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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF POPULAR AND ELITE LITERATURE

By

Janice Anne Radway

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF POPULAR AND ELITE LITERATURE

By

Janice Anne Radway

Although the study of popular art has recently emerged as a legitimate academic pursuit, very little theoretical speculation about the nature of popular forms of expression has been conducted. Some popular culture analysts have demonstrated a growing interest in new methodologies for the study of specific works but few have scrutinized the methodologies themselves or placed them within a larger framework considering human creation in general. It is, therefore, the purpose of this study to situate popular forms of expression within a broad theory of human creation, to analyze the similarities and differences between "popular" and "elite" literary texts, and to suggest alternative procedures for aesthetic evaluation and judgment.

While I agree with the premise of French Structuralism that all forms of human behavior including literary expression can be fruitfully compared to man's use of the linguistic system, I have definite reservations about the conception of language which Structuralism employs. In an attempt to compensate for the Structuralist preoccupation with the synchronic, institutional nature of language, I have, therefore,

turned to the linguistic theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. As a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty is primarily concerned with individual speech acts and the effects they have on the diachronically evolving nature of the language system.

After defining the need for a theory of popular literature in the first chapter, I provide, in the second, a short exigesis of Merleau-Ponty's ontological theories about the nature of man's insertion in the world, the general character of all expressive acts, and the specific character of linguistic expression. The chapter then concludes with an examination of Merleau-Ponty's belief that speech may be Creative if man uses the properties of the language system in unfamiliar ways, thus creating new meaning, or Empirical, if he employs the same properties traditionally, thus relying on the standard sedimented significance associated with them.

The third chapter suggests that literature can be thought of as a language system complete with fundamental properties and rules for their combination. After explaining that individuals know how to create and read literary texts only because they have acquired a "literary" competence in addition to the linguistic competence they possess as native speakers of a language, I extend the analogy between literature and language even further, describing "popular" texts as Empirical or Conservative uses of the literary system and "elite" texts as Creative uses. I do not, however, argue that every text must fit within one of

two rigidly defined categories, but maintain instead that all texts form a continuum extending between the theoretical poles of Empirical and Creative literary expression.

Part Two of this dissertation is a case study designed to demonstrate through reference to a single genre, that texts actually use literary elements in creative and conservative ways. Accordingly, in the fourth chapter, I analyze classic examples of the gothic novel in order to establish the properties and essential combinations which define the genre. My analysis is based on an examination of The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, and Melmoth the Wanderer. Then, in the fifth chapter, I show how Phyllis Whitney's popular gothic romances employ the standard gothic "system" traditionally, while Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding and William Faulkner's Sanctuary deform that system, using essential properties in unfamiliar ways, thus causing the gothic form to carry new significance.

The final chapter explores the possibility that popular texts may be read without the benefit of a literary competence. In arguing that such non-literary reading may be related to play, I propose new ways for judging the relative merits and success of different empirical texts.

"To S. O. R. with Love"

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Finally, I want to express deep gratitude to two especially important people for their continuing care and constant attention. My friend, Nancy, helped me to see clearly when lack of confidence and fatigue clouded my vision and I truly appreciate her concern for my personal and professional growth. My husband, Scott, has cheerfully shared every moment of this enterprise and provided gentle but searching criticisms when most needed. I cannot imagine having completed this study without his unqualified support, friendship, and love.

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PART ONE

PHENOMENOLOGY, LANGUAGE, AND LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE PRESENT SITUATION IN POPULAR CULTURE ANALYSIS: THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY

Since man first developed his capacity for expression, all human societies have produced characteristic forms of folk or popular culture. However, because such forms were largely the creations of the poorest and least educated members of society, and because they differed greatly from the works of the most celebrated artists of the day, they were generally ignored in philosophical and critical treatises on the subject of the arts. But as industrialization changed the very nature of life in the early twentieth century, it had a tremendous impact on the standard critical neglect of popular culture forms. When the middle class appeared and grew to huge proportions as a result of industrialization, it began to demand and produce its own unique forms of expression. Then, with the help of the newly emergent business class and its increasingly successful methods of production and distribution, such cultural forms proliferated, became extremely visible, and seemed to challenge the hegemony of high or elite art. With the advent of the electronic media, the problem became even more worrisome, and many began to wonder if the exploding popular culture of the middle class did not pose a serious threat to the survival of high culture and elite art. As

concern mounted, critics previously preoccupied only with the state of high art began to devote time and energy to the analysis of popular forms of culture and, as a result, the first attempts to understand the nature of such work and to distinguish it from the forms of high culture were made.

During the 1930's and 1940's in the United States, and even well into the 1950's, much of the resulting analysis of popular literature, as only one form of this sort of cultural production, was highly critical. Such analysis was nearly always based on the assumption that popular forms of expression were either unsuccessful attempts at the creation of art or deliberate attempts to ignore artistic standards in order to appeal to a broader group. Dwight MacDonald pointed out, for example, in Against the American Grain (1952), that popular culture came not from the masses but from above. He argued that it was "fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen" and maintained that it did not satisfy but rather exploited the desires of the masses.[1] Early analysts such as MacDonald assumed that all artistic creation ought to pursue the same purpose and argued that the real distinction between elite and popular literature was merely the difference between aesthetic success and failure. Although such analysis paved the way for serious consideration of a subject previously labeled insignificant, it managed to avoid the most difficult questions posed by the appearance of two apparently separate and distinct cultures. Neither MacDonald nor others of his

persuasion ever questioned whether all forms of human creation embodied in written texts were the same. They did not ask if all literary texts were meant to perform similar cultural functions, nor did they attempt to determine whether they ought to be judged on the basis of the same aesthetic standards. In short, they failed to question that basic premise which served as the foundation for all their critical judgments; they simply assumed that all forms of human expression ought to be evaluated on the basis of a single set of absolute criteria.

Highly critical analysis such as MacDonald's was gradually replaced in the 1960's by a more favorable sort in which popular forms of culture were scrutinized and examined in their own right. This kind of analysis developed as a result of the growing interest in comprehensive intellectual history and because of the new concern for the sociological study of all forms of cultural expression, whether high or low. Three distinct but related approaches developed during this period, and all assumed that the study of popular literature could tell a great deal about the culture that produced it. The first approach, which I call "historical," made every effort to avoid critical judgments based on the notion of artistic merit. Its practitioners observed that popular forms of expression were appealing to larger and larger audiences and they argued that because of this such forms ought to be examined systematically and in depth. What resulted was a historical catalogue or a history of the development of genres.

Perhaps the most important and best known study using this general historical approach was Russel B. Nye's The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America, first published in 1970. Nye's work was a detailed history of the development of popular literature, music, and drama, and it was based on the assumption that "whatever its manner of expression, popular culture and the arts included in that culture can no longer be treated with contempt or dismissed as unworthy of study."[2] Nye rarely made comparative judgments about various works within a particular genre and preferred, instead, to describe in depth the development of the genre as a whole. His book was one of the first to treat popular art seriously and without condescension.

As the historical approach developed in sophistication and popularity, it gave rise to a related form of analysis and study which I like to call "sociological." This approach, like its parent, avoided the whole problem of critical evaluation and instead thought of the popular arts as a cultural barometer. Sociological analysts argued that by examining the themes and ideas of popular forms of expression, one could learn a great deal about the general concerns and preoccupations of the culture as a whole. Roderick Nash, for instance, maintained in The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917 - 1930, that "the intellectual life of a nation does not begin and end with intellectuals."[3] As a result, his study of the American twenties paid due homage to Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and O'Neill, but also focused on Gene Stratton-Portor, Zane

Grey, and Bruce Barton. Although Nash thus acknowledged the importance of popular literature, his analysis of it was still highly traditional in its preoccupation with theme and idea. Nash simply applied the common tools of literary analysis to popular literature in order to shed some light on those aspects of American culture not represented or expressed in elite art. In a sense, he assumed as MacDonald had, that popular and elite literature functioned in the same way and could be explicated using the same method. The difference was that Nash saw some sociological value in the study of popular forms of expression, whereas MacDonald generally lamented the fact of their existence.

The third approach to the study of popular literary forms also developed in the late sixties and was closely related to the sociological approach in its dependence on the tools and forms of traditional literary analysis. However, while sociological analysts used these tools to demonstrate the way in which popular works reflected the world of which they were a part, these other "literary" analysts simply used the tools to interpret works regardless of their connection with society. This "literary" approach became increasingly popular after the founding of the Popular Culture Association in 1968, and it is still the primary method employed by contributors to the Journal of Popular Culture. In this kind of analysis, a popular work of literature is considered intrinsically valuable and it is dissected and explained with the same kind of attention to detail that would be paid to

a work like Ulysses or The Sound and the Fury. In the Fall, 1974 issue of the Journal of Popular Culture, for instance, James B. Lane carefully analyzed the themes of violence and sex in Harold Robbin's A Stone for Danny Fisher and Hubert Selby, Jr.'s Last Exit to Brooklyn.[4] While Lane did speculate that the reason for the popularity of these works was their ability to create a "realistic journey into the recent past," he did not analyze the novels solely because they could be treated as a window open to that past.[5] Instead, he argued that their very popularity attested to their significance and, as a result, he carefully scrutinized character development, plot construction, and thematic unity.

Like the historical and sociological analyst of popular literature, the literary analyst like Lane seldom concerned himself with the differences between his subject and the forms of elite literature. Content to confine himself to an analysis of the structure and ideas found in works clearly identifiable as "popular," this sort of analyst produced almost no theoretical writing about the relationship between popular or low literature and high art. As a result, most of the questions left unanswered by the early critics of popular culture continued to be ignored by the new historical, sociological, and literary apologists alike. It appears to me that if these very basic questions about the structure and function of popular literature are not first addressed, no serious attempt can be made to formulate comparative or evaluative judgments about popular forms of expression. If we do not make

some attempt to describe the exact nature of popular literary forms, we can never hope to distinguish them from high art forms, nor can we hope to evaluate their relative success or failure on their own merits. To do so, certain fundamental problems must first be confronted and resolved.

It is first absolutely necessary to recognize that the heretofore generally accepted distinction between elite and popular literature is not a distinction that has been carefully and systematically established in theory. In most cases where the problem is even treated, the two different categories have been set up on two completely distinct and separate sets of criteria. The category, "art," or elite literature, for example, is usually composed of those works judged by the literary and academic community to embody certain ideal standards and to perform some generally agreed-upon "aesthetic" function. Often, however, these ideal standards are not explicitly stated, nor are the aesthetic functions to be performed by a work of art set forth. Still, works continue to be dismissed and excluded from this vaguely defined category in an easy and off-handed manner that is truly astonishing.

On the other hand, the category, "popular literature," is sometimes established on the basis of numbers alone, and sometimes on the notion that the ideas and themes exhibited in such works are "of the people." There seems to be a genuine disagreement over the meaning of the word, "popular," since some critics argue it refers simply to the phenomenon

of mass readership, while others maintain it delineates a certain kind of relationship between a work and the society that produced it. In both instances, however, the definition creates more problems than it solves. In the first case, the definition forces us to label most of William Shakespeare's major plays "popular literature," and in the second case, we find ourselves hard pressed to exclude Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography from a list of those works whose themes are judged to be "of the people." While such categorization might not bother the most rabid champion of popular literature, it would almost certainly be challenged by elite critics and popular culture analysts alike who, for centuries, have thought of both Shakespeare's and Franklin's work as "art."

The real problem with these glibly defined categories of "art" and "popular literature," is that they do not separate popular works from elite works on a consistent basis. Because the criteria used to identify a work of art are quite different from those used to isolate a popular work, the categories thus established are not mutually exclusive. They are not founded on a differentiation based on certain constant reference points such as language-use or character development and, as a result, it is entirely possible to find a work that performs the aesthetic functions thought of as the province of art, and which, at the same time, enjoys immense popularity in the sense of mass readership.

By the same token, it is conceivable that we can point to a work which reflects the attitudes and ideas "of the people" and which fulfills, at the same time, the ideal standards conceived of as the definition of art. In each case, the shoddy and inconsistent delineation of criteria prevents us from identifying how a particular work differs from another, and we are then prevented from assigning any work to a truly descriptive category. Consequently, categorization such as this is generally useless and in effect serves only to muddy already unclear waters to an even greater extent.

It seems evident to me that popular literature analysts are in desperate need of a comprehensive theory of literary expression which will include a system of categorization that is both consistent and useful. In such a theory, the exact range of the categories themselves will have to be founded on the similarities that exist among all forms of written "literary" expression, and the resulting distinctions between kinds or types of expression will have to be formulated on the basis of a comparison over a fixed set of reference points or ideas. Only by establishing such categories on a consistent basis, can we hope to differentiate one kind of literary expression from another with any sort of confidence. However, I must add here that I do not envision such a system of categorization as a rigid or static one composed only of separate categories with absolutely determined and impenetrable boundaries. Instead, I prefer to think of the whole realm of literary expression as a kind of continuum, possessing two

theoretical poles composed of works different from one another, but joined by a middle range marked off by a multitude of variations. In such a system, the continuum would ideally include all texts that could be identified as "literary," and the two poles would be defined by the fact that certain groups of works could be shown to theoretically exhibit diametrically opposed structures and to perform opposite functions. It will be my purpose in this paper then, to define the nature of that continuum, to indicate how and in what way it is marked off in theory by two very different types of literary texts, and to explain how those types gradually fade into each other in practice.

In approaching such a problem, it occurs to me that there is no small significance in the fact that all written literary texts, whether casually defined as popular or elite, are at one and the same time expressions of an individual human mind and creations wrought of language. While this kind of observation may amount to nothing more than a truism for some, it seems absolutely essential to me as that most basic of starting points. For if we can accurately determine what it is that "high art" and "popular literature" have in common as human creations in the medium of language, we might be better able to discern exactly how they use that language differently and in what way they vary their appeal to their readers. A two-sided observation such as this would then enable us to suggest flexible categories based on both structural and functional differences. While it would be impossible

to specify the exact dividing line between the two categories, we could define them as pure theoretical types and then compare specific works to each. In this way, we could identify which structures and functions a particular work possessed or did not possess and, as a result, we could place that work on the continuum of literary texts by referring to how closely it approached one or the other theoretical type.

From the preceding introductory remarks, I am sure it is easy to discern the direction I propose to take for the remainder of this study. After establishing a certain theory of human expression and providing a complementary theory of language-use, I intend to suggest ways in which written texts employ language differently for different expressive purposes. I propose to delineate both structural and functional differences among kinds of literary texts and I hope thereby to explain both how and why one kind of text can establish a certain relationship with its readers, while another type can appear to create a very different one. After formulating such loose and flexible theoretical distinctions, I will examine certain texts generally thought of as obviously different in kind with the intention of showing the structural and functional variations in operation. I then propose to consider the problems posed by borderline cases, that is, by texts which do not clearly fall within the ideal limits of one category or the other. Only then will I address the difficult problem of comparative evaluation and aesthetic judgment and make some suggestions about the models and methods

which might be employed with such a normative interest in mind.

NOTES

[1]Dwight MacDonald, Against the American Grain (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 14.

[2]Russel B. Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 420.

[3]Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1970), p. ix.

[4]James B. Lane, "Violence and Sex in the Post-War Popular Urban Novel: With a Consideration of Harold Robbins's A Stone for Danny Fisher and Hubert Selby, Jr.'s Last Exit to Brooklyn." Journal of Popular Culture, VIII (1974), 295-308.

[5]Lane, "Violence," p. 295.

CHAPTER II

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, and Human Expression

It has always been my conviction that the most useful and convincing theories of literary form are those derived from a clear theoretical conception of the human mind and the process of artistic creation. While many have speculated over the years on the exact nature and function of literary form, comparatively few have grounded such speculations in an understanding of the complex relationship that obtains between thought, language-use, and expression. However, modern phenomenology and linguistic theory have evolved since the turn of the century into far-reaching inquiries into the general human capacity to create meaning and, as a result, a new comprehensive outlook has prompted the formulation of several inclusive theories which treat literary creation as a special case of human expression. Although Maurice Merleau-Ponty was only one among many phenomenological philosophers, and despite the fact that he died before he could systematically examine the peculiarities of expression in the medium of language, it seems to me that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body-subject possesses some of the most interesting and pregnant suggestions ever made about the intricate connections between consciousness, perception, and literary

expression. Before he died in 1961, Merleau-Ponty was able to sketch out the framework for a complete phenomenology of language, which I believe can be filled in and extended to produce a phenomenology of literary expression which will specifically treat the differences and distinctions between those forms we traditionally call "elite" and "popular." This chapter, then, is an exploration and extension of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of language and, in it, I try to lay the groundwork for the phenomenology of literary expression which is the subject of the third chapter.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of language is itself only one aspect of his more comprehensive exploration into the nature of human life in general and it is, therefore, derived from a complex conception of the relationship between the human subject and his environment. In fact, most of Merleau-Ponty's early works are designed as systematic refutations of the traditional notion of the human subject as a consciousness distinct and separate from an independent environment or Nature.[1] Merleau-Ponty generally disagrees with Cartesian philosophy and rejects the traditional subject-object ontology which even now still dominates much of twentieth-century philosophical thought. In The Structure of Behavior, for example, Merleau-Ponty explores generally-accepted theories about the relationship between the human subject and its world, and concludes, finally, that "a deeper reflection on the objects of science and on physical causality finds relations in them which cannot be posited in-themselves

(en soi) and which have meaning only before the inspection of mind."[2] Merleau-Ponty argues, in effect, that subject and object, body and world, are inextricably intertwined and as a result cannot be accurately spoken of as separate and distinct entities. Consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, is always consciousness of something, just as the world is a world only by virtue of the fact that it exists for someone.

Using terminology borrowed from the writings of Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty expands upon this conclusion in his preface to Phenomenology of Perception, where he advocates that philosophy return to the Lebenswelt, or to a description of things themselves. "To return to the things themselves," he writes, "is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is."[3] Merleau-Ponty insists that phenomenology's goal is the description of the primordial contact between body and world which exists prior to any form of consciousness as such. He argues that the human body is not a separate physical entity which merely comes into contact with an already fully constituted world, but instead, a structure which is open to the world and correlative with it. He also maintains that the world is inseparable from the perceiving subject who is always inserted in the world by virtue of his incarnation as a body. Man's "being-in-the-

world" precedes any consciousness he may have of that world, and as a result, he is truly a body-subject who lives in direct contact with beings and things.[4]

This notion of the body-subject, then, is the foundation of all Merleau-Ponty's philosophical speculations including those he made about language-use and the creation of meaning. It is the primary concern of his two major treatises, Phenomenology of Perception and The Visible and the Invisible,[5] and it must be recognized for the revolutionary concept that it is, if the full implications of his position are to be known. It is, therefore, necessary to summarize this conception before any discussion of his linguistic theories can begin. The following is in no way intended as a critical analysis of the notion of the body-subject, but is meant, rather, as a quick summary of Merleau-Ponty's most basic premise and starting point.[6]

In commenting on Merleau-Ponty's use of the phrase j'en suis in The Visible and the Invisible, Remy Kwant has pointed out that the choice could not have been a more perfect one, since the very structure of the phrase itself emphasizes the fact that man and the world are not separate entities for Merleau-Ponty.[7] Because of the peculiar exigencies of French grammar, subject and object are locked together here as the single morpheme or word, j'en. Thus, by using this particular wording, Merleau-Ponty has not only said that I, as human consciousness, belong to it, or Being, but that consciousness and Being are intertwined or joined

as two syllables of a single word or as two sides of a single piece of paper.

He also uses the word le chiasme or chiasm to describe this conjunction, and the metaphor seems peculiarly apt.[8] By referring to the connection between man and the world as a figure of crossed lines like the Greek letter chi, Merleau-Ponty indicates that the entity he seeks to describe is a unity composed of distinct elements and that any analytical procedure which attempts to isolate or separate those elements actually destroys that unity.[9] Merleau-Ponty maintains that consciousness and the world only have real being as correlative aspects of a single entity and that to speak of them accurately, we must, in effect, learn to distinguish without dividing.[10] Although Merleau-Ponty elaborates at some length in the last section of The Visible and the Invisible on the exact nature of this connection between man and Being, it is not necessary to recount the entire argument here. Suffice it to say that Merleau-Ponty envisions human consciousness and the environment as reverse "sides" of a unified single Being and refuses to grant independent ontological status to either. They exist together for Merleau-Ponty as a unity of reciprocal implication. He argues that consciousness and the world are inextricably intertwined through the medium of the human body and that if we are to understand how man makes meaning out of that environment, we must acknowledge the importance of the corporeal connection between the two.

It is absolutely clear that although the idea of incarnation is central to Merleau-Ponty's theory, his conception of the body is not even remotely related to our common-sense notion of it as a mere collection of physical organs. Instead, he views it as a kind of power or ability, an I-can, as he sometimes calls it. Merleau-Ponty thinks of the human body as the center of power or locus of a man's ability to be subject and object for himself at one and the same time. He points out again and again throughout his works that man can use his left hand to touch his right hand just as his right hand is touching his left, and thus simultaneously be both toucher and touched, perceiver and perceived, subject and object. From this he concludes that man has the unique ability to be both sensitive to himself and to the world as well. His body is a perceptible reality in that it is fully continguous with Being and can be seen, and yet it is likewise a perceiving reality since it can take note of the reality that surrounds it. The body, then, belongs to things or to the world and is in full communion with them, but it is also separate from those things in that it is capable of "looking" at them from a distance. As Merleau-Ponty writes in Themes from the Lectures, "we are not dealing here with two natures, one subordinate to the other, but with a double nature. . . . Thus the body proper is a sensible and it is the 'sensing'; it can be seen and it can see itself; it can be touched and it can touch itself, and, in this latter respect, it comprises an aspect inaccessible to others, open in principle only to

itself."[11] In other words, while man's body is visible to others, his power to see or to do is not; hence, his visible body is the reverse side of his invisible power to see or to do. The human body is, therefore, simultaneously a "thing" and an activity or power, and its two aspects are conditioned by the fact that they occupy a physical place by virtue of their connection and mutual interpenetration in a single, sensible portion of Nature.

It can be seen therefore that for Merleau-Ponty the human subject is truly a body-subject, that is, an incarnate power-to-be occupying a specific, identifiable place in nature. What this means is that every human subject has a unique physical perspective on the things of his environment and is simultaneously affected by and expressive of that situation or perspective. To see the world is to see from a certain place, and the things that are seen are thus perspectively altered by the position from which they are viewed. To speak is to speak about things from a particular point in space and time, and the things that are uttered are thus conditioned by the special circumstances of the point of utterance. It is impossible for man to operate outside his own particular corporeal orientation and, as a result, every gesture, movement, thought, and act is in some way an expression of that individual's way-of-being-in-the-world. In essence, then, both the act and the product of that act are embodiments of the actor's particular corporeal situation. Even in vision, as Merleau-Ponty says, "the meaning of a

perceived object when picked out from all others still does not stand isolated from the constellation in which it appears; it is articulated only as a certain distance in relation to the order of space, time, motion, and signification in general in which we are established."[12] Merleau-Ponty concludes that meaning or order cannot be said to exist solely within the natural world nor can it be seen as the creation of consciousness alone. Rather, it must be thought of as the pre-conscious orientation itself or way of occupying space born at that moment when a body-subject is situated within Being.

Merleau-Ponty argues that this pre-conscious orientation exists for the body-subject from the beginning, but not as conscious awareness of "meaning" as such. It is only objectified and given presence in the world through expression which he defines as man's ability to absent one portion of his experiential field as "object" from the rest of himself as experiencing subject. Merleau-Ponty argues that man is continuous with the world and open to its meaning before he is conscious of it as meaning. When he does gradually become aware of himself as the tangible-toucher, the audible-hearer, and the sensible sensor, man can be said to be both absent from himself and present to himself at the same time. He is absent from himself in that he feels a portion of himself as an alien "object," as a tangible "thing," for instance. But he is, at the same time, present to himself because he continues to "know" he is the toucher of that thing. Once man is able to absent himself in this way, he is able to make an object of

virtually any portion of that Being with which he is continuous. In doing so, he expresses his primordial situation and gives it objective existence as the object seen, thing felt, or act completed. In essence, Merleau-Ponty argues the object "created" is not separate from the act that gave it existence or meaning, and hence, that both are always necessary expressions of a way-of-being-in-the-world. Even perception itself is expression according to Merleau-Ponty, and the thing perceived is as much a part of that expression as is the act itself. "Perception," he writes, "is precisely that kind of act in which there can be no question of setting the act itself apart from the end to which it is directed. Perception and the perceived necessarily have the same existential modality, since perception is inseparable from the consciousness it has, or rather is, of reaching the thing itself."[13] Expression then is that most basic activity through which man gives objective, identifiable, and separate existence to some small portion of his manner of being-in-the-world. It is the process by which he makes meaning out of his corporeal situation and causes part of it to be born as sense or as some "thing" in the world. It is, in short, that "primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs, makes that which is expressed dwell in them through the eloquence of their arrangement and configuration alone, implants a meaning in that which did not have one, and thus - far from exhausting itself in the instant at which it occurs - inaugurates an order and founds an institution or tradition."[14]

It is expression, therefore, which is the link between human consciousness as we know it in everyday life and the pre-conscious, pre-verbal level of existence in which that consciousness is grounded. At this primordial level of awareness all being is inarticulate or mute in that it has no identifiable "meaning" as such. What form or structure there is exists as inseparable and indistinguishable from the field as a whole. Individuals and things are merely imperceptible variations woven into the single fabric of Being. However, through expression, these variations or mute structures and forms are actualized by being isolated; they are marked off or framed by a body-subject as separate aspects of its own field and thus given objective, bodily presence. To express is to give existence to some part of that system which is made up of all the connections and lines of force created by a particular body-subject's insertion in the world. As Remy Kwant points out, expression transforms man's primordial or pre-conscious awareness of the world into a reflective consciousness which is simultaneously aware of itself as perceiver and of the world as perceived.[15]

Speech and Language

Merleau-Ponty maintains that expression can take many forms including that of gestures, behavior, or work, but he concedes that expression through speech is a special case and occupies a privileged position.[16] Expressive speech is born between two silences according to Merleau-Ponty; it

expresses the pre-conscious silence that is inarticulate and unaware of its own meaning, but it does so only to bring that silence or "truth," as he sometimes calls it, to conscious existence--only to actualize it as part of the objective world. As Merleau-Ponty writes in The Prose of the World, "when one goes from the order of events to the order of expression, one changes levels but does not change the world."[17] It is through the objectification process inherent in language-use itself that distance is achieved between man and Being, and, as a result, man must speak of the world in order to know it. To say something about the world is actually to bring that world to existence. A word is not the sign or representation of a particular thought but that thought's very existence in the world. Expressive speech, then, or the use of language, is not merely a mental act but a production of the entire body-subject. Just as man's body is the incarnation of a dimension or style of being in physical space, so speech is the embodiment of that style in act. Merleau-Ponty argues that when someone speaks, inchoate Being is transmuted into objectified meaning. In speech there occurs a "migration of meaning scattered in experience that leaves the flesh in which it did not manage to collect itself, mobilizes already capitalized instruments for its own profit, and employs them so that in the end they become the very body it had needed while in the process of acquiring the dignity of expressed meaning."[18] Speech is not merely one gesture among many for Merleau-Ponty but "the vehicle of

our movement toward truth, as the body is the vehicle of our being in the world."[19] It is the incomprehensible virtue of language that it seems to efface itself before the meaning that it embodies, and it thus always propels us toward the world it signifies and to which it refers. For example, when we understand what someone is saying, we do not attend to each word as it is uttered but rather to the entire meaning or idea marked out by those words taken together. As Merleau-Ponty comments, "the perfection of language lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed."[20]

Because of its abilities and consequent complexities, language can always be considered from two distinct but entirely related perspectives. It is, on the one hand, an institution or system made up of culturally agreed-upon signs, equivalent meanings, and rules for their combination. On the other hand, it can also be thought of as an act or event whereby we are ostensibly led beyond the signs themselves to some separate "meaning." Language is neither the stable institution itself nor the speaking event alone. The two exist, rather, as reverse sides of a single entity. If a system of signs with generally agreed-upon meanings did not exist, men could not objectify their experiences in such a way that they could be understood by others. But, on the other hand, if it was not possible to add to that system through new speech acts, to augment the meanings already available within the institution, then no man could ever say anything that had not been said before and no new meaning could ever be embodied in

the carnal presence of words. For every potential speaker, therefore, language is first a system that must be learned, an institution to which entrance must be sought. If looked at in this manner, that is synchronically, it is a static, unchanging body of knowledge which every child must acquire. Merleau-Ponty refers to language looked at in this way as le langage parlé[21] and thinks of it as a "fait accompli--as the residue of past acts of signification and the record of already acquired meaning."[22] Language in this sense, however, is wholly dependent on speech events themselves which create the institution over the course of time. Speech, or le langage parlant, language looked at diachronically, is then made up of contingent, temporary, individual acts which go beyond the limits of the institution itself and which constantly add to or actualize the possibilities of expression contained within it. Speech events are therefore capable of and responsible for the modification of language as a system. The two taken together comprise the true being of language, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as logic in contingency. Language, he comments, is an "oriented system which nevertheless always elaborates random factors, taking what was fortuitous up into a meaningful whole - incarnate logic."[23]

In his essay, "On the Phenomenology of Language," Merleau-Ponty is careful to stress the fact that language can never be reduced to either one of its two aspects. He cautions, furthermore, that we must not conceive of them as two separate and distinct entities in sequential juxtaposition,

but must recognize that they interpenetrate one another and function simultaneously in a kind of dialogue. Merleau-Ponty adds that "far from our being able to juxtapose a psychology of language [focusing on the event] and a science of language [focusing on the institution] by reserving language in the present for the first and language in the past for the second, we must recognize that the present diffuses into the past to the extent that the past has been present. History is the history of successive synchronies, and the contingency of the linguistic past invades even the synchronic system."[24] In other words, it can never be a question of arguing that speech events are the chronological antecedents of language considered as a system, since there can never be a speech event that does not use the elements of that system. Nor can we ever say that the institution as such precedes any use that can be made of it, since the institution itself is determined by the residue or sedimentation of all past speech acts.

Still, theorists deliberately ignore the diachronic aspect of the being of language and insist on considering language wholly as a synchronic system. But this kind of limiting vision prevents us from understanding how new meaning is made and how it is communicated among men. To look at language synchronically, that is as a stable, self-contained system, is to close off the possibility of diachronic or temporal change and hence to ignore the fact that speakers utter things that have never been said before and that, as a result,

still others are admitted to ideas they did not previously know.

The Phenomenological Conception of Language

If we are to account for the fact that people do learn, it seems absolutely necessary to consider language phenomenologically, that is, from the point of view of a speaker who can manipulate the language system to express his unique way-of-being-in-the-world and to communicate that meaning to others.[25] To look at language in this way is to recognize the intertwining that exists between language as event and language as a system and to acknowledge the fundamental nature of the interdependence that results. However, the phenomenological point of view also enables us to admit that despite this radical dependency, language as event is ontologically prior to language considered as a system. What this means is that the temporal speech act itself is actual, that is, it can be said to exist in the real world, whereas the language system as a whole is only virtual in that no speech act can ever realize it in totality. As Merleau-Ponty says, "since synchrony is only a section of diachrony, the system realized in it never exists wholly in act but always involves latent or incubating changes."[26] Thus, language considered phenomenologically can never be thought of as a group of absolutely determined univocal meanings which are explicitly defined as the equivalents of certain signs by some transparent consciousness. Rather, it must be thought

of as "a cohesive whole of convergent linguistic gestures, each of which [is] defined less by a signification than a use-value."[27] Language in this sense is truly a system-in-use and Merleau-Ponty refers to it as Speech. This phenomenological conception of language as Speech, does not refer merely to the act of speaking itself nor to the system of sedimented meaning, but rather to the convergence or intertwining of the two that is effected when a human subject utters words to make himself understood. Speech, as Merleau-Ponty says, does not simply activate the possibilities contained within the language system. Far from being a simple effect of that system, "it modifies and sustains [it] just as much as it is conveyed through it."[28]

Merleau-Ponty is not always consistent in his use of the term Speech and sometimes employs it to refer to any speech event at all. However, he does use the term most often to designate that kind of speech act which manipulates the language system in order to formulate a new meaning, that kind of act which attempts to give carnal presence to an "idea" that has only previously existed outside the system itself. When language is thus used "authentically," it forces the listener to go beyond the system of signs and their equivalent meanings to some indeterminate space where the new meaning is created for the first time. When language is used in this way, as Speech, "it is not a simple invitation to the listener or reader to discover in himself significations that were already there. It is rather the trick

whereby the writer or orator, touching on these significations already present in us [as part of the language system], makes them yield strange sounds."[29] As Merleau-Ponty usually defines it, then, Speech is "that operation through which a certain arrangement of already available signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new signification is secreted."[30] Language used in this way is truly expressive, that is, it is used to give form to that primordial, pre-verbal level of experience which is thereby organized and made to exist in the carnal presence of words. However, it must be added here that language can also be used in such a way that both speaker and listener rely on familiar significations which have been previously deposited within the system as a result of creative speech acts. But before I can elaborate on this kind of language-use or discuss its relationship to truly expressive Speech, it is first necessary to point out a few crucial facts about the nature of the language system itself.

As I have noted previously, a language system is composed of signs which seem to possess certain equivalent meanings and rules governing the combination of those signs. Every speech act, therefore, whether true Speech or not, must rely on and manipulate those signs according to the agreed-upon rules if anything at all is to be said. It is important to point out, however, that the signs themselves, taken singly, one by one, actually signify nothing. While this observation about language, first made by Ferdinand de

Saussure, is an extremely difficult one to grasp, it must be understood if we are to comprehend how a word, already known to possess a certain identifiable signification, can be modified and forced to take on new meaning as a result of combination with other words. Saussure maintained that although the sign was indeed the fundamental unit of language, it was not a thing or a substance but a functional relationship which itself contained two factors. The sign was actually the juncture between the word itself, the signifiant or signifier, and its arbitrarily determined meaning or signifié.[31] Saussure argued further that the essence of any sign was not simply its signifié, or some positively determined dictionary definition, but rather the signification distance it marked off between itself and other signs. As Merleau-Ponty acknowledges, Saussure maintained that each sign "does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs" and that, as a result, "the terms of language are engendered only by the differences which appear among them."[32] For example, the phoneme, "knife," taken entirely by itself, does not automatically signify that sharp-bladed instrument we commonly think of when we hear the phoneme pronounced. Rather, that sound refers to that instrument only by virtue of the fact that there are other, different sounds within the same language system which do not refer to it, but which indicate instead fork, spoon, spade, or shovel. Thus, the meaning of the word "knife" is not lodged in itself as it is explained in the dictionary correspondence table, but

exists within the language system as a whole. The meaning of each sign is, therefore, dependent on the total movement of the language as it is spoken.

Currently accepted theory about the acquisition of language in children seems to support Saussure's notion. Jean Piaget, for instance, points out that for very young children, words and even syllables function as complete sentences.[33] He implies that what a child first learns about language is not certain finite words and their dictionary meanings, but rather certain oppositive and relational principles about sign juxtaposition which are later applied and extended to a broader and broader range of signs. As Merleau-Ponty himself points out, "the important point is that the phonemes [or first words] are from the beginning variations of a unique speech apparatus, and that with them the child seems to have 'caught' the principle of a mutual differentiation of signs and at the same time to have acquired the meaning of the sign."[34] What this means is that when a child has learned to speak and to master these functional oppositions, he has been initiated into a system where the ultimate relation of sign to meaning is dependent on the lateral relationship of sign to sign.

Meaning, then, as it is created through language, arises only at the intersections and intervals between words. In order to speak and to refer to the world we must make sentences out of signs which are themselves "empty." Like a charade, our speech can only be understood "through the

interaction of signs, each of which, taken separately, is equivocal or banal, and makes sense only by being combined with others."[35] Each time a sign is uttered, then, it is entirely dependent for its meaning on the speech act as a whole. Thus it is that the creation of any meaning, whether familiar or new, is actually the product of the complete language system as it is mobilized and put to use in that particular speech act. Meaning, therefore, cannot be said to exist behind or beneath separate words but is, rather, the creation of whole sentences engaged in discourse. To understand a speaker's meaning, we must let outselves be seduced by the motion of the sentences of his conversation, rather than consult a dictionary for the meaning of each word. Even though the sentence as the foundation of the speech act is composed of signs, it is not a sign itself. Created by the juxtaposition of a naming function and a predicative function, the sentence is a synthesis which goes beyond the simple sum of its parts. It is, in reality, a wholly separate entity, and it is through its existence as event that meaning is made. Therefore, we are forced to analyze the exact nature of the speech event itself if we are to understand precisely how "empty" words can be put together to yield very different kinds of results. It has got to be the character of the temporal occurrence which determines whether words merely confront a listener with familiar meanings or whether they point the way to radically new and not yet entirely formulated significations.[36]

Authentic or Creative Speech

As has been mentioned before, language can be used in two distinct and different ways. Words can be combined "authentically" so that they intersect with each other and thus create new meaning or they can be put together in such a way that both speaker and listener rely on the significations generally associated with the words used. However, since those significations were once the original products of previously creative acts, the true importance of speech to the institution of language becomes increasingly clear. It would seem, therefore, absolutely necessary to explain the nature of a truly creative speech act before analyzing that secondary event which only refers to already expressed meanings. In the authentic use of language, that is, in true Speech, the speaking subject seeks to give objective, verbal presence to some portion of his pre-verbal, pre-conscious existence. What this means is that true Speech is not the verbal equivalent of some previously existing, conscious "thought," but that thought's actual existence or presence in the world. Thought simply cannot precede language if we accept Merleau-Ponty's premise that true meaning is only made to exist when some subject is able to separate a portion of his primordial existence from the total experiential field and cause it to exist apart from that field through the auspices of some other medium. A thought limited to existing for itself, outside the confines of language and speech,

would merely sink back into the pre-conscious state as soon as it had appeared. In essence, it would not even exist for itself, since without the separation and objectification of language there would be no consciousness.

This idea can be demonstrated if we think about the process that occurs when we see an object whose exact essence we cannot discern. When I perceive some "thing" partially revealed in the shadows of twilight, that thing has no determinate existence for me until I can name it. While I do admittedly see something, the object does not come into focus for me as an object until I can identify exactly what it is. To identify it is to give it its proper name, and therefore I only see a wheelbarrow-hidden-by-shadows at the very moment that I can say "that is a wheelbarrow hidden by shadows." The denomination of the object does not follow recognition but rather is that recognition itself.[37] Thus, my statement itself bears the meaning, and by imposing it on the object, I am conscious of finally reaching and understanding that wheelbarrow. When a speech act is successful, therefore, and meaning is created, the sentence does not leave behind a simple reminder of some thought existing "out there" but brings the meaning into existence as the very essence of the words employed. As has been pointed out before, when I hear someone speak, I do not first attend to his words and then decipher the meaning hidden behind them. Instead, I listen to the thought or meaning directly as it is bodied forth at that moment in the presence of those words.

What is so misleading about the relationship between language and thought and causes us to believe in the existence of thoughts apart from language, is thought already constituted and expressed--thought which we recall to ourselves in the privacy of our silent existence. However, this silence is, in actuality, teeming with words, and our inner life is really an internal speaking.[38] Such thoughts were at one time the original products of radically creative speech acts, and it is only as a result of repetition and familiarity that they have become acquired significations and internal possessions. We must say, therefore, with Merleau-Ponty, that "true speech does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it."[39]

When man uses language to accomplish thought, to express, whether for himself or others, something about his living relation with the world, that language is not an instrument of translation, but a manifestation or revelation of his most personal existence. When he speaks "authentically," he does not simply transpose into equivalent words some previously known "thing-to-say," existing before him, but rather gives verbal existence to an as yet indeterminate desire to say something. This "significative intention," as Merleau-Ponty terms it, is an <u>experienced</u> gap or a "speechless want,"[40] and it is produced by the fact that each man experiences a great deal more than he or anyone else has ever expressed. What any speaker has to say, then, is only "the excess of what [he] lives over what has already been

said."[41] Since this significative intention is merely the awareness of a lack, the speaking subject has no text to guide him, no concrete idea of what words to choose to tell him what he feels the lack or privation of. He has no explicit or formulated idea of what he desires to say until he has actually said it. In true speech, therefore, the subject does not deliberately select each sign as the equivalent of some previously worked out signification "the way one searches for a hammer to drive in a nail or pincers to pull one out."[42] Instead, he feels the need to say something, directs his intention toward the as yet indeterminate goal and simply begins to speak. One might say that the speaker aims at the words he needs in the same way that I unconsciously reach across my desk to shut a window. I do not need to mentally represent space and my own body in order to effect the necessary movements involved in shutting the window because both space and my own body exist for me as part of a possible field of action. In the same way, the speaker does not need to visualize a word or represent it to himself in order to articulate it. He possesses certain words as part of his linguistic field of action, merely reaches back to the necessary locations in that field, and utters the words he finds. Since this is an extremely difficult concept to grasp, it might be helpful here to let Merleau-Ponty himself speak at some length on the subject. In commenting on the way in which words are selected in a speech act, he writes:

> The words and turns of phrase needed to bring my significative intention to expression recommend themselves to me, when I am speaking, only by what Humboldt called innere Sprachform . . . that is, only by a certain style of speaking from which they arise and according to which they are organized without my having to represent them to myself. There is a "languagely" meaning of language which effects the mediation between my as yet unspeaking intention and words, and in such a way that my spoken words surprise me myself and teach me my thought. Organized signs have their immanent meaning, which does not arise from the "I think" but from the "I am able to." This action at a distance by language, which brings significations together without touching them, and this eloquence which designates them in a peremptory fashion without ever changing them into words or breaking the silence of consciousness are eminent cases of corporeal intentionality. . . . Signification arouses speech as the world arouses my body - by a mute presence which awakens my intentions without deploying itself before them.[43]

It is true to say, therefore, that a speaker never knows exactly what he wishes to say until he says it. While he does experience a desire to say something, the exact character of that something remains concealed from him until he gives it the "bodily" presence of words. In a sense, his meaning precedes his speaking and simultaneously is its result. It can be said that it comes into existence as the internal companion of the words he utters, and yet that it also guides the choice of those words. A speaker thus has only one way to represent a word or idea to himself and that is to utter it. It is impossible to state, therefore, whether meaning precedes language or is its creation. There can be no question of primary or secondary phenomena here since subordination of one to the other simply cannot exist.[44] Speech—

or the act of expression--"this joining through transcendence of the linguistic meaning of speech and the signification it intends - is not for us speaking subjects a second-order operation we supposedly have recourse to only in order to communicate our thoughts to others, but our own taking possession or acquisition of significations which otherwise are present to us only in a muffled way."[45]

If we accept this fact that new significations come into existence as the result of authentic speech acts, we must inevitably wonder how it is that familiar words can be combined to reveal meanings they have never carried before. Furthermore, we are prompted by such an assertion to question the manner in which the traditional use-value of individual signs can be permanently altered by a single, contingent speech event. That this undoubtedly occurs is attested to by the publication history of any good dictionary since the meanings of many words are subtly altered between one edition and the next. But the exact manner in which such a change is effected is not clearly understood and the process itself is seldom treated systematically in linguistic theories. In attempting to account for the radical creation of meaning and its consequent effect on the character of the language system, Merleau-Ponty uses a phrase he attributes to André Malraux, who attempted to explain the operation of a similar process in painting.[46] Merleau-Ponty speaks of "the coherent deformation," as that operation which arranges available words and their significations in a new sense thereby taking "not only

the hearer but the speaking subject as well through a decisive step."[47] What he describes here is that strange process which occurs when one suddenly sees through the previously opaque words of a speaker or writer and instantly understands ideas which have been obscure until that particular moment. Such an éclarissement or enlightening can occur at all levels, whether one is confronted by the modest changes to a few words introduced by the operation of a local metaphor or by the radical reorientation of a whole language system created by the statement of a new philosophical theory. In either case, once-familiar words are combined in such a way that they are momentarily thrown out of focus for the reader or listener who is then forced to ignore their generally accepted significations and to await the modification or augmentation of them which will be effected by their own internal coherence and form.

It is this action of language upon language which is the essence of Speech, and Merleau-Ponty argues we cannot conceptually place it within the speaker or the listener or even within the words themselves. This magical transformation of signs occurs, instead, at the point of convergence created when a man speaks to another man using the standard units of a language system. Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the importance of this conjunction in The Prose of the World when he writes, "the other's words or mine in him, do not limit themselves to vibrating like chords the listener's machinery of acquired significations or to arousing some

reminiscence. Their flow must have the power of throwing me in turn toward a signification that neither he nor I possessed before."[48] In actuality then, it is the flow of the words themselves as they interact within both speaker and listener which creates the decentering and subsequent refocusing responsible for the foundation of new meaning.

This difficult concept can be explained fairly easily if we stop here for a moment and expand on Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body-subject, on its insertion in and perception of the world, and on its confrontation with others. At the moment when man is born into the world as a body-subject, he is primordially situated and immediately begins to organize his perceptual field. As a result of this normal situation and organization process, certain figures are set off from the ground, top is distinguished from bottom, and space is organized. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "certain elements of the world assume the value of dimensions to which subsequently all the rest relate and through which we can point them out."[49] Meaning is then created out of this situation when a subject focuses on and isolates an aspect of his pre-verbal existence as it is profiled against this primordial orientation or situation. In a sense, this is a process of comparison, and in discussing it in The Prose of the World, Merleau-Ponty refers to it both as the "coherent deformation" and as the perceiver's individual "style" of perception. He echoes Malraux's comment that "all style is giving form to the elements of the world which permits the orientation of the world to one of

its parts," and then adds that "signification occurs where we subject the given elements of the world to a 'coherent deformation.'"[50] His point here is that even at the most basic level of individual experience, meaning is the product of a comparative relationship established between the "object" being brought into existence and the perceiving subject's primordial organization of the perceptual field. By placing the new element into relationship with the already organized field, the perceiver subjects the field to a change or deformation that is nonetheless coherent. The whole field is deformed in that it is organized around an entirely new focal point, but that deformation is still comprehensible to the perceiver because the reorganization is carried out with respect to the originary dimensions which mark his primordial situation. Merleau-Ponty argues that even when a man perceives his world, he "stylizes" it--that is, he affects all the elements of the thing, body, or behavior which he sees with a certain common deviation with respect to the familiar norm that he has behind or within him.[51] Even perceptual meaning, therefore, is the product of this comparison process--this coherent deformation through which man "focuses the signification still scattered in his perception and gives it an express existence."[52]

As a result of this fundamental operation, each body-subject works out a system of relationships and equivalences which serves as the skeleton or framework for all future perceptions. Each time a subject confronts some new object,

person, or idea, those "things" are fit into that system, differentiated by the distance marked off between them and the elements of the system, and thus given meaningful, independent, perceptual existence. Each individual, therefore, can be said to possess his own unique style or system of internal relationships and equivalences, and communication is, as a result, the confrontation and merging of one style with another. This confrontation and interpenetration is made possible by the fact that both subjects perceive the same world through similar bodies. Their perceptual systems, therefore, possess certain elements in common, and the meanings of one can be understood and accommodated by the meanings of the other. What this signifies is that when I perceive the gestures of another, I do not merely understand the meaning I have put into those gestures, but actually comprehend the gestures themselves in terms of my own body and its system of equivalences. As Merleau-Ponty says, "in watching an organism orient gestures towards its environment, I begin to perceive its perceiving because the internal organization of its gestures is the same as my own conduct and tells me of my own relation to the world. . . ."[53]

Just as we are able to understand another's gestures because we share an anonymous corporeality, so we are able to understand another's Speech because we possess the same language. The solution to the problem of understanding how we can truly comprehend the "meaning" of another lies, Merleau-Ponty writes, "in recognizing that, in the experience of

dialogue, the other's speech manages to reach us in our significations, and that our words, as the replies attest, reach him in his significations. For we encroach upon one another inasmuch as we belong to the same cultural world, and above all to the same language, and my acts of expression and the other's derive from the same institution."[54] Because I speak the same language as my listener, our internal perceptual systems are articulated in the same terms and even though slightly different in focus and perspective, converge at certain crucial points. Because of this convergence, I can listen to another's words which are expressions of his primordial situation, perceptual system, and style, fit those words into the spaces of my own system, and thereby activate for myself the meaning they already express. As Merleau-Ponty so eloquently puts it, "when I speak to another person and listen to him, what I understand begins to insert itself in the intervals between my saying things, my speech is intersected laterally by the other's speech, and I hear myself in him, while he speaks in me."[55]

All understanding of meaning, then, is a product of the relationship established between the alien project of an actor, whether in the form of gestures or speech, and the primordial situation or perceptual system of the perceiver. The gestures or words possess significance themselves, but that significance cannot be meaningful for the perceiver until it inserts itself within his own system, subjects that system to deformation, and then reorients the entire system coherently

about itself. This process explains why a subject can listen to another's words, attend immediately to their traditional significance and then realize that, taken together, they seem to mean nothing. It is only after he allows the coherent deformation to take place within himself that he is permitted to hear the other speak in him. It is in this remarkable way that a speaker can listen to familiar words and suddenly be led beyond the words themselves and the significations he already possesses in connection with them to some new meaning or comprehensible signification. Speech, Merleau-Ponty remarks, "endlessly renews the mediation of the same and other" and "perpetually verifies for us that there is no signification without a movement, at first violent, that surpasses all signification."[56]

Before explaining just how this new meaning created by the coherent deformation manages to anchor itself in the words responsible for its presence, I would like to quote at length once again from Merleau-Ponty. His description of the process whereby new significance is brought into existence is both eloquent and precise and it is, I feel, the best illustration that can be given of this amazing operation:

> My relation to a book begins with the easy familiarity of the words of our language, of ideas that are part of our makeup, in the same way that my perception of the other is at first sight perception of the gestures and behavior belonging to "the human species." But if the book really teaches me something, if the other person is really another, at a certain stage I must be surprised, disoriented. If we are to meet not just through what we have in common but in what is different between us--which

> presupposes a transformation of myself and of the other as well - then our differences can no longer be opaque qualities. They must become meaning. In the perception of the other, this happens when the other organism, instead of "behaving" like me, engages with the things in my world in a style that is at first mysterious to me but which at least seems to me a coherent style because it responds to certain possibilities which fringed the things in my world. Similarly, when I am reading, there must be a certain moment when the author's intention escapes me, where he withdraws himself. Then I catch up from behind, fall into step, or else I turn over a few pages and, a bit later, a happy phrase brings me back and leads me to the core of the new signification, and I find access to it through one of its "aspects" which was already part of my experience.[57]

In summary, we might say that it is the power inherent in Speech itself which rescues the utterances of the other from total non-sense and leads me beyond the significations I already possess to those he had originally intended. The force of the words themselves, as they are repeated within me, performs the coherent deformation, remakes me in the other's image and admits me to the presence of new meaning. The other can communicate with me and I with him because we are alike capable of Speech in the same language and thereby open to being led by the flow of each other's talk toward a new state of knowledge. The direction of the coherent deformation is a centrifugal one in that it is a movement away from instituted language that is, from words and their sedimented meanings, toward an indefinite significatory space in which some new meaning is gradually materialized.[58] The centrifugal movement of the coherent deformation is then followed by a

centripetal movement which causes the newly created meaning to be deposited in the very words that gave it birth. In actuality, it is this secondary movement which is responsible for the sedimentation that is the foundation of the institution of language and it is to it that we must now direct our attention.

The centrifugal movement of the coherent deformation does not operate in isolation. If it did, the creation of new meaning would be a wholly transitory event and in effect nothing new could be brought into existence. If new meaning is to be made present in the language system, it must be made to exist within that system, as a property of familiar words. This centripetal movement, therefore, is the process spoken of earlier whereby a single, contingent speech event permanently alters the "meanings" of particular words and phrases. When I am led, for example, by the power of the other's words to realize some new meaning beyond my own significations, it suddenly appears to me that those words have always possessed or contained that meaning which I simply never saw before. I am deceived into believing that the meaning existed even before I became cognizant of it as the content of the words that only just gave it birth. In fact, the meaning did not exist prior to the immediate utterance, but once bodied forth as the production of that utterance, drifted back into those words and became merely one more addition to their polysemic nature. Although Merleau-Ponty admits this process occurs at all levels, he notes it is particularly visible when we

read an unfamiliar author for the first time. He claims, for example, that when we begin to read a philosopher, we first assign common and accepted meanings to the words he employs. However, over the course of time, "through what is at first an imperceptible reversal, his speech comes to dominate his language, and it is his use of words which ends up assigning them a new and characteristic signification."[59] This signification, therefore, becomes a permanent alteration of the words used because the power of speech and the magic of the coherent deformation admits us to the meanings intended by the philosopher and forces us to alter our own language system in order to accommodate them. We come to understand the philosopher's theories because we slowly comprehend his meanings as the peculiar style of his way of speaking. The meanings, as such, become received knowledge for us when we can organize further discourse about them. But this occurs only when we have succeeded in giving them separate and distinct existence by forcing them to live in that series of words which never before carried them as significance.[60] When we are able to do this, the meanings are truly acquired and henceforth always available to us. We can be said to possess them as the transformed content or significance of the once familiar words that have now been forever altered by the speech of the philosopher.

The centripetal movement of the coherent deformation, then, is the recentering process whereby the listener, having understood the style of the other's speaking, gives form to that style by locating it in the very words that first directed

his gaze or attention outward toward it. Such a process can also be thought of as a refocusing operation conducted largely by the listener himself. When someone hears familiar words uttered by another and does not quite understand how they are used or what is intended, he feels those words slip out of focus. However, if he lets the words continue to resonate within him, his capacity to understand is transformed or augmented by the centrifugal force of the coherent deformation. Then, when he refocuses on the words, because he himself has been altered, the words appear to contain the significance he now comprehends.

It can be seen, therefore, that the process of understanding another's speech is a complex and delicately balanced operation in which the listener is forced to step beyond the language system itself in order to comprehend the new or different significations intended by the other. However, that same listener is forced to return to the system and to employ familiar signs to act as vehicles for the newly discovered significations if his comprehension of them as style is to be transformed into understanding of them as acquired meaning. As Merleau-Ponty himself puts it, to understand the unique meanings offered by another is to understand speech as it is distinguished from language, and speech, he says, "is that moment when the significative intention (still silent and wholly in act) proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others - of

shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments. It becomes 'available' in turn because in retrospect it gives us the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of ruse it espoused them only in order to infuse them with a new life."[61] Therefore, it is through the centripetal movement of the coherent deformation that speech comes to dominate language as a system and the contingent event permanently alters the meanings of individual signs contained within that system.

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, a speech act involves both a transitory action in which signs are combined and uttered, and a simultaneous creation of meaning in which significations are brought into existence which live on in the listener after the event has exhausted itself. This dual nature of the speech act is once again a unity which cannot be divided into primary and secondary elements. Meaning comes into existence at the very moment of utterance and is, therefore, essentially part of the event itself. It is simply impossible to conceive of it as something separate from the words through which it is first bodied forth. If we are careful, however, to distinguish without dividing, we can state that the event is that aspect of the act which disappears or ends. In effect, it is the temporal aspect of the speech act and in it the message exists as duration. On the other hand, the meaning is that portion of the act which, from the moment of utterance, seems to live a life of its own.

Because we think of it as that aspect of the speech act which is communicated from speaker to listener, we conceive of it as an abstraction translatable from one vehicle to another. In actuality, it never ceases to be the invisible side of the visible event, but because it can continue to exist as acquired meaning in our private world of silent speaking, it seems to function as a "thought" capable of generating innumerable ways to clothe itself. As Merleau-Ponty points out, meaning is usually thought of as transcending the signs which indicate it, just as thought is usually conceived of as transcending the sounds and sights which mark it off.[62] In truth, that is, if we are speaking phenomenologically, neither is an accurate description since the meaning of a sign exists only in so far as it is profiled against other signs and thought is always locked to words. Still, we often do put signs together as if each word possessed its meaning once and for all, and we talk as if speaking merely involved matching one element of meaning with an equivalent element of discourse. Language used in this way is neither expression nor Speech, for it is no longer that primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs and implants the meaning which dwells in them "through the eloquence of their arrangement and configuration alone."[63] Instead, when language is used in this manner, both speaker and listener rely on the sedimented meanings of the signs as they are traditionally used and, as a result, they remain within the boundaries of the language system itself. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, they speak

"empirically" or make use of language as a complete, fully created institution.

Empirical Speech

Merleau-Ponty cautions in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," that "the empirical use of already established language should be distinguished from its creative use" even though the latter necessarily involves the former.[64] When language is used empirically, the speaker depends on sedimented meaning or that collection of relationships between signs and significations which he gradually learned as a child while seeking to master the use of the system as a whole. This store of established relations was itself at one time the production of primary Speech acts which established sign and signification together as one unit. But because of the peculiar nature of the act of speaking itself, the two gradually appeared to separate and signs seemed to point to meanings which were separate and distinct "thoughts." Empirical use of language, then, is nothing more than the "opportune recollection of a pre-established sign" which itself possesses a definitive sense.[65] A speaker employs the sign and its traditional sense conservatively and cannot be said to change or augment its use-value in any way. He does not rattle the chain of language as an integrated whole to ring from it some new signification, but is, instead, content to strike each word separately, permitting it to vibrate the next only in the most traditional way.

In empirical speech, therefore, the speaker allows what he wishes to say to be controlled by the previously established significations of the signs he uses, since he does not subject those signs to any kind of change or re-orientation. Because he allows his intentions to be contained within the language system itself, he does not truly express his unique way-of-being-in-the-world, but instead permits the culture, as it is contained within the language system, to speak through him. Furthermore, when using language empirically, the speaker does not subject the system to a coherent deformation because that which he seeks to say is already embodied within it. As a result, there is no need for his significative intention to alter previously existing cultural instruments in order to make itself present within the institution of which they are a part. Since the speaker simply utters familiar signs and refers to their traditionally agreed-upon meanings, it can be said that he speaks not as a unique and individual body-subject, but as a culturally determined member of a group. In essence, he merely seeks to replace his "thought," which was itself at one time the radical creation of Speech and the coherent deformation, with some verbal counter that can serve as its equivalent. His listener then comprehends that counter because it vibrates like a chord his own machinery of acquired significations and arouses in him the necessary reminiscence.[66] Merleau-Ponty points out that "speech in the sense of empirical language. . .is not speech in respect to an authentic language. It is as

Mallarmé said, the worn coin placed silently in my hand."[67]

The Radical Interdependence of Creative and Empirical Speech

This crucial distinction between the creative and empirical use of language will, perhaps, be greatly clarified if we can imagine two conversations, one of which is controlled by the creative use of language while the other is dominated by its empirical use. In the first, I listen to apparently familiar words uttered by some other and feel strangely separated from their total meaning by a kind of screen. Words that ought to be transparent and reveal their meaning to me because I have already learned them suddenly become opaque, and I hear nothing more than non-sense. However, if I listen to the speaker long enough, his speech begins to take over and I am gradually led away from my own understanding of the separate words he uses to the general sense or signification they contain for him. I am, in effect, changed or altered because his words repeated within me actually give me the capacity or ability to comprehend that which I did not know before. Through the medium of our shared language and by virtue of the power of his words, I suddenly confront him as Other, as an individual wholly distinct and different from me. At this moment, I do not meet him through what we have in common but instead am taken out of myself and confront him on his own ground. His style or way of intending the world through language gradually becomes familiar to me and I begin to understand the way of

being in the world that is behind it. Slightly altered therefore in the direction of his vision, I now turn back to the elements of my own system and see those once-familiar words in a new way. It is at this point that the screen is removed, the words become transparent, and I suddenly possess as acquired meaning the significations intended by the other. It can be said, therefore, that when a speaker uses language creatively, he not only fabricates new meaning, but also expands his listener's capacity to understand it and therefore restructures the vehicle in which that understanding is to be revealed. In a sense, he can be said to re-create his listener's entire language system. As Merleau-Ponty argues, "it is. . .necessary to conceive the operation of speech outside any previously institutionalized signification, as a unique act whereby a man's speaking furnishes his listener and a culture that is common to them."[68] Such use of language is, therefore, a radically creative act and through it a speaker can express for another his own very special way of inhabiting the world.

Empirical language, however, cannot be used in this way and, as a result, any conversation dominated by it is vastly different from the one just related. When I converse on an empirical level, for example, I listen to the words spoken by the other and simultaneously understand what they mean. I am not conscious of any disjunction between the sounds the speaker utters and the significations he intends for, in this instance, they appear to me to be one and the

same thing. The words themselves are transparent and to hear them stated is to immediately see through them to the sense they contain. This is possible because I possess those words and certain coordinate significations as part of my own personal language storehouse and, when they are spoken by the other, it appears as if his language system is identical to my own. His words simply call up the thoughts or meanings I possess as the equivalent of those particular counters. Because of this rigid parallelism, we are not forced to confront each other as wholly separate and distinct individuals, but instead acknowledge each other's presence within the same institution or culture. I am not pushed beyond myself in order to understand what the other says because I carry his meanings within me as the sedimentation of the signs I use every day. Thus, when we communicate in this way, on this particular level, we converse as culturally determined beings inserted within the same institution and, as a result, we acknowledge all that we possess in common as members of the same system.

It is just because we are able to depend on this previously worked out, stable institution of language that we begin to believe our thoughts lead an independent existence of their own. Because we possess an equivalent meaning or "idea" for every sign contained within the language we speak, and because we know how to transpose those meanings into still other signs, we begin to assume that the thoughts themselves precede their expression in language. The individual words

then seem to be simply the arbitrary English, French, or German equivalents of previously existing human ideas. The real difficulty however in looking at language in this way is that it prevents us from understanding how meaning can be created or how men can learn things they do not already know. For if, in speaking, a person merely codes his thought and replaces it "with a visible or sonorous pattern which is nothing but sounds in the air or ink spots on the paper," then another can understand those thoughts only if he already possesses them as the equivalent of those particular sounds or ink spots.[69] But if this is the case, then no listener can ever discover in another's words anything more than what he has put there himself and true communication between different individuals is impossible. Indeed, if language only operates in this way, "how [can] communication possibly carry us beyond our own powers of reflection, since the signs communication employs [can] never tell us anything unless we already grasp the signification?"[70]

If we are honest with ourselves, however, we must acknowledge that our own educational experience warns that this is not the entire picture. All, for example, who have ever discovered a new idea expressed through the medium of familiar words, must recognize that the meanings of words can be changed by the context in which they are used. Furthermore, any one who has ever encountered the curious magic of a metaphor must certainly be aware that language is not entirely fixed, but malleable and flexible, and that words can be

combined to say things they have never said before. In fact, the creation of new meaning is a common occurrence in all language systems, and as a result of the contingent events responsible for this, such systems evolve diachronically through time. It can be seen, therefore, that language is both a pre-established stable institution and a dynamically changing method for making meaning out of the world, and it can, consequently, be used in two entirely different ways. A speaker may situate himself within the system and depend completely on its signs and accepted significations to carry his meaning or he may choose instead to use that system the way a sculptor uses clay. Unable to change its basic structure or character, he will mold it into the shape he desires and force it to "say" that which he wishes to communicate.

While this does not mean that every speech act falls clearly into one of these two categories or the other, it does suggest the existence of two poles between which all speech events are situated. Although it is, in reality, impossible for an entire conversation to be conducted at the level of the creative use of language, any such conversation could conceivably be characterized by a preponderance of authentic or creative speech acts. At the same time, another conversation could be dominated by the empirical use of language and both speakers would then rely almost entirely on the sedimented meanings of the words employed. In any case, when discourse effects true communication between two separate individuals, it is highly probable that the conversation will

include both kinds of language use.

In summary, then, I might reiterate that language considered phenomenologically, that is, as it functions in real speech, is truly "logic in contingency." Although it is an oriented, equilibrated system, it is, nevertheless, capable of sudden change and can absorb the effects of such change as permanent alterations of itself. While it is also composed of discrete units or signs, each of which possesses its own sedimented meaning, it can be used in such a way that those signs are forced to secrete a significance they have never before possessed. In other words, depending on which aspect of its nature is stressed in the composition process, language may force the listener to go beyond himself and his immediate ability to comprehend in order to understand that which has been intended, or it may merely require him to depend on standard procedures and operations to decipher the meanings encoded within traditional forms. In the latter case, when language is used empirically, both speaker and listener rely on the sedimented meanings of the signs manipulated. By asking nothing more of the signs he uses than that they reveal their familiar and accepted meanings, the speaker fits his intention to speak within the limits of the language system. The listener, then, easily decodes the speaker's utterance because the speaker's word-usage conforms to his linguistic expectations. Because he is a member of the same language system as the speaker, he understands the same signs and their traditional meanings, knows the same implicit rules

governing their combination, and thus possesses a similar set of expectations or anticipations about the way in which those signs should mean for him. This linguistic "competence," or ability to understand all rule-governed speech acts, then enables him to immediately "hear" the meaning contained within the speaker's utterances if they conform to the implicit rules of the language he speaks.[71]

In the former case, however, when language is used creatively, the listener does not immediately comprehend the significance of the words uttered because they interact among themselves in an unexpected way. While the words, taken separately, may each sound familiar to the listener, the statement as a whole appears strange. His linguistic competence is unable to aid him in decoding its significance because the words have been combined in a manner that breaks some rule or expectation about context implicit within his language system. In order to understand the meaning contained within this kind of speech event, therefore, the listener must actually attend to the words themselves and permit them to direct him toward the as-yet silent space of signification intended by the speaker. When he lets the words resonate within him, he is gradually led beyond his own expectations and, through the power of the coherent deformation, begins to absorb the other's style of speaking and the unfamiliar rules governing the sort of expression that results.

To use language creatively, therefore, is to alter the language system itself by changing the rules for the production

and comprehension of meaning. The standard rules are effectively changed or added to the moment a speaker produces an utterance defying them, simply because the utterance as such exists and cries out to be understood. If he wishes to make sense of such an utterance, a listener is forced to scrap his previous expectations and must attempt to determine the implicit principles underlying its peculiar organization and structure. If he can do so, his linguistic competence is forever altered by the action of the words themselves, for it is they who create in him the capacity to follow their style and the ability to understand the latticework of internal relationships that is the necessary foundation of that style. When the listener finally does absorb the principles by which a certain signification is given verbal presence in the world, he then possesses as acquired knowledge the ability to discern and comprehend other speech events organized along the same lines. In essence, both his capacity to understand others and his ability to make meaning out of his own world are enlarged by the concerted action of the other's speech and the power inherent within language itself.

As Merleau-Ponty himself concludes at the end of The Prose of the World, it is through Speech "that we realize the impossible agreement between two rival totalities not because speech forces us back upon ourselves to discover some unique spirit in which we participate but because speech concerns us, catches us indirectly, seduces us, trails us along,

transforms us into the other and him into us, abolishes the limit between mine and not-mine, and ends the alternative between what has sense for me and what is non-sense for me, between me as subject and the other as object."[72] Although it is ultimately authentic Speech which enriches language and forever increases its capacity to delineate the world, there can be no Speech or expression without the underlying stability of a familiar language system. In the end, both personal expression and interpersonal communication are entirely dependent on the fact that language can be made to function for both speaker and listener in two distinct but reciprocally dependent ways.

NOTES

[1]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, trans. Alden Fisher (New York: Beacon Press, 1963), and Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). Because of the limited availability of the French editions, I have referred to and quoted from the standard English translations of Merleau-Ponty's works wherever possible.

[2]Merleau-Ponty, Structure, p. 215.

[3]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. lx.

[4]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xv.

[5]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

[6]Because Merleau-Ponty's philosophical thought was actually a system in evolution, there are contradictions, inconsistencies and disavowals of earlier positions throughout his work. As a result, commentators often rightly disagree over what Merleau-Ponty "really" meant, and the writings themselves are not always entirely clear or definitive. For purposes of this short summary, I have attempted to represent what seemed to be his position at the time of his death. This has been an extremely difficult task since Merleau-Ponty had already abandoned consideration of several of the topics examined here by the time he turned to The Visible and the Invisible where he was clearly changing or altering some of his most fundamental premises. I have been aided in this interpretive task by Remy Kwant's invaluable study, From Phenomenology to Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Last Period of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophical Life (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1966).

[7]Remy C. Kwant, From Phenomenology to Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Last Period of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophical Life (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), p. 44.

[8]Merleau-Ponty, The Visible, p. 131.

[9]Merleau-Ponty, The Visible, pp. 145-146.

[10]In paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty's argument here, I have made use of a phrase of Coleridge's that was first introduced

to me by Dr. Roger Meiners. The concept of distinguishing without dividing and its philosophical consequences is explored at length by Owen Barfield in What Coleridge Thought (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), pp. 18-21, 36, 93, 148, 172, 149n, 251n.

[11]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France 1952-1960, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 129.

[12]Merleau-Ponty, Themes, pp. 3-4.

[13]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 374.

[14]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signs, trans. and with an introduction by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 67.

[15]Kwant, From Phenomenology to Metaphysics, p. 77.

[16]This is the position set forth in the enigmatic and incomplete last chapter of The Visible and the Invisible, pp. 130-155. It is in some sense a direct contradiction of his earlier position, set forth in the Phenomenology, that perception and its structures determine the nature of all higher-level activities. Merleau-Ponty defended his early argument in his address to the Société francaise de philosophie, which he called "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences." This address can be found in The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Although he did grant primacy to language in The Visible and the Invisible, he never abandoned his notions about embodiment and incarnation and thus never moved away from his conviction that language is still a form of that most basic human activity of the body-subject, expression.

[17]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Prose of the World, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 75.

[18]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 48.

[19]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 129.

[20]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 10.

[21]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 10.

[22]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 85.

[23]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 88.

[24]This is, of course, to ignore the fact that at one time there must have been an initial speech act which preceded language as institution and which was actually responsible for the creation of that institution. This is an extremely difficult problem and one that is really outside the realm of this study. Still, Merleau-Ponty does account for the possibility of a radically creative speech act and the reader may wish to consult his discussion in Chapter Five of The Prose of the World, pp. 42-45, 131-146.

[25]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 85.

[26]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 87.

[27]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 87.

[28]Merleau-Ponty, Themes, p. 19.

[29]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 13.

[30]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 13.

[31]Eugene F. Kaelin, An Existentialist Aesthetic: The Theories of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), pp. 265-266.

[32]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 39.

[33]Jean Piaget, Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood, trans. C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1962), pp. 215-245.

[34]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 40.

[35]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 42.

[36]This notion of the speech event will become very important in the third, fourth, and fifth chapters of this paper where I will be arguing that a literary text is in many ways like a speech act. If we can think of literature as a language system composed of basic units and rules for their combination, then the meaning of any text is not to be found solely in the units it uses but rather in the way it uses those units. For example, both The Golden Unicorn. a popular novel by Phyllis Whitney, and The Member of the Wedding, by Carson McCullers, are written about young girls who have been called descendents of the gothic heroine in the novels of Ann Radcliffe. However, these two novels are extremely different from each other in theme and in significance and, as a result, it seems logical to conclude that

the difference in meaning is "caused" by differing uses of this gothic heroine.

[37]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 183.

[38]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 177.

[39]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 178.

[40]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 90.

[41]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 112.

[42]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 45.

[43]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, pp. 88-89.

[44]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 83.

[45]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 90.

[46]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 61.

[47]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 91.

[48]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142. (emphasis added)

[49]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 61.

[50]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 60.

[51]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 60.

[52]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 61.

[53]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[54]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 139.

[55]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[56]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[57]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, pp. 142-143.

[58]Merleau-Ponty never specifically appends the terms centrifugal and centripetal to his discussions of language-use and the coherent deformation. He does, however, use the terms to describe the reciprocal relationship established between an individual and the culture within which he is situated in an essay entitled "The Philosopher and Sociology" included in Signs, pp. 98-113. The relationships he describes are strictly analogous to the operations of language-

use as he conceives it and, as a result, I have used his own terms in this different context. The passage from which I have adapted the terminology follows:

> For there are two truths which must be grasped simultaneously. The individual drama takes place among roles which are already inscribed in the total institutional structure, so that from the beginning of his life the child proceeds--simply by perceiving the attentions paid to him and the utensils surrounding him--to a deciphering of meanings which from the outset generalizes his own drama into a drama of his culture. And yet it is the whole symbolic consciousness which in the last analysis elaborates what the child lives or does not live, suffers or does not suffer, feels or does not feel. Consequently, there is not a single detail of his most individual history which does not contribute something to that personal significance he will manifest when (having first thought and lived as he thought best, and perceived according to his culture's imagery) he finally comes to the point of reversing the relationship and slipping into the meanings of his speech and his behavior, converting even the most secret aspects of his experience into culture. From the causal point of view it is unthinkable that this centripetal movement and this centrifugal movement are compossible.

[59]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 91.

[60]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 91.

[61]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 92.

[62]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 42.

[63]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 67.

[64]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 45.

[65]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 44.

[66]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[67]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 44.

[68]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 141.

[69]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 7.

[70]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 145.

[71]The term "competence" is actually Noam Chomsky's. He was the first to use it to refer to that body of implicit linguistic knowledge possessed by a native speaker of a language which enables him to decipher grammatical and non-grammatical utterances. I suspect many of Merleau-Ponty's followers would object to my application of this term to his phenomenological theories since Chomsky's own enterprise is strictly structural in its attempt to discover the principles of a universal human grammar. Although Merleau-Ponty criticized such an attempt in his early writings on language, he also recognized the importance of la langue and even argued for its logical priority with respect to la parole. I am in full agreement, furthermore, with James Edie who maintains in Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976), that Merleau-Ponty tried to reconcile the structuralist and phenomenological conceptions of language in his last published work, The Visible and the Invisible. It is on this basis that I feel justified in incorporating a structuralist term in my exigesis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of language. Since that phenomenology does recognize the claims of language considered as a system, I see no harm in "naming" that phenomenon with Chomsky's term. For what Chomsky has to say about linguistic competence, see especially Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1965), pp. 3-15.

[72]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 145.

CHAPTER III

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF LITERARY EXPRESSION

Why Phenomenology?

Before moving from the study of language to the study of literature, it is necessary to explain why I have turned to Merleau-Ponty and his particular phenomenology of language in my search for a conceptual framework which might encompass both popular and elite literary forms. This question is particularly significant in light of the fact that so much recent work has been done in the name of "structuralism" on the connections between modern linguistics and literary inquiry. Although I agree with theorists such as Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Tzvetan Todorov that literature as an institution can be fruitfully thought of as a language and that, as a result, the characteristic principles and processes of modern linguistics can be applied to written texts, I have definite reservations about the particular conception of language that they, as structuralists, employ. It seems to me that by looking at language phenomenologically, taking into account the point of view of a speaking subject, Merleau-Ponty corrects some of the significant omissions and unfortunate emphases of purely structuralist analysis. More specifically, he avoids their tendency to concentrate the meaning

of an utterance in the listener and his knowledge of the language system alone. Such a tendency derives from the fact that structural linguistics directs its attention away from the individual speech act and the meaning it founds in order to focus on that unconscious knowledge of a language system which is necessary for both the production and comprehension of the act and its meaning. Indeed, Ferdinand de Saussure, acknowledged by the structuralists as one of their great progenitors, devotes a considerable amount of time and effort to the argument that while la parole or speech has significance in and of itself, it is outside the realm of a truly scientific linguistic study which ought to concern itself solely with la langue.[1] Because Saussure maintains that la langue is the essential aspect of language and la parole only the accessory or accidental, contemporary structuralism derived from his theory "directs its 'scientific' attention toward the analysis of the macroscopic and intersubjective structures, the statistical regularities, the nontemporal and nonparticular synchronic forms to which behavior can be found to conform."[2] Indeed, structuralism has often been accused of doing away with the human subject, since it attributes so much power to the determining capabilities of unconscious structures.

Since most critics willing to call themselves structuralists focus their attention on la langue or on the synchronic system that is the possession of all speakers of a language, they transpose that preoccupation with linguistic

competence to the study of literary texts. They argue that an utterance has a particular form or structure and hence, a meaning, only within a certain language system and that in order to understand how that meaning is produced, one must know the various rules and strategies used by a listener to construe that specific form as meaning. Structuralists are less concerned therefore with the meaning of a speech act or the significance of a text than with the peculiar manner in which such meaning or significance is produced by a listener or reader. The structural analysis of texts, argues Roland Barthes in Critique et vérité, is not a study of content, but rather "a science of the conditions of content, that is to say of forms. What interests it will be the variations of meaning generated and, as it were, capable of being generated by works; it will not interpret symbols but describe their polyvalency. In short, its object will not be the full meanings of the work but on the contrary the empty meaning which supports them all."[3] While most structuralists acknowledge the existence of la parole, and Barthes himself admits in S/Z that the meanings found in a text are not established by one reader or a series of readers alone, but by specific "systematic marks,"[4] both Barthes and his fellow structuralists continue to insist on the primary importance and determining power of the linguistic and literary systems as they are possessed by the readers of such texts. To study literature with the tools of linguistics does not mean, for a structuralist, to analyze those meanings produced by the language and comprehended by a reader, although

that is sometimes done. Instead, it means to examine the forms of specific texts in the hope of discovering what expectations and reading strategies a reader employs to make those texts "signify."

While Merleau-Ponty does not discount the importance of the listener and his knowledge of a language system to the comprehension process, neither does he focus on these things to the exclusion of all other factors involved in the operation. Although he acknowledges the logical primacy of la langue to la parole and admits that no human can ever speak unless he already possesses implicit knowledge of a language system, he maintains that ontological primacy must be granted to la parole or to the speech event itself.[5] In fact, in all his various writings on language, Merleau-Ponty rarely concerns himself with the listener or receiver of an utterance because his interest rests primarily with the speaker and his ability to express his way-of-being-in-the-world by embodying his significative intention in the carnal presence of words. Furthermore, because he is most curious about man's ability to create new meaning and to say things that have never before been said in the language he speaks, Merleau-Ponty focuses his attention on the peculiar nature of the sign or the word itself and its capacity to carry wholly unfamiliar significance. By arguing so vehemently for the gestural significance of words and by maintaining that the meaning of an authentic utterance cannot be separated from the physical form in which it is couched, as the meaning of a

dance cannot be separated from the actual movements of the dancers,[6] Merleau-Ponty draws attention away from the fact that, ordinarily, listeners do "know" words and associate meanings with them. Indeed, he often seems to forget that even the creative use of language is entirely dependent on the fact that both speaker and listener must necessarily begin with empirical language, that is, with individual words which possess certain known sedimented meanings. If this were not the case, men could express themselves with unique but entirely random vocalizations and they thus would be incomprehensible to each other. Still, his preoccupation with the "languagely" meaning of language itself and the power of words to take a listener completely outside himself and the knowledge he already possesses, is characteristic of his phenomenological concern with the actual event or phenomenon as "the thing itself."

It is important to stress at this point that in suddenly speaking of the listener and linguistic competence at the end of chapter two, I believe I am reflecting a subtle shift in position that takes place in Merleau-Ponty's thought itself.[7] While he shows very little interest in language as a system or body of knowledge in his earliest works, particularly in Phenomenology of Perception, he encountered the writings of Saussure shortly after the Phenomenology's publication in 1945 and his work published after 1949 reflects his very personal version of Saussurean structuralism.[8] Although he continues to focus on the speaker after reading Saussure, he

pays new attention to the acquisition of language in children and concerns himself with the problem of what it is a child learns when he learns to speak.[9] While this never leads Merleau-Ponty to a full-fledged examination of language as "possession," it does cause him to introduce the distinction between authentic and empirical language-use and forces him to acknowledge that speakers necessarily rely, at least initially, on sedimented meanings and traditional syntactical or combinatory rules. At a deeper level, his encounter with Saussure prompts him to reconsider the nature of perceptual truth and rational or intellectual truth, and eventually to conclude in The Visible and the Invisible that perception is structured as language is, and not vice versa, as had been his argument in the Phenomenology.

In this last work, published after his death, Merleau-Ponty argues that the structures of perception are analogous to the structures of language and he suggests that man's knowledge of anything is at once an opening onto the things themselves and an introduction to the "ideal" structure underlying them. It is possible, in fact, to argue, as James Edie does, that Merleau-Ponty finally considers the world from both a phenomenological and structural point of view. He continues to stress the essential reality of phenomena or "the things themselves," but he admits the equally real existence of the necessary structural conditions present within the body-subject which are responsible for the form those phenomena take for that subject. With respect to language, this leads

him to conclude that while the speech-event itself is of crucial and even primary importance, there are, indeed, morphological, syntactical, and phonological rules governing both the production and comprehension of such acts. As Edie points out, at the time of his death, Merleau-Ponty was attempting to account for the interdependence of la parole and la langue and to demonstrate the fundamental reciprocity of structural rules or conditions and the actual events which are founded on them but which give them their "ontological validity."[10]

The implications of Merleau-Ponty's final position are considerable, especially for anyone contemplating the application of language theory to the phenomenon of literature. For if we argue that meaning is produced in speech by the coming-together of a speaker, speech-act, and listener, then any analysis of the meaning of an utterance must be based on an examination of all three factors and the nature of their connection in the act of comprehension. Furthermore, if we agree with Merleau-Ponty that the utterance itself is meaning, then we must acknowledge the power of that utterance to determine the nature of its comprehension. However, if we also concede that both speaker and listener are determined by the structures of the language they speak, then it is also imperative that we recognize the extent of the comprehension can be circumscribed by the listener's linguistic competence. If, therefore, we decide to consider literature as a language, we ought to admit that the meaning of a text is similarly the

result of a conjunction between author, text, and reader. While the text itself can certainly be said to possess or exhibit meaning, that meaning can only be brought into existence by the action of a reader whose ability to construct or construe meaning is directly affected by all his previous encounters with literature. In dealing with literature, therefore, throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will not argue that a single objective and complete meaning exists within a text and can be ferreted out by some ideal reader. Neither, however, will I argue that meaning is solely the creation of a reader and thus wholly dependent on that reader's literary expectations and reading strategies. Instead, it is my contention that meaning does exist as the invisible side of the visible words of a text, but that it must also be construed by the actions of a reader if it is to be truly present in the world as an existential "phenomenon."

It is useful, I think, to point out that this notion about the ontological status of meaning can be directly derived from Merleau-Ponty's arguments about the essential wrong-headedness of both materialism and transcendental idealism in philosophy. He is, in fact, always careful to point out that the order or meaning of the universe cannot be said to exist solely within the material world itself nor can it be thought of as the mental or "ideal" production of a transparent, constituting consciousness. His position is a careful and calculatedly-maintained dialectical stance which seeks to stress the essential but partial truth of each of

these two arguments. For Merleau-Ponty, meaning exists in Nature as an inarticulate or undifferentiated variation in the fabric of Being, but it must, nevertheless, be brought to the level of carnal and hence conscious existence by the activity of a body-subject if it is to exist as meaning.

It is, therefore, because Merleau-Ponty's theory of language is derived from a complex position about the existential status of meaning that I have chosen it as my starting point in an attempt to differentiate popular from elite literary texts. I do not claim, as the structuralists do and, as Jonathan Culler does, that linguistics merely provides a useful model for the analysis of literature and literary texts. I claim much more for the theory and philosophy of language for I look upon language as the quintessential semiotic system and think of speech as the primary instance of man's ability to distance himself from the Being within which he is situated and out of which he creates meaning. I am in full agreement with Merleau-Ponty, and I contend that meaning is always and everywhere, in all media, the production of the convergence between the act of an actor (la parole) and the action or activity of some perceiver or listener who is, in some sense, determined by prior knowledge, experience, and structures (la langue). The meaning produced by such a convergence can be "new" in that what is apprehended has previously been only an undifferentiated part of Being and is now made to exist within the system or structures of the particular vehicle used to bring it to existence for the

first time. On the other hand, such meaning can also be familiar and previously understood since what is apprehended in this instance is merely some act, idea, or object already embodied in the system employed. It is, therefore, absolutely essential to look at literature as a kind of language which is simultaneously an institution or system and a string of individual and unique speech-events or texts. When man engages in the creation and comprehension of literature, he is simply using his ability to make meaning of his world in a very special way and thus, in order to understand the peculiar nature of this activity, it makes sense to examine it using what we already know about language and speech.

Literature Considered as a Language System

I want to make it clear that I am not, for the moment, concerned with the current debate over the structural differences between literary and non-literary texts. While it is entirely possible that such differences may be discovered in the future when we have perfected methods for uncovering the complex structures of all sorts of texts, I don't think it is necessary to await such a breakthrough in order to make some observations on groups of texts we traditionally agree are "literary." Because I see no problem in defining literature functionally, I will use the term accordingly to refer to those texts we approach by convention as fictional accounts by an author designed to have some connection, however remote

or dubious to the world in which we live. Furthermore, I will include within this group not only those texts traditionally labelled "Literature," that is, elite works of high art, but also those works generally excluded as "popular culture," or the popularly acclaimed works of mass entertainment. In other words, for purposes of this study, the term "literature" will be applied to all those texts we can and do read as literature. While I am fully aware that this seemingly arbitrary cultural agreement about what is to be designated "literary" is almost certainly founded on unconscious, inarticulate perceptions about real differences in structure and function, I don't think these differences have been isolated as yet. It seems to me it will be possible to do so only after we have acknowledged the existential reality of this operational category and attempted to describe its structural and functional properties in detail. This is obviously a huge undertaking and, as a result, this paper proposes only to provide some general theoretical hypotheses about differences within this group of "literary" texts and then seeks to make some procedural and methodological suggestions about how to conduct further analysis of individual texts in order to discover those properties that differentiate them from non-literary texts.

Because I take literature to be all those texts we read as literature, I do not believe a reader can approach an unfamiliar text anew without falling back on certain implicit notions about what literary texts in general ought to look

like or "do." We cannot understand a wholly unfamiliar landscape without unconsciously referring to all other landscapes we have previously viewed, just as we cannot comprehend a new utterance without also relying on what we have already learned about utterances in general from our previous experience. We are always already situated within an institution because of our primordial incarnation as body-subjects and, as a result, we can never escape the unconscious knowledge that accompanies such a situation. We are at once situated in a world, a language, and a culture and, as we are educated, we are also incorporated into a literary institution whose composition preceded our individual appearance. To read a text as literature, therefore, is to come to it with certain preconceived ideas about the way sentences are put together and the way those sentences refer to the world. In other words, in order to make sense of a text we have never encountered before, we must rely on accepted notions about how written literary language "means." Similarly, we also approach new texts with previously established expectations about the ways in which specific textual elements are combined in the production of certain generic forms, just as we encounter the genre itself with certain ideas about that genre's relation to the world and its consequent significance. In summary, we might say that we always approach an unfamiliar text with specific expectations in mind. As a result, our ability to understand that text is necessarily affected and often limited by the flexibility of those expectations.

Before moving on to a consideration of the implications of such a conception of the reading-process, it is necessary to digress for a moment in order to examine the whole question of "meaning" and "reference to a world." As has been pointed out before, the structuralists are not interested in the meaning of a text but concern themselves instead with the necessary conditions responsible for the presence of that meaning in the world. However, I do not see how we can go about isolating the elements and structures responsible for a certain meaning unless we already have a general sense of what that meaning is. Analysis or structuralist decomposition therefore can only follow understanding or comprehensive synthesis and it is this process or ability we must account for before proceeding to an examination of the structures of certain texts. We must first make some observations about <u>how</u> meaning is understood before we can speculate about exactly how that meaning is made.

I have left this problem until now because Merleau-Ponty does not deal with it explicitly in his numerous writings on language. Despite this fact, however, it is possible to derive the implicit notions he adhered to by acknowledging the fact that he accepted most Saussurean linguistic theory. This is exactly what James M. Edie has done in a volume entitled <u>Speaking and Meaning</u>: <u>The Phenomenology of Language</u>, where he concerns himself with how Merleau-Ponty the phenomenologist accounts for the process of comprehension. In response to such a concern, Edie writes, "the answer to this

question, of course, takes us away from la langue towards la parole and to questions of referential meaning and semantic conditions. This question takes us away from the necessary, presupposed structural condition of all speaking to the speech-act itself, and Merleau-Ponty, like all phenomenologists . . . recognizes that meaning is actualized only in use and that the sentence . . . is, in an existential sense, intentionally prior to its component parts (the morphemes and words, which can be discovered only by a later, formal analysis.)"[11] Edie notes that although Merleau-Ponty once wrote that as human beings we are condemned to meaning, he never systematically concerned himself with problems of syntax or semantics. He simply did not describe in any detail how one speaker understands another. As a remedy, Edie proposes to distinguish four levels of meaning revealed by the use of language, and I think it particularly useful to summarize the levels here for his conception can provide a solid base for our attempt to understand how human beings make sense of complex literary texts.

Edie argues that four levels of meaning can be isolated in linguistic experience; the first, the level of immanent meaning, is dependent on language as a phonological system; the second, the level of transcendent meaning, is produced by the move from semiotics to the semantic; the third, the level of syntax and semantics, concerns the use of sentences, and the fourth, designated as "the higher unit of 'texts,'" encompasses and goes beyond the preceding three.[12] The level

of immanent meaning, which exists below the level of speech, is that "languagely" aspect of language which Merleau-Ponty charges with ultimate responsibility for the coherent deformation. He bases such a conception on his belief that language is not composed of discrete, wholly positive and independent signs, but exists rather as a system of differences or diacritical oppositions revealed in the presence of a system of phonemes. At this level, the language system exists apart from its ability to signify and it refers to nothing other than itself. As Edie points out, "each phoneme takes its place in the phonological system as an element sufficiently distinct to be distinguished from all others in the same system and capable of being related to others according to a system of phonological rules which apply within the system and refer to nothing outside the system itself."[13] What this means is that the phonemes or sounds of a particular language system possess certain affective, immediately understood "meanings" as immanent sense. When a child begins to babble, for example, Merleau-Ponty maintains that his utterances contain this level of meaning for it is not words the child is beginning to understand but the melody of the phonemic oppositions characteristic of his native language. "The meaning of words," Merleau-Ponty writes, "must be finally induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of subtraction from a gestural meaning which is immanent in speech."[14] His point is that, despite its ability to point beyond itself to elements of another

world, language first possesses a kind of internal or emotional sense that is locked to the very sounds of which it is composed. That sense is unique to that particular system and it is this level of meaning that cannot be translated into other languages since they too are based on phonological systems which possess their own immanent sense. Once a speaker has learned the necessary system of diacritical oppositions and begun to speak, he has, in effect, internalized the "ideal" collection of phonological rules which describes the operation and possibilities of the system and he can immediately comprehend the level of immanent meaning in any utterance based on the phonemes in question. However, because these sounds and phonemic oppositions are realized in the presence of words, it is necessary to move on to the second level of meaning which involves word-combination and usage.

At this second level of language-use, signs or words are combined according to syntactical rules implicit within the language system itself in order to refer to something that transcends the system as a whole. It is these rules that have been the consistent concern of linguists for years, and Edie merely summarizes the general concept. As he points out, this notion of language as a semiotic system of signs which can be paired with "meanings" is based on the assumption that "the primary, although incomplete, elements of syntax are words which must be arranged according to strict syntactical rules in order to make sense."[15] In other words, when any speaker engages in discourse and seeks to make himself

understood, he must employ words contained within the language he speaks according to the logical grammatical rules which govern such combination in his language. Most linguists agree that such grammatical rules are based on the primacy of the logical proposition and it is because all languages are organized similarly at this second level that utterances can be translated from one language to another. As Edie points out, our experience of words in their "isolability" often leads us to question the possibilities of translation since a word in one language is rarely identical to its equivalent in another. But, he adds, "the purely syncategorematic or syntactical elements in various languages, particularly when formalized into the rules of pure logical grammar, approach and even reach the perfect unity (and translatability) of mathematical and other purely formal systems."[16] Once again, when a subject learns to speak, he does not only memorize lists of words and equivalent meanings but also internalizes these syntactical rules that are contained implicitly in the language he is learning. As a result, he is forever after capable of discovering the sense contained in word-combinations he has never encountered before if those combinations are organized according to the rules he has learned. He does not, however, have to be conscious of those syntactical rules in order to understand another's speech. It is enough that he possess them implicitly if he wishes to distinguish the grammatical from the non-grammatical and that which has sense from that which does not.

On the third level of meaning, that is, at the level of syntax and semantics, the words a speaker has learned in the process of acquiring use of the system as a whole are combined in sentences in an attempt to designate ideas, things, feelings, and persons which exist wholly outside the language system itself. This is the level of speech to which Merleau-Ponty often directed his attention because it is on this level that someone speaks about something to someone. It is the thing, idea, or person which transcends the semiotic system and which is intended by the speaker that takes on primary importance here for it is this "meaning" which is revealed through the use of the sentence. As Edie himself points out, "language, which can be considered as a closed system of signs or symbols governed by fixed rules on the semiotic level, on the semantic level necessarily refers to something other than itself."[17] When a speaker uses language in this way, therefore, he simultaneously becomes conscious of himself as the speaker and of his world as that which he intends <u>through</u> his speech. To focus on this level of meaning then is actually to be concerned with <u>la parole</u> and the remarkable ability of speakers to produce an infinite number of new word-combinations using the same few syntactical rules which are invariant and basic to nearly all natural languages.

Edie calls this the "paradox of language" and stresses the fact that strict adherence to the syntactical rules alone will not produce a sentence with meaning. If a speaker does not also pay attention to the meanings of words and to the

fact that they must generally appear in context, he may produce such utterances as "the book feared the grass" or "green isn't intelligent." While these sentences are structured according to the rules of pure syntactical grammar, they make no sense because ordinarily one cannot attribute fear to a book or a quality of mind to a color. Edie suggests that what such utterances tell us is "that there are semantic laws of 'context' which cannot be reduced to the purely formal structures of syntax."[18] At this level, then, the fact that words do refer to things which transcend the physical presence of the words themselves becomes a determining factor in the sense that is produced, and, to converse meaningfully, a speaker must not only combine words according to syntactical rules but according to meaning contexts as well. In attempting to comprehend a new utterance, therefore, a listener relies on both his implicit knowledge of grammatical rules and on his understanding of the meanings of words and the general regions in which they traditionally occur.

What prompts Edie to distinguish a fourth level of meaning above that of sentences is largely an observation by Émile Benveniste "that the recognition of the meaning of the various constituent parts of linguistic strings is essential to distinguishing them."[19] Edie argues that this implies we cannot determine the necessary constituent parts of a sentence unless we already know what significance each of those parts contributes to the sentence as a meaningful whole. Linguistic units, therefore, cannot be isolated unless they

can be understood as parts of some more complex, comprehensible entity. He reasons from this that there must be some higher level of organization than the sentence itself which permits us to discriminate, for example, between sentences which contribute to plot structure and those which do not. As he comments, "there has to be an organizing principle of meaningfulness in language higher than the sentence simply because, to be meaningful, sentences cannot follow one another in random order."[20] He agrees with such theorists of the text as Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer who maintain that the larger structures of common plots, generic types, and myths determine the significance of single paragraphs and sentences. Edie specifically credits structuralism with the discovery of the text as a higher level linguistic unit and he argues that the true strength of structuralism lies in its ability to discover those structures indigenous to the text which give sentences, paragraphs, characters, and events the peculiar significance they possess as parts of a whole. "There is a meaning in the text," he agrees, "which not only transcends the rules and elements of linguistic usage . . . but also transcends the psychological and deliberate intentions of the authors themselves."[21] In other words, just as the phonemic, morphological and syntactical rules of <u>la langue</u> control what a speaker wishes to utter because they circumscribe what he can potentially say and still be comprehensible to another speaker of the same language, so the structural rules governing the organization of linguistic

strings in texts also govern what an author can write and still be understood by readers operating within the same system. While an author can deliberately choose to ignore the structural semantic, and functional rules governing the composition of texts and write entirely outside the literary institution, it is doubtful he will be understood by more than a handful of readers.

What Edie's fourth level of meaning tells us then is that in comprehending a literary text, a reader relies on an implicit body of knowledge which tells him how to construe lower levels of linguistic meaning into larger structures which are themselves meaningful and constitutive of the significance of the text as a whole. Like the linguistic competence he possesses as a native speaker of a language, this knowledge is responsible for his extraordinary ability to read a text he has never seen before and to know immediately the structure of its plot and the import of its story. It is also synonymous with those expectations I was speaking of earlier before embarking on this digression about meaning-levels and strategies for comprehension. Because he possesses this knowledge, the reader of literature comes to a text with certain expectations and preconceived notions and it is these which enable him to understand that an occurrence in a text is meaningful despite the fact that he is yet ignorant of the outcome of that particular plot. Similarly, it is this body of knowledge which determines whether a text creates new meaning or whether it merely manipulates old and, as a result, it

is to it that I now wish to direct my attention.

Literary Competence

While the first three levels of meaning are also necessary components of literary texts and, despite the fact that readers must implicitly understand the rules governing their appearance in order to understand the significance presented at those levels, it is the larger, fourth level that has begun to preoccupy literary critics and theorists alike. The notion that there is an exclusive body of knowledge bearing on our ability to make sense of literary texts is a relatively new notion developed primarily by structuralists such as Barthes and Todorov. In his critical analysis of the structuralist methodology, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature, Jonathan Culler devotes an entire chapter to this body of knowledge which he calls "literary competence."[22] If we recall that what Noam Chomsky designates as linguistic competence is a native speaker's implicit understanding of the phonetic, morphological and syntactic rules of the language he speaks, it becomes clear that what Culler refers to as literary competence is that collection of implicitly understood rules, procedures, and strategies used by a reader to make sense out of those long strings of sentences and paragraphs which constitute all texts. Because a reader knows these rules implicitly, he is able to come to an unfamiliar text as a comprehensible, significant whole rather than as a random and entirely contingent

collection of independent sentences. As Culler himself points out, "anyone lacking this knowledge, anyone wholly unacquainted with the conventions by which fictions are read, would, for example, be quite baffled if presented with a poem. His knowledge of language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature . . . because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' which enables others to proceed."[23]

Although it is certainly true that knowledge of the language and tacit comprehension of the rules governing the first three levels of meaning will take any reader part of the way in understanding a novel or short story, neither will instruct him in how to assign particular significance to certain descriptions and how to distinguish them from those which may be passed over quickly as mere contributions to superfluous detail. This kind of comprehension is actually a form of anticipation or an educated guessing about the way in which the plot is likely to develop or the manner in which the story will probably end. Such anticipatory knowledge can only have been built up in the reading of other similar types of texts. Because a reader already knows something about the probable ways in which a story will progress or conclude from his previous encounters with similar forms, he has a fairly good chance of distinguishing events which will prove to be meaningful with respect to the sense of the text as a whole

from those that are merely insignificant. This ability to discriminate between sense and non-sense in unfamiliar phenomena, then, is the product of the reader's literary competence.

To say, however, that a reader possesses literary competence or has acquired the principles of literary composition just as he has acquired the principles and rules of his own language system is to say at the same time that the writer must possess that competence as well. In both, a portion of this knowledge may be brought to the level of consciousness, but a great deal of it often subsists at the pre-conscious, inarticulate level of general existential awareness. Even though such knowledge is then possessed implicitly or tacitly, it is just as powerful in directing a reader's attempts to apprehend the structure and thus to comprehend the meaning of an unfamiliar text. There is an obvious parallel to linguistic competence here, for while I may not know all the rules of English grammar as they are currently represented and articulated in my culture, as a native speaker of the language, I have an internal awareness of what makes sense and what does not. While I may be aware that "erasers smile curdled" is nonsense, at least according to traditional norms, I may not be able to explain what rules have been broken or to articulate why those particular words can't be combined in that way. Nevertheless, I do know this can't be done and I either avoid communicating such nonsense to another or tell the person to whom I am listening that this is precisely what

he is telling me.

In other words, while neither writer nor reader may be aware of what constitutes his literary competence, nor even of the fact that his comprehension is based on such a body of knowledge, both possess that knowledge implicitly and, as a result, it tacitly governs the nature of their production and the quality of their understanding of literary texts. Each has certain expectations about how texts are structured and how they function. Consequently, the writer may choose to compose according to those conventions or he may deliberately decide to violate some and ignore others. The reader, on the other hand, may find it helpful to rely on the reading strategies developed from such expectations in order to make sense of a strange text, or he may discover those procedures are useless and the text remains obscure. But, in any case, to be composed or understood as a distinct entity, as a whole, a literary text must be placed in relationship to all those dimensions, perspectives, and expectations which are part of man's situation as an incarnated, primordially oriented being.

This sounds remarkably similar to what Merleau-Ponty asserted about all perceived objects when he wrote, "the meaning of a perceived object does not stand isolated from the constellation in which it appears; it is articulated only as a certain distance in relation to the order of space, time, motion and signification in general in which we are established."[24] I might add here that the meaning of a literary text does not stand isolated from the constellation in which

it appears either. It is articulated only as a certain distance in relation to the order of literary texts in general, the genre of which it is a member, and the author's corpus of work in which it is included, to name only a few. All of these things are aspects of the competence we possess as readers who have been introduced gradually and by education to an always already constituted literary system.

It is important to emphasize, here, a point I made earlier in this chapter; that is, the meanings of a text are not simply imposed on that text by a reader and the competence he brings to his confrontation with it. While a text must undoubtedly be read and construed with respect to a previous knowledge of how other texts function, it nevertheless possesses in <u>itself</u> that structure or form which serves as the latticework, foundation, or vehicle for the meaning as it is realized in the act of reading. The text <u>is</u> that inarticulate structure or form in the same way the environment is a style or structure even before its various elements are marked off and actualized as objects in the consciousness of a particular body-subject or perceiver. The meanings of the text, therefore, can be thought of as the tacit component of the words, sentences, paragraphs, and larger structures which make up the entity which is that specific text. We can argue that this meaning is "created" by the author because he is the manipulator of the words, the one responsible for bringing that text into existence. However, once the words are written down, the text frees itself from its author and the

meanings contained therein are no longer entirely dependent on him or on the original significative intention which sought to bring them into existence. They simply await a reader who, in the act of reading, confronts the visible form of which they are the invisible depth. If such a reader closely and carefully attends to that form, he can reactivate those meanings as they were formulated by the author so that they come to exist for him in his consciousness.

It is impossible to say then whether the meaning of a text, as it is construed by a reader, is the result of the author's creative actions or simply an effect produced by the power of the language itself. Certainly, the author cannot compose without the benefit of an already fully constituted language and, as a result, what he wishes to say must, in some ways, be determined by the language that he speaks. However, like any speaker, he can use that language creatively or "authentically" and when he does, he stamps that language with his own very personal imprint. If he is successful in this, the words he writes will cause his reader to be disoriented for a moment until they can carry him along and help him to detect, beneath familiar words, the new context, form, or structure created by the author which causes those words to mean in a different way. Merleau-Ponty has described this reading process at length and he makes it very clear where he believes the meaning lies:

> But the book would not interest me so much if it only told me about things I already know. It makes use of everything I have contributed in order to carry me beyond it. With the aid of signs agreed upon by the author and myself because we speak the same language, the book makes me believe that we had already shared a common stock of well-worn and readily available significations. The author has come to dwell in my world. Then, imperceptibly he varies the ordinary meaning of the signs, and like a whirlwind they sweep me along toward the other meaning with which I am going to connect.
>
> Before I read Stendhal, I know what a rogue is. Thus I can understand what he means when he says that Rossi the revenue man is a rogue: but when Rossi the rogue begins to live, it is no longer he who is the rogue: it is a rogue who is the revenue man Rossi. I have access to Stendhal's outlook through the commonplace words he uses. But in his hands, these words are given a new twist. The cross references multiply. More and more arrows point in the direction of a thought I have never encountered before and perhaps never would have met without Stendhal . . . .
>
> I create Stendhal; I am Stendhal while reading him. But that is because he first knew how to bring me to dwell within him. The reader's sovereignty is only imaginary, since he draws all this force from that infernal machine called the book, the apparatus for making signification.[25]

It is not possible to say, therefore, that the reader is <u>alone</u> responsible for the meaning which is produced in the act of reading a text. While his activity certainly does cause that book to live for him and thus serves as the agent which brings the meaning into existence as meaning, such activity must be carried out with respect to a text which itself possesses an unavoidable structure or form. Although no reader can ever make his knowledge of a book identical

with the psychological intentions of the author who produced it, he is obliged to attempt to discern beneath the actual presence of the words themselves, the peculiar style which informs that author's way-of-being-in-the-world and the expression he has created out of it. As Merleau-Ponty points out, "although the final effect is not for me to dwell within Stendhal's lived experience, I am at least brought within the imaginary self and the internal dialogue Stendhal held with it for the fifty years he was coining it in his works."[26]

I want to make it clear, however, that in accepting such a notion of the reading process, I do not think of the meaning of a text as an objective "thing" present in or behind the words employed which merely needs to be perceived and described by an intelligent reader. If we recall that for Merleau-Ponty no object is conceivable except as an object of consciousness, then it becomes clear that the meaning of a text cannot be conceived except as an object materialized in the consciousness of a reader. The meaning is not a thing or object in the world but rather that which is formulated in the mind of the reader about that thing which he brings into existence. Strictly speaking, the meaning is the result of a convergence that occurs between a reader and a text and it is thus always perspectively altered by the reader's perceptual orientation, linguistic knowledge, and literary competence. Despite the fact that a text does have a unique structure or form, that form can have no sense for

a reader unless he implicitly understands how to construe that form as meaning. While a poem such as T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" has a complex structure which is often naturalized or made to mean in a specific way, that form and meaning do not exist for the reader who is ignorant of the procedures necessary to construe them as symbols of the modern human predicament. Because he lacks the necessary literary competence, the poem is meaningless for him.

A Literary Continuum

Before confronting this extremely complex question of literary competence and attempting to determine exactly what assumptions, rules, and strategies govern our comprehension of popular and elite literary texts, I want to examine literature itself from a phenomenological point of view. Whereas phenomenology is, in general, a science of the various objects which can be given to consciousness, the following discussion will be limited to concern with the object "literature" and to a consideration of some of the ways in which that object is given to the consciousness of both author and reader. Specifically, I want to approach the act of writing as a process that is in some respects analogous to the act of speaking. I will look at the activity from the point of view of the writer who functions as a speaker when he produces his utterance, the text. In order to present the world with this "thing," the author manipulates the words of his language in concert with traditional literary forms and

procedures. As the words are part of his linguistic competence as a native speaker of his language, so his knowledge about literary forms and procedures for interpretation is part of his literary competence as a member of a previously existing literary institution. In other words, I will be discussing literature here as a language put to use, as an institution that is made to "mean" by a writer in the act of writing and by a reader in the act of reading. Once I have examined literature from this point of view, I will then return to it as a system or institution and discuss the problems of attempting to discern the particular elements and rules of which it is composed.

At this point, it is important to recall Merleau-Ponty's constant insistence on the fact that language possesses a dual aspect. It is, at one and the same time, a stable institution filled with familiar words and traditional meanings and a tool for the creation of meaning which has never existed before. It can be spoken of as <u>la langue</u> and yet, it is simultaneously capable of being transformed into <u>la parole</u>. Because of this peculiar property, a speaker may combine the familiar signs of the system in different ways: he may group them together according to standard rules and use them in conventional contexts or he may deliberately choose to ignore those conventions in a creative speech act and thus try to extend the signifying potential of the system as a whole. If he decides to remain within the system and compose according to traditional norms, that is according to syntactic rules

and traditional semantic contexts, he can rely only on the sedimented meanings of the signs he uses. However, if he chooses to break those norms and to combine words in a different way or to use them in a different context, he depends as much on the sedimented meanings of those words and on their immanent, phonemic meanings, as on the new structure or combination itself. It is, then, the conjunction of these three things which gives to words the power to create an ability in the listener to discern the new sense brought into being because familiar words have been used in a strange way.

In this latter case, the speaker uses language authentically while in the former he uses it empirically. A continuum exists between the two for a speaker may actually break or adhere to any number of rules he desires just as he may violate contexts as he wishes. He can, for example, choose to ignore nearly all traditional rules for formulating a verbal utterance, upset all his listener's expectations and strategies for comprehension, and thus risk communicating only nonsense. If I say "purple into malicious of" to a native speaker of English it is doubtful that even the most imaginative listener will be able to make any sense out of it at all. However, if I then say "purple boxes are desolate," it is conceivable that my listener will be able to discover some context or operation which will make that utterance meaningful. In a case such as this, the speaker adheres to most of the norms of the language he is speaking and simply violates one or two expectations by using signs in an unfamiliar context.

As a result, he depends on his reader to detect the structure or principle of composition underlying the new use. On the other hand, it is entirely possible for a speaker to remain within the language system, break no rules, conform to all norms and expectations, and thus to utter nothing more than a clichéd phrase.

By continuing to extend the comparison between literature and language, it is possible to come up with a very useful notion of a similar literary continuum in which specific texts are located with respect to the number of rules, norms, and expectations of the literary system which they violate. Of course, I am not talking here of definitive, logical classes based on some requisite number of broken or satisfied norms. Rather, I am speaking of operational distinctions between texts which use the elements of the linguistic and literary systems differently and thus are rendered more or less meaningful, more or less intelligible to the reader. I think texts can be grouped functionally according to the ways in which they work for readers with respect to literary competence. Given, for example, some absolute, ideal notion of literary competence (it does not matter for the moment what that includes), some texts will break all the rules, some will violate only a few, and others will violate none. This is not, certainly, a new notion, and Roland Barthes and other structuralists have demonstrated how a wholly deviant and unreadable "modern" text differs from one which fulfills conventional norms of plot structure, character development,

and thematic unity. Barthes himself, for example, distinguishes between the text of pleasure, "the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, [the text that] is linked to a comfortable practice of reading," and the text of bliss, or that which "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language."[27] To my knowledge, however, no one has yet systematically applied this particular conception of the variations in texts to the subject of popular literature and its differences from elite art. I find the notion an extremely suggestive one and I think it can tell us a great deal about the very real differences observable between popular texts and those we call "art." I suggest, therefore, that those texts we traditionally label elite literature are the texts that defy convention and violate norms, while the ones we often think of as popular are those which remain within the literary system and are composed according to readers' expectations.

On the "revolutionary" side of the proposed continuum, we might include all those texts which upset conventions, pioneer in the formation of unusual structures, and create new meaning. Some of these works are so far outside the literary institution as it exists at the moment of their creation, that they are virtually unreadable and incomprehensible.

In cases such as these, the deformation effected in the reader's competence is so great that what he reads is no longer coherent for him. Often, a certain amount of time must elapse during which readers are pushed by the style of the work itself to the point where they can comprehend that style implicitly, intuitively grasp the peculiar semantic richness of the words and forms used, and then begin to articulate that understanding by translating it into other words which are roughly equivalent. Works such as these which readily come to mind are the "Cantos" of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake, and even William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. With each of these texts, there was something of a time lag between the composition of the work and adequate explication of its significance. As Barthes has so astutely pointed out in a slightly different context, "to read is to struggle to name . . . to understand, to thematize . . . [it] is therefore to retreat from name to name, driven by the signifying thrust."[28] His remark accurately diagnoses the peculiar problem posed by works such as the preceding, since, in violating conventional norms and expectations, they create forms and significance which are outside the literary institution and thus have no label or name. If we recall that to name something is to bring it to consciousness as an object of consciousness, as meaning, it becomes clear that literary works cannot be fully understood until their readers can express in familiar form the new sense which they intuitively grasp

in their reading. To say, therefore, what the meaning of The Sound and the Fury is, is ultimately to understand the style or structure which is the vehicle for that significance.

There are cases, however, where only a few conventions and expectations are overturned and the consequent deformation effected in the reader's competence is less severe. In instances such as these, the text often adheres to the traditional norms governing generic form and plot construction, but ignores a few covering character development or reference to a world. When this occurs, a reader often finds that the meaning of the text has become momentarily opaque only to clear up a few moments later when the coherent deformation extends his capacity to understand. In a case such as this one, the originary dimensions which mark off the limits of the reader's competence are generally respected and the minor deformation or disorientation produced by a strange configuration is consequently a coherent one. Merleau-Ponty has pointed out that we can approach Stendhal precisely because he makes use of commonplace words that are familiar parts of our own linguistic competence. But because he gives these same words a new twist, we can no longer rely on our own understanding of them and, in order to discover exactly how they signify for Stendhal, we must listen to the author's voice as it speaks through the entire context. As Merleau-Ponty observes, "common words and familiar events, like jealousy or a duel, which at first immerse us in everyone's world, suddenly function as emissaries from Stendhal's world."[29]

A similar, though perhaps more extreme example, might be the work of Henry James. While his novels generally adhere to conventions of generic form and plot construction, his characters are developed in a way that was alien to readers of his day. Since very little action of external consequence ever occurs in his works, it is nearly impossible to give meaning to his characters by observing how they behave and what they do. It is necessary instead to pay very close attention to what they think, what they see, and what they choose not to do or say in order to make sense of their extremely limited activity. Though James' characters are revealed in greater depth than those of many of his contemporaries, that depth can be missed if the reader does not construe the characters in the proper manner, a procedure which is dictated by the overall structure of the text itself. James' works, therefore, force us to read in a way that was unnecessary before he began writing. In effect, his novels have endowed his readers with new ideas and expectations about character development and, as a result, he can be said to have altered the general literary competence of the culture and extended its ability both to signify and to comprehend.

To say that some literary texts violate norms of comprehension and create new meaning may be a very useful observation, but it is not an easy thing to demonstrate. While we may intuitively feel that the statement is an accurate one and that it correctly identifies an important characteristic

of literary works of art, we must still show how art effects these changes and in what way it causes us to understand things we have never encountered before. While it is perfectly admissable to agree with Merleau-Ponty that the meaning of a novel is perceptible at first only as a coherent deformation imposed on the visible and that "it is essential to what is true to be presented, first, last, and always in a movement which throws our image of the world out of focus, distends it, and draws it toward fuller meaning,"[30] it is quite another thing to explain what that fuller meaning is and how it is made to exist in the world as a property of once familiar forms.

In attempting to deal with both aspects of this problem, I have found two comments made by Merleau-Ponty in The Prose of the World particularly enlightening. In the first, he attributes much of the power of literature to the fact that the words or signs of our language are not distinct entities which cause us to conjure up equally distinct and isolable significations. He points out instead that "in the art of prose, words carry the speaker and the listener into a common universe by drawing both toward a new signification through their power to designate in excess of their accepted definition or the usual signification that is deposited in them from the life they have had together in us."[31] This power to refer to more than accepted definitions is a direct result of the fact that language is not composed of positive terms but of differences among terms which are realized in the process of

combination. Merleau-Ponty firmly believes that the meaning of signs cannot be set forth independently of them because those meanings are really "nothing other than the way in which the signs behave toward one another and are distinguished from one another."[32] Therefore, it is essentially the process of combination itself which gives meaning to signs, and the particular significance they carry is always determined by the nature of the combinations in which they occur. Because signs can be made to secrete a new significance simply by changing the context in which they are used, one can argue, as Merleau-Ponty does, that the meaning of any word is bound up with the drift of the entire language and that only a minor portion of its semantic richness is ever activated for us in any one combination. He refers to this capacity to signify beyond sedimented meaning as a word's "semantic thickness" or its "signifying soil" and he links it directly to the ambiguity of great literature which he argues is not a weakness but "the price we must pay to have a conquering language which, instead of limiting itself to pronouncing what we already know, introduces us to new experiences and perspectives that can never be ours, so that in the end, language destroys our prejudices."[33]

This notion that great works of literature do not pronounce what we as readers already know leads me to that second very important point which Merleau-Ponty makes about art in The Prose of the World. He writes that "what is irreplaceable in the work of art - what makes it not just a pleasant

occasion but a voice of the spirit whose analogue is found in all productive philosophical or political thought - is that it contains, better than ideas, matrices of ideas. A work of art provides us with symbols whose meaning we never stop developing. Precisely because it comes to dwell in the world in which it makes us at home though we do not have the key to it, the work of art teaches us to see and makes us think as no analytic work can, because in the analysis of an object we cannot find anything other than what we have put into it."[34] The point here is by no means a simple one, but it seems to me Merleau-Ponty is arguing that a text which functions outside the system, whether that system be linguistic or literary, cannot present its reader either with a name, label, or "idea," which already exists within that system as the property of familiar words. As a result, because the reader is not confronted with a familiar abstraction, he is forced to discover, beneath the surface level of word-combinations, the new structuring principles which govern those combinations and which are responsible for the new sense brought into being in the process of reading.

As a matrix can be the womb or any place of origin and growth,[35] so the structures of a text are the seeds from which significations bloom and develop. Once a reader has intuitively comprehended the nature of this dynamic structure and is able to objectify it by giving it a name from within the system, then the effects it has had on the very words through which it is revealed become permanent aspects of the words'

signifying soil. However, the structure itself continues to exist as a tacit component of the text itself, and whenever it is actualized in the process of reading, it persists in functioning as a matrix or womb of signification. Merleau-Ponty is careful to distinguish between the limited objectification produced by the naming process of analysis and criticism and the eternal fertility of the structures themselves, and he stresses the fact that confrontation with a true matrix produces change in the reader before the meaning created in the matrix is brought to consciousness. "Critical thought," he concludes, "takes the system of ideas and technical means which it finds in the work of art and abstracts them from the inexhaustible signification with which the novel is invested when it manages to throw our image of the world out of focus, to distend the dimensions of our experience and pull them toward a new meaning. Prior to any signification our experience is transformed when gripped by a novel, the way a figure acquires a new shape with the addition of an extra line."[36]

In response, then, to the questions articulated earlier about what is created in a work of art and how that "thing" is brought into being, Merleau-Ponty would argue that while the significance itself is new, that significance is merely the reverse side of a structure produced through the unfamiliar combination and use of familiar signs. It is the structure or principle underlying the combination which is truly generative and constitutive of the significance, for it must be recalled that "meaning appears only at the intersection of

and as it were in the interval between words."[37] I want to make it clear that while I have been applying Merleau-Ponty's observations primarily to language and thus to James Edie's first three levels of meaning, I am convinced that they also hold true with respect to the literary system and the fourth level of meaning discovered in the text. If one thinks of the various units and functions combined in the creation of a particular genre, for example, as signs and syntactic rules governing sign combination, it is possible to see how the literary structure itself, taken as a whole, can also be thought of as a matrix. In this case, those particular elements such as characters, objects, and events, which comprise the text are juxtaposed to each other in new ways and the structures underlying those strange juxtapositions generate unfamiliar meanings and thus new possibilities in the genre itself.

However, if we were to engage in practical criticism and attempt to discover the new structures presumably created by Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! or by Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, it would first be necessary to determine the rules and conventions of the literary system or institution which they as individual texts violate. In other words, we must have a fairly detailed picture of our own perceptual, linguistic, and literary conventions for making sense of phenomena before we can describe exactly how these works render those conventions or strategies ineffectual, how they throw our understanding of the world out of focus, and how they lead us to some new opening on it. To draw such a picture, however,

would entail discussing the entire range of our linguistic and literary competence, and I want to defer consideration of the obvious problems posed by such an undertaking until I have placed popular texts on the same continuum with those that create new structures and significations for the first time.

Before moving to this opposite end of the continuum, however, I want to make it clear that I have purposely tried to avoid imposing value judgments on the ability of certain texts to draw a reader out of or away from himself and to enable him to forge new tools and strategies for making meaning of the world. As a result, I would like to refrain from stating categorically, at least for the moment, that it is Art which creates new meaning and reorients the conventions we have for making sense of literary texts. Suffice it to say at this stage in the argument, that some texts do create new structures and new significations because they function outside literary norms and conventions and that, for the most part, these are the texts we have traditionally called "elite literature." To argue, however, that the creation of new meaning is the sole criterion upon which we should base the category "Art" is not my intent or purpose here. I am simply interested in the fact that such an operation can and often does occur in literary texts and I think it useful to group all such texts accordingly.

However, if we argue that our comprehension of a literary work is governed by expectations and norms which are part

of a literary system, and that any number of these norms can be ignored or violated in the creation of texts, it is necessary to argue at the same time that it is equally possible for a text to remain within the system and to conform to all or nearly all of those same conventions. It is my belief that the texts we traditionally label "popular literature" or disparage as "mass entertainment" are actually those which chose not to violate conventions, upset expectations or pioneer in the creation of new forms. Such works prefer instead to manipulate familiar forms and structures and to rely on the standard or sedimented significance generally associated with them. These texts are formulaic in that they rarely function outside a reader's competence and thus assiduously avoid disappointing his expectations. This notion of identifying popular works as those which are formulaic is not new, however, and in exploring the idea at length, John G. Cawelti has defined a formula as "a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype."[38] Cawelti maintains, furthermore, that such texts serve the psychological functions of escape and entertainment because "the formulaic element reflects the construction of an ideal world without the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of experience."[39] This assertion is very similar to Barthes' claim, noted earlier, that because the text of pleasure comes from culture and refuses to break with its norms, it is linked to a comfortable practice of reading.

It seems to me that both observations are astute, and Cawelti and Barthes are perfectly justified in focusing on the specific character of the reading process, for it is that process and the strategies which control it that determines whether a text functions in a revolutionary way and creates new meaning or whether it functions as a conservative force and merely confirms or restates the familiar.

As might be expected, I see a direct parallel between the empirical use of language described by Merleau-Ponty and the formulaic manipulation of literary elements such as narrative patterns, plot structures, and character types in popular literature. If we recall that when a subject speaks empirically, he combines the words of the language system according to standard rules of syntax and thus reveals only the generally accepted sedimented meanings of those words, it is possible to think of the "popular" author "analogically" as one who arranges the common elements or signs of a literary text into familiar sequences which exhibit well-known meanings and thus provide the reader with the experience he anticipates. While I am here thinking of literature as a language system with basic units and rules of combination and thus am considering only the fourth level of meaning described by James Edie, I suspect that popular literature also reaffirms familiar meanings on the first three levels as well. In fact, it is my contention that those texts we have traditionally labelled "popular" are properly named and truly "of the people" in the sense that they remain entirely within

both the linguistic and literary expectations of the mass of readers. Indeed, the word-usage of a popular novel is seldom strange or out of the ordinary and any native speaker can attend to it as if it is transparent and provides a clear window to the natural, normal significance of each familiar word. By the same token, these texts also follow rigid patterns in plot structure and often make use of stock character types which rarely vary from one work to the next. As a result, any reader already familiar with the genre or particular type of popular text he is reading, can immediately assign to an event or character the proper significance it is to have in the narrative as a whole when that narrative is concluded. He does not need to suffer disorientation or to live with ambiguity until the coherent deformation teaches him how to comprehend that which he cannot see simply because there is nothing in the text he has not encountered before, did not expect, or does not know how to interpret. Such texts are entirely commensurate with the linguistic and literary competence possessed by most readers and, as a result, they function primarily to reaffirm their faith in the efficacy of the strategies and procedures they use to make sense of the world.

Because the creator of a popular text does not defy convention and therefore relies on his own linguistic and literary competence, it can be argued that what he says in that text is actually molded by the language he speaks and the literary system within which he operates. He does not

express himself, at least in the way Merleau-Ponty thinks of expression, that is, as the creation of something wholly personal and fundamentally new, because he does not stamp the culturally-owned materials he uses with a new and unique imprint. Instead, he combines words into accepted patterns, uses them in the proper contexts and manipulates literary characters, events, and "ideas" in familiar ways. Because he does not subject either the words he uses or the literary elements he employs to any kind of deformation, he does not disorient his reader or ask him to step out of himself in order to confront something alien to his entire range of previous experience. Because he permits his culture to speak <u>through</u> him, by using its language and literary forms and generally accepted meanings, he enables his reader to decode the text quickly because that reader is a member of the same culture and possesses those same meanings as part of his own competence.

For example, when a reader sees familiar words used in the context he expects, he is able to discount the visual presence of the words themselves and to penetrate to the meanings he "knows" they contain. As Merleau-Ponty himself points out, when we become engrossed in a book, we no longer see the letters on the page or even recall turning the pages.[40] Instead, we ignore those physical characters and attend to the meaning itself. Although this certainly occurs in the case of <u>successful</u> authentic expression as well, it cannot happen immediately if the expression we encounter is too strange or too

far outside the range of our normal expectations and competence. In that case, we are forced to note the presence of the character themselves simply because those characters are not transparent and do not give way to a readily available "meaning." We are, therefore, able to ignore the signs themselves in the reading process only because we already possess those signs in conjunction with certain culturally agreed-upon meanings. In essence, then, to read a text which uses familiar words in accepted ways is actually to affirm what we already know as members of a previously instituted cultural system.

Because what is "meant" in formulaic texts is already an accepted part of the cultural and linguistic system, that meaning or signification is not dependent for its existence on those particular words of that particular text. Such a meaning already exists as an abstraction or "idea" within the culture and it can be transposed from phrase to phrase and from vehicle to vehicle. For example, in the contemporary gothic romance, The Golden Unicorn, Phyllis Whitney portrays characters and arranges events in such a way that her story seems to say the proper role of woman in modern society is that of the beloved wife of a devoted husband.[41] Since such a notion is a cultural commonplace in twentieth-century America, one might expect this same idea to be revealed in numerous other forms and, indeed, this is the case. Not only do all of Whitney's novels evidence this same theme or preoccupation, but so do numerous other romantic novels,

daytime television serials, and magazine short stories.

As a result, the texts through which these cultural abstractions are revealed are peculiarly ephemeral, and I suspect they disappear precisely because the culture does not need them to give expression to its concerns. Since those concerns are already well-known and previously embodied in other nearly equivalent vehicles, new texts which express them are largely interchangeable with the old and, as a result, they are not preserved and reread for the unique light or perspective they shed on the modern world. Therefore, the function of such texts, with respect to both the linguistic and literary system, is to shore up, to reinforce, and to conserve traditional meanings and structures of combination. They are, by their very nature, conservative since they choose not to play with structure in the interest of creating new meaning. In addition, these texts also serve to confirm the efficacy of their readers' literary and linguistic competence. In fact, because they give way so quickly in the face of the procedures the readers bring to bear on them and yield their meaning so easily, they assure those readers that such procedures and strategies are effective in making meaning of the world.

Whereas texts which function "authentically" for the reader (by expanding his ability to make sense of other texts) create matrices of ideas rather than ideas themselves, formulaic or empirical texts can be said to present the reader with abstract ideas or "thoughts." I do, however, want to

caution the reader here that I am not arguing for the establishment of two separate categories into which all literary texts must be forced. I propose, instead, to think of all such texts as forming a continuum which extends between two purely theoretical extremes or poles where the structures employed are either radically creative or radically conservative. In actuality, it seems to me, all texts fit somewhere in between the two poles and they thus combine both authentic and empirical use of the elements of which they are composed.

To return, however, to the abstract notion of a strictly "empirical" text, I want to point out that such a text can be said to contain abstract ideas because it makes use of linguistic and literary structures that are already familiar to the reader as structures which possess a certain definitive sense or signification. Because an empirical text, like empirical speech, vibrates like chords the reader's "machinery of acquired significations" and arouses in him specific reminiscences,[42] the meaning of that text cannot be continually developed through time. Such a text does not provide the reader with symbols whose significance can be constantly elaborated and extended but rather confronts him with counters or indices which are directly linked by tradition to previously-known, immediately-available "ideas." Because they are members of the same culture and possessors of the same literary and linguistic systems employed in the creation of the empirical text, readers of such texts know tacitly how to decipher the codes and indices which they encounter. They

possess the key to the puzzle because they already understand the nature of the link between sign and signification. A reader of westerns, for example, does not need to await the outcome of the adventure in order to know that the cowboy in black is an index or sign of evil. This is a common character in all westerns and any reader familiar with the genre knows implicitly that the black figure and evil are locked together "naturally."

In essence, then, to read an empirical text is to reaffirm what we already know as members of a culture and to emphasize the accuracy and power of those strategies for comprehension and models of intelligibility that we use every day in our ordinary encounters and intercourse with the world. Because empirical texts remain within the linguistic and literary systems from which they are composed, it can be argued that their function is to stabilize or strengthen both those institutions. These texts function as a kind of anchor or weight in that they insure the continued survival of the systems as shared cultural resources and, at the same time, assure their continued success in giving verbal conscious existence to the culture's most basic and universal concerns. Continued use of the two institutions as they are familiarly known and understood tends to perpetuate the life and vitality of both.

However, if we recall that language itself possesses a dual nature in that it is a stable system capable of radically creative expression, we must acknowledge that wholly

empirical use of the literary system is both impossible and undesirable as well. If that system is to continue to be successful in making sense of a perpetually changing world, then it is imperative for the system itself to evolve and keep pace with environmental change. A necessary function is, therefore, performed by "authentic" or truly creative texts with respect to the literary and linguistic systems, because they constantly extend the boundaries or limits of both institutions. These texts are, by nature, subversive or revolutionary in that in breaking rules and defying conventions, they inevitably found new ones. Furthermore, these texts also undermine their readers' sense of stability and tradition because they constantly demonstrate the ineffectiveness and impotence of the reading strategies and procedures that they, as readers, bring to bear on such texts. Because a truly creative text will not yield and fit in with a reader's traditional models of intelligibility, that reader is forced to alter those models and to fashion new ones which will enable him to make sense of what he has previously been unable to decipher. A creative text that uses the linguistic or literary system "authentically" thus forces the reader to question his tacit knowledge and serves to push him out of or beyond his own personal and cultural frame of reference. In a sense, we might argue that texts such as these are a force for true communication in the world and the power behind the extension and growth of the institutions used for that communication. Creative texts renew literature

considered as a system, just as they tend to renew and extend the capacity for expression contained within language itself. In reality, they tug away at that anchor which holds the system back and they therefore constantly drag the system to uncharted areas and force it to function or operate there as well.

Once again, I want to make it clear that I do not wish to place greater value on the creation of new structures and meanings than on conservation of the old. While the former activity is important and inevitable with respect to the institutions of language and literature, I don't believe we can say that it is more important or desirable than the latter. It seems essential that we remember, in language use or discourse, the creative character of certain speech acts is only discernible against the background of other more conservative acts which underscore the traditional structures and meanings contained within the system. Therefore, if we are to argue that literature is also a system complete with basic units, rules of combination, and strategies for reading, and that it too is capable of being used to formulate revolutionary creative texts, we must never lose sight of the fact that those texts are creative only with respect to the traditional norms and familiar conventions of more conservative works. Just as language as a dynamic totality must persist in functioning as a stable institution if the creation of new meaning is to be possible at all, so literature must continue to exist as a balanced system of expression in

order for creative texts to be drawn from it. In short, if we are going to consider literature as a language, we are forced to acknowledge the reciprocal importance of its subversive and conservative texts. The literary system itself does not tell us which of its aspects has more value nor does it provide us with intrinsic criteria for judgment. All we know is that both uses of the system are possible and necessary and that it is inconceivable that one could exist without the other.

Who is Reading?

In discussing the proposed literary continuum and the violation or fulfillment of norms, expectations, and reading strategies, I have been thinking primarily of those rules which govern the structures of the text as a separate entity beyond the level of connected sentences alone. However, because such textual units are necessarily composed of written language, they unavoidably make use of Edie's first three levels of meaning as well and, as a result, they require the reader to rely on his ordinary linguistic competence in reading any literary text. Because the writer may thus choose to violate either linguistic or literary conventions, it becomes extremely difficult to situate texts on the suggested continuum. A given work, for example, can conceivably remain within the linguistic competence of a certain reader while at the same time upsetting the traditional expectations he possesses concerning a familiar literary genre. On the

other hand, it is equally possible for a text to use language itself in new ways while making use of traditional narrative patterns, plot structures, and generic forms. In describing texts, therefore, and in attempting to decide whether they use the linguistic and literary systems empirically or creatively, it is first necessary to have some idea of who is reading those texts and what is included in the competence they bring to them.

However, while it might be possible to identify the readers of various kinds of texts, I suspect that it would be almost entirely fruitless to question such readers about the procedures they use to derive sense from the astonishingly complex conglomeration of ideas, characters, and events which make up a literary work. As fluent or accomplished users of both the linguistic and literary systems, such readers are no doubt tacitly aware of the rules and conventions which govern "grammatical" use of both institutions, but it is doubtful that even the most articulate reader could ever bring to the level of consciousness all the assumptions and tactics he uses to make sense of a text. The question of text identification and classification thus becomes even more problematic and it is difficult to see how we will ever be able to suggest a procedure for categorization that will be anything more than an idiosyncratic method for assignment based on the most personal of expectations and assumptions.

Still, I do think the problem can be solved and I suspect the key to it rests with the quality of our definition

of competence and our ability to keep in mind the fact that competence is an extra-personal, intersubjective body of knowledge that is directly connected with or related to a literary system which, though only a system in potentia, nevertheless exists as a phenomenological reality because it can always be partially embodied in actual texts which exist in the "real" world. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to clarify the nature of the relationship between literary competence and the literary system if we are to offer suggestions about what it is we ought to look at in the attempt to judge whether a particular literary text is truly "creative" or basically empirical.

A reader's literary competence is directly related to the literary system since he can be said to possess competence only when he has mastered the use of that system. However, mastery cannot be defined as the reader's express knowledge of all the elements, functions, and relationships that comprise that system, since he can never have read all the texts which make use of the system, nor can he anticipate all that will be done with it in the future. To master the use of a system, therefore, whether linguistic or literary, is to have acquired an implicit knowledge of the basic operations that can be brought to bear on the elements contained within it. That is to say, then, competence is actually a tacit knowledge of the principles governing the combination of elements and the formulation of structures in that system. Once he has acquired an understanding of these abstract

principles, the reader is able to approach a text he has never seen before, pick out the peculiar juxtapositions of elements which are the truly meaningful structures of that text, and then construe for himself the meaning that exists as the invisible component of those visible juxtapositions. A reader's competence, then, is really the set of rules governing his ability to read and to make sense of any legitimate use of the system from which those rules have been derived.

I think it essential to keep in mind the fact that the literary system is at least logically prior to any individual reader's competence or ability to make use of it, since such competence or mastery must grow or develop out of an acquaintance with actual uses of the system. The system then must exist prior to any reader's introduction to it and it certainly is present in the individual manifestations of it which he confronts. However, the idea of literature as a complete synchronic system is really a theoretical one since the system can never be made to exist in totality. The literary system is therefore the potential collection of all the signs or basic units of combination and the possibilities of combination that could be understood by a reader initiated into the system.

It is easy to see here that while competence and literature considered as a system are inextricably bound up with each other, they are still not the same thing. It seems to me that Jonathan Culler's foremost contribution to the

clarification of the structuralist enterprise is his ability to distinguish between these two notions. It is also significant that he provides this subtle differentiation in the process of pointing out that Northrop Frye's ingenious taxonomy or scheme for literary classification is not founded on a clear understanding of what literary categories ought to describe. Culler points out that the status of Frye's taxonomic categories is "curiously indeterminate" and he asks "what is their relation to literary discourse and to the activity of reading?"[43] It is at this point that he specifies the exact nature of the difference between competence and the system itself and he identifies which of the two he feels ought to be studied:

> The linguistic model provides a slight reorientation which makes apparent what is needed. Study of the linguistic system becomes theoretically coherent when we cease thinking that our goal is to specify the properties of objects in a corpus and concentrate instead on the task of formulating the internalized competence which enables objects to have the properties they do for those who have mastered the system. To discover and characterize structures one must analyse the system which assigns structural descriptions to the objects in question, and thus a literary taxonomy should be grounded on a theory of reading.[44]

Culler bases this conclusion, in large part, on his argument that linguistics itself did not meet with much success when it insisted on trying to describe the actual properties or content of the synchronic language system. He maintains that it made greater headway when it learned to focus on the rules a speaker employs when trying to make sense of

utterances he has never heard before and he argues that those concerned with the analysis of the literary system might learn a great deal from the linguists' eventual success in this area. He goes on to say that what is needed now is not a description of the literary system and the various categories contained within it but rather the explicit formulation of a "poetics" whose object of study ought to be literary competence. Culler points out that "both author and reader bring to the text more than a knowledge of language," and he maintains that this additional knowledge which includes "expectations about the forms of literary organization, implicit models of literary structures, [and] practice in forming and testing hypotheses about literary works - is what guides one in the perception and construction of relevant patterns. To discover the nature and forms of this supplementary knowledge is the task of poetics. . . ."[45]

In actuality, Culler is not concerned with the linguistic character of texts, nor is he interested in the actual literary structure of specific works. Instead, what he wishes to discover is exactly how a reader goes about detecting plot structures, identifying the important details which aid in the development of a character, and assigning meanings to particular occurrences. He maintains that this sort of meaning-giving operation must precede any analysis of the text and he argues, therefore, that it should be the object of study and the basis of literary categorization. He agrees, finally, with Roland Barthes that the "task of

a structuralist poetics . . . would be to make explicit the underlying system which makes literary effects possible" and he cites Barthes' own statement that such a poetics "will not interpret symbols but describe their polyvalency. In short, its object will not be the full meanings of the work but on the contrary the empty meaning which supports them all."[46]

While I certainly agree with Culler that all readers possess a certain literary competence and am, therefore, sympathetic to his call for a poetics which would explicitly articulate this in the form of a grammar, such a goal is not my primary concern or preoccupation here. I do not propose, in short, to append to my theory of the differences between creative and empirical texts an even more comprehensive theory of literary discourse complete with a formal grammar accounting for all those rules, strategies, and conventions which we possess as tacit knowledge and use to make meaning out of literary works. Rather, I am ultimately concerned with my hypothesis that "popular" or empirical literary texts remain within that competence by using the elements of the synchronic literary system in accepted and familiar ways. I would, therefore, like to demonstrate through the use of a case study that such texts are, by nature, conservative in that they are put together in traditional ways according to traditional conventions and that they can thus be construed or understood using traditional strategies based on those rules. In essence, what I am really interested in is the way in

which the various elements and structures, identified and objectified through the application of a competence, combine. I am interested in the properties of objects within a corpus, as Culler might say, since I would like to identify in some paradigmatic case those elements which constitute a particular literary genre and also would like to discover which combinations of those units are empirical or accounted for by the system itself and which are authentic deformations or extensions of it. In short, I propose to concern myself in the next chapter with the actual content or composition of a single generic manifestation of the synchronic literary system.

I believe, furthermore, that it is possible to accomplish this precisely because I do possess both a certain linguistic and literary competence and can thus construe a text and "discover" the meaning that exists in it as the tacit component of its structure. Indeed, this sort of literary analysis has been conducted for centuries even though critics have, for the most part, been unaware of the implicit knowledge or models of intelligibility they have brought to bear on texts in the process of making them signify. Despite this lack of awareness, such critics have formulated adequate and accurate analyses of numerous works and, in accordance with that, I have every hope that the explications I shall offer will correctly identify those elements crucial to a genre and also accurately isolate the empirical and creative combinations of them. Jonathan Culler admits the worth of

such "unconscious" literary analysis in a roundabout way when he admits that if a critic "began by noting his own interpretations and reactions to literary works and succeeded in formulating a set of explicit rules which accounted for the fact that he produced these interpretations and not others, one would then possess the basis of an account of literary competence."[47] He adds that "adjustments could be made to include other readings which seemed acceptable and to exclude any readings which seemed wholly personal and idiosyncratic, but there is every reason to expect that other readers would be able to recognize substantial portions of their own tacit knowledge in this account. To be an experienced reader of literature is, after all, to have gained a sense of what can be done with literary works and thus to have assimilated a system which is largely interpersonal."[48] What is implicit in Culler's statement is the notion that any good reader who has a true mastery of the system will be able to produce a substantially "accurate" reading of the text even if he does not possess conscious awareness of what constitutes that mastery and thus is unaware of how he produces the literary effects he does.

Working under the assumption, therefore, that what I isolate and describe in literary texts is not necessarily selected on personal and idiosyncratic principles, I propose to rely on my own competence or implicit understanding of the interpersonal literary system in order to demonstrate how certain elements of that system are used differently in

empirical and creative texts. I have arbitrarily selected a single type of genre within the broad class of texts identified as novels in order to circumscribe the scope of my analysis. This genre has already been identified by other literary commentators who have themselves relied on their own mastery of the system in question in order to isolate this one form or manifestation of it and to include specific texts within it. I intend to examine the "contemporary gothic novel" or those texts whose lineage can be traced either to eighteenth-century gothics like Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto and Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, or to Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre which is itself an alteration or mutation of Walpole's and Radcliffe's earlier work. In the course of my analysis and explication, I will attempt to delineate those elements and their combinations, the structures of the novel, which are constitutive of the contemporary gothic form. I agree with Culler that a genre is actually "a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text,"[49] and by examining works that are almost exclusively formulaic, and thus the most reductive versions of the genre, I hope to detect the exact nature of the fundamental relation to the world which is the characteristic mark of this particular form.

Culler later points out in his discussion of the idea of genre that the function of genre conventions "is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so

as to make certain relevant expectations operative and thus to permit compliance with and deviance from accepted modes of intelligibility . . . ."[50] It is my contention that by following the generally familiar procedures of traditional thematic analysis and by continuing to take the analogy between language and literature seriously, thereby using certain linguistic terms and methods to modify this procedure, I will be able to discover the terms of the contract established between the contemporary gothic and its reader. By closely attending to the patterns of the texts themselves, I hope to isolate those elements and functions central to the genre which require reader construction or interpretation. Then, having identified the functional units and juxtapositions or oppositions between them which define the genre, it will be possible to deal with works which play with those essential units and relations of opposition in order to make that genre function or "mean" in a new way. In other words, it will be possible to identify deformations of the fundamental form and creative use of the system as a whole. In summary, then, what I propose to do in the following two chapters is to analyze certain selected texts <u>as literature</u> using the implicit literary competence I possess as a member of the cultural literary system. In the process of interpretation, I will produce "literary effects" as Jonathan Culler terms the meanings we derive from texts, but where his concern would be with the procedures I use to produce those effects, my focus will be on the structures or

forms from which I create or construe those meanings.

NOTES

[1]James M. Edie, Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 108.

[2]Edie, Speaking, p. 108.

[3]Roland Barthes, Critique et vérité quoted in Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 118. My understanding of the structuralist enterprise has been greatly enhanced by Culler's critical evaluation of its attempt to apply linguistic methods to the analysis of literary texts. While I do not agree completely with Culler on the usefulness of the structuralist methodology, I have found this notion of "literary competence" extremely helpful and my own later use of the term in connection with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its applicability to the study of popular literature is directly derived from Culler's work. Since the question of literary competence and its relation to both the production and comprehension of literary texts is a major concern later in this chapter, I will leave an extended discussion of Culler's work and my own adaptation of it until then.

[4]Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 11.

[5]It is necessary to point out here that Merleau-Ponty's position on the exact nature of the relationship between la parole and la langue must be implied, for much of what he wrote about these two aspects of language is really oblique to the issue, at least as that issue has been formulated by structuralism. Unfortunately, he died just as the structuralist point of view was beginning to clarify itself and I'm sure his statements on the problems involved here would have been more to the point had he been writing in response to explicitly formulated structuralist premises. However, this was not the case and, as a result, his comments on la parole and la langue must be carefully culled from other contexts.

[6]I am indebted to Professor E. Fred Carlisle who suggested this very useful comparison between a speaker and his speech and a dancer and his dance.

[7]There are several critical works easily available to the reader of Merleau-Ponty interested in the evolutionary nature of his philosophical thought. Perhaps the most general and in some ways the most useful is the work cited earlier by Remy Kwant, From Phenomenology to Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Last Period of Merleau-Ponty's Philosophical Life. James Edie's Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language, however, considers the changes in Merleau-Ponty's theory of language and J. F. Bannan's "The 'Later' Thought of Merleau-Ponty," Dialogue V no. 3 (December, 1966) focuses on the changes in his notions about perception. All are extremely helpful in the attempt to understand the exact nature of the changes in his approach embodied in the incomplete last volume, The Visible and the Invisible.

[8]Edie, Speaking, p. 75.

[9]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language in Children, trans. Hugh J. Silverman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[10]Edie, Speaking, p. 123.

[11]Edie, Speaking, p. 112.

[12]Edie, Speaking, pp. 124-150.

[13]Edie, Speaking, p. 126.

[14]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 179.

[15]Edie, Speaking, p. 132.

[16]Edie, Speaking, p. 134.

[17]Edie, Speaking, p. 137.

[18]Edie, Speaking, p. 139.

[19]Edie, Speaking, p. 142.

[20]Edie, Speaking, p. 143.

[21]Edie, Speaking, p. 149.

[22]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, pp. 113-130. I encountered Culler's work immediately after I drew up the schematic outline for this chapter and his writing has helped me immensely in clarifying my own ideas on the subject. I have decided to use his term to designate that system of rules and expectations which guides our comprehension of literary texts in acknowledgment of his influence and because I think the designation itself is descriptively precise and methodologically useful.

[23]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 114.

[24]Merleau-Ponty, Themes, pp. 3-4.

[25]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, pp. 11-12.

[26]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 12. (emphasis added).

[27]Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 14.

[28]Barthes, S/Z, pp. 92-93.

[29]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 12.

[30]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 78.

[31]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 87.

[32]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 42.

[33]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 90.

[34]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 90.

[35]The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 1744.

[36]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 91.

[37]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 42.

[38]John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 6.

[39]Cawelti, Adventure, p. 13.

[40]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 9.

[41]Phyllis Whitney, The Golden Unicorn (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1976).

[42]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[43]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 120.

[44]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 120.

[45]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 95.

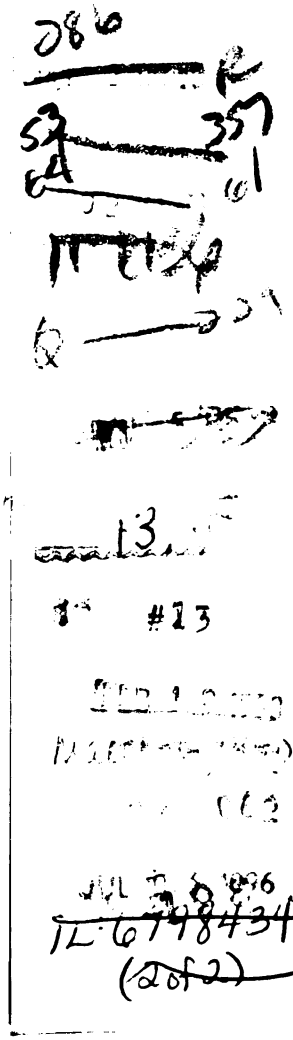
[46]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 118.

[47]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 128.

[48]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 128.

[49]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 136.

[50]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 147.



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PART TWO

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE IDEA OF A LITERARY CONTINUUM: A CASE STUDY

CHAPTER IV

AN ACCOUNT OF A LITERARY COMPETENCE AND A THEORY OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

Specific Strategies for Reading

Having made several broad generalizations about literature and the nature of its relationship to language and linguistics, it is now my task to show that these generalizations are descriptive and that they identify real differences in the way literary texts function. This case study is in no way designed to "prove" my theory scientifically but is presented rather as a demonstration of its applicability and usefulness in isolating both structural and functional variations within a particular type or genre. In short, I hope to show that an understanding of the notions of literary competence and the literary continuum can help us to comprehend what a text is attempting to do, how well it succeeds in its purpose, and how that text can be classified with respect to others of its type. In this attempt to demonstrate how certain texts do function as I have said they can, I intend to make use of a method derived from the analogy between literature and language. In essence, this approach will be a "linguistic" one despite the fact that I will make no attempt to analyze the language of specific

literary texts.

Because I have argued that literature is, in actuality, a language system, I have maintained that an analogical relationship exists between the elementary signs or words of a language and the fundamental combinatory units of the literary text. Just as a sign has little practical meaning when isolated or taken entirely alone, so the elements of a text, whether they be sentence fragments, descriptive paragraphs, or whole character presentations, do not signify by themselves. Like signs, which only begin to signify when they are profiled against other signs, the basic units of literary texts make sense for a reader only because they are integrated within some larger literary context. In essence, they possess a meaning which can be comprehended by a reader only because they are parts of a larger significant structure. Therefore, in order to determine the sense or import of any element contained within a text, it is first necessary to discover the place it occupies in some greater unit or structure and then to understand how that structure is itself integrated into the largest unit of all, the text as a whole.[1]

A simple example included at this point might help to clarify this somewhat troublesome concept. It is common knowledge that in everyday language-use it is possible to use the same word in different ways and, as a result, to force it to carry two very different meanings. If I say, for example, "Give me another cup of coffee," the word

"cup" has a very different meaning from the same word used in another sentence. When I say, "If you want to light the match in this wind, cup it between your two hands," I am using the word in question in a different manner, that is, metaphorically, and thus causing it to mean something other than a "small, open container for beverages." The meaning of this simple word "cup" is in each case determined by the exact nature of its relationship to the other words in the sentence. In this example, the significance is altered by the fact that the word performs a different grammatical function in each of the two sentences. This same variation in meaning caused by a change in function also occurs in literary texts where similar events or characters can have different meanings depending on how they are used in the text as a whole. For example, the appearance of a large medieval castle in a narrative could indicate that the text is a gothic novel and that the hero or heroine is about to be threatened by the dark forces of the world. On the other hand, its appearance could conceiveably carry no special significance at all. The point here is that the meaning or sense of any element in a literary text is determined by the relationship established by the author between that element and others of the text as well as by the function it performs in the narrative as a coherent whole.

It can be seen, therefore, that in my analysis of literary texts, I will have to concern myself with structures in much the same way "pure" structuralist critics do.

This is understandable since their structuralism derives from their own use of the same linguistic model or analogy upon which I have relied to develop the idea of the literary continuum. However, the emphasis of my argument will be different, since I plan to concern myself with the actual variations in meaning and significance created by an author and disclosed by the reader in his encounter with the structures in question. It is unfortunate that many structuralists tend to ignore the fact that linguistic and literary structures are meaning-ful entities and can only be adequately understood as such. This tendency to forget that structures are employed by speakers and writers to communicate meanings to other speakers and readers is dangerous, since it permits one to believe that meaning exists wholly within the structures themselves or within the mind of the reader. In actuality, meaning is a construction produced by the conjunction or coming-together of an author, his text, and a reader, and it is consequently the duty of any analyst to recognize the role played by each in the reading process.

I want to describe, therefore, the specific procedures I will be following in attempting to isolate the elements and combinations of elements essential to the gothic novel in general and to the contemporary gothic novel in particular. As I have pointed out before, comprehensive synthesis must necessarily precede any explicit analysis or decomposition of a text into its component parts. That is to say,

in order to identify those elements essential to a specific text, a reader must first construe the unfamiliar words, sentences, events, and sequences into an organic, coherent whole. The necessary units of a text are, therefore, only identifiable against the background or outcome of the text as a complete unit. Because of this peculiarity, I have found it necessary to read, construct, and interpret certain texts identified as gothic novels as I would normally approach any work of literature. Therefore I have read The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, and Melmoth the Wanderer in the same way I might read Romeo and Juliet, Bleak House, Moby-Dick, or The Sound and the Fury. I have also read popular gothics such as The Golden Unicorn, Spindrift, and The White Jade Fox in the same manner, that is, as literature, and my analysis of them is founded on the same set of analytic procedures and strategies.

However, I want to make it clear that I have done this knowing full well that the reading conventions I have followed, while standard, are not necessarily the only ones available. I engage, therefore, in such interpretation fully cognizant of the fact that in accepting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory about how we transform experience into meaning, I must also admit the possibility that there are different ways of reading, as there are different ways of seeing, because individuals can come to a new event with different histories and thus with different

expectations. Since I intend to concern myself with the possibility of reading popular texts as something other than literature in the final chapter of this study, I will leave that entirely separate problem until then and proceed with a discussion of Roland Barthes' description of literary analysis--a description which I feel accurately, though perhaps not exhaustively, describes my own literary competence. This description will later figure prominently in chapter six where I intend to propose a hypothesis about the difference between literary competence and that competence employed by those who read popular novels as something other than literary texts.

The "Codes" of Roland Barthes

In S/Z, Barthes' primary concern is with the manner in which a reader makes sense of the apparently random conglomeration of characters, actions, and events he confronts when he begins reading any literary text. Barthes identifies the most basic or fundamental units of a text not as its words or even as its sentences, but rather as its meaning-units which can theoretically be groups of words, sentences, or even paragraphs. He calls these significant units "lexias" and maintains that each lexia in a text derives its meaning from the fact that it is organized hierarchically into ever-larger units. He also argues that the overall meaning of the narrative is therefore the product of this composite, hierarchical structure.

In an early essay entitled "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,"[2] Barthes discusses this sort of structure but refers to the lexia as a "function." To avoid confusion with my own use of the term in chapter three, I will quote Barthes substituting the later word "lexia" which he himself chose to use in S/Z. In this essay, Barthes identifies three separate levels of organization including the level of lexias, the level of actions, and the level of narrative, and he points out that "attention is . . . called to the fact that those levels are bonded together according to a mode of progressive integration: a lexia has meaning only insofar as it takes its place in the general line of action of an actant; and this action in turn receives its ultimate meaning from the fact that it is being told, that is, entrusted to a discourse which possesses its own code."[3]

In commenting on Barthes' notion of the lexia, Jonathan Culler has stated that "a lexie is a minimal unit of reading, a stretch of text which is isolated as having a specific effect or function different from that of neighboring stretches of text. It could thus be anything from a single word to a brief series of sentences. The level of lexies would, then, be the level of one's primary contact with the text at which items are separated and sorted out so as to be given various functions at higher levels of organization."[4] Barthes himself maintains that the "soul" of a particular lexia "is, as it were, its seedlike quality,

which enables [it] to inseminate the narrative with an element that will later come to maturity, on the same level, or elsewhere on another level."[5] For Barthes, then, a lexia is any identifiable portion of the linguistic pattern of a literary text which possesses significance when viewed as a step in the development of some larger action, event, or idea contained within that text. This lexia can be thought of, furthermore, as a content-unit since it is "'what an utterance means,' not the way it is made, which constitutes it as a functional unit."[6]

When, for example, I read Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding and note that at the beginning of the second chapter Frankie is suddenly referred to as F. Jasmine Addams, the significance of this lexia as a meaningful element in the text is not realized until I am able to subsume it under some category related specifically to the personality growth of Frankie Addams. The fact that her name is changed carries no special significance for me until I can correlate it with other lexias which indicate together that Frankie sees herself in an entirely new way. It is the hierarchical organization or structure therefore which gives a lexia its meaning and thus determines its function in the text.

Because I am an educated reader and have already encountered numerous other texts, when I read an entirely new work as literature, I am able to identify and isolate lexias and to group them according to type or kind. I

know what hierarchical structures they belong to precisely because I am already familiar with the literary system and know how certain textual units "mean." I am generally aware that certain kinds of lexias or stretches of a text move different aspects of that text forward and I am able to make immediate decisions about which descriptions contribute to plot construction, character development, or symbolic exposition.

In the course of his discussion of the lexia, Barthes identifies several categories or groups of lexias which he believes are descriptive of the various levels of organization present in a literary text. He maintains that these groups are organized and put together during any reading of a literary work and insists that they are the foundation of virtually all forms of traditional literary analysis. He argues, furthermore, that the organization of each such group is governed by a code which he defines as "one of the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is the network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven."[7] Since Barthes is at his most cryptic in this book, it might be helpful here to quote Jonathan Culler who explains the code as a "general semantic model which enables one to pick out items as belonging to the functional space which the code designates. That is to say, the codes enable one to identify elements and to class them together under particular functions."[8] In sum, what Barthes' codes account for is that remarkable process which

occurs when a reader encounters a wholly unfamiliar text and knows not only how to ferret out the essential textual units but also how to assign them to meaningful categories and classes which themselves are descriptive of significant "perspectives" of literary texts in general.

Although Barthes himself does not list these codes in order of importance, it seems logical to begin with the proairetic code since it is the one which governs the reader's ability to identify and to name the actions constituting the text's plot structure. This code is the model which enables the reader to discover and group lexias together that have to do with the story of the text and its continuing advancement. Because I already possess familiarity with certain basic plot structures, I can read a text I have never seen before and decide almost at the moment of first reading that a certain element is identifiable as a detail of the plot or one which primarily contributes to related character development, symbolic presentation, or thematic exposition. As Barthes points out, the actions which are the terms of the proairetic code, can be grouped into different sequences. He argues that "whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (stroll, murder, rendezvous), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given a name, it unfolds as this process of naming takes place, as a title is sought or confirmed. . . ."[9] To read a text and to organize it

according to the proairetic code is, then, to order certain of the available actions into sequences whose very names indentify the meaning or function of the lexias so organized.

A second code closely related to the proairetic is the hermeneutic code, defined by Barthes as "all the units whose function is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer. . ."[10] This code, therefore, actually enables the reader to identify those lexias which pose problems, ask questions and present enigmas. To fully comprehend this portion of the text, the reader must be able to hold these units in abeyance, in waiting, so to speak, until the eventual solution or answer is provided by later developments within the text itself. Culler has pointed out that the hermeneutic code involves a logic of question and answer and, I might add here, that because of this, it is primarily responsible for the reader's ability to detect a mystery, to participate in suspense, and to be overwhelmed by dread. As one might expect, knowledge of the hermeneutic code is essential to an appreciation of the detective story and the mystery tale as well as to an understanding of the gothic novel. Like the elements of the proairetic code, the lexias of the hermeneutic code must be ordered horizontally or sequentially and it is the name given to the sequence as a whole which identifies the function or meaning of the elements contained

within it.

Whereas the organization of lexias in these first two codes proceeds in a linear fashion, that is sequentially, the organization in the remaining three must be carried out hierarchically or categorically. In other words, in the last three codes described by Barthes, sequential ordering is not as important as is accurate grouping or assignment. For example, in the semic code, which enables the reader to identify and collect units which develop characters in the text, it is not immediately as important to order details properly as to include all those that are relevant and significant. It is somewhat more difficult to identify on first reading all those lexias of the semic code than to isolate those of the proairetic, since apparently trivial details often take on major importance in light of subsequent actions performed by the character in question. Barthes equates this process, whereby the reader comes to "know" a character, with the activity of naming. "To state that Sarrasine is 'active or passive by turns,'" he writes, "is to attempt to locate something in his character 'which doesn't take,' to attempt to name something."[11] Barthes adds that in this grouping and naming process, "the connotator refers not so much to a name as to a synonymic complex whose common nucleus we sense even while the discourse is leading us toward other possibilities, toward other related signifieds: thus, reading is absorbed in a kind of metonymic skid, each synonym adding to its neighbor

some new trait, some new departure."[12]

Barthes identifies the fourth model which enables the reader to construct thematic and symbolic readings of a text as the symbolic code and maintains that the antithesis or juxtaposition of opposites is always at its base. His discussion of antithesis and its grounding in the human body is extremely complex, highly controversial, and irrelevant to my concerns here. However, I do feel Barthes is correct in maintaining that some kind of model guides the reader's extrapolation of symbols from a text and I suspect the code enables us to detect some underlying pattern or theme which unites all the lexias organized through the other codes into a single, coherent, meaningful whole. As Jonathan Culler points out, it is in the symbolic portion or aspect of the text that "the process of interpretation is made to seem natural."[13] This is so precisely because it is the essence of this code to require us to generalize or extrapolate some meaning from events, actions, characters, and objects in the attempt to make those things signify beyond themselves. To read a text for symbols, in short, is to recuperate lexias of other codes in such a manner that they point to some acceptable, all-encompassing abstraction beyond or outside the text itself.

The final code is actually a group of models, identified by Barthes in S/Z as the referential codes, which permit the reader to focus on certain elements and to use them in his construction of the meaning of the text because

they derive from his own cultural background. Barthes argues that lexias in the text which can be organized referentially are statements actually "made in a collective and anonymous voice orginating in traditional human experience," and he maintains that through these lexias, the text in question refers to general patterns of knowledge and wisdom possessed by both author and reader alike.[14] In discussing Barthes' notion of referential codes, Culler points out that the role of referential lexias is primarily "to substantiate the fictional contract,"[15] that is, to convince the reader that the world he is constructing within the text is identical to and contiguous with the world that he himself inhabits.

Because the referential statements of a text seem to appeal to moral and scientific authority, Barthes argues that they function as implicit proverbs. This might be clearer if I cite one of the lexias from "Sarrasine" which Barthes himself identifies as part of a referential code. He labels the phrase "this golden age of love, during which we take pleasure in our own feeling and in which we are happy almost by ourselves," as referential and then notes that the statement makes sense as part of the cultural code about the ages of love. What he implies here is that any reader familiar with the culture and hence with the code itself will be able to read this and immediately understand what age is intended and exactly what is being asserted about it. If we convert the phrase itself into a proverb

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"the golden age of love is that time when we take pleasure in our own feeling and in which we are happy almost by ourselves," we will see that this statement is indeed a cultural commonplace and we will know how to recuperate it or to group it properly. As Barthes points out, the utterances of the cultural code "are written in the obligative mode by which the discourse states a general will, the law of society, making the proposition concerned ineluctable or indelible. Further still: it is because an utterance can be transformed into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate that the supporting cultural code is discoverable: stylistic transformation 'proves' the code, bares its structure, reveals its ideological perspective."[16] The referential codes, then, enable an author to construct within the confines of the text a world whose limits appear to be continuous with those of the world that exists outside that text and which is inhabited by both author and reader together. In large part, it is because we possess referential codes and write and read according to them that we assume all literary texts are "about" the human condition and the world as we know it.

In discussing Barthes' codes, Jonathan Culler criticizes him for failing to include a code which enables the reader to gather those lexias together which develop the narrator of a specific text. Culler acknowledges the crucial role of this fictional personage when he points out that the lexias or stretches of the text which

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characterize him also establish "a kind of communicative circuit" between the text and its reader through the mediating role of the storyteller himself.[17] Although I am sure Barthes would maintain that the semic code governing the construction of characters in general would also cover the reader's ability to "name" the distinguishing traits of the narrator, I think Culler's emphasis on the special nature of this character is well placed. By separating these lexias and hence the narrator himself away from those units dealing with other characters in the text, we acknowledge that, in large part, it is the relationship established between the reader and the narrator which determines how other lexias are to be recuperated and how the text is to be read.

I have included Barthes' complex description of the procedures of traditional literary analysis here because it seems to me his description accurately and adequately explains the strategies I have used in reading and interpreting gothic novels. I have relied on my acquaintance with other literary texts as well as on my implicit understanding of the methods my culture uses to detect the meaning in unfamiliar texts in order to establish the plots of these novels, to perceive their initial problem and its solution, to identify and develop their important characters, to work out themes and a symbolic reading, and to relate all that has been presented in them to the world that I, as the reader, inhabit. Throughout the remainder

of this chapter, therefore, I will be presenting various interpretations or, in Culler's words, describing certain literary effects which I see in gothic novels precisely because I have acquired the use of these codes and know how to classify and to arrange what would otherwise be an orderless jumble of words, sentences, and paragraphs. After presenting further interpretations of gothic novels in chapter five, arrived at with the help of these codes, I will then return to them explicitly in chapter six in order to compare my literary mode of reading with that method employed by those who refuse to analyze popular novels and who claim that such works contain no significance beyond that of the story itself.

After describing the special literary effects peculiar to certain specific gothic novels, I will attempt to identify the various lexic groups or actants and actions constitutive of the gothic as a genre. Obviously, some of these will have been put together at the direction of the proairetic code, some according to the specifications of the hermeneutic, while still others will have been organized by the powers of the semic, symbolic, referential, and narrative codes. Furthermore, because I will continue to argue that these textual elements or lexic groups only possess meaning when they are profiled against other groups contained within the same text, I will also strive to clarify the nature of the relationships and oppositions that exist between them. For example, it will not be enough to state

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that a gothic novel must have lexias devoted to a description of an isolated medieval castle since it is really the relationship established between this castle and certain identifiable inhabitants which makes the novel in question a gothic. In reality, then, it is actually the nature of the relationship established between certain crucial lexic groups which defines a genre and not the content or composition of the individual groups themselves.

I want to make one final point before proceeding with my interpretations of specific gothic texts and the consequent analysis derived from them. If we recall the fact that every literary text is first composed of language and only then of certain fundamental textual units, I think the extraordinary complexity of any and all such texts is suddenly made clear. Not only must a reader make sense of the language he sees before him, but he must also discover the significance of those textual combinations which produce a meaning above and beyond that secreted by the simple words themselves. In short, he must coordinate both his linguistic and his literary competence in order to read and understand any text, no matter how simple or how complex its levels of integration. What this remarkable complexity and intricacy means for the analyst is that the task of classifying texts as empirical or creative is made even more problematic since all levels of meaning must be taken into account in order to determine whether the system has been deformed and new significations created, or whether

it has been used conservatively to say that which it has always traditionally said. Indeed, we have to wonder whether any blanket generalization can ever be made at all since it is possible for a text to fulfill some expectations, to rearrange and reorganize others, and to defy still others completely. The problem of categorizing texts is obviously going to pose questions of degree since some works will create new meaning on several levels and in several categories at once while others will pioneer in only one area at a time. In truth, we cannot avoid thinking of the entire range of literary texts as a vast continuum which has two clearly defined theoretical poles but which, in practice, is composed of texts whose relative positions are somewhat imprecise and strangely flexible. Still, I do think certain distinctions can be made and my ultimate task will be to demonstrate how several identifiably "gothic" contemporary novels use the conventions of the genre to underscore familiar truths or to forge ones that are entirely new.

The Origins of the Gothic Novel

While there is ever-continuing debate over what it is that makes a novel "gothic," few literary critics or historians would dispute the fact that the form first appeared in 1764 with the publication of Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story. Although Walpole's novel is clearly derivative in that its close relationship to the sentimental romance is easily demonstrable, it does violate

some of the conventions of its day, particularly those which prescribed the kind of subject matter that ought to be treated in a novel. I do not propose to get involved here in a detailed analysis of the relationships between English gothic novels of the eighteenth century since my primary concern is with contemporary American manifestations of the genre, but in passing, I would like to point out that Walpole's novel is almost certainly one of those problem texts which clearly violates certain specific literary conventions while it fulfills the vast majority of others. The Castle of Otranto is assuredly not a creative or authentic text in the purest sense of those terms, but neither is it entirely formulaic or empirical since it is obviously distinguishable from the other literary works of its time. In fact, I suspect the borderline status of Walpole's novel is reflected in the very way the novel has survived in literary history. Although few have argued over the years that this first gothic romance is a great work of art, it has still managed to survive and is studied even now as the earliest serious manifestation of the developing genre. The fact that it has not disappeared into oblivion with the hundreds of other imitations it spawned attests to its seminal place in the history of the form. Had Walpole defied all the literary conventions of the period, his novel would have been incomprehensible to the vast majority of readers and, as a result, unpopular, and I question whether it could have had as great an impact as

it did on both the popular and "serious" fiction of the day.

But, to return to the origins of the gothic genre, I think it useful to point out that Walpole himself was an intellectual dilettante convinced of the greatness of "the past" and intrigued by all things medieval.[18] In fact, having once purchased a small farm near Twickenham, Walpole set about gothicizing the main building until it evolved into a sort of castle complete with a gallery, round tower, greater cloister, and cabinet.[19] Although Walpole is often dismissed as a wealthy fop and dandy, his interests did reflect those of his class and his age, and his preoccupation with England's medieval past was really a reflection of his culture's growing rejection of Enlightenment thought and the Age of Dr. Johnson.

Because Walpole was in touch with the unconscious trends of the day, his gothic story struck a chord in that society and although the novel was not a "best-seller," it did build up a solid following in the literary community. It took some time for imitation to begin, but when it did, a flood of gothic novels overwhelmed the English reading-public. Most of those gothic imitations were written by women and, though extremely popular, few have survived. Nevertheless, foremost among Walpole's imitators was a woman named Ann Radcliffe, whose novels were, and still are, recognized as a further development in the form initially created in The Castle of Otranto. Radcliffe's

The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) and The Italian (1797) were followed by other novels which, though slightly different from hers, were still clearly derived from Walpole's first formulation of the type. Included among these were Matthew G. Lewis's The Monk (1796), Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1816), Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), and Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847). Although all the novels mentioned here were quite different from the immensely popular and clearly gothic "shilling-shockers" and "penny-dreadfuls" sold throughout the period in question, they originated in the same gothic impulse that had motivated Walpole and Radcliffe as well as those whose works were extraordinarily popular. The fact that all these novels are included together in a single genre raises serious questions about the definition of the genre itself and this situation poses subsequent problems for any analyst who seeks to describe the ways in which that genre has been varied and extended over the course of time. Therefore, before I can make assertions about contemporary use of gothic conventions, it is first necessary to identify those conventions which are shared by the paradigm works of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin and which, as a result, constitute the genre of the gothic novel.

I believe that if we read these works closely enough, it is possible to discover a certain common skeleton of form and meaning underlying each unique set of characters, events, and themes which is the immediate preoccupation of

each individual work. In addition, it is my conviction that "the gothic" is something more than castles, dungeons, monks, and storms, and I am convinced that this peculiar something is tangible and thus identifiable. Therefore, in order to isolate this skeleton, I will focus on four of the works which I consider particularly representative with the express goal of describing those conventional meaning-structures which are at the foundation of all gothic novels. By looking at The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, and Melmoth, the Wanderer, I hope to formulate that literary pattern or set of conventions which is the starting point for such contemporary "gothics" as The Golden Unicorn, Thunder Heights, Sanctuary, The Member of the Wedding, and Reflections in a Golden Eye.

The Castle of Otranto

As I have mentioned before, it seems to me that although Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto has a great deal in common with the sentimental romance, it is at the same time the precursor of those novels often identified with the high gothic mode. Regardless of the changes the novel portends, Walpole's work is itself a peculiar conglomeration of old styles, stock narrative devices, and familiar characters, and there are even long passages in the novel which seem to have been directly transposed from the plays of William Shakespeare. The cut and paste character of the work has prompted Richard Kiely to remark

that because it is "littered with lifeless images and archaic conventions, Walpole's novel may still strike some as an act of irresponsible vandalism rather than a creative literary experiment."[20] In fact, his own opinion is that Walpole's novel "proves him more adept at dismantling the old and presenting it in shambles than in building something truly new."[21]

While I certainly agree with the general import of Kiely's assessment, I feel Walpole's novel creates something new in the atmosphere of suspense and dread which permeates the entire narrative. It is this atmosphere combined with the change in subject matter which differentiates his work from that of Fielding and Richardson and, although Walpole's quarrel with his predecessors is primarily over issues of content rather than over issues of form, it is a quarrel nonetheless and it does result in a substantive break with tradition. Kiely himself has acknowledged this in distinguishing the earliest gothics written by Walpole and Radcliffe from those later ones produced by Lewis, Shelley, and Maturin, and, in fact, he has pointed out that "those writers who first turned to Gothic castles and oriental palaces did so because they were tired of the drawing room and the country inn."[22] While obviously still thinking of Walpole and Radcliffe, Kiely adds that "certain of the earliest romantic experimenters changed the setting and cast of the novel without substantially altering the narrative procedures established by their predecessors."[23] I do not

agree completely with Kiely on this last point since it seems impossible to me to ignore the fact that the incidental properties introduced into fiction-writing by The Castle of Otranto later became the principal defining elements of a new form, and I cannot help but wonder if such apparently minor variations in scene and character were not also accompanied by certain more significant changes in narrative convention.

When this first gothic novel is analyzed with respect to later works which developed from it, it becomes clear that Walpole did something more than legitimize the use of exotic settings and medieval architecture when he published The Castle of Otranto. Although the castle itself and the supernatural events which take place within its walls, because sensational, seem to be the most distinguishing marks of the novel, it is, in reality, the slight change in the narrative contract between text and reader which sets Walpole's work apart from that of Richardson and Fielding. Where Walpole's predecessors present their readers with numerous opinions about a sequence of events which every one agrees has taken place,[24] Walpole includes fantastic events and then leaves his reader in doubt as to whether they occur at all. He does this by explaining to his reader in the preface that while the characters are represented as believing in "miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events," such occurrences "are exploded even from romances" and he implies that he

himself doesn't believe in such goings-on.[25] Walpole reasons that an author "is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them."[26]

This carefully calculated disclaimer suspends the reader between the world of the text, in which life is strange and threatened by the inexplicable, and the world of his own everyday life where events are familiar, rational and comprehensible. Because he is not sure whether he is to believe all he is told, the reader is left in a state of suspense not unlike that experienced by the characters themselves when they are confronted by the apparitions in question. Where sentimental fiction invites its readers to contemplate and admire fine feelings, the gothic vision of Horace Walpole requires participation by the reader in the action of the novel and seems to conceal a deliberate attempt to puzzle, shock and frighten. In fact, an essential aspect of the gothic novel is its ability to include the reader as an active participant in the action of the narrative by carefully controlling the amount of information released to him. Reading The Castle of Otranto is like walking hand in hand with Manfred himself as he blunders his way from revelation to revelation and from mystery to solution. Walpole knows very well what he is doing with the tale as indicated by his comment in the preface to the first edition that "everything tends directly to the catastrophe."[27] As he points out, terror is the author's principal engine and "it prevents the story from ever languishing."[28] He

adds that because the terror "is so often contrasted by pity . . . the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions."[29]

If we grant the fact that this attempt to engage the reader by arousing his feelings is both a new and significant departure from previous fictional patterns, then it becomes clear why Walpole's gothic furniture had such an effect on his contemporaries. The isolated setting in both place and time is not merely a curiosity produced by Walpole's vivid imagination but rather a functional detail which serves to distance the world of the novel from that of the reader, thereby endowing the former with mystery and magic. The crumbling medieval castle, complete with its dungeons and secret passages, is the perfect embodiment of a world the reader is never intended to understand completely. Consequently it becomes the symbol of a kind of fiction whose avowed purpose is to frighten the reader by confronting him with the strange and the unfamiliar. Therefore, it seems to me Walpole's claim to be the "founder" of the gothic novel does not depend on the fact that he first wrote about a gothic castle or introduced the supernatural into the novel form, but rather on the fact that he created a narrative pattern or plot structure which engages the reader in an entirely different manner. Indeed, it is the general movement of Walpole's plot that is imitated by Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin despite the fact that each modifies the focus of the action in a unique and

individual way.

It is possible to reconstruct the linear development of Walpole's plot even though the reader is prevented from following the action in this manner since certain of the events are not disclosed until the final dénouement. Although we do not learn this fact until the end of the narrative, the event which sets the story in motion and provides the necessary motivation is the murder of Alfonso, Prince of Otranto, by Ricardo, the current Prince's grandfather. This crime has been compounded, we learn, by the fact that Ricardo fabricated a will, thus depriving the rightful heirs of their patrimony. At the time the story occurs, the true heir to the principality of Otranto, the peasant, Theodore, is concealed in another identity and even he is not aware of his "true self." However, by a chance occurrence, Theodore is introduced into the castle, is persecuted by Manfred who is trying to solidify his claim to the falsely-gotten inheritance, and is eventually revealed as a man of noble birth and the rightful heir to Manfred's estate. As E. F. Bleiler says of the typical gothic plot inspired by The Castle of Otranto, "through a chain of circumstances, which usually involve the supernatural, the ancient crime is detected, the villain is punished, and the heir receives his birthright."[30]

Interestingly enough, Bleiler also adds that "it might be said the Gothic novel is a primitive detective story in which God or Fate is the detective."[31] In truth, the

connection he draws between the gothic novel and the detective story is entirely justifiable since both are structured around the fact that a crime has been committed and cries out for detection. In each, the reader is forced to participate in the process of discovery since he is only gradually accorded the knowledge he needs to solve the mystery. In Barthes' terms, the reader of the gothic novel is forced to rely on the hermeneutic code to make meaning of the numerous lexias he encounters which suggest problems, propose questions, and hint at enigmas. He learns to keep all the suggestions and clues revealed to him present in his mind because, as he winds his way through the subterranean passages of the novel, he gradually begins to discover the answers to the problems that trouble him. Although this process of revelation begins slowly, it accelerates as the novel progresses until, in the last few pages, masks are thrown away, the crime is explained, the criminal himself is caught and punished, the hero gains what he deserves, and a semblance of order is restored to this fictionally disordered world. However, because the greatest portion of the gothic novel is devoted to the pieces of the puzzle, to disorder and to mystery, this final resolution often seems artificial and contrived. Indeed, in The Castle of Otranto, the reader is certainly less impressed by Walpole's final assertion of order in a "season of explanations" than by the chaos and illusion which precede it. Ultimately, it is the breakdown of

rationality, the descent into disorder, and the terror produced by both which are the hallmarks of Walpole's novel and the genre created out of it.

The Mysteries of Udolpho

As Walpole's novel was absorbed by the literary consciousness of the day, it was gradually and then widely imitated. Several of the earliest such adaptations were produced by Clara Reeve and Charlotte Smith although none of their works ever achieved the popularity and significance of those created by Ann Radcliffe. Her most popular novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, published in 1794, was an instant and enormous success. It went through ten editions alone between 1794 and 1860, after which it appeared in 1870, 1877, 1882, 1891, and sporadically thereafter.[32] The novel, in short, became a general cultural possession, alluded to again and again in numerous novels, essays, and critical pieces as the epitome of the gothic form. Richard Kiely has pointed out that "her gently euphemistic prose, her fainting heroines, and explainable ghosts were reproduced by other writers so quickly and on such a large scale that they were clichés before they had time to become conventions. Not only the plots but the titles of her books were borrowed and used with slight variations."[33] It seems only natural to observe that where Walpole had struck a chord in the literary community two decades before, Mrs. Radcliffe touched a sensitive nerve now exposed throughout

the culture as a whole. Although it might be interesting to speculate why eighteenth century English society was so ready to be emotionally stimulated by the gothic novel, that cannot be my concern at this point. Rather, I would like to focus on the nature of Mrs. Radcliffe's debt to Horace Walpole as well as on the changes she produced in the form through the variations she included in The Mysteries of Udolpho.

Although several students of the gothic novel have argued that Mrs. Radcliffe's work, like Walpole's, has more in common with the sentimental romance than with the high gothic novels of the nineteenth century, I cannot fully agree. It is possible to consider the plot of her novel as a variation of the sentimental narrative with the addition of gothic properties, but again, it seems to me The Mysteries of Udolpho contributes more to the development of this new genre than scenic descriptions and weak-kneed heroines. As is the case with Walpole's novel, Mrs. Radcliffe's work is centered around a series of mysteries whose solutions must be sought by some character in the work and by the reader himself. However, where Walpole focuses primarily on the villain, Mrs. Radcliffe's attention is clearly centered on her heroine, Emily St. Aubert, who becomes the detective so to speak because she is thrown together with the villain, Montoni, a clear descendent of Walpole's Manfred. In fact, because Mrs. Radcliffe relates her story from Emily's point of view, thus permitting her

reader to know only what Emily can discover, she forces that reader to become involved in the mystery almost as Emily's companion or alter ego. By establishing a sense of identification between her reader and her heroine, Mrs. Radcliffe is able to control the reader's response to an extraordinary degree, and it is obvious she expects Emily's danger to arouse fear and dread in the heart of he who sympathizes with her.

Except for this difference in focus, the plot of The Mysteries of Udolpho is similar to that of The Castle of Otranto. As with its predecessor, the action of Udolpho is motivated by the fact that a crime has been committed and concealed. In this case, Lady Laurentini, the former owner of Montoni's estate, murdered Emily's aunt with the aid of that woman's husband many years prior to the opening of the narrative. Because Emily's father has concealed the story from her, she is unaware that he once had a sister who was indirectly connected with the castle of Udolpho. Thus, when she accidentally sees a miniature obviously very dear to her father, she has no idea the picture is of his sister and she imagines the worst about her revered parent. Furthermore, because Laurentini's disappearance is still unaccounted for by those living in and around Udolpho, she suspects Montoni of having murdered her for her estate. Of course, none of this is revealed until the tale is concluded. As a result, Emily wanders through the narrative dreading what she may discover about her father

and fearing what Montoni will do to her if she uncovers the secret crime she is sure he has committed. Although the actual plot of the novel is a great deal more complex than what I have recounted here, all of it concerns Emily and is seen through her eyes. Indeed, much of the narrative is devoted to a detailed description of Emily's state of mind and the increasing sense of confusion she experiences as she chances upon clues and draws her own fantastic conclusions. This preoccupation with a disturbed emotional state, new to the English novel, is Radcliffe's major variation in, and hence contribution to, the developing genre. In large part, The Mysteries of Udolpho is an exploration of what can happen to an individual so cut off from contact with society, family, and friends that her sense of reality is destroyed and all her perceptions colored by the incredible fears to which such isolation gives rise.

Although it is true the mysteries and supernatural events at the heart of the novel provide a great deal of interest and excitement for the reader, the narrative is actually the story of Emily St. Aubert, a sensitive young woman who is susceptible to every nuance and change in the environment which surrounds her. We first see her at La Vallée, her family home, in the company of her mother and father, to whom she is clearly devoted. Mrs. Radcliffe focuses at length on the harmonious relationship which exists within this family unit and is careful to describe the sympathy each member of the family feels for the

natural world. La Vallée is situated in a serene and pastoral landscape and Mrs. Radcliffe's descriptions of it seem to have been drawn from the paintings of Nicolas Poussin. There is nothing irregular in the scene to destroy its balance and proportion since the author deliberately places even the majestic and "awful" peaks of the Pyrenees at a considerable distance. In fact, the entire first section of the novel which takes place at La Vallée, is dominated by this mood of natural serenity and classical balance. At its moral center stands Monsieur St. Aubert who, we are told, has been able to maintain his principles and benevolence despite his contact with morally corrupt human society.[34]

The relationship established between St. Aubert and his daughter in the early pages of the novel provides the foundation for Emily's reaction to all that occurs later in the narrative. St. Aubert understands the extraordinarily sensitive nature of Emily's character and knows full well the problems such susceptibility can cause. In an extremely important passage, which has significance for the reader on several levels at once,[35] St. Aubert cautions Emily about her nature and warns her that it leaves her open to the dangers of unchecked passions and to the terrors created by an imagination run wild. I think, it necessary to quote the passage at length here since the action of the novel must be seen in its light. "Above all, my dear Emily," St. Aubert tells his daughter, "do not indulge in the pride

of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds."

He continues:

> Those, who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight, from every surrounding circumstance. And, since, in our passage through this world, painful circumstances occur more frequently than pleasing ones, and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more accute than our sense of good, we become the victims of our feelings, unless we in some degree command them. . . . I know you will say, that you are contented sometimes to suffer, rather than to give up your refined sense of happiness, at others; but, when your mind has been long harassed by vicissitude, you will be content to rest, and you will then recover from your delusion. You will perceive, that the phantom of happiness is exchanged for the substance; for happiness arises in a state of peace, not tumult. It is of a temperate and uniform nature, and can no more exist in a heart, that is continually alive to minute circumstances, than in one that is dead to feeling. You see, my dear, that, though I would guard you against the dangers of sensibility, I am not an advocate for apathy. At your age I should have said <u>that</u> is a vice more hateful than all the errors of sensibility, and I say so still. I call it a <u>vice</u> because it leads to positive evil; in this, however it does no more than an ill-governed sensibility, which, by such a rule, might also be called a vice; but the evil of the former is of more general consequence.[36]

Although St. Aubert delivers this lengthy address late in the first section, (on his death-bed, in fact), it is clear Emily has been following his advice throughout this early portion of the novel. Because of her father's influence she is able to keep a tight rein on her emotions and she never lets her imagination run entirely free. In his study of Mrs. Radcliffe's work, E. B. Murray has pointed out that

while certain typically gothic events intrude on the peaceful balance of La Vallée, they are either ignored or explained away by Emily and her family because reason always tempers any fanciful notions they feel tempted to entertain. As Murray says, "tangential threats of banditti, a way occasionally lost, even the mysterious chateau and its prophetic music never emerge into descriptive or dramatic existence of their own in these early pages. They are psychological events whose existence is contingent on the degree of response they evoke in those whose experience they pass through."[37]

However, as this initial portion of the novel draws to a close, Emily loses first one parent and then the other. She is left entirely alone in a universe which no longer seems serene, peaceful, or good. Her carefully constructed world begins to unravel at the seams, and she loses all conventional ties to family, society and to objective reality. After the deaths of her parents, she is forced to leave first her childhood home and then her native country by her aunt whom she had thought to be her one remaining connection with her old way of life. However, Emily is not even permitted to remain within the city of Venice which, though entirely strange to her, at least allows her to maintain a sense of connection with the outside world. Instead, she is forced to withdraw to the castle of Udolpho, which is completely isolated in a wild and threatening countryside. Where the landscape at La

Vallée had been dominated by "luxuriant woods," "plantations of olives," "simple cottages," and "the soft green of the pastures,"[38] that of Udolpho is characterized by "tremendous crags," "scathed branches," "ridgy precipice[s]," and "barren rocks."[39] Although farms and pastoral scenery occasionally come into view, they are only fleetingly glimpsed "smiling amid surrounding horror."[40]

As Emily's ties to benevolent human society are severed one by one, her perception of reality gradually changes; the world in which she is situated becomes almost completely alien to her; and contemplation of the natural environment no longer has the power to soothe the frenzy of her increasingly hysterical emotional state. In the world of Udolpho, not even art can calm Emily's fears and fantasies, and she throws down her lute when it fails to provide the comfort she had always been able to find in it before. Almost completely abandoned and left to confront the evils of this unfamiliar world alone, Emily has difficulty controlling her imagination which begins to color and distort all she sees. Because she is unable to tell the difference between illusion and reality, she draws false conclusions about what occurs around her and, despite her father's warning to the contrary, continually extracts "the excess of misery . . . from every surrounding circumstance."[41]

In the lengthy section of the novel which follows, it is the castle of Udolpho itself which serves as the

governing symbol of Emily's turn inward or descent into the self as she attempts to escape the growing violence and evil of the world she perceives about her. Mrs. Radcliffe spends more than two hundred pages detailing Emily's flight through the shadowy corridors of the castle. Her attention in these passages alternates between a description of the subterranean complexity of the structure itself and of Emily's almost tangible sense of dread as she explores its intricate turnings. In fact, the two are nearly always linked together by Mrs. Radcliffe, who leads Emily further and further into the heart of the castle at the same time she tells of the increasingly tenuous connection Emily is able to maintain with the rationally ordered outside world. Because of Mrs. Radcliffe's interest in Emily's emotional state, the reader follows her day after day as she is confronted by new horrors and more mysteries which serve to convince both Emily and the reader of the reality of Montoni's evil designs.

Surprisingly enough, however, very little actually does happen to her. Still, when she manages to escape from Udolpho, after discovering Montoni is only interested in her inheritance, the reader continues to fear Montoni's reappearance and Emily's eventual deflowering or death, neither of which ever materialize. Despite this fact, however, it is not my intent to criticize Mrs. Radcliffe for raising expectations fruitlessly because it is obvious her real concern is with her heroine's fantasies and fears

and not with their substance. Indeed, it is her aim as a gothic novelist to explore the psychological state produced by extreme isolation rather than to justify the terror and dread experienced by either heroine or reader.

The truth of this contention is borne out by the third and final section of the novel concerning Emily's gradual return to society. After escaping from Udolpho, she proceeds to Château-le-Blanc, the home of the Villefort family, where she looks back on her imaginings at Udolpho with scorn and where, as a result, her sense of stability is restored. Through Emily's own discoveries, Mrs. Radcliffe discloses that the apparitions and supernatural events which had dominated life at the castle were, in fact, easily explainable by rational causes, and she appears to make fun of her heroine for her over-active fantasy life. However, by explaining away the causes of Emily's terror, which in most cases has been shared by the reader, Mrs. Radcliffe does not also explain away the terror itself. In fact, by minimizing the events which give rise to such fears, she actually testifies to the power of an imagination which can see horror in even the most ordinary of daily happenings. Mrs. Radcliffe's point, voiced clearly almost four hundred pages earlier by Monsieur St. Aubert, is that indulgence in fantasy and fine feeling is "the romantic error of amiable minds." She argues in this last section of <u>The Mysteries of Udolpho</u> for the primacy of reason but not before she has subjected her heroine and

reader "to the full potential for horror implicit in every darkened passageway and ghostly utterance."[42]

I think it interesting to note that once supplied with the rational explanation for an apparition, it is possible to return to Mrs. Radcliffe's initial description of the event and to discover hints which refer to its true cause. However, since few readers ever attend to these clues, it seems safe to say Mrs. Radcliffe is extremely successful in demonstrating her point, for it is only the reader's own overactive imagination which causes him to believe in Emily's fantastic explanations and to be disappointed when corpses turn out to be wax and ghosts are unmasked for smugglers. As E. B. Murray has pointed out, the power of Mrs. Radcliffe's art "depends on our sensibilities being so thrown out of order and so distorted that we accept the misconceptions that Emily entertains."[43]

Although it can be argued that a quest is at the foundation of The Mysteries of Udolpho, it is necessary to point out that the mysteries and puzzles which prompt that search are strictly hermeneutical and thus nothing more than plot devices. Emily's search for explanations of the horrors she thinks she has uncovered at Udolpho can never be organized thematically at a higher level, since she does not learn anything new about herself nor does she discover some new truth about the world by descending into the depths of the castle of Udolpho. Indeed, as Richard Kiely has argued "there is nothing salutary,

creative, or formative about Emily's interior experience. She does not emerge from her captivity in Udolpho with a fuller comprehension of the complexities of human nature or sympathy for its weaknesses. . . . Her idea of nature does not change either: she does not find a deeper rapport or a greater incongruity between herself and her natural surroundings, but resumes in the last pages of the book her never-ending walks in search of melancholy vistas and moral edification."[44]

Emily's quest in The Mysteries of Udolpho is a search for the proper explanation for apparently supernatural occurrences. That which she ultimately discovers is the proper frame of mind enabling her to explain those events rationally. Her descent into chaos and evil is not an initiation into a morally ambiguous world but rather a temporary deprivation of reason in which the true nature of the world is obscured by the shadowy phantoms of her own imagination.[45] The world as she knew it at La Vallée is restored to Emily at the end of the novel and she does, in fact, return to her familial home with Valancourt. Although she has spent more than four hundred pages imprisoned in the haunted castle of her mind, Emily emerges from that castle, unscathed and unchanged, to a world where evil is clearly separate from good and moral choices are easily made. Kiely has pointed out that "when the blindfold is removed, there is the same orderly universe, bright and clear as it had before - mountains distinct from valleys,

virtue undaunted by vice."[46] He concludes from this, and rightly so, I might add, that Mrs. Radcliffe's moral point, "despite her penchant for romantic atmosphere, is antiromantic."[47]

While it is evident in the final analysis that Mrs. Radcliffe's gothic novel owes a great deal to The Castle of Otranto, particularly its plot structure and supernatural marvels, it is also clear the The Mysteries of Udolpho combines those properties in new and unusual ways. The linear development of Mrs. Radcliffe's narrative is similar to that of Walpole's but where the latter tends to focus on Manfred and his reaction to the wierd happenings at Otranto, Mrs. Radcliffe centers her attention on Emily, the one character directly threatened by the unfamiliar and the strange. In devoting an enormous amount of time to Emily's hysterical frame of mind, and by linking her study of this aberrant psychology to an exploration of the gothic castle, Mrs. Radcliffe endows the most famous of Walpole's medieval properties with new meaning. Not only does the gothic castle and medieval setting serve to distance the action and thus create separation between the world of the novel and that of the reader, but it also functions on a symbolic level as the objective correlative of Emily's mental state which grows ever more irrational as she remains within the castle walls, isolated from the calming influence of the natural world. Robert Kiely is entirely correct when he argues that "the achievement of The

Mysteries of Udolpho is not, then, the mere introduction of Gothic effects into an otherwise conventional sentimental narrative, but the projection of a nonrational mentality into a total environment."[48]

By relating this story from her heroine's point of view, Mrs. Radcliffe forces the reader to seek the solution to the mysteries with Emily herself; she is thus able to prompt that reader to succumb to the power of his own imagination and to experience with Emily the terror produced by total irrationality. This careful narrative decision enables Mrs. Radcliffe to emphasize her ultimate thematic assertion, for it permits her to implicate the reader in this situation where reason has lost its sway. Because the reader believes in the reality of Emily's fantasies, when those fantasies are exposed for the wild imaginings they are, he cannot help but be impressed by Mrs. Radcliffe's belief that the health of the human mind is dependent on reason's ability to hold the imagination in check. Where Horace Walpole seeks only to arouse the feelings of his reader and to confuse him about the ultimate reality of the world of Otranto, Mrs. Radcliffe deliberately pulls her reader into the very action of the narrative, forces him to participate in the dread and fear experienced by her heroine, and thus prompts him to cry out for the moral solution she proposes as the justification behind The Mysteries of Udolpho. In sum, her novel is both a derivation from and an extension of the fictional

form first created by Horace Walpole in The Castle of Otranto.

The Monk

If Ann Radcliffe's novel can be thought of as a particularly important step in the development of the gothic genre because of the modifications it produces in the form initially worked out by Walpole, then Matthew Gregory Lewis's The Monk must be considered equally significant since it too begins with Walpole's plot and gothic encumbrances, subjects them to a series of changes, and endows the genre itself with entirely new possibilities. Lewis's novel initiates the subsequent variations it does primarily because he adds a characteristically Radcliffean interest in interior mental states to Walpole's preoccupation with the villain. As a result, he creates an infinitely more intriguing character in the Capuchin monk, Ambrosio, than either Walpole or Radcliffe are able to present in Manfred or Montoni. However, in addition to this major variation, Lewis also reverses so many of the newly formed conventions of the genre, that The Monk almost appears to be a burlesque or parody of the early gothic novel. Even though Lewis does intend to poke fun at some of the most typical gothic excesses, he also uses the form seriously to explore the effects of passion, the dangers of superstition, and the nature of power and the subjugation it exacts from others.

Precisely because Lewis does intend to play with the gothic conventions he uses, the sequential plot development of The Monk is somewhat different from the familiar story line related by Walpole, Radcliffe, and the other gothic novelists of the period. However, despite this change, Lewis manages to include most of the expected gothic incidents in the novel and The Monk is filled with crimes and their concealment, descents into dungeons and catacombs, and ghostly appearances. Although an ancient crime committed by some relative of a major character does not function as the motivating force behind the main plot of The Monk, such a device does figure prominently in the primary subplot concerning Raymond and Agnes. Thus, we are treated to the rather gruesome history of the Bleeding Nun and are even permitted a glimpse into the sordid past of the Wandering Jew. However, it is essential to point out that Lewis does not involve his reader in the detection of the crime as Walpole and Radcliffe do. In fact, the detection of the double murder at Lindenberg occurs almost by accident as Raymond pursues the main business of his tale, union with Agnes. Nevertheless, Lewis does involve the reader in his story and much of what he writes is deliberately calculated to arouse emotions and to produce the suspense and dread so characteristic of the gothic form. He manages to accomplish this by advancing and then stalling the forward progress of the primary plot; even though the reader knows what crimes are meditated by Ambrosio he

is held in suspense as to whether they will be successfully brought to conclusion. Lewis is able to provoke his reader's concern in this by forcing him to sympathize with both the heroine of the tale and with her potential ravisher, who is presented as a superior being capable at once of enormous excellence and abysmal crimes. I might add here that this extremely difficult task is one at which Walpole does not succeed and one which Ann Radcliffe never attempts.

The Monk opens conventionally enough as Lewis brings together the three major characters of the now familiar gothic plot--the heroine, her hero, and the villain. Antonia, as she is described to us, is typically beautiful, demure and innocent,[49] and, as might be expected, the young, earnest hero, Lorenzo, falls in love with her at first sight.[50] However, most of the first chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the Capuchin monk, Ambrosio, who is, strangely enough, presented to us at the height of his powers. Technically, it does not become clear to the reader that it is Ambrosio who poses a threat to Antonia until chapter three of volume two which occurs more than halfway through the novel. But the comments Lewis includes in his first presentation of the monk hint at a dark nature hidden deep beneath the surface nobility and exemplary holiness he presents to the world. As Lewis points out about Ambrosio, "still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could

sustain the glance of his eye at once fiery and penetrating."[51] When he compounds this hint by disclosing in the second chapter that Ambrosio suffers from inordinate pride,[52] it becomes obvious to a reader familiar with gothic conventions that the haughty villain necessary to the form will, in fact, prove to be Ambrosio himself.

However, as I have said, Lewis does not make this clear until well into the novel, and, as a result, the beginning of The Monk tends to disappoint any expectations the reader might entertain about the way the story should progress. Although Lewis does detail Lorenzo's desire to marry Antonia, he spends little time describing either the relationship itself or the obstacles presented to it. Instead, he switches his interest to Ambrosio and his relationship with the monk Rosario. In fact, all of chapter two is devoted to the story of Ambrosio's slip from grace as he gradually submits to the seductions of Matilda who has concealed her true identity and pretended to be Rosario only in order to be near Ambrosio.

Again, Lewis interrupts even this tale and turns in chapter three to Raymond's recitation of his unsuccessful attempt to elope with his beloved Agnes. His narrative occupies two chapters and more than one hundred pages and upon its conclusion, Lewis does not return to the story of Ambrosio and Matilda, but rather doubles back even further and proceeds with the tale of Lorenzo and Antonia. The reader is not permitted to learn the consequences of

Ambrosio's temptation until the third chapter of the second volume. At this point Lewis finally dovetails the three stories heretofore kept separate and involves the participants of each with those of the other two.

In this chapter Ambrosio conceives his plot to rape Antonia and, in a development unlike that in any other gothic novel preceding The Monk, he succeeds in his designs. In the process, Ambrosio kills Antonia's mother and murders Antonia herself. Although Lewis does fulfill one of the gothic conventions by uniting his hero with a beautiful virgin at the end of the tale, he still manages to disappoint expectations since Lorenzo does not win Antonia and is forced to console himself with the affections of the hastily produced Virginia. Lewis does permit Raymond to win Agnes, but again, he provides a significant twist to the conventional gothic union since Agnes has already been seduced and the child she conceived has been allowed to perish.

I think it probably clear from this brief recital of the plot structure of The Monk that although Matthew Lewis includes most of the conventional narrative devices of the gothic novel worked out by Walpole and Radcliffe, he introduces them at unexpected moments, delays the anticipated conclusions usually derived from them, and thus subjects the resolution of the story itself to a subtle shift in meaning. By tampering with gothic clichés, Lewis is able to fulfill a dual purpose in his novel. Since his

story does not hinge on the detection and revelation of a long-hidden crime, he must find some other way to involve his reader in the action of the story if his work is to remain within the gothic genre. Furthermore, because he does not focus on his heroine or ask his reader to identify solely with her, he must use other means to create the sense of dread and fear of further exploration which are behind the plot development and reader response in The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries of Udolpho. By conjuring up the necessary characters or properties involved in a certain typical gothic incident, he sets certain expectations in motion and then turns around abruptly, disappoints them, and "proves" to his reader that things are not always as they seem. Thus, in bringing his reader face to face with the fact that most of what he thinks he "sees" is a deception, Lewis is able to create both the feeling of suspense and the dread of what lies hidden beneath the surface which Walpole and Radcliffe produce by withholding information from their readers. In short, Lewis actually distorts certain gothic conventions precisely because he wants to disorient his reader and to intensify that relationship between reader and text which is so characteristic of the gothic form itself.

His deliberate attempt to involve his reader in the tension between deception and truth, and between illusion and reality serves an additional purpose in that Lewis causes the reader to experience that which is felt by

Ambrosio himself, who discovers again and again that appearances are false and conditions in this world are almost never what they seem. It appears to me that this is Lewis's ultimate goal, since his primary concern is certainly the fate of the Capuchin monk and it is through his demise that Lewis demonstrates the larger theme of this gothic romance. Although the subplots of the novel involve the conventional gothic lovers and the difficulties they encounter in consummating their love in an evil world, The Monk, as its title implies, is really the story of Ambrosio, the Capuchin abbot.

More fully realized than either Manfred ar Montoni, Ambrosio is an extraordinarily talented man who is neither wholly good nor totally evil. In fact, Lewis is careful to point out that had Ambrosio been allowed to develop naturally, he may well have become a generous and kind human being. As he says, "he would have shown himself possessed of many brilliant and manly qualities. He was naturally enterprizing, firm, and fearless: He had a warrior's heart, and He might have shone with splendour at the head of an Army. There was no want of generosity in his nature: The Wretched never failed to find in him a compassionate Auditor: His abilities were quick and shining, and his judgment vast, solid, and decisive."[53] However, Lewis makes it clear, first through Ambrosio's actions and then in an explicit aside, that most of these qualities have been distorted or destroyed by the repressive

training of monastic life. That Lewis blames the church for what Ambrosio has become is clear for he comments, "while the Monks were busied in rooting out his virtues, and narrowing his sentiments, they allowed every vice which had fallen to his share, to arrive at full perfection. He was suffered to be proud, vain, ambitious, and disdainful: He was jealous of his Equals, and despised all merit but his own: He was implacable when offended, and cruel in his revenge."[54] However, not only is the Church responsible in Lewis's eyes for Ambrosio's harsh and unyielding temperament, but he suggests it is also responsible for the crimes he commits, because it is the excessive nature of his passion, previously repressed and now released with a vengeance, which causes him to murder and rape. Indeed, Lewis is ambivalent about all forms of social convention, and though he seems to be aware of the fact that they are necessary, he is also cognizant of the dangers inherent in them. In the end, his portrait of Ambrosio is the picture of an individual in almost total rebellion against the constraints produced by such forms.

It is important to point out that although Ambrosio is clearly a descendent of Manfred and Montoni and thus a gothic villain, he also has a great deal in common with Emily St. Aubert, since his situation echoes, in some respects, that of the typical gothic heroine. Both Emily and Ambrosio gradually lose all ties to human society; the

story of each is the story of increasing isolation and the dangers it poses to the life of the individual. By first introducing Emily in the shelter of the family unit, Mrs. Radcliffe is able to contrast her idyllic life in the society of others with the hysterical and narcissistic existence she leads imprisoned within Udolpho and the recesses of her own imagination. Lewis establishes a similar contrast between Ambrosio's early life as a participating member of the monastic community and his later existence, characterized by a rejection of all ordinary human relationships and a refusal to conform to certain of his order's social conventions. Ambrosio's rejection of society is particularly ironic since early in the novel he discourses at length on the importance of human connection. However, we cannot ignore the fact that even at this early stage, Ambrosio is fascinated by the possibility of an absolutely free and individual life, for he admits to Rosario that "were it possible . . . for Man to be so totally wrapped up in himself as to live in absolute seclusion from human nature, and could yet feel the contented tranquility which these lines [of poetry] express, I allow that the situation would be more desirable, than to live in a world so pregnant with every vice and every folly."[55] Although he feels the pull of the individual life, Ambrosio is still mindful of the dangers it poses. Thus, he lectures Rosario on the effects of an existence lived outside the bounds of human society and the

conventions it necessarily imposes, arguing:

> However little [man] may be attached to the World, He can never wholly forget it, or bear to be wholly forgotten by it. Disgusted at the guilt or absurdity of Mankind, the Misanthrope flies from it: He resolves to become an Hermit, and buries himself in the Cavern of some gloomy Rock. While Hate inflames his bosom, possibly He may feel contented with his situation: But when his passions begin to cool; when Time has mellowed his sorrows, and healed those wounds which He bore with him to his solitude, think you that Content becomes his Companion? Ah! no, Rosario. No longer sustained by the violence of his passions, He feels all the monotony of his way of living, and his heart becomes the prey of Ennui and weariness. He looks round and finds himself alone in the universe: The love of society revives in his bosom, and He pants to return to that world which He has abandoned.[56]

Ambrosio explains further to Rosario that he values his life in the monastery because it permits him to combine the best of two possible worlds. He can isolate himself from the evil and horror which plague human society in general and can yet partake of the pleasures of a social existence lived among a few valued friends. He argues that this balance between isolation and conviviality is "the principal merit of a Monastic Institution" since it "secludes Man from the temptations of Vice," procures that leisure necessary for the proper service of the Supreme," "spares him the mortification of witnessing the crimes of the worldly, and yet permits him to enjoy the blessings of society." [57]

I have quoted Ambrosio's sentiments at length because they are essential to the theme of the novel and because they occur at a crucial point in the narrative. No sooner

has Ambrosio delivered his speech about the necessity for communal life than he is presented with an opportunity to escape the restrictions it imposes. Rosario discards his disguise, reveals that he is a woman and, as Matilda, confesses her love for the Capuchin abbot. Although Ambrosio is able to resist Matilda's charms and to suppress his awakened passions for a short while, he is intrigued with the idea that he may be able to indulge his individual desires, disobey his religious vow of chastity, and yet remain within the protecting walls of the monastery itself. Once he has entertained such thoughts, his desire is released from the fetters which bound it, and he begins to dwell on Matilda's beauty and the possibility of possessing her. He does succumb, and in so doing, defies one of the most important restrictions of the individual will established by the monastic community. Thus having denied the social taboo against expression of certain sexual desires, Ambrosio is completely unable to hold his passions in check. He grows bored with Matilda and when Antonia appears, imploring his help for her mother, he lusts after her. As a result, he breaks another of his monastic vows by venturing outside the cloister.

At this point, Lewis begins to link Ambrosio's sexual passion and his desire to express it with the will to power. What Ambrosio actually wants to do is to set himself outside or above all social conventions so he might satisfy those wants which society has decreed must go unfulfilled <u>except</u>

in certain situations. Matilda recognizes this, and in her attempt to bring Ambrosio into league with the devil, plays on his pride in his own individual strength and power. When he expresses horror at her pact with Satan, she contradicts his argument that she has enslaved herself for momentary happiness. She assures him that "the Enemy of Mankind is my Slave, not my Sovereign," and asks, "is there no difference between giving and receiving laws, between serving and commanding?"[58] When he still refuses to accept her reasoning, she scorns his timidity:

> You dare not? How have you deceived me! That mind which I esteemed so great and valiant proves to be feeble, puerile, and grovelling, a slave to vulgar errors, and weaker than a Woman's....It is not virtue which makes you reject my offer; you would accept it, but you dare not. 'Tis not the crime which holds your hand, but the punishment; 'tis not respect for God which restrains you, but the terror of his vengeance! Fain would you offend him in secret, but you tremble to profess yourself his Foe. Now shame on the coward soul, which wants the courage either to be a firm Friend, or an open Enemy![59]

When Ambrosio continues to resist, she excites the one desire she knows he can no longer control and permits him to observe Antonia, the object of his lust, as she disrobes to bathe. Matilda succeeds in persuading Ambrosio and from this point on he seeks to impose his individual desires on those about him despite their wishes to the contrary. In his push to exert his will against any and all opposition, he murders Elvira, rapes Antonia, and then kills her as well. His attempt to set himself above society and the restrictions

it imposes on its members only serves to assure his participation in the violence and evil of the world, and as a reward for his hubris, Ambrosio achieves the isolation he had coveted. As the story draws to a close, he is rejected by his former monastic brethren and by society as a whole, and discovers that total isolation is even more terrible than he had suspected. Ambrosio, however, retains his sense of superiority to the end. He will neither pray to God nor beg for absolution because he reasons his crimes are so great that they could never be forgiven by anyone. That extraordinary pride in his own individuality and uniqueness which continues to separate him from the rest of humanity, eventually brings about his total destruction.

The last few pages of Lewis's novel are particularly interesting for he integrates his belief in the dangers of extreme individualism with his interest in the problem of distinguishing between illusion and reality. When it becomes clear to Ambrosio that his death is imminent, he decides to accept Matilda's solution and conjure up the devil. However, because he is not ready to renounce all ties to humanity or to give up hope of eventual salvation, he attempts to bargain with Satan himself. Indeed, in his final hours, Ambrosio is still so driven by pride that he suggests a lesser bargain and proposes to Satan, "be my Servant for one hour, and I will be yours for a thousand years."[60] The devil, of course, refuses, for his condition is nothing less than the possession of Ambrosio's

soul for eternity. However, when his jailers are about to open his door to escort him to almost certain death, Ambrosio signs the pact and is spirited away, only to be told by his "savior" moments later, "the guards whom you heard at the prison-door came to signify your pardon."[61] In fact, those very men who seem to be escorts to destruction are actually agents of his salvation. Furthermore, his apparent escape from death by fire turns out to be a wholly unnecessary flight into the flames of eternal damnation. In addition, Ambrosio learns that in raping Antonia and in killing Elvira, he has ravished his own sister and murdered his mother. He discovers, to his horror, that what he thought was a simple crime against the laws of society was actually the most terrible crime against Nature itself. Ambrosio finally realizes that in denying the necessity of abiding by social convention, he has destroyed his most fundamental tie to human society, his connection with the members of his own family. However, even this revelation is not the last Ambrosio must endure, for Satan now withdraws from the bargain, admitting that Ambrosio will never leave the mountain upon which he has been deposited. In truth, what Ambrosio thought was a sure contract guaranteeing his continued existence is actually his death warrant. His story concludes as he is impaled on a mountain peak, rejected even by Satan himself. Unlike Emily, Ambrosio is never permitted to return to society and the solitude he once desired becomes his final curse.

Of course, it is essential to point out that Lewis contrasts Ambrosio's fate with that of the four lovers who do, in fact, achieve union and begin the formation of two new families. As Emily rejoins society and is united with Valancourt in The Mysteries of Udolpho, so Agnes is restored to Raymond and Lorenzo is joined with Virginia in The Monk. Even though Mrs. Radcliffe appears to be more interested in the chaos and confusion created when an individual imagination is permitted to run wild, she eventually reestablishes order in her novel by restoring the family unit to its position of dominance, leaving us with the distinct impression that Emily will never again allow her fantasies to control her reason.

However, while Matthew Lewis also restores order and creates two new family units, we cannot forget that The Monk ends not on this note of relative stability and hope for the future, but rather concludes with the horrible torture and death in isolation of Ambrosio himself. Lewis's last words to his reader concern the monk's final days and his description is a gruesome reversal of the opening of the Book of Genesis. Ambrosio finally dies on the seventh day after he has been abandoned by Satan and Lewis makes it clear that he is aware of his state until the very last moment. Lewis's final description of his death in total isolation can only be an indication that Lewis himself entertains very little hope for the future. The ending of his gothic novel is bleak indeed--his vision is far removed

from that of Walpole or Radcliffe even though he makes use of similar properties and conventions to realize it.

> Blind, maimed, helpless, and despairing, venting his rage in blasphemy and curses, execrating his existence, yet dreading the arrival of death destined to yield him up to greater torments, six miserable days did the villain languish. On the Seventh a violent storm arose: The winds in fury rent up rocks and forests: The rain fell in torrents: It swelled the stream; The waves overflowed their banks; They reached the spot where Ambrosio lay, and when they abated carried with them into the river the Corse of the despairing Monk.[62]

Before leaving Lewis's gothic romance for Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, I want to comment on Lewis's use of standard gothic architecture as well as on his explicit descriptions of sexual passion, violence, and death. Although a gothic castle does not figure in the main plot of The Monk, Lewis does dwell on the castle of Lindenberg at length, using it to intensify the mystery surrounding the Bleeding Nun and to create a sense of dread about the outcome of the midnight tryst between Raymond and Agnes. Furthermore, it seems to me Lewis uses the Capuchin monastery of the primary plot in much the same way Radcliffe uses the castle of Udolpho. It is also particularly significant that when Ambrosio accepts Matilda's help in his attempt to rape Antonia, he does so in the dungeons and catacombs of the monastery. Furthermore, at the moment when he cuts all ties with society by raping and murdering his sister, he is hidden deep within the bowels of the structure, surrounded by the bodies of dead monks and nuns. In

a sense, the more Ambrosio turns away from society and looks within himself for the power to satisfy his desires, the further he descends into the depths of the monastery, away from the life of society and into the embrace of the dead. It is also important that Ambrosio is never again released from these dungeons until he has signed away his right to be a member of the human community. Unlike Emily St. Aubert who is able to leave the haunted gothic castle behind and to rejoin society, Ambrosio continues to be imprisoned in it almost until the moment of his death. In the end, because he continues to assert his individual will, he cuts himself off from intercourse with other men, and locks himself away in the prison of his own egotism.

Although Lewis varies and plays with several gothic conventions in The Monk, the novel is most notably different from those preceding it because of the kinds of descriptions he chooses to include. While it is true that both Walpole and Radcliffe set out to shock their readers, they tend to do this by surprising them with an unexpected explanation or by suggesting that something terrible is about to happen. In fact, very little ever does, though we are continually told that the horrible sight is "beyond description" or "too awful to express in words." Lewis, however, feels no such squeamishness. His novel is filled with graphic portrayals of torture, passion, and death; indeed, he is at his most detailed when writing of the dark side of human existence. His most original contribution to the

genre is his refusal to stop at "unspeakable horrors" and his willingness to present the physical aspects of pain and death in a realistic manner. Where The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries of Udolpho are tales of terror in that their primary aim is to strike fear into the hearts of those who read them, The Monk is closer to a horror story in its desire to bring the reader face to face with everything decayed and disgusting in this world.[62]

Melmoth the Wanderer

If Mattew Lewis's novel is important because of the complexity it brings to the traditional presentation of the gothic villain as well as because it darkens the gothic vision through its preoccupation with death and decay, then Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer should also be considered equally significant for its villain is even more interesting than Ambrosio and its view of the world is less hopeful than that of The Monk. Although the derivation of the novel is clear because it makes use of the standard gothic props and conventions, it is, nevertheless, decidedly different from either The Castle of Otranto or The Mysteries of Udolpho. Melmoth's story bears little outward resemblance to that of Manfred or Emily but it is still my conviction that Maturin's novel is a particularly creative variation of the gothic form established in the two earlier romances. I am inclined to agree with Richard Kiely who sees it as a derivative work which is,

at the same time, "wilder, more complicated, and, in many ways,...more daring...than most of its predecessors."[63]

One of the things setting this novel appart from those which precede it is the fact that many of the traditional gothic properties dealing with the Roman Catholic Church, such as convents, monasteries, monks, and priestly rituals, are no longer employed simply to distance the action or to create an air of miraculous mystery. In Melmoth the Wanderer these things are important at the level of plot construction, but they are also integral to a larger thematic level of meaning as well. Maturin's work functions in some respects as an explicit denunciation of Catholicism and Kiely has called it "a belated work of the Reformation, a roar of outrage against the bigotry, superstition, sadism and hypocrisy which had infested the Roman Church."[64] Part of the impact of this novel is attributable to its complex use of properties whose meanings in other gothic novels are simply the result of the functions they perform while moving the narrative forward. Because Maturin uses them within a larger conceptual framework, the properties themselves derive their significance from the thematic argument to which they contribute as well as from the role they perform within the plot. As a result, the monks, nuns, and monasteries of Melmoth the Wanderer are all more fully realized than those appearing in the earlier works.

Although the thematic character of Maturin's work is relatively simple, his interest in the evil that pervades

all human existence is revealed through a complex narrative structure which is directly related to the halting forward movement of Lewis's The Monk. Melmoth is composed of five separate tales nested within each other as a "set of chinese boxes."[65] These tales are, in turn, suspended within an even larger frame story whose principal character is John Melmoth, a descendent of the Wanderer. The six different stories are linked together by the fact that this wanderer, the original Melmoth, figures in all of them. Although the details of his story are not revealed until we encounter "The Lover's Tale," the last tale in the narrative, they do explain how he can continue to appear over the course of 150 years in places as far removed as Spain and the Orient. Like any good gothic novelist, Maturin releases this information about his villain-protagonist only gradually and he is thus able to shroud him in a cloud of mystery. Each new detail about Melmoth's history and temperament, supplied by some new character in a new tale, serves to compound this mystery. As a result, Melmoth becomes an almost mythic figure even before he appears as principal protagonist.

We eventually learn that Melmoth had become interested in astrology and the occult sciences and had been promised knowledge of the future world on the condition that he would yield his soul to the devil. However, this contract was made to appear less horrible by the fact that Melmoth was told he could be released from his bargain if, in the

course of 150 years, he presented a single soul as his substitute. Thus armed with the power to appear to the suffering at that moment when their pain was the greatest and resistance lowest, Melmoth wandered the world in search of a stand-in. Each of the tales recounts in ever-increasing clarity the power of his attempts and the ultimate failure of them all. However, each time we reach the moment of temptation in a particular tale, Maturin lowers the veil once again, telling us only that the mysterious visitor made a proposition which cannot be repeated.

For example, in the second tale contained within the frame, Moncada tells Melmoth that a curious apparition "took advantage of my agony, half visionary, half real as it was, and, while proving to me that he had the power of effecting my escape from the Inquisition, proposed to me that incommunicable condition which I am forbid to reveal, except in the act of confession."[66] Maturin then deliberately suggests that this creature may be the one who tempted Stanton in his moment of despair in a madhouse. He appends to Moncada's recitation the observation that "here Melmoth could not forbear remembering the <u>incommunicable condition</u> proposed to Stanton in the madhouse, - he shuddered and was silent."[67] By thus exciting our curiosity and delaying our discovery about the true nature of the Wanderer's plight, Maturin creates that air of suspense and dread which is at the heart of every gothic novel and which is the basis of the contract between the

gothic text and its reader. In Melmoth, as in Otranto and Udolpho, we are kept ignorant, given a few hints and suggestions about the reality that exists beneath the surface of events, and charged with the task of discovering the solution which will explain all that we have seen.

Although the primary motive behind Maturin's delaying tactic seems to be his desire to provoke the reader's involvement in the mystery which enshrouds Melmoth, this intricate narrative structure serves a thematic function as well. Each of the five tales is told by or about a particularly engaging character with whom we, as readers, are asked to identify. Four of these stories center around attractive young men who are subjected to all sorts of outrageous tortures and cruel punishments. In fact, it is easy to see that the younger Melmoth, Stanton, Moncada, and Guzman are all modeled after such innocent young heroes of earlier gothics as Theodore, Valancourt, and Lorenzo. The fifth tale is the story of the beautiful, Eve-like Immalee, and her derivation from Emily and Antonia is equally obvious. Thus, Maturin engages our sentiments in such a way that when Melmoth does intrude into the early tales, he is taken to be strangely alien, wholly evil, and the ultimate gothic villain.[68] Maturin effectively controls our perception and leads us to a certain interpretation of this enigmatic figure whose situation we are sure we understand by the time the "Tale of the Indians" is presented.

However, as in The Monk, appearances in the world of

Melmoth are deceiving, and in this crucial tale Maturin dashes our expectations, contradicts our interpretation, and presents Melmoth himself as a complex character who is both hero and villain to Immalee. By demonstrating to us that things are not always as they seem, Maturin prepares us for the moral argument he wishes to make in the novel as a cohesive whole. In essence, his narrative is really the story of Melmoth, and each of the tales must be reconstructed or reinterpreted in that light.

The first encounter between Melmoth and Immalee occurs in the "Tale of the Indians," the third narrative related within the original frame story. The tale itself centers around Immalee who is, at this time, the sole inhabitant of an Edenic island in the Pacific. She is completely innocent and unfamiliar with the corrupt ways of the outside world and Melmoth thinks of her as a means to escape his destiny. He destroys her innocence by acquainting her with the suffering and evil of the world beyond her island, but at the same time he is touched by her trust and gradually falls in love with her. Robert Lougy has argued that Maturin is at his best when describing Melmoth's reawakening and rediscovery of dead emotion,[69] and I certainly agree. His description of the pain Melmoth experiences as a result of the tension between the cynicism and despair he has lived with for over a century, and the fragile hope nourished by his feeling for Immalee, is a moving testament to Melmoth's deeply human nature in which evil is inextricably

bound up with good. Maturin writes:

> When absent from her, his purpose was what I have described; but while present, that purpose seemed suspended; he gazed often on her with eyes whose wild and fierce lustre was quenched in a dew that he hastily wiped away, and gazed on her again. While he sat near her on the flowers she had collected for him, while he looked on those timid and rosy lips that waited his signal to speak, like buds that did not dare to blow till the sun shone on them, - while he heard accents issue from those lips which he felt it would be impossible to pervert as it would be to teach the nightengale blasphemy, - he sunk down beside passed his hand over his livid brow, and, wiping off some cold drops, thought for a moment he was not the Cain of the moral world, and that the brand was effaced, - at least for a moment. He felt again the gnawings of the worm that never dies, and the scorching of the fire that is never to be quenched....He looked intensely at her, while rage, despair, and pity, convulsed his heart. . . .[70]

However, despite the redeeming nature of Immalee's love, Melmoth, whose extraordinary intellect still controls his emotions, reasons that a shield of cynicism and despair is the only armor man can use to combat the pain and suffering of human existence. As a result, he does not beg for the forgiveness still available to him and finally persuades Immalee to leave her island. He becomes, in effect, the agent of her corruption, and despite the short revival of his feelings, he appears to the reader even more depraved than before.

After Immalee is returned to her family in Spain, Melmoth continues to visit with her. Once again, his dormant feelings are awakened and he begins to entertain the

faintest hope that his misery might be alleviated if he can share it with another. Immalee delays when he proposes marriage but eventually consents to follow him wherever he wishes. Melmoth, however, restrained by his conscience, cannot subject Immalee to a marriage with a doomed soul and abruptly disappears. He returns just as abruptly, however, to marry her in a bizarre and diabolical ceremony which reverses the marriage ritual concluding every other gothic novel. Melmoth finally appears to be totally evil after all. But Maturin surprises us yet again. We learn some 200 pages later that in the interval between Immalee's acceptance and the actual marriage, Melmoth, in an unselfish attempt to protect her warns her father of the danger which threatens her. In fact, he tells Aliaga, "there is an eye fixed on her, and its fascination is more deadly than that fabled of the snake! - There is an arm extended to seize her, in whose grasp humanity withers! - that arm even now relaxes for a moment, - its fibres thrill with pity and horror, - it releases the victim for a moment."[71] He beseeches Aliaga to hear him, but because business matters prove too pressing, Aliaga does not hurry home, and the marriage takes place. Maturin's point in presenting these reversals can only be that the will to do good still exists within Melmoth's soul and is at constant war with its darker, more pessimistic side <u>despite</u> his pact with the devil.

With Melmoth's story, Maturin argues that no matter

how evil a man seems to be, no matter how depraved his life appears to others, he is always just outside the range of God's infinite mercy which can be extended to him if he will only deny his power-seeking ego and acknowledge his need for something beyond himself. Melmoth, however, controlled by his own pride, cynicism, and despair, refuses to avail himself of the opportunity extended to all men. As Robery Lougy points out, "his damnation results not from the diabolic powers without, but from within, and in this lies the tragedy of his fate."[72] Like Ambrosio, Melmoth considers himself superior to all he sees about him, and it is finally this pride which isolates him from human society and dooms him to perdition. Both novels function on a thematic level as an exploration of the dangers of extreme individualism, and although both assert that human connection, achieved through the social institution of marriage, is both necessary and possible, they present that argument in subplots which are subordinate to the bleaker, less hopeful stories of the title characters. Even though Ambrosio and Melmoth are finally punished and order restored at the end of both novels, it is still with the sense of hopelessness and despair which seems to be the characterizing theme of these two gothic "romances." By exposing the hypocrisy and corruption of the Church, both Lewis and Maturin seem to imply that man's salvation is entirely dependent on his personal, individual relationship with

God. However, since they also dwell on the horrible consequences of total reliance on the self, the reader cannot help but be more impressed with the inevitability of the paradox of individualism than with the possibility of its resolution.

In his lengthy analysis of Melmoth the Wanderer, Richard Kiely includes an excellent statement of the principal concern of the literary form known as the gothic romance. Although he tends to speak of it in terms slightly different from mine, Kiely, too, focuses on the paradoxical situation confronted by Melmoth in the novel, exploring the consequences of the tension produced by the conflict between the two sides of Melmoth's nature. Kiely calls these two aspects "the compassionate" and "the cynical," referring specifically to Melmoth's desire for union with some other fellow human, and his inability to lower himself to the level of others. In this context, Kiely writes, "the difference between them, then, cannot be described in terms of action, but only in terms of attitude. One feels and hopes and therefore suffers mentally from the physical suffering he witnesses; the other feels and expects nothing, rejoices in his isolation from other men, and even asserts an indifference to nature, which gives him a kind of superiority over it. The struggle thus depicted is an internal one between two aspects of the self which can never be reconciled, yet which define one another as surely as night and day,

death and life."[73] Like Ambrosio, Melmoth is an extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive human being, appalled and disgusted by the depravity and corruption he sees about him. But because he possesses such an acutely sensitive nature, he suffers from his own awareness, and isolates himself from others and thus from his own "human" nature. Whereas Ambrosio shuts himself up in a monastery, Melmoth tries to learn more than anyone else in order to alleviate his suffering. By setting themselves above the rest of men, both Ambrosio and Melmoth reject human society and are forced to turn inward in search of the power and ability necessary to insure survival in a difficult world. This journey into the self, however, proves disastrous, for once an individual's connection to the social world is severed, the triumph of narcissism is complete and absolute isolation is the result. Neither Melmoth nor Ambrosio ever discovers the passageway out of the haunted castle of the individual self. In the end, both succumb to the darker, more pessimistic side of their nature and die particularly horrible, gruesome deaths. The damnation of each is made even more poignant by the fact that in both novels, some character does establish a connection with another which, however tenuous serves to justify the suffering and pain they must endure as part of the paradox of the human condition.

It is ultimately this conflict between the power of the individual will, and the undeniable need for

communication and connection with others, which is at the heart of the gothic novel. While early manifestations of the form do not locate the conflict within the limits of the individual human psyche, they represent it as a struggle between the forces of good and evil. Neither Manfred nor Montoni is a fully realized human being precisely because each functions as a personification of the absolute evil inherent in the desire to control one's own destiny and that of others. They are opposed in Otranto and Udolpho by characters who similarly personify absolute good or the longing for connection and, as a result, Theodore and Valancourt, Isabella and Emily are easily and accurately described by the terms "hero" and "heroine." However, Radcliffe avoids Walpole's absolute dichotomy by placing her heroine in the middle of these opposing impulses, forcing her to choose between them. When Emily loses her ability to distinguish illusion from reality and good from evil, it is because she has been isolated from society by the power of her own will and imagination. As she gradually leaves objective reality behind her, she sinks into the same isolation and narcissistic individualism which imprisons Montoni, the "villain" of the story. Radcliffe, however, permits Emily to escape. Her marriage to Valancourt symbolizes both the necessity for and the possibility of achieving connection with another, and hence, with the rest of human society.

As I am sure it is clear by now, both The Monk and

Melmoth the Wanderer are structured around this seminal "gothic" conflict. However, in these two more complex variations of the genre, the struggle is located within the individual self and good and evil are not so easily distinguishable from one another. Although both novels include pairs of lovers who seem to be "heroes" and "heroines" this designation is not entirely satisfactory, for while Ambrosio and Melmoth are clearly the villains of the narratives, they also seem to be their heroes as well. Both are complex characters and, while it is not possible to say they are wholly good, neither can it be said that they are wholly evil. The will to exert power over others by virtue of one's own superiority is equally balanced in these hero-villains with the desire to rely on others through connection and communication. Although the desire for power wins the battle, these two men who have tried to live at the expense of others are harshly and brutally punished. Society is restored in The Monk and in Melmoth just as it is in Otranto and Udolpho, but the happiness of the restoration is tempered by the fact that the marriages upon which it is based are not the ideal unions we might wish. Lorenzo does not marry his true love, but must content himself with a devoted substitute. Raymond marries Agnes only after he has raped her and nearly caused her death. Similarly, Immalee is finally joined with Melmoth, but dies soon thereafter giving birth to their doomed child.

In the world of the late gothic novel, happiness is inextricably bound up with terrible suffering, good is unavoidably mixed with evil, and moral ambiguity characterizes all of human existence. These novels are directly linked to those by Walpole and Radcliffe by the fact that, in the end, they too counsel against hopelessness, asserting the importance of human connection even in the face of the constraints it produces on the individual will and the horrible pain it must endure in order to survive. Adapting a comment Kiely makes about Melmoth alone, one might say that the lesson these novels try to teach--which is not to despair--is all the more moving because their vision of man and nature gives so much to despair about.[74]

The Conventional Gothic

Having presented this general interpretation of the genre, it is now possible, I think, to describe with accuracy which elements or combinations of elements are constitutive of the particular literary "system" we call the gothic novel. This form, as I have characterized it here, first appeared in reaction to the realistic novel of manners and morals which focused on society, its customs and conventions, and the individual's adaptation to each. Whereas the gothic is also concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, its focus, unlike its predecessor's, is on the individual and the state of his mind when he is cut off from harmonious communion with others.

The form is characterized, therefore, by its concern with an isolated, often orphaned seeker who is forced to pursue some goal in order to insure his own survival. Strangely enough, this seeker may either be a beautiful young woman or an extraordinarily talented, diabolical figure. The content of the unit does not matter as much as its relationship to other central or defining units in the genre. What is crucial then is that this figure must somehow be cut off from all normal intercourse with human society and thus from the aid or sustenance which might be provided by others. As a result, this gothic seeker is forced to look inward to find the strength necessary to help him withstand the pain of life in a universe which is anything but wholly benevolent.

The gothic is marked, furthermore, by the antipathy which develops between the isolated questor and the natural world. Because most of his normal ties to society have been severed, the questor's perception begins to be colored by the fact that it cannot be checked against the perceptions of significant others. As a result, he gradually loses his ability to see objectively; he feels himself confronted at every turn by a completely alien and hostile environment bent only on his personal destruction. It is, in fact, the gothic novelist's preoccupation with the questor's psychic state during this confrontation with the outside world which produces that curious sense of dread and fear so characteristic of every novel in the genre. This

atmosphere of mystery and suspense is not simply a peculiar feature of certain novels but rather a defining unit of the genre itself. Indeed, it is through this presentation of an ominous and oppressive air that the gothic novelist is able to describe the questor's loosening grip upon reality and at the same time engage the reader's sympathies in the protagonist's struggle to control his own destiny in an alien world.

Most gothic novels guarantee their reader's participation in this experience of dread by controlling the amount of information released to them, thereby forcing them to identify with the questor of the tale. Again, this technique is not a mere curiosity employed randomly by a few authors, but rather a condition of the contract established between reader and gothic text. By telling the tale from the questor's point of view and by granting to the reader only that information possesed by the questor himself, the author places the reader in a position equivalent to that of the protagonist; he is thus forced to see the universe through the protagonist's strangely colored glasses. The obvious assumption behind such a strategy is that if a reader participates in the terror and fear produced by complete isolation, he will be all the more willing to accept the author's moral argument that order and stability are dependent on healthy social relationships. This sense of fear and dread is thus both thematically and stylistically important to the genre and

it is for this reason that the single defining element of the gothic novel is often thought to be its peculiarly oppressive atmosphere. Of course, it is my conviction that it is not suspense and dread alone which make a gothic novel, but rather the appearance of both within a tale told about an isolated seeker who at some time perceives the universe surrounding him as unutterably "other."

However, there are still other elements I have not yet mentioned also central to the genre of the gothic novel. In addition to the relationships between questor and universe and between reader and text already mentioned, there must also be established certain relationships between the questor and other characters if the novel is to be considered a gothic. The characteristic action of the genre is set in motion by a conflict between the desire for a life of isolation lived outside the cares and worries of the world, and the recognition that connection with others is the only thing that can provide a shield against the suffering inherent in the human condition. These tendencies may be embodied in two entirely separate characters or they may be portrayed as opposite sides of a single figure. In any case, not only must both forces exist within the novel, but they must be played off against each other in such a way that both protagonist and reader confront the possibility of choosing between them. Thus, we have Emily St. Aubert, who wishes to marry Valancourt, suddenly locked within Udolpho and the fantasies of her

own imagination and then threatened with the isolation Montoni deliberately chooses. In another instance, we see Ambrosio the monk simultaneously attracted and repelled by the life of isolation and in the end cruelly punished because he chooses an existence ruled by the individual will. In both cases, these opposing tendencies confront each other and the conflict is ultimately resolved in favor of a life lived within the limits of social existence.

It is necessary to add at this point that as a result of this "gothic" conflict, the seeker-protagonist of the novel is always brought face to face with the violence, evil and unspeakable cruelty which characterize human existence. He is most often initiated into an awareness of this evil, but occasionally he is implicated in it as well because he finds it necessary to use the same violence and cruelty to assert his individual will. However, such a movement is not absolutely necessary, since what is truly important to the genre is the fact that knowledge of the suffering at the foundation of all human existence makes the choice between isolation and community even more difficult. The questor is seduced by the apparent ease of a life lived outside the inevitable problems of human society and he often believes he is opting for a virtuous existence by denying his participation in the human community. No such questor in the traditional gothic novel ever survives his choice of isolation; social connection is

always presented as the painful but necessary solution to a life that must be lived amidst such horror. Manfred, Montoni, Ambrosio, and Melmoth all try to impose their wills on others, attempt to deny their need for human connection and, as a result, are ultimately destroyed. The fate of the character who chooses the individual life is always contrasted in the gothic novel with that of one who is willing to commit himself to an existence lived in the presence of others despite the inevitable suffering such a connection portends. Marriage is essential to the resolution of the standard gothic romance for it stands in opposition to the life of isolation, symbolizing man's need for the comfort provided by others within the limits of social convention.

While I have characterized the traditional gothic romance as a kind of quest novel, it is, in some respects, an escape narrative as well. At the same time the protagonist of the novel searches for a way to live in a world filled with violence and pain, he desperately tries to avoid being sullied by the evil he perceives about him. Consequently, much of the gothic plot concerns this character's attempts to escape a realization of or consummation with evil and the novel itself is dominated by his dread of this final, inevitable outcome. While evil is thus often the prime motivating force in the standard gothic romance, it seldom affects the ultimate resolution. As I have pointed out before, order is restored at the end

of these novels because all those who have attempted to set themselves outside society are punished, while all those who have consented to remain within it are rewarded with marriage. Nevertheless, because so much of the novel is devoted to descriptions of violence, torture, sexual passion, and death, the reader cannot help but be impressed by the extreme fragility of the gothic resolution. In short, the gothic form is characterized by this strange tension between the cynicism and despair of its thematic concerns, and the optimism and hope of its narrative action.

Before leaving this discussion of the gothic genre in order to explore the ways in which it has been varied since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I want to make some comments about those standard properties often isolated as exclusively "gothic" and generally thought of as the defining elements of the form. I am referring specifically here to medieval castles, labyrinthine passages, subterranean caverns, ghosts, and all manner of supernatural happenings. It seems to me that simply because some of these things are present within a certain novel does not necessarily guarantee that such a work is in reality a true gothic romance. Indeed, it is my conviction that these "gothic" encumbrances are so closely identified with the genre because they are the outstanding features of the earliest presentations of that strange, mysterious, and largely alien world so central to the fictional form just discussed. Including such properties

in a novel does not automatically make that novel a gothic because those properties must be integrated within the more fundamental structural patterns which function as the true foundation of the gothic form. Thus, a medieval castle is "gothic" if it is used to symbolize the characteristic questor's descent into the self. Similarly, ghosts and apparitions are "gothic" if they function within a narrative which concerns a character's loss of rational contact with objective reality. In other words, the traditional gothic furniture is important to the genre because it plays an integral part in the creation of that menacing world which threatens both the protagonist of the novel and the reader who sympathizes with him. However, it is entirely conceivable that a gothic novel can be created without these properties since the necessary relationships between seeker and universe, between seeker and other characters, and between reader and text are not dependent on the presence of medieval castles or subterranean passages, or even on the appearances of ghosts.

The gothic novel, then, can be defined as any prose narrative of considerable length which uses the structure of interlocking relationships heretofore discussed as its point of departure. An author may choose to use these relationships or oppositions in a conventional way, that is, according to the form defined by Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin, or he may choose to subject them to slightly new combinations thus giving to the elements he

uses a somewhat different meaning. However, no matter how deformed he may wish to make the relationships among these elements the author must use them if his novel is to be in the gothic mode. In other words, he must concern himself with the conflict between the individual will and social commitment by focusing on a seeker who is isolated from the world and thus threatened by all he perceives about him. Furthermore, this author must include the reader in the terror and fear experienced by the seeker as a result of his isolation, in order to involve that reader in the seeker's choice between a life lived with others amidst violence and pain, and a life lived alone within the confines of the solitary ego. While an author does not have to resolve this conflict in any specific way, his novel must dwell on the evil that pervades life in this world if it is to be judged a true gothic. The gothic vision, in short, is characterized by an awareness of the pain, suffering, and death inextricably bound up with life, and the narrative action of the genre is dominated by the discovery that any attempt to escape this human condition is doomed to failure. Connection with another human being is held out in the traditional gothic novel as the only viable solution for man in his attempt to withstand the tortures of human existence. Although these tortures cannot be avoided, they can at least be minimized by the comfort derived from a life shared with others.

NOTES

[1]Although I would also argue that the text itself has meaning only because it too is integrated into the larger context of an individual life, that issue need not concern us here if we can accept the premise as given. For a discussion of the connection between extra-literary contexts and the construction of meaning within a literary text I would direct the reader to S/Z by Roland Barthes and to Jonathan Culler's chapter on "Convention and Naturalization" in Structuralist Poetics, pp. 131-160.

[2]Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," trans., Lionel Duisit, New Literary History (Fall, 1975), 238-272.

[3]Barthes, "An Introduction," p. 243.

[4]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 202.

[5]Barthes, "An Introduction," p. 244.

[6]Barthes, "An Introduction," p. 245.

[7]Barthes, S/Z, p. 21.

[8]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 202.

[9]Barthes, S/Z, p. 19.

[10]Barthes, S/Z, p. 17.

[11]Barthes, S/Z, p. 92.

[12]Barthes, S/Z, p. 92.

[13]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 229.

[14]Barthes, S/Z, p. 18.

[15]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 203.

[16]Barthes, S/Z, p. 100.

[17]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 203.

[18]Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1927), p. 2. See also Martin Kallich, Horace Walpole (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 1-33.

[19]E. F. Bleiler, "Horace Walpole and The Castle of Otranto" in Three Gothic Novels, ed E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. ix.

[20]Robert Kiely, The Romantic Novel in England (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 41.

[21]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 41.

[22]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 10.

[23]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 10.

[24]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, pp. 20-21.

[25]Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story in Three Gothic Novels, ed. E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), p. 18.

[26]Walpole, Otranto, p. 18.

[27]Walpole, Otranto, p. 18.

[28]Walpole, Otranto, p. 18.

[29]Walpole, Otranto, p. 18.

[30]Bleiler, "Horace Walpole," p. xv.

[31]Bleiler, "Horace Walpole," p. xv.

[32]Bonamy Dobrée, "Introduction," to Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. vii.

[33]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 65.

[34]Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 1.

[35]Not only does this passage enable the reader to add to his understanding of M. St. Aubert, but it also helps him to characterize Emily and to deepen his understanding of her. Furthermore, as the action of the novel progresses, it becomes clear to the careful reader that this passage must also be interpreted thematically as one of the key statements of the novel's moral point. In actuality, it functions simultaneously on several different meaning levels.

[36]Radcliff, Udolpho, p. 80.

[37]E. B. Murray, Ann Radcliffe (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 117.

[38]Radcliffe, Udolpho, p. 1.

[39]Radcliffe, Udolpho, pp. 225-226.

[40]Radcliffe, Udolpho, p. 226.

[41]Radcliffe, Udolpho, p. 80.

[42]Murray, Radcliffe, p. 124.

[43]Murray, Radcliffe, p. 127.

[44]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 78.

[45]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 78.

[46]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 78.

[47]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 78.

[48]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 77.

[49]Matthew Lewis, The Monk: A Romance, ed. Howard Anderson (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 9.

[50]Lewis, The Monk, p. 24.

[51]Lewis, The Monk, p. 18.

[52]Lewis, The Monk, p. 39.

[53]Lewis, The Monk, p. 236.

[54]Lewis, The Monk, p. 237.

[55]Lewis, The Monk, p. 53.

[56]Lewis, The Monk, p. 53.

[57]Lewis, The Monk, p. 54.

[58]Lewis, The Monk, p. 268.

[59]Lewis, The Monk, pp. 268-269.

[60]Lewis, The Monk, p. 434.

[61]Lewis, The Monk, p. 440.

[62]Although this is a distinction frequently made by critics of the gothic, I think it has been most cogently set forth by Robert D. Hume in an article entitled "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel," PMLA, 84 (1969), pp. 212-229.

[63]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 189.

[64]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 189.

[65]This comment on the novel's structure is included in nearly every study of the work but it is usually cited without an indication of its source. In Charles Robert Maturin: The Terror Novelist (Amsterdam, H.J. Paris, 1933), p. 90. Willem Scholten attributes the observation to an anonymous reviewer in The Quarterly Review, 1821, vol xxiv, p. 303.

[66]Charles Robert Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer: A Tale, ed. Douglas Grant (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 237.

[67]Maturin, Melmoth, p. 237.

[68]Melmoth actually figures in three stories before he is presented to us in depth in the "Tale of the Indians." We first hear of him in the frame story concerning his descendent. Then, he appears in Stanton's narrative and in the "Tale of the Spaniard" both of which are contained within the frame. The "Tale of Guzman's Family" intervenes between the "Tale of the Indians" and the "Tale of the Lovers," the two stories which actually concern Melmoth himself. Thus, Maturin uses Guzman's story to temporarily halt the revelation of Melmoth's character begun but not completed in the "Indian" narrative.

[69]Robert E. Lougy, Charles Robert Maturin (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1975), p. 72.

[70]Maturin, Melmoth, p. 299.

[71]Maturin, Melmoth, p. 503.

[72]Lougy, Maturin, p. 72.

[73]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, p. 199.

[74]Kiely, The Romantic Novel, pp. 204-205.

CHAPTER V

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN GOTHIC: EMPIRICAL AND CREATIVE USE OF A LITERARY "SYSTEM"

The Gothic Novel in the Twentieth Century

Although Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer is generally thought of as the last real manifestation of the genre created by Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe at the end of the eighteenth century, many works written after 1820 have continued to be identified as "gothic" novels. In fact, this appellation has been extended to such an extraordinarily diverse group of fictional products--including Wuthering Heights, Dracula, "The Fall of the House of Usher," Moby-Dick, The House of the Seven Gables, As I Lay Dying, and The Hawkline Monster--that one must wonder exactly what these very different works could have in common in order to warrant the same description. While I do not propose here to engage in a defense of all those critics who have argued the gothic is something more than ghosts, castles, and monks, I would like to examine several contemporary works called "gothic," either by literary critics or book publishers themselves, in order to ascertain whether these works actually make use of that structure of interlocking relationships I have

identified as the skeleton of the form.

In describing a particular novel's dependence on this peculiarly "gothic" constellation of textual units, I will attempt to establish whether the constellation has been used conventionally, that is, in the manner established by Walpole and Radcliffe and modified by Lewis and Maturin: or whether it has been subjected to a structural deformation severe enough to change the basic significance of the form itself. In short, I will attempt to demonstrate that two novels as different as Phyllis Whitney's The Golden Unicorn (1976) and William Faulkner's Sancturay (1931) can justifiably be called gothic novels, even though they appear to have nothing in common, because they both use the same skeleton as their point of departure. Ultimately, I hope to show that the distinction I have drawn between the empirical and creative use of a literary system is, in fact, a useful way of describing how certain texts employ the same elements or structures and yet appear to belong to two absolutely different categories of literary works.

Since I have theorized that the texts we traditionally dismiss as "popular literature" or "mass entertainment" are, in reality, conventional or formulaic uses of a specific literary system, it seems logical to begin here with the popular gothics for, if my hypothesis is correct, they ought to prove very similar to those works by Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin examined in the last chapter.

Although I will focus on only two popular gothic romances written within the last five years, these two novels are so similar to the hundreds of others which have flooded the paperback market in the last two or three decades that my analysis of them will be representative of the entire "class" or group as a whole. Before getting involved in a lengthy interpretation of Phyllis Whitney's Spindrift (1975) and The Golden Unicorn, I want to make a few comments about the enormous popularity of these and other works like them. According to a circular distributed to retail book outlets by a large midwest book distribution firm, "gothic" novels such as those by Whitney account for ten per cent of all mass market releases and sixteen per cent of all fiction published in any given year.[1] Nearly thirty-five gothic titles are released in a typical month while more than 400 appear each year. The initial printing of a Phyllis Whitney paperback usually runs to about 800,000 copies. When Spindrift was first published in 1975, it sold more than 57,000 hard cover copies in less than eight months and remained on the New York Times best-seller list for more than three. Although very little research has been done on the nature of the audience reached by these books, most agree the majority of the readers are women. While these facts and figures certainly tell us nothing substantial about the relationship between these contemporary gothics and those English novels published more than 200 years before, they suggest that the

form still touches a nerve in the populace at large, and that there continues to be something peculiarly appealing to women about these narratives--since the vast majority of Radcliffe's readers were also female.

For purposes of organizational symmetry, I shall center my analysis of the contemporary gothic romance on two novels by Phyllis Whitney. Although most of the novels included within this popular genre are written by British writers (such as Victoria Holt, Norah Lofts, and Mary Stewart), Whitney's novels are structurally and thematically so similar that any statements about them can be applied to the works of English authors as well. I have decided to focus on an American novelist primarily because I want to use American novels when I discuss the creative use of the gothic system later in this chapter. I want to do so in order to demonstrate that two works obviously derived from the singular world of the American South--The Member of the Wedding (1946), and Sanctuary (1931)--are directly descended from The Castle of Otranto and The Mysteries of Udolpho, though neither contains any of the medieval architecture or props so prominent in the earlier works.

My purpose is two-fold. I want to establish, first of all, that the gothic form is something more than a random collection of drafty castles and moaning ghosts, by showing that the genre can continue to exist even though these properties have been long discarded as instruments

of terror and dread. Furthermore, I wish to show that the gothic novel is, in fact, the product of a literary system which exists outside cultural boundaries, one which can be adapted and modified to suit various kinds of thematic purposes. By selecting American novels which are necessarily derived from different cultural backgrounds and settings, I hope to show that in creating the gothic form, Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe did more than give expression to popular British preoccupations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Phyllis Whitney and the Popular Gothic Romance

Phyllis Whitney first began writing during the Depression when she composed hundreds of short stories for the romance magazines then so popular. She later switched to the field of children's books, and then in the early 1950's, began working with a form she called the "romantic suspense story" patterned after Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Daphne DuMaurier's Rebecca. Her first novel in this vein, The Quicksilver Pool, was published in 1955 and since then she has written nearly a gothic novel a year. By 1975, Whitney had published more than fifty-five books and her work had been translated into seventeen languages.[2] Her name is so well known and so closely identified with the genre that publishers often try to boost the sales of a work of an unknown author by claiming on the cover that the novel is in the Whitney tradition or, better yet, that

it has been read and approved by Phyllis Whitney herself.

In February, 1967 article published in The Writer magazine, Whitney addresses herself to all would-be writers of gothic romances and, in the course of giving novices advice about how to write such a work, provides an excellent summary of the main features of the genre which can serve as an ideal introduction to her work in particular and to the popular gothic in general.[3] Whitney first points out that she rejects the term "gothic" as a description for her work because she feels it confining and too redolent of a "gloomy-old-house" atmosphere. She prefers instead to call her works "romantic novels of suspense" and requests this phrase be placed on the jacket of her books "by way of identification for the reader." She admits, furthermore, that she is not writing serious novels, but rather providing entertainment for an audience which has clearly defined expectations. She likes to think of each work, she adds, as a "performance." I think it useful here to examine Whitney's theory of the form in some depth, since her analysis is an accurate description of her own work as well as that of numerous others. Indeed, if this short article is any indication, it seems safe to say Phyllis Whitney fully comprehends the nature of the gothic novel and knows exactly how to put one together so it will appeal to a huge number of readers.

Whitney makes it clear that when writing one of her romantic suspense stories she is acutely conscious of her

reader's expectations. She argues that the genre has a definite form and is composed of a series of "ingredients," all of which are familiar to her reader and anticipated by him. As she says, "There is about these stories - and I'm now speaking as a reader - a certain wonderment. One steps into what Monica Dickens has called 'a dear familiar landscape,' in which anything at all may happen, romantically speaking. There is an entrancing promise, sure to be fulfilled by the skilled writer."[4] A gothic romance then, according to Whitney, must appear to be open-ended--dominated by a sense that all things are possible, even while it gives the reader only those things he has been trained to expect. In actuality, the promise of these books is not infinite, since the action is always predictable enough to fulfill crucial expectations entertained by the audience. But they derive much of their power from the illusion of endless, infinite promise and, as a result, the atmosphere of excitement and suspense is probably the most important "ingredient" in the genre. In fact, I think it no mere coincidence that Whitney mentions this aspect of the form first in her attempt to characterize it.

Whitney attributes the gothic's sense of promise to its setting, or "background" as she calls it. While she understands that it is "the spooky old mansion set in a brooding landscape" which provides this interest in the traditional gothic, she maintains these specific props are not necessary to the creation of the correct atmosphere in

the modern version of the form. I find it interesting that Whitney seems to know implicitly that it is not the medieval castle nor the sublime landscape which is functional in the standard gothic; rather it is the reaction these things produce in the reader as he follows the protagonist's encounter with this environment which gives to the novel its distinctive air. Whitney argues it is entirely possible to set a gothic novel in the twentieth century, but she cautions the action must be distanced in some way so the world of the novel appears strange and threatening. She advises her reader, "If you use the modern scene, you'd better remove your characters to some isolated spot where you won't have as much trouble with believability. Such isolation can even be achieved in an old brownstone in today's New York, if you can shut out the outside world to a sufficient extent."[5] It is clear from her comment that in the contemporary as in the traditional gothic it is necessary that all formal ties between the protagonist and the outside world or objective reality be cut. Not only does this introduce the crucial theme of isolation, but it also helps to create that suspense and fear which must be coupled with the promise of excitement.

The second necessary ingredient mentioned by Whitney also concerns the relationship or contract established between reader and text. She maintains that the gothic suspense story must be centered around romance and emotion--"No feeling, no story - and that's a rule!" Thus, if we

take her word for it, we must conclude that the contemporary gothic shares with its more traditional predecessors a scorn for mere contemplation and an interest in engaging the emotions of the reader. It is also interesting to note that she advises the potential writer of such tales that a love story combined with some significant problem to be solved is the surest plot device for involving any reader in the action of the narrative. The parallel to the traditional English gothic is once again made evident if we recall how important the pairs of lovers are to Otranto, Udolpho and The Monk and if we remember that crime detection is in some respects at the center of all three.

Although Whitney's next piece of advice ostensibly concerns the presentation of sexual passion in these novels, what she is really concerned about once again is the relationship between reader and text. She states categorically that sex should never be presented explicitly but the passion it produces should be allowed to smolder just beneath the surface. As she points out, "a scene that is underplayed, suggested rather than stated, can often have greater emotional effect because of the way the reader's imagination will work for you."[6] Again, what she is concerned about here is the effect of the narrative action on the reader; what she hopes to do by leaving sexual details unsaid is to engage that reader by forcing him to flesh out the skeleton with his own hopes and desires. This

procedure is similar to that employed by Ann Radcliffe herself who, in Udolpho, attempts to activate her reader's imagination in the same way as Emily's by confronting him with maddeningly incomplete hints, clues, and suggestions. The sex element is also important and I think it one of the unstated agreements between author and reader of the genre at this level that sex will not be discussed openly. This is attested to by the fact that when Doubleday published a gothic in 1975 it received an enormous number of complaints because the heroine had been raped. As Sally Artseros, a Doubleday editor, has pointed out, rape, like explicit sex, "is going beyond the understood agreement with the reader."[7]

Whitney calls the next ingredient "the damsel in distress." She places great emphasis on the fact that the young woman who is to be at the center of the novel must be both "plucky" and vulnerable. She stresses the fact that the heroine must be strong because she is the focal point of the novel and thus the center of action. It is essential she initiate much of the movement of the plot. However, Whitney does not discount a need for female weakness; the extreme sensitivity evidenced by her heroines is derived directly from Radcliffe's portrayal of Emily St. Aubert. Whitney points out that these women "are brave, and sometimes reckless, they meet adversity with courage, but they are fearfully open to hurt, and the reader must feel this, believe in it."[8]

In elaborating on her conception of the properly presented heroine, Whitney makes a particularly interesting comment in light of what I have said about the gothic genre as a whole. She maintains that the young woman at the center of the novel must be vulnerable not only because of her love and because of her involvement with other characters, but also "because her initial position is one of helpless unimportance."[9] This situation does exist, in fact, at the beginning of most contemporary gothics, where the heroine is usually orphaned, friendless, and alone. While she is often portrayed as self-confident and assured, she seldom has any close relationships and she herself often stresses the fact that she is of importance to no one. Like her counterpart in the gothic novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the contemporary heroine too is isolated and cut off from all meaningful human relationships.

To balance character presentation in the contemporary gothic, Whitney maintains it is necessary for the author to present a hero who is believeable as a person and equal to the challenge of winning the heroine away from her life of isolation. She admits that all her heroes are descended from Heathcliffe, Rochester and Max de Winter, described as "driven, bedeviled, stern, dark men." Although I have not dealt with either Wuthering Heights or Jane Eyre, it is possible to argue that the extraordinarily complex heroes of these novels are themselves but a step removed

from Manfred, Montoni, Ambrosio, and Melmoth. The heroes of Whitney's gothics, however, are not even as complex as Ambrosio or Melmoth, nor are they plagued by the dark side of their nature. While they often physically resemble their earlier prototypes in that they are presented as dark, brooding and imposing figures, Whitney does not use this sort of description as a symbol for internal psychological complexity. The farthest she is willing to go in suggesting that the hero is not wholly good is to portray him as aloof or brusque. She often spends a great deal of time pointing out that her heroine is both attracted to and repelled by this man. When the tale is finally resolved, any suspicions the heroine may have entertained about her hero are proved groundless and he eventually does succeed in ending her isolation.

Since the major male figure in the contemporary gothic therefore is always innocent of all wrong-doing, he cannot be said to stand in opposition to the heroine and thus does not function as that source of evil so essential to the story. Whitney acknowledges that a true villain is necessary to the gothic and she maintains that such a villain may either be male or female. In discussing this figure, she argues his identity must be kept a secret as long as possible and she does, in fact, manage to do this in all her books. Much of the suspense created by the novels at this level depends on the heroine's attempt to search out and unmask that nameless character who threatens

her throughout the narrative. It is not the malignancy of the evil that threatens her which is so frightening, but rather the fact that she cannot identify its source and therefore cannot effectively combat it.

As might be expected, Whitney fully understands the importance of mystery and suspense to the gothic romance. At one point in the article she obligingly asserts that "from the first, there must be a sense of mystery, of growing threat, of fear that mounts into terror."[10] She maintains, furthermore, the test of a good gothic novel is the effectiveness of its attempts to build suspense, pointing out again that there must be a genuine feeling of evil, existing in some unknown form."[11] In fact, all Whitney says about suspense and the central position it occupies in her novels accords with what I have said about the gothic genre as a whole, nor do I find this coincidental. The structural basis of the contemporary gothic is similar to that of its predecessors and knowledge of the hermeneutical code must be at the base of the reader's response to both. Throughout her novels, Whitney raises questions, poses enigmas and then postpones the solutions until the very end. If the reader is to make sense of her story, he must be able to pay attention to those hints which will later prove "useful," hold them in his consciousness until all the puzzle pieces are provided, and then make the necessary connections to solve the mystery. Indeed, Whitney herself argues that the role of the

gothic novelist is to ask the reader questions from chapter to chapter but, as she points out, "You don't answer the last question until the final scene."[12]

In concluding her analysis of the contemporary gothic form, Whitney maintains two last "ingredients" are essential to the genre and must never be neglected. She insists that the novel must have both a "meaning" and a "happy ending"; "We read a story of suspense," she asserts, "so that everything will stop hurting in the end."[13] Whitney believes her novels are about human growth and she is convinced they would not be read if the heroine did not show some development or change in her outlook. A good story, she argues, is one about somebody who grows, and she advises potential authors that "Your heroine is human - she makes mistakes, she stumbles, she learns - and in the course of her maturing you cannot help but say something to the reader. Something worth saying about life, about living, about maturing."[14] Whitney never does quite say what this "something" should be but if the endings of her novels are any indication, then it must have something to do with the importance of love, marriage, and the family. Every story she has ever written concludes with an impending marriage, making it evident that the heroine has finally achieved happiness through her union with another. As in the early English gothic, order is restored and the family unit is returned to its rightful place at the foundation of society.

As Whitney's general comments on the genre make clear,

all her novels written according to this form are extraordinarily similar. In fact, if we discount surface variations in the content of those units used as the skeleton of each novel, and consider only the structure and function of the units themselves, I think it permissible to say that her novels are all virtually identical. This is not to criticize Whitney, but rather to stress the essential importance of the formulaic structure itself at this level of text composition. The same "ingredients" or actants and actions are always combined in the same way in all such novels; variations are generally non-functional in that they have no significant effect on the structure of the work as a whole and thus do not alter its "meaning." Because of the close resemblance that exists among popular gothics, it is possible to analyze the form by looking at a very small number of novels. I propose, therefore, to use two of Whitney's most recent releases in order to sketch out the formula which serves as the backbone for each work, and ultimately to demonstrate how this contemporary form is related to that system first worked out some 200 years ago by Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe.

The first thing one notices in reading a popular gothic by Phyllis Whitney is that the general movement of the plot is close to that evidenced by early versions of the form. Whitney makes it immediately clear in both The Golden Unicorn and in Spindrift that the central character of the work is a young, attractive heroine. Each novel is,

in fact, narrated by the heroine herself who tells us by the end of the second page both who she is and why she has a tale to tell. Thereafter, most of the first chapter is devoted to expository material which sets the scene by delving into the past and leading us up to the point where the heroine's adventures begin. I use the word "begin" here because although the action at the foundation of the novel occurred in the heroine's past, it is always related to us as if it is happening to her simultaneously with her telling of the tale. By establishing this sort of narrative position, Whitney involves us in the excitement of the story and frightens us with the unknown, even after she has indicated to us that the story has been completed and the heroine has survived the terrors we are about to confront. Thus, even an inexperienced reader of popular gothics understands after the first few pages that he can safely identify with the heroine and participate in her fear, knowing full well that order will be restored at the end and both he and she will survive the about-to-be-related experience with style and grace.

Aside from assuring us about the final outcome of the novel, this first chapter in the popular gothic establishes that initial situation of the heroine which is to be altered by the action of the story. She is always presented to us as a lonely, isolated figure who has recently lost some member of her family. In most cases, the heroine is newly orphaned and forced to depend for her survival on

the mercy of relatives who are less than anxious to receive her. In The Golden Unicorn, for example, Courtney Marsh tells us that the parents who adopted her as a small child have recently died and thus that she has been orphaned for a second time. On the day the story opens, she has resigned her job as a successful magazine writer, refused the help of friends, and thus cut all ties to her past life which has been dominated by her relationship to her family. We also learn, significantly enough, that although there have been men in her life, Courtney Marsh has never been loved. She is, in fact, the typical gothic virgin caught between her childhood allegiance to her parents and her adult desire to establish a primary relationship with a man. The story of The Golden Unicorn begins as she leaves her immediate past behind and sets off in search of her original family. Whitney places great emphasis on the fact that she must uncover her real parentage if she is to learn her true identity and to begin her adult life with an assured sense of self. The popular gothic is, in effect, the story of an adolescent's entry into the world and the action of the novel chronicles the heroine's developing maturity and her gradual resumption of a life of communion with others.

Despite the fact that Whitney varies some apparently significant details in Spindrift, the net effect on the structure of this initial situation is negligible. Although Christy Moreland is already married and the mother

of a small child when the novel begins, she too is alienated from all those who surround her. We learn that as a result of her refusal to believe her father committed suicide a year before, she has become emotionally estranged from her husband, son, and mother-in-law. In addition she has also suffered a nervous breakdown over the loss of her father and has been hospitalized in a kind of sanitarium. As a result, she is no less isolated than Courtney Marsh in The Golden Unicorn or, for that matter, than Emily St. Aubert in The Mysteries of Udolpho. Indeed, I think it safe to say that the initial situation presented in the popular gothic is nearly a perfect carbon copy of that which occurs in Udolpho, The Monk, and even in Melmoth. The protagonist is, in effect, cut off from all normal connection with society, the family unit is in total disarray, and a search is begun for some way to put an end to the isolation which results.

The action of the novel always begins when the heroine enters an old, disintegrating house somehow connected to the disordered family unit which she now confronts. Often, this family is composed of an odd assortment of relatives upon whom she must depend for security. In the case of Courtney Marsh, however, it is the group of people she suspects of being her original family; in the case of Christy Moreland it is her own estranged husband, son, and mother-in-law--with a few friends added to make the confrontation even more interesting. The heroine is brought

to this mansion by a need to find the solution to a mystery which has been concealed by the family connected with the house. Just as Emily St. Aubert suspects Montoni of murder, so these modern heroines concoct theories involving different family members and all sorts of crimes. Christy, in fact, goes to Spindrift to prove her father was murdered and at one point she even suspects her husband of the deed. While Courtney ostensibly goes to The Shingles only to find her natural parents, soon after arriving she uncovers all manner of strange disappearances and the hint of murder.

The house itself is clearly patterned after the gothic castles and monasteries dominating works like Otranto, Udolpho, and Melmoth, and although it usually lacks dungeons and catacombs, the modern version has dark winding corridors, faulty lighting, and blowing draperies. Upon entering the dilapidated structure, the heroine feels uneasy and her apprehension grows as she becomes convinced the house is aware of her presence and hostile to her. Since the gothic castle and the heroine's reaction to it plays a significant role in the traditional gothic novel, it is useful to examine the way Whitney presents The Shingles in Unicorn. Courtney's first description of the house is particularly interesting because the emphasis in the passage is focused on the atmosphere or ambience surrounding the house rather than on the details of the structure itself. In fact, this first paragraph devoted to the most famous of gothic properties is remarkably imprecise, thus

serving as proof for my hypothesis that it is not the castle itself which is functional in the gothic novel but rather the atmosphere of dread and suspense created by it which is essential to the form. Courtney is overwhelmed by the house because it is not at all what she expected. As she says:

> His words prepared me to be impressed - so that I expected beauty, soaring architecture - some vista of loveliness. The house that lifted three stories into the air atop its high dune was anything but beautiful. Impressive, yes, with a great and brooding dignity as it raised shingled walls and tall brick chimneys against the blue sky, but its color was a dark umber, shading into ebony in the shadows, somehow heavy and oppressive. It had stood there since the last century, braving the storms that had burst over its head, riding like a ship into the very teeth of the gales and high seas that must have hurled themselves upon it. 'The Shingles' seemed a modest name for so overpowering a structure.[15]

And that, precisely, is the extent of the description we are given. Although we are told a few pages later Courtney feels threatened by The Shingles, Whitney never provides the kind of detailed plans and pictures which figure so prominently in Otranto and Udolpho. Courtney tells herself that there is something far from reassuring about it, something she must eventually reckon with, but we are not told what gives her that impression or why she feels the way she does. It is enough for the popular gothic that the house is present, that it is mysterious and threatening, and that the heroine must live within it for a time.

Simply by including such a house at all and by presenting the slightest hint that it is dark and brooding, Whitney is able to capitalize on the associations most readers have about haunted houses and strange castles in general, and is thus able to create the necessary air of suspense and atmosphere of dread. She does not, like Radcliffe, use the house on a thematic level, for she never correlates movement within the house with any identifiable state of mind experienced by the heroine herself. There is no progression in the way the house is developed or explored; apparently the only function it serves in the narrative is to trigger the already established response the reader possesses toward haunted old homes.

Once the heroine has entered this modern version of the gothic castle, the search for answers begins in earnest. She dashes about trying to discover the solution to her mystery, uncovers clues, clutches at hints dropped by other characters, and generally upsets the traditional routine of the house into which she has been thrown. Almost immediately after she has begun to ask questions, her life is threatened. The first threat is usually verbal but as her search progresses, the attacks become increasingly more physical and dangerous. At no time, however, in these novels do we ever fear that the heroine is threatened with rape. It is her life, not her virginity which is endangered and, in this respect, the popular gothic differs slightly from its earlier prototype. While the change is a

relatively significant one, I don't think it radically alters the meaning of the narrative, since the young woman's fear of union with a man is explored elsewhere as part of her relationship with the hero. Thus, where Ann Radcliffe deals openly with this fear by threatening her heroine with rape, Phyllis Whitney merely hints at it by developing a love-hate relationship between the young woman and the hero of the novel. Courtney Marsh finds herself simultaneously attracted to and frightened by Evan, the dark and brooding man at the center of The Unicorn, and while Whitney never says Courtney is afraid of being ravished, her suggestions are always clear. What Courtney is attracted to in Evan is his strength and his vitality, but at the same time she fears his male power and wonders whether she dare waken the sleeping tiger. In fact, I think it necessary to examine this fear a little more closely since this relationship between hero and heroine is at the thematic center of the popular gothic novel.

As I explained before, the heroine of the popular gothic is emotionally inexperienced in that she has had very limited contact with men. Although she is, in most cases, a young woman in her early twenties, she is something of an adolescent in that she is frightened of men and still possesses a strong attachment to her father. However, soon after entering the "gothic" house, she confronts the customary dark, brooding male and finds herself

responding in a way she never has before. Her initial reaction, always one of fear, is similar to that expressed by Courtney when she speaks to Evan for the first time. She is disturbed by the tone of his response and thinks to herself, "Formal words, ordinary words, with a wild rage seething beneath them and held in check by that iron grip he kept upon himself. He was a man I would not want to make angry."[16] As the story progresses, however, her fear is lessened by the fact that she is gradually attracted to this man, and beginning to wonder what it would be like to love and be loved in return. As she starts to overcome her fear, she also begins to see the hero differently, as less gruff and cold. However, their immediate union is always prevented by the fact that the contemporary gothic hero is somehow remotely implicated in the crime at the center of the novel and the heroine is never quite sure that it is not he who is a threat to her.

It is easy to see the contemporary hero's derivation from the villain-hero of The Monk and Melmoth, since he is both the man the heroine desires (as Antonia is attracted to Ambrosio and Immalee is drawn to Melmoth) and he who apparently means her harm. However, the contemporary version of Melmoth is only apparently evil, and when the young woman is able to admit that she loves and wants him, he reciprocates her love and quells all her uncertainty. Their relationship culminates at the end of the novel after the real villain is unmasked, the crime is solved, and the

heroine is able to lay her past to rest. Free from old family ties, she promises to marry her hero; and her isolation is effectively ended forever. The resolution of the relationship between the lovers in the contemporary gothic is thus virtually identical to that presented in the earliest versions of the form.

Since Phyllis Whitney varies the relationship between hero and heroine in Spindrift and still manages to write the same formulaic "gothic" novel, it is interesting to examine her changes in order to see why they are not functional. First of all, even though Christy Moreland is already married and the mother of a young son when the story opens, her emotional state is no different from either Courtney Marsh's or Emily St. Aubert's. Christy is as alienated from her husband, Joel, as if he were dead, and her own son rejects her because his grandmother, Christy's mother-in-law, suggests to him that his mother doesn't love him. Such a situation leaves Christy isolated, alone, with no family at all. The one emotional connection that still dominates her life is her love for her father and her desire to prove he did not commit suicide. Because Joel will have nothing to do with her theories of murder, she is so estranged that they no longer sleep together. It is then that she meets Bruce Parry, described for the reader in the same terms as the typical contemporary gothic hero. In this case, he is set off in direct opposition to Christy's husband:

> I was aware once more of the contrast between the two men. It was not in Joel's favor. Bruce was a little older, but he always seemed infinitely more mature. He was dark-browed with heavy, winged eyebrows, a strong forceful mouth and carved nose. But his dynamic intensity came through most of all in eyes that were almost jet in their lack of color. His appraisal of me seemed sharply alert, and I wondered what he saw.[17]

After this initial confrontation, the relationship between Christy and Bruce progresses in the same way as does that between Courtney and Evan. First frightened by his strength and vitality, Christy is suspicious of Bruce and wonders whether he is set against her as every one else at Spindrift seems to be. However, she is soon attracted to him in that same love-hate manner which is at the foundation of the hero-heroine relationship in all popular gothics. Indeed, Christy's reaction to Bruce could be transferred to any one of hundreds of these novels and it would not seem out of place. Although the particulars change, the heroine's emotions are always the same:

> He stood very close to me on the small balcony and I was aware of him, as I had not been aware of a man for a long while. For the first time I wondered a little about <u>him</u>. Why had he never married? What would it be like to have those nearly jet black eyes kindle when he looked at a woman?
>
> My own thoughts startled me, frightened me a little. I wanted to come back to life. But not in this way, not for this man. Infinitesimally I moved away from him on the balcony.[18]

As Christy responds to Bruce, her interest in her husband also revives and she begins to see Joel a little

differently. He suddenly appears much stronger to her and although much of his force is now directed against her, she finds him more attractive than when he had been overly solicitous. Thus, in some ways, the relationship between Christy and Joel is marked by the same tensions which characterize her relationship with Bruce. Christy, however, eventually chooses Bruce because Joel seems opposed to her, but at the moment of revelation she is shocked to discover that it was Bruce all the time who was threatening her life and who had murdered her father. She then seeks Joel's assistance, as Courtney asks for Evan's, and in the end, their marriage is restored to even greater harmony since Christy has now overcome her adolescent attachment to her father.

Although the gothic hero turns out to be the villain in this version of the contemporary form, the love-hate relationship is still the major preoccupation of the novel. It is significant that Whitney does not continue the initial opposition set up between Bruce, the strong, virile lover, and Joel, the kind, gentle husband, because if she did, we would have to conclude that the message behind the action was a <u>general</u> warning about the dangers of sexual passion. But Christy is attracted to Joel only when he begins to exhibit some of the male strength initially identified with Bruce, and by giving in to him at the end and by depending on his help, she submits to that power and overcomes the fear of being taken over by another. The

point behind the resolution of Spindrift is the same as that behind The Golden Unicorn: although physical passion is frightening in that it can lead to loss of self-control, if properly channeled in marriage it can also be the basis of a lasting union which will banish the loneliness and isolation so bound up with the human condition. Thus, although Whitney's changes in the plot development of Spindrift appear to be significant, they do not negate the functional oppositions set up within the standard structure of the form and therefore do not alter the basic significance of the novel.

Although this relationship between the hero and the heroine is the primary concern of the contemporary gothic, there are several other interesting relationships developed in the novels which contribute to the statement of the major theme. These secondary relationships do not usually contribute to or affect the final resolution, but they often heighten the contrast between the life of isolation and that of connection with others which stands at the center of the novel. For instance, there is always another woman who is contrasted to the young heroine. She is usually older than the heroine, divorced or widowed, and she is portrayed as exotically beautiful and vitally sensual. In most cases, she is extremely strong and independent and she directs the weaker men who surround her. More often than not, she is involved in the crime uncovered by the heroine and while she is not usually the villain, she is

implicated in the violence and evil as a willing accomplice. Thus, the opposition established between this woman and the heroine functions as a sort of warning about what happens to a woman who does not admit her need for dependence on a man. The popular gothic novelist suggests that her fate will be isolation and unhappiness and we are shown that this lack of human contact and connection can ultimately lead to a desire to harm others. In this context, it is also interesting to note that the villain in these novels is usually an unattached male who has adored and been rejected by this dark, independent woman. Because he seeks her approval or because he is despondent at her rejection, he commits some crime in the hope that he will be able to win her love. Of course, he never does, and both are ultimately destroyed by their inability to establish association with another. In the end, this pair functions as a foil for the hero and heroine; their fate is meant as a warning to those who would choose a life of independence and total freedom.

As I am sure it has become clear thoughout this analysis of the plot development of the contemporary gothic, the narrative progress of Phyllis Whitney's novels is extremely close to that of The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, and even of Lewis's The Monk. For instance, the major character in all these novels is always emotionally stranded at the beginning of the narrative. Furthermore, he or she embarks on some quest, either to solve a crime or to fulfill some personal design and, in

the midst of the search, is physically threatened by powers from without. This character, plagued by a sense of dread and by a fear of what lies beneath the surface, often wishes to withdraw into a life of isolation. If the character does choose such isolation, he is punished and his fate contrasted with that of two lovers who are able to achieve union as a result of his destruction. If, however, the character is able to overcome her fear, she returns to the world and is united with her hero in the end.[19] In any case, these novels are concluded in similar ways and the reader is always told that a life of connection with others, lived within the confines of dictated social convention, is better than an existence lived alone.

Since I have argued in the previous chapter that in addition to possessing a certain plot structure, the gothic novel must also establish a particular relationship with its audience, it seems only natural to examine the way in which Phyllis Whitney involves her reader in the story and creates the necessary suspense. In fact, it seems to me Whitney's method is similar to that utilized by Radcliffe herself in The Mysteries of Udolpho. Although Whitney's tale is narrated by the heroine and Radcliffe's story is merely focused on her, the effect is the same for the reader is given only as much knowledge and information as the heroine in each novel possesses. In essence, what Emily, Courtney, and Christy see is what I see as well; when their fear leads to suspense and dread, I am forced to participate

in that feeling too. However, despite this basic similarity, Whitney and other popular gothic novelists have made one change which tends to lessen the intensity of the suspense. Because the heroine begins the tale speaking in the present about actions which have occurred in the past, we know that no matter how frightening what we are about to read, the story will turn out all right in the end since the speaker herself has survived to tell about it. Thus, once the story is in progress and we find it impossible to figure out who is threatening the heroine or why, the suspense and fear we experience are mitigated by the fact that we have already been assured those threats will not succeed. Because it uses this technique, the popular gothic is able to create that air of mystery so essential to the genre, while at the same time it assures its reader that the disorder and chaos which dominate the tale are not permanent, but rather temporary and titillating. We are never in doubt about the outcome of the popular gothic--as we often are about the resolution of its prototype--for the suspense it creates is not open-ended. Even if we are reading a popular gothic for the first time, we know the outcome of the tale even before it begins because of the verbal clues contained within the text itself.

In addition to her use of carefully manipulated verb tenses, Whitney also employs another technique to create the illusion of total chaos and to assure us that no matter how frightened we may be by the heroine's story, her

triumph will be secured. Whitney presents hint after hint and clue after clue throughout the narrative and reserves the final solution of the puzzle until the end of the novel. However, she also occasionally presents an enigma, provides a very obvious hint, and permits her reader to draw the inevitable conclusion which she then verifies a page or two later. By providing this instant corroboration, she assures us that we are using the right methods in our attempt to draw the proper conclusions, suggesting by implication that a solution to the mystery does exist and can be found if we will only persevere long enough.

In pointing out Whitney's deliberate efforts to reassure her readers, however, I do not mean to imply that suspense is absent from or unimportant to the contemporary gothic. In fact, this atmosphere of uncertainty and dread is still the most obvious characterizing feature of the genre and the contract between reader and text is quite similar to that originally established by Otranto, Udolpho, Melmoth, and The Monk. As readers, we are still kept in a state of ignorance, provided with certain clues and suggestions, and then drawn into the effort to solve the mystery. We are engaged in the narrative action, and forced to construct our own explanation of that which we are permitted to see. Furthermore, because of the way the story is told, we sympathize with the heroine and participate in her growing sense of unease. However, the fear and apprehension we experience never become intolerable, primarily

because Whitney refuses to graphically portray the violence of the threats made against the heroine and leaves the person responsible for those threats anonymous. As a result, the evil force which motivates the opposition in these tales is only sketchily drawn and the ultimate focus of the novel is the resolution and the restoration of order which the author provides.

In some ways, the contemporary popular gothic can be thought of as a homogenized version of the earlier form because of its unwillingness to dwell on the causes of the suspense and terror at the heart of the gothic experience. All the necessary actants and actions are included in the newer version, but the motives behind those actions are only discussed on the most obvious of levels. Thus the intensity of the emotion generated by the narrative pattern is to a great extent lessened. While the basic significance of the form is no different from what it was nearly 200 years ago, the response it can potentially evoke in the reader has been tamed by the popular novelist because she wishes to reassure at the same time she frightens. In short, the structure of Phyllis Whitney's novels is nearly identical to that form standing at the heart of those romances written by Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. What is different is her relative lack of concern for the details of evil. Because she skims over the violence and pain produced by the villain in the novel, she is able to avoid that peculiar tension evident in Otranto, Udolpho, and The

Monk between the despairing tone of the gothic work and the hopeful nature of its final resolution. Although the happy ending Whitney provides in all her novels also occurs in those earlier works which define the genre, that happy ending of the contemporary popular gothic is never qualified as it is in Otranto and Udolpho by an inordinate interest in the evil which nearly prevents it. In summary, then, where the older gothic is marked by its fascination with the dark side of the world even while it asserts the inevitable necessity for the success of its opposite, the contemporary popular version of the form is characterized by its unwillingness to do more than hint at the existence of evil, and by its overwhelming faith in the ultimate power and superiority of the good.

Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding, and "New American Gothic"

Although many "serious" American novels written since 1820 have been identified from time to time as descendants of the English gothic romance, few have been subjected to as close a comparison with the eighteenth century prototype as that diverse group of novels which has come out of the American South during the last fifty years. In fact, there have been two book length studies detailing the gothic roots of Southern American fiction including Irving Malin's New American Gothic (1962)[20] and William Van O'Connor's The Grotesque: An American Genre (1962).[21] In addition,

Leslie Fielder has devoted a large part of his study, Love and Death in the American Novel (1966) to tracing the gothic ancestry of American fiction, and numerous articles have appeared discussing gothic elements in the works of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote. While I tend to agree with the final verdict of these studies that works such as As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary, Wise Blood, "Judgment Day," Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Member of the Wedding, and In Cold Blood all derive their peculiar tone from the gothic novel, I find some of the arguments about specific "borrowings" to be superficial and strained. I suspect that the tortured nature of some of these discussions is the direct result of an inadequate conception of the traditional gothic novel, since it is extremely difficult to demonstrate that these novels are gothic if one believes gothicism is produced by castles, storms, dungeons, and ghosts. Indeed, very few of the novels mentioned here ever use those medieval properties identified with the eighteenth century form, and as a result, if we are to continue placing these works within the gothic tradition, we must do so on some other basis and for some other reason.

Neither Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding nor William Faulkner's Sanctuary presents us with a castle, a catacomb, or a monk, but both use that same structure of interlocking relationships, that same skeleton of form and meaning, which I have identified as the essence of the genre.

However, I also feel both novelists have taken liberties with the gothic structure by modifying certain of the crucial relationships at its foundation and have subtly but surely altered its final significance. If the gothic vision expressed by McCullers and Faulkner is even darker than that of Lewis and Maturin, it is because they have subjected the entire gothic system to a structural deformation which itself serves to eliminate much of the hope manifested in earlier versions of the form. Therefore, in discussing The Member of the Wedding and Sanctuary, I will first attempt to uncover that same gothic foundation--initially laid by Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe--which is at the base of these novels, and will then demonstrate how both change the appearance of the edifice erected on it by making certain significant structural alterations. Because Carson McCullers makes fewer changes than Faulkner, her novel is more obviously "gothic." It seems wise therefore to begin with her somewhat modified version of the gothic form rather than with Faulkner's radical reorientation.

It is interesting to note that, like The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Member of the Wedding is divided into three sections, each of which corresponds to a significant change in the life of the young woman who stands at the center of the novel. As the three major divisions in Radcliffe's work are marked by Emily St. Aubert's changing residence and emotional conditions, so the sections of The Member of the

Wedding correspond to Frankie Addams's evolving relationship to her childhood home and her changing state of mental awareness. The first section of the novel takes place primarily within the kitchen of Frankie's home on an oppressively hot evening in late August after Frankie has learned her brother is going to be married at the end of the week. Most of the first forty pages are devoted to an explanation of what the summer has been like for Frankie; this is the initial situation which is to be changed by the action of the novel. In the second section, Frankie, now F. Jasmine Addams, wanders about town on the day before the wedding seeking contact and connection with all whom she meets. This is the longest of the three sections in the novel and it is almost entirely devoted to a description of Frankie's frame of mind as she confronts the world about her and gradually becomes aware of what it means to be human. Although the last section begins with her departure from her home as her family prepares to go to the wedding, Frankie, now referred to as Frances, is on her way back to town and to the house she thought she had escaped. She is forced to return and two more months elapse before she is finally permitted to leave this home behind. The novel concludes just as Frances is preparing to move to a new house with her father and, in our last glimpse of her, she puts the past behind her and prepares to meet the future.

Although this brief recital of the general plot development of McCullers' novel does not show in any detail

how The Member of the Wedding resembles the gothic novels of the eighteenth century, it does suggest that McCullers' development of Frankie Addams parallels Radcliffe's presentation of Emily St. Aubert. Accordingly, it also provides us with a useful procedure for comparison. Indeed, the three sections of The Member of the Wedding not only correspond to the three sections of The Mysteries of Udolpho, but they echo the peculiar character and concerns of the three major textual divisions contained in all gothics, that is, the initial situation, the quest, and the resolution. By exploring McCullers' use and "misuse" of these divisions, I hope to show both how and why she makes the changes she does in the plot structure traditionally identified with the English gothic romance.

Although Frankie Addams is neither orphaned nor so physically isolated as the narrative action of the novel begins, she is as emotionally alone as Emily St. Aubert, Ambrosio, Melmoth, or Courtney Marsh. The first few lines of The Member of the Wedding could almost describe these other gothic protagonists as well as Frankie herself. We are told that something happened to Frankie during the summer of her twelfth year, and though McCullers does not tell us what that something is, she does elaborate on the character of the summer itself which she describes as "green and crazy." McCullers adds, "this was the summer when for a long time [Frankie] had not been a member" and she continues to underscore this theme of isolation:

> She belonged to no club and was a member of nothing in the world. Frankie had become an unjoined person who hung around in doorways, and she was afraid. In June the trees were bright dizzy green, but later the leaves darkened, and the town turned black and shrunken under the glare of the sun.[22]

In fact, Frankie's summer has been dominated by a growing sense of unease as she feels less and less a part of the groups with which she has been connected. For instance, we learn that Frankie has suddenly grown freakishly tall and that this and her boy's haircut sets her apart from her former girlfriends.[23] Furthermore, we are told that the two people to whom she has been closest, Berenice Sadie Brown, her family's cook, and John Henry West, her six-year-old cousin, no longer fill the void which is becoming increasingly real to her. Indeed, when the story opens at the end of the summer, she is tired of their company and incredulous at John Henry's suggestion that she might be able to have a good time with him alone. Frankie has not been able to give a name to what she feels and when all she has experienced during the summer is abruptly changed by her brother's announcement of his impending marriage, she cannot express her reactions to that development either. As McCullers points out, "the name for what had happened to her Frankie did not know, but she could feel her squeezed heart beating against the table edge."[24] Although she is not yet aware of it, what has happened to Frankie is that her brother's wedding has awakened her desire to belong to

someone else and has only served to make her feel the pain of adolescent separation more acutely.

Carson McCullers is particularly adept at juxtaposing the sudden changes of Frankie's twelfth summer with the sense of isolation produced by them and the fear she feels as a result. In elaborating, for example, on Frankie's unnatural height, she points out that because Frankie has grown so tall she is no longer able to walk under the scuppernong arbor with the other children who can "still walk around inside, give shows, and have a good time." She realizes this puts her in a group with "the grown people" although she does not understand why this causes her to be afraid.[25] The fear is all the more unsettling because it is amorphous and apparently without cause. But although Frankie cannot consciously identify what creates her fear, McCullers shows that awareness of it is just below the surface. Immediately after she finds John Henry in the arbor, she invites him to dinner. When Berenice reminds Frankie she had said she was sick of him, Frankie justifies her action:

> "I am sick and tired of him," said Frankie. "But it seemed to me he looked scared."
> "Scared of what?"
> Frankie shook her head. "Maybe I mean lonesome," she said finally.[26]

In fact, it is not John Henry who is scared or lonseome but Frankie herself, and on this day before her brother returns to announce his marriage, all her feelings of isolation and

fear have converged to make her doubly glad at John Henry's presence. Later in the evening, after they have gone to bed, Frankie listens to John Henry breathe and thinks that "now she had what she had wanted so many nights that summer; there was somebody sleeping in the bed with her. . . .With somebody sleeping in the dark with her, she was not so much afraid."

By presenting Frankie's emotional state in such detail so early in the novel, McCullers begins to prepare us for her strange reaction to the announcement of her brother's wedding. Although the wedding is mentioned prior to this, we do not become aware of the fact that it holds more than ordinary significance for Frankie until her perception of it is linked with the pain in her heart. When McCullers writes, "the wedding was bright and beautiful as snow and the heart in her was mashed,"[27] it becomes clear that Frankie envies her brother's happiness and wishes to participate in it. When she realizes her brother and his fiancée both have the initials J. A., Frankie contemplates changing her name in order to be like them, but when she decides on F. Jasmine Addams, Berenice tells her its against the law.

Later, she compares the wedding to the Freaks of the Chattahoochee Exposition who have come to town nearly every year since she can remember. These strange creatures have frightened Frankie and she has now begun to wonder if she is growing up to be like them. When she assures herself Freaks don't marry or go to weddings, it becomes clear that

she sees the wedding as an escape from the "freakish" life of loneliness and fear which has increasingly become her state since the previous April. But before McCullers allows Frankie or the reader to make that connection explicit, she elaborates once more on what has happened to Frankie with the coming of Spring. I think the passage worth quoting at length for only the intensity of Frankie's loneliness can explain what it is she sees in the wedding.

> The long afternoons flowered and lasted and the green sweetness sickened her. The town began to hurt Frankie. Sad and terrible things had never made Frankie cry, but this season many things made Frankie suddenly wish to cry. Very early in the morning she sometimes would go out into the yard and stand for a long time looking at the sunrise sky. And it was as though a question came into her heart and the sky did not answer. Things she had never noticed much before began to hurt her: home lights watched from the evening sidewalks, an unknown voice from an alley. She would stare at the lights and listen to the voice, and something inside her stiffened and waited. But the lights would darken, the voice fall silent, and though she waited, that was all. She was afraid of these things that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light; or staring up at the sky: alone. She was afraid, and there was a queer tightness in her chest.[28]

Frankie is caught, in this summer of her twelfth year, between the innocent world of childhood and that unknown future toward which she is being inexorably propelled. On the one hand, her father will no longer permit her to sleep with him because she is too old, but on the other she is disgusted when she learns the details about sex

with a boy in a garage. Similarly, she is tired of John Henry and has outgrown the games they used to play together, but, at the same time, she has been rejected by friends her own age and has no one else to rely on for companionship. In essence, she has been forced to turn inward by her growing inability to connect with others--much the same situation at the beginning of the novel as that of Emily St. Aubert as she escapes from Udolpho Castle. While it takes Emily a good part of the gothic romance to realize the dangers inherent in extreme isolation, Frankie's tale actually begins at the moment when she seizes the idea of her brother's wedding as the only means of escape from the pain and terror produced by being alone. McCullers allows Frankie to learn what Emily learns at the end of The Mysteries of Udolpho much earlier in her story, which has a significant effect on the structure of the novel. But before we can talk of significance it is first necessary to explore her reaction to the wedding and to discuss the Quixotic quest she begins as a result.

Before she allows Frankie to give a name to that which she feels, McCullers presents her spontaneous reaction to her brother's announcement of his impending marriage. We are told the sight of her brother and his fiancée "shocked her heart" and caused her to feel emotions that were "like the feelings of spring, only more sudden and more sharp," and we learn that she is once more afraid.[29] The fact that two people are going to marry only serves to place Frankie's

sense of isolation in high relief as she too longs for the promise of love and protection that this union seems sure to provide. Soon after she is stricken by the realization that they will probably go away and leave her after the ceremony, she decides she will go with them and never return. As the plan matures in her mind, she suddenly understands what she has been feeling and why the wedding is the answer to her problem. She thinks to herself:

> They were them and in Winter Hill, together, while she was her and in the same old town by herself. The long hundred miles did not make her sadder and make her feel more far away than the knowing that they were them and both together and she was only her and parted from them by herself. And as she sickened with this feeling a thought and explanation suddenly came to her, so that she knew and almost said aloud: <u>they are the we of me</u>. Yesterday, and all the twelve years of her life, she had only been Frankie. She was an <u>I</u> person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a <u>we</u> to claim, all other except her.[30]

Frankie realizes that the only <u>we</u> she can claim is "the terrible summer <u>we</u> of her and John Henry and Berenice," which she rejects as the last thing in the world she could ever want. At this point, she turns her back on her childhood and looks toward an adult future. She does not, however, envision her own marriage but rather attaches herself to her brother and his wife. She is delighted with her newfound knowledge, assures herself that "they are the we of me," and vows to go with them on their honeymoon. But no sooner has she made her vow than McCullers makes use of a standard gothic device to suggest that her scheme can only

bode ill for all concerned. An ominous darkness gathers in the "thick-leaved trees" even though night has not come.

"It is too quiet," she tells John Henry, and she confesses she has "a peculiar warning in her bones."[31] We cannot help but suspect that her new awareness of what she lacks and what she needs will only cause her tremendous pain. This realization is made all the more poignant by the fact that the last words of the section describe in exquisite detail Frankie's feelings of joy and hope at suddenly having something to call her "we." Although the chapter seems to end on a note of happiness and anticipation, the seeds of disappointment and despair have been sown. We know that it will only be a matter of time before Frankie's beautiful dream comes crashing down.

Before moving on to the second section of The Member of the Wedding, I want to say a few words about Carson McCullers' use or nonuse of standard gothic properties. Although there are no castles and dungeons in the novel, Frankie does feel as if she has been imprisoned in the kitchen which she likens to a "crazy-house" because its walls are covered with John Henry's "queer, child drawings." This room is a symbol for Frankie of her isolation and she is acutely conscious of the fact that she has spent her entire summer playing cards with John Henry and Berenice amidst its oppressive heat and gloom. McCullers uses this kitchen in a way quite similar to Ann Radcliffe's use of the castle of Udolpho, since she links Frankie's fear to

the atmosphere of the place within which she is confined. Although she likes John Henry's drawings at first, they begin to bother her as the summer progresses and by the time the wedding is announced the entire kitchen looks "strange" and unfamiliar to her, even frightening.

As Frankie, like Emily St. Aubert, remains cooped up in the kitchen and locked within her self, the more frightened she becomes about the truth and accuracy of her own perceptions. The world seems to be a strange and terrifying place. The more isolated she becomes, the more she is forced to return to the kitchen and to rely on the company of Berenice and John Henry. Thus, even though McCullers does not include a creaky old house in her novel and devotes relatively little attention to description of Frankie's house, she still manages to create the atmosphere of dread and fear so essential to the gothic experience simply by linking Frankie's emotional traumas to the stifling heat and depressing air of that crazed kitchen. Frankie's kitchen is her gothic castle. Like the castle in the works of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin, it functions as a symbol of a self turned in upon itself, cut off from others, thus unable to feel at ease with the natural environment or the human society which it inhabits.

McCullers uses other gothic props much as she uses an adaption of the medieval castle. Although the ghosts and apparitions of the English version of the form do not figure in the plot of <u>The Member of the Wedding</u>, they are

occasionally mentioned when Frankie is particularly afraid and lonely. For example, immediately after telling Berenice that she means to go away with her brother and his bride, she wanders off by herself, unsatisfied with her attempt to express what troubles her. She realizes "the questions she had asked that afternoon had all been the wrong questions" and that Berenice had not taken her seriously. We are told "she could not name the feeling in her, and she stood there until dark shadows made her think of ghosts."[32] McCullers does not need to develop the ghosts in greater depth for their simple appearance emphasizes the fact that Frankie is alone, afraid, and at the mercy of her imagination. The ghosts are, in effect, a short-hand reference to fear, adapted from the earlier gothic novels in which supernatural apparitions terrorize the heroine and set her wandering about the castle in search of aid.

As I have pointed out before, McCullers also uses the typical gothic storm in order to create a sense of foreboding and dread. Again, however, she does not work this storm into the plot but merely includes it as a fragment of Frankie's own imagination or consciousness. Simply by mentioning it she immediately calls up all those associations of storms and impending disasters developed in her readers as a result of their familiarity with traditional gothics. She is thus free to concentrate instead on a description of the emotional state over which the storm

is meant to cast a shadow. In Carson McCullers' hands the traditional gothic furniture, which is an integral part of the plot structure in The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, and Melmoth the Wanderer, becomes a kind of short-hand script for easy and immediate characterization of an emotional state or mood. These props are no longer truly functional since they play no part in the action of the narrative nor do they tell us things we don't already know. They are, however, descriptive in an auxilliary sense and they tend to underscore or emphasize that crucial connection between the structure of McCullers' novel and those of her predecessors.

Returning to the plot structure of The Member of the Wedding, it is important to note that the second chapter of the novel seems to be almost a complete reversal of the typical quest occupying the middle section of the gothic romance. Where Emily, Ambrosio, and Melmoth sever nearly all ties with the outside world and withdraw into castles and monasteries, Frankie Addams walks out of her haunted kitchen and begins a day-long journey about town. She does not feel cut off from the outside world or threatened by everything she sees as most other gothic protagonists do, but for the first time since early April, senses that she truly "belongs." In fact, she no longer calls herself by her tomboyish, schoolgirl-name, Frankie, but insists instead that she is really F. Jasmine Addams. We are told that it was "because of the wedding, F. Jasmine felt connected with

all she saw, and it was as a sudden member that on this Saturday she went around town. . . .It was the day when, from the beginning, the world seemed no longer separate from herself and when all at once she felt included."[33] Buoyed by the awareness that she now has a "we" to claim, Frankie goes out to meet the world as if protected by new armor. Because she no longer feels lost or afraid, her perception of that world is drastically changed and everything she sees is actually a reflection of her own mental state. We learn, for instance, that because of her new sense of connection Frankie is now able to see her father differently. Although she has held a "secret grudge" against him since June because he declared her too old to sleep in his bed, she now no longer holds this grudge because his rejection is negated by her membership in the wedding. Similarly, she sees the people of the town in a new way; she perceives them differently because she feels differently. When she sees an old colored man rattling down the street in a wagon she exchanges glances with him and detects new meaning in this chance occurrence.

> But in that glance, F. Jasmine felt between his eyes and her own eyes a new unnamable connection, as though they were known to each other - and there even came an instant vision of his home field and country roads and quiet dark pine trees as the wagon rattled past her on the paved town street. And she wanted him to know her, too - about the wedding.[34]

This feeling of connection dominates her entire morning and as she moves from place to place, Frankie feels a special

link "with a lady, going into MacDougal's store, with a small man waiting for the bus before the big First National Bank, [and] with a friend of her father's called Tut Ryan."[35] She shares her good fortune with everyone and is joyously happy during much of the early part of the day. In a sense, we might say that Frankie chooses to end her isolation as Ambrosio and Melmoth cannot, and it would seem that McCullers thinks it an easy and natural choice which all men need to make to be happy in this world.

However, even as we are told of Frankie's sense of oneness with the universe, McCullers interjects another note of warning, preparing us for the sudden changes about to occur. Although the novel is narrated by a third person, it is told from Frankie's point of view <u>after</u> the action has been completed. As a result, we are increasingly made aware throughout the early pages of the section that something wholly strange and unexpected eventually destroys Frankie's sweet euphoria. We are not yet told what it is, but it is clear that it involves the red-headed soldier and the Blue Moon café. Indeed, when we first meet this soldier, we don't see him as Frankie did for we are immediately told of her retrospective point of view which gives him an added significance he did not have when she first saw him.

> It was then she noticed him for the first time, the soldier who at the very end would twist so strangely that last, long day. Later, on thinking back, she tried to recall some warning hint of future craziness - but at the time he looked to her like any other soldier standing at a counter drinking

> beer....He was one of the thousands of soldiers who came to town from the camp near-by. But as she looked into this soldier's eyes, in the dim light of the Blue Moon, she realized that she gazed at him in a new way.[36]

By carefully juxtaposing these two very different points of view, McCullers creates a feeling of dread about that nameless horror which will soon take place at the same time she extends our awareness of Frankie's sense of happy expectation. She thus manipulates our feelings and sets us up to experience that same shock which terrifies Frankie herself.

In essence, what McCullers has begun to do here is to establish that contract between reader and text characteristic of the gothic novel. We are asked, in short, to identify with the young heroine and then kept in a state of semi-ignorance about her fate. The suspense thus created only heightens the tension and makes our senses even more acute. As a result, we are pulled into the narrative and exposed, as Frankie's alter ego, to the pain and suffering inherent in the human condition.

Although the direction of Frankie's journey appears to be different from the direction followed by Emily, Ambrosio, and Melmoth, what she encounters on that journey is remarkably similar to that which the earliest gothic protagonists discover as a result of their descent into the self. Although Emily manages to avoid being deeply affected by her experiences within Udolpho castle, she is, at least, forced to acknowledge the very real presence of evil in

the form of Laurentini's lust and murder. Neither Ambrosio nor Melmoth, however, fare as well as Emily and both are implicated in the evil that is a natural part of human existence even though they make a deliberate attempt to be "different" from other men. As I have pointed out in chapter four, it is their desire to be unique and to set themselves apart from others which finally effects their personal participation in the evil they so despise. In these early gothic novels, in short, the protagonist's quest eventually results in an initiation into evil which itself seems to dominate the mood and tone of this quest section.

Although Frankie's search seems to take her out of herself and into communication with other men, she is not, as one might expect, suddenly protected against the dark forces present in the world and in herself as well. In fact, as the day progresses, her journey abroad turns into a harrowing encounter with sexual passion, violence, and death. Her vision of the red-headed soldier signals the crucial change in mood as Frankie tries to enter the adult world previously barred to her. Indeed, when she walks into the Blue Moon which "the old Frankie had known she had no valid right to enter," she enters a world still just beyond her adolescent comprehension. As a result of her encounter with this soldier, a meeting which is prompted by her desire to belong, Frankie is forced to come to terms with those aspects of the adult world which are neither

comforting nor beautiful.

Frankie is willing to attach herself to this soldier because he seems interested in her and because she wants to tell the story of the wedding to someone else. However, she is not totally unaware of the fact that he intends more than simple friendship, for when they walk down the street together she does not feel "altogether proud." We are told that "there was an uneasy doubt that she could not quite place or name."[37] Again, McCullers increases our sense of dread since we already know this soldier will have something to do with the fact that Frankie's day descends into total "craziness." Frankie herself is on the verge of dawning awareness for when the soldier flirts with her she realizes he assumes she is much older than she is. This makes her happy for she wants to be grown up, but we are also told "her pleasure in this was somehow uncertain." Her sense of uneasiness is increased when the soldier asks her for a date and McCullers is adept at describing the tension between Frankie's unconscious desire to remain within the world of childhood innocence and her longing to move into the adult world which, on this day, is symbolized for her by the impending connection between her brother and his fiancée.

> On any other day than this it would have seemed almost impossible that anyone, much less a soldier, would have invited her to a date. The very word, date, was a grown word used by older girls. But here again there was a blight upon her pleasure. If he knew she was not yet

> thirteen, he would never have invited her, or probably joined with her at all. There was a troubled sense, a light uneasiness. "I don't know -"[38]

Frankie still doesn't know what she is getting herself into but she does sense that it is somehow threatening and dangerous. When she accepts his proposal she is not entirely happy for the encounter has destroyed "the wedding feeling" of the early morning. But she is yet able to dismiss the whole incident from her mind and to ignore the awareness which keeps pressing upon her as she returns to the kitchen and John Henry and Berenice. The scene which follows is a lengthy commentary on what Frankie has been seeking throughout this morning before the wedding and it seems that McCullers intends it as the thematic center of the novel. In addition, by delaying Frankie's final encounter with the soldier, she prolongs our suspense and intensifies the atmosphere of dread she has created about Frankie's initiation into the adult world.

I think it particularly significant that this crucial discussion between Frankie and Berenice takes place in the kitcher <u>after</u> her initial foray into the world, for much of what Frankie says directly contradicts the feeling of connection which had motivated her wanderings about town. It is almost as if Frankie has had to attempt an escape from her self in order to discover the fact that absolute connection with another is impossible. She talks with Berenice as one adult to another on this afternoon and the

subject they discuss is love. Because she has fallen in love with the wedding, she understands something about the desire to be connected with others and though her understanding is yet inarticulate she seems to know what it is she seeks. Even though Berenice warns her about the impossibility of fulfilling this desire completely, she will not listen and continues to cling to her plan to run off with her brother and his bride. This is made all the more poignant by the fact that on one level, she seems to understand that human beings can never wholly overcome their isolation within the individual self. Indeed, Frankie appears to possess a certain adult understanding but it has not yet affected or controlled her adolescent longings. Even while she prepares for the wedding, she explains her new-found understanding to Berenice:

> What I've been trying to say is this. Doesn't it strike you as strange that I am I, and you are you? I am F. Jasmine Addams. And you are Berenice Sadie Brown. And we can look at each other, and touch each other, and stay together year in and year out in the same room. Yet always I am I, and you are you. And I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you. Have you ever thought of that? And does it seem to you strange?[39]

Frankie is disturbed by this inability to be anything but "I" and she wonders about its effects on perception. She puzzles over the problem, asking Berenice how people know they are seeing the same world if they really can't communicate with one another. Berenice, of course, tells her

proof is impossible and points out that a certain amount of faith is necessary if we are to believe we understand each other's world. But even though Frankie comprehends all this, at least subconsciously, she doesn't want to admit it. She laments the fact that she is leaving town and "there are all these people [she] will never know," and when Berenice asks her exactly who she wants to know, her reply is simple and childishly naive. She answers, "Everybody. In the world. Everybody in the world."[40]

Still, she is frustrated by the fact that she cannot express all she has begun to understand, and we are told her unsaid words stick in her throat and make her sick. She alternates throughout the rest of the conversation between black despair and frenzied exaltation about the wedding and at one point contradicts what she has just said to Berenice. As she grows more and more hysterical with joy over the prospect of going away with her brother and his bride, she blurts out, "We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of all of them," adding, "We will be members of the whole world. Boyoman! Manoboy!"[41] Part of Frankie still wants to believe that union with others is possible, but this belief is gradually being shoved aside by her growing awareness that it is impossible to escape from the self. However, even in her last exchange with Berenice, she still insists there must be some kind of connection between men. At this point, Berenice has begun to understand what Frankie is driving at, and

she puts it in her own words:

> We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each of us somehow caught all by ourself. Is that what you was trying to say?[42]

Frankie isn't sure but she does know she doesn't want to be caught and her final comments to Berenice indicate once again that she refuses to believe isolation is total. In thinking about Berenice's question Frankie considers the notion of being "caught" and decides it isn't quite what she means. She thinks she understands what Berenice says but she adds, "at the same time you almost might use the word loose instead of caught." When Berenice is understandably puzzled, Frankie explains:

> I mean you don't see what joins them up together. You don't know where they all came from, or where they're going to.... People loose and at the same time caught. Caught and loose. All these people and you don't know what joins them up. There's bound to be some sort of reason and connection. Yet somehow I can't seem to name it.[43]

Frankie is not yet ready to admit that connection is not possible and she still believes there is reason behind the apparent craziness in the universe. She no longer wants to think about the paradox of being caught and loose and finally confesses to Berenice that the wedding is her escape. "After we leave Winter Hill," she says, "I won't have to worry about things anymore."[44]

But even before she can escape with her brother and the bride, Frankie must carry out her rendezvous with the red-headed soldier, a meeting she is now afraid may prove to be a mistake. From the first, things do not go as she would like and she finds herself distressed by a queerness she cannot place or understand. Of course, the pain of the episode is heightened for the reader who is aware of the soldier's sexual intentions even though Frankie herself is not. Again, however, awareness is just below the surface and when he leads her upstairs, Frankie is sure something is wrong. What is wrong is that all she wants from this soldier is a general sense of companionship and connection; what he thinks she wants and is willing to give is sexual intimacy. As fear takes charge of Frankie, she feels threatened by the soldier whom she now sees as an isolated "single person" and "not as a member of the loud free gangs who for a season roamed the streets of town and then went out into the world together."[45] In short, what Frankie and the soldier have become is an "I" and a "you" and both are wholly separate from each other. This separateness frightens Frankie and for a moment she is paralyzed. But as soon as he reaches for her, she hits him over the head with a water pitcher and he crumples to the ground, apparently dead. Immediately thereafter Frankie is overwhelmed by a knowledge which threatens her childhood peace and she tries to ignore the images that come flooding over her. Even though all her previous encounters with

sex are immediately conjured up together, she absolutely refuses to acknowledge what they suggest. As McCullers says, "There slanted across her mind twisted remembrances of a common fit in the front room, basement remarks, and nasty Barney; but she did not let these separate glimpses fall together, and the word she repeated was 'crazy.'"[46] Frankie is not yet ready to come to terms with her own sexuality or to understand that even though man may physically connect with another, he can never escape from the prison of the self in which he is confined. As a result, she rushes back home, sits very close to her father, and drinks sweetened condensed milk to wash away the disgust she feels. Slowly her "anxiousness" is eased and terror begins to subside. The "quest section" concludes as Frankie tells herself, "I'll never be so glad to get to any place in all my life as Winter Hill tomorrow. I will be so thankful when the wedding is over and we have gone away. I will be so thankful."[47]

As I am sure it must be clear by now, while Carson McCullers makes use of the typical gothic quest in The Member of the Wedding, she also manipulates it sufficiently to alter its significance. Where Emily, Ambrosio, and Melmoth begin their quests as isolated beings, Frankie is determined to end the isolation she feels and she sets out on her journey to establish connection with others. By contrast, the "journeys" undertaken by Emily, Ambrosio, and Melmoth all draw them farther away from the beneficent

influence of human society and they are confronted with a choice between eternal isolation or connection with a world drastically flawed by evil. Emily, of course, chooses connection, while Ambrosio and Melmoth continue to assert their own individuality and thus choose isolation. The end is the same, however, for in each novel we are told that no matter how imperfect a solution connection is, it is the only viable one since absolute isolation leads only to violence and death.

Frankie Addams appears to be one step beyond these earlier gothic protagonists, for she chooses connection even before the second section of the novel begins. But strangely enough, she discovers at the end of her search that connection itself is fleeting, sometimes ugly and violent, wholly inadequate to the task of banishing the loneliness she whishes to repudiate. McCullers seems to suggest by this that the choice so glibly marked off by the earlier gothic novelists is not a choice at all, since isolation is man's unavoidable human condition. She appears to say the individual will is powerless to effect escape from this fate because even the decision to share one's happiness with another leads ultimately to violence and death. The vision of this second section of The Member of the Wedding is extraordinarily bleak and it seems, at least at this point, that the "meaning" behind McCullers' gothic tale is diametrically opposed to that set forth in The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, and Melmoth the Wanderer.

This verdict, however, is not final, for the third section of the novel has not yet been played out nor has Frankie gone to the wedding.

The third and final section of the novel opens as Frankie, now referred to as Frances, prepares to go to the wedding. But almost before the description of her preparation and journey is completed, we are told that the affair has ended in a complete fiasco for everyone concerned. McCullers is careful to give us Frankie's perceptions and what seems to surprise her more than anything else is the fact that she has not been able to control what happens to her. As she sits on the bus returning home, she thinks back on the wedding which now seems as "unmanaged as a nightmare" because "all that came about occurred in a world beyond her power."[48] Slowly, the details of the wrecked occasion are revealed and it becomes clear that despite her decision to run off with the bride and groom, she has not even been able to tell them of her need or her plan. She wishes now that she had written down what she wanted to say for that might have changed things. As it was, they called her Frankie instead of F. Jasmine and treated her as a child. Thinking back, she decides "there was from first to last, the sense of something terribly gone wrong."[49] We finally learn that even at the moment when the newly married couple was about to drive away, Frankie could not tell them that they were her "we" and she had to be dragged from the car crying "Take me, take me." When Berenice tries to cheer

her up we discover for the first time how the entire incident has affected Frankie herself:

> The baby promises rasped her nerves. Her cheap heart hurt, and she pressed her crossed arms over it and rocked a little. 'It was a framed game. The cards were stacked. It was a frame-up all around.'[50]

Frankie's pain is acute. No matter what scheme Berenice proposes, she is inconsolable. But her hurt soon turns to anger and she plans to run away to spite them all. "You think its all over," she says to Berenice and John Henry, "but that only shows how little you know."[51] Frankie decides that even if she can't go into the world "safe with her brother and the bride" she will undertake the frightening venture by herself. In a sense, she is right back where she started at the beginning of the second section for she still refuses to rest content with the isolation she feels.

That night Frankie runs away but in the midst of her flight she realizes she doesn't even know how to hop a train. She wanders through town instead carrying her father's pistol intending to shoot herself with it. She changes her mind, however, and continues to wander, growing ever more afraid. Images of death plague her consciousness and she sees Lon Baker's slashed throat and the red-headed soldier's slumped body. Her longing for company is so great that she thinks she sees her missing cat and then imagines a strange couple is really her brother and his bride come to take her with them. Both visions fade, however, and Frankie decides

instead to see if the soldier has survived her "attack" and to ask him to marry her if he has. But as she walks toward the Blue Moon, the adult knowledge she sought to escape earlier dawns once again and this time she cannot ignore what she now comprehends. The separate recollections of the fit in the front room, the silence of the soldier's hotel room, and the nasty talk behind the garage suddenly fall together "as shafting searchlights meet in the night sky upon an aeroplane, so that in a flash there came in her an understanding."[52] Each separate encounter with sex now illuminates the other and the sudden recognition produces in her "a feeling of cold surprise" which only increases her fear and forces her to admit to herself that she is too scared to go into the world alone.

No sooner has she admitted her dependence, however, than she is grabbed by the arm of "the Law." Although the policeman only wants to return her to her father, Frankie assumes she will be jailed for killing the soldier or for stealing from Sears and Roebuck. Although she's not sure why she has been captured, she is not surprised for "the crimes of the long spring and summer merge together as one guilt which she had lost the power to understand."[53] Frankie feels guilty and, in a sense, she is. Because of her journey into the world, she has been implicated in the violence which plagues human society. She has become acquainted with evil and death and finally initiated into the adult world. When "the Law" asks where she is going,

Frankie cannot answer because the world now seems incredibly far away. It is obvious that she is now forced to acknowledge the human isolation that cannot be denied:

> Between herself and all the places there was a space like an enormous canyon she could not hope to bridge or cross. The plans for the movies or the Marines were only child plans that would never work.... It was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see. The world was too far away, and there was no way any more that she could be included. She was back to the fear of the summertime, the old feelings that the world was separate from herself - and the failed wedding had quickened the fear to terror....In the blue light she felt queer as a person drowning. At last she was staring at the Law and finally he looked into her eyes. He looked at her with eyes as china as a doll's and in them there was only the reflection of her own lost face.[54]

What Frankie now sees when she exchanges glances with another is not his past or his private world but only her own reflection. She cannot connect with anyone in the Blue Moon because all are isolated within their own skins and she is finally forced to relinquish her dream of discovering and possessing the "we of me." In the end, there is no choice between separation and connection in the world of The Member of the Wedding because all men are "caught" within themselves and thus cut "loose" from others to roam about the world alone.

But Frankie does not perish as a result of her newfound awareness, which is as significant as the fact that her quest ends in disappointment and despair. She returns

home, survives John Henry's death and prepares to leave Berenice as she moves to a new house. We are told she has a new friend, Mary Littlejohn, and that they plan to travel around the world together. Particularly important to Frankie is the fact that Mary is a Catholic for "this difference was a final touch of strangeness, silent terror, that completed the wonder of her love."[55] In this last, very short section of the novel it is clear that Frankie does feel a connection with Mary but that connection is tempered by fear and by the sad recollection of John Henry's death. The two are linked together in her mind for both changes have come about in October. Her memory of John Henry's suffering and pain is interlaced with her joyful recollections of the fair just as her happiness at having a friend is still shadowed by her fear of loneliness and death:

> It was the time of the Fair and a big banner arched the main street and for six days and nights the Fair went on down at the fairground....As the bright days followed one upon the other, the words of Berenice became so terrible that she would listen in a spell of horror, but a part of her could not believe. John Henry had been screaming for three days and his eyeballs were walled up in a corner stuck and blind. He lay there finally with his head drawn back in a buckled way, and he had lost the strength to scream. He died the Tuesday after the Fair was gone, a golden morning of the most butterflies, the clearest sky.[56]

As October fades into November, Frankie is able to remember John Henry as he used to be and her days are filled with

"radar, school and Mary Littlejohn." She is no longer bothered by nightmares and only at "twilight time" or when a room grows especially quiet does she feel John Henry's presence - "solemn, hovering and ghost-gray." It is, of course, significant that the novel ends at such a twilight when the geranium glow fades from the sky and "the last pale colors. . .crushed and cold on the horizon" intrude on Frankie's babbling about her plans to go around the world with Mary Littlejohn. But the terrible resulting hush does not last for long because Mary rings the doorbell and "an instant shock of happiness" courses through Frankie once again. In the gothic world of Carson McCullers temporary connection between separate human beings is possible and when it occurs it produces happiness, joy, and contentment. But such connection is only temporary and the wonder it creates is thus always intermingled with the pain and suffering produced by the knowledge that isolation is inescapable and death itself unavoidable.

In the last analysis I find the similarities between The Member of the Wedding and The Monk and Melmoth the Wanderer more striking than those between McCullers' novel and Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho. Even though the plot structure of this twentieth century gothic seems to echo Radcliffe's work, I think the vision it sets forth is actually much closer to that of the two later gothics written by Matthew Lewis and Charles Robert Maturin. McCullers manages to darken Radcliffe's vision of the world by making

structural changes in the progress of the narrative which contribute to the creation of a more satisfying work because they eliminate some of the disturbing contradictions between plot and subplot evident in both Melmoth and The Monk.

Although McCullers' focus, like Radcliffe's, is on the psychic state of a young heroine as she confronts the evil present in the world, McCullers conceives the confrontation itself in a different way and at a different time. In The Mysteries of Udolpho, while Emily St. Aubert is forced into isolation by others, she makes the condition worse by allowing her imagination to run wild. Once she can control her fantasies with a deliberate act of the will, she recognizes the dangers inherent in extreme isolation and chooses to end hers by forgiving Valancourt his transgressions and by consenting to join with him in marriage. Although evil does exist in the world of Udolpho, it is clearly separate from good and the choice between the two is presented as a necessary and relatively simple one to make.

On the other hand, by focusing on Frankie only after she has acknowledged that isolation is both painful and destructive, McCullers considers whether the choice "recommended" by Radcliffe is actually a choice at all. Because she alters the direction of Frankie's journey and presents it as a physical journey outward into the world, she is able to underscore the terrible fact that even in the face

of a deliberate decision to establish connection with others, individual isolation is utterly inescapable. Frankie too confronts the evil abroad in the universe, but she discovers its presence because she attempts to deny or negate her imprisonment within the self not because she wallows in it. Once she recognizes that she will always be "caught" and "loose," Frankie is able to withstand the pain produced by her initiation into evil and death and, in spite of that pain, learns to establish temporary connection with others. The world Frankie joins at the end of The Member of the Wedding is a morally ambiguous world where good can only exist as the opposite of evil, a world where human isolation cannot be denied though the loneliness it produces may be temporarily assuaged in fleeting moments of connection and communication with others. Although a marriage takes place in McCullers' novel, in no way can it be said to contradict or alter the meaning of Frankie's fate, for Jarvis and Janice never become characters in their own right nor are they ever dealt with except as they affect Frankie herself. In fact, because their union serves to emphasize Frankie's "I-ness," we might argue that the marriage is meant to demonstrate once again that happiness is inextricably intertwined with pain and connection always marred by isolation.

Finally, it seems to me, the significance of Frankie's story is closely related to the meaning of the primary plots of The Monk and Melmoth even though the latter two

novels are preoccupied with the sins of an outstanding villain-hero, not with a beautiful young heroine and her initiation into evil. Because of extreme egotism and faith in the power of the individual will, both Ambrosio and Melmoth choose to set themselves apart from their fellow men. As a result of their decision they are implicated in the violence and evil of the world and finally destroyed. Despite this ultimate destruction, however, Lewis and Maturin create complex protagonists who are extraordinarily talented and capable of tenderness and affection. I think they mean to suggest by this that good and evil are not so easily distinguishable as Radcliffe teaches nor is the choice between the two as clear-cut as she would like. Nevertheless, both authors dwell on the evil deeds of their villain-heroes and the resulting tone of the two novels seems to suggest that evil and death are more powerful than the forces of good and thus the dominating powers in the universe. Furthermore, because Lewis and Maturin seem to contrast the fate of Ambrosio and Melmoth with that of fairly well developed characters who marry at the end of the subplots, it seems both are reestablishing, at least to a certain extent, the distinctions between good and evil they had sought to discredit in their presentations of the two major characters. In fact, I think the resulting tension between plot and subplot diminishes the power of both novels since the vision of the world as a morally ambiguous place presented through the characterizations of Ambrosio and Melmoth

is contradicted by the "happy ending" and resolution provided in the secondary narrative. Because McCullers trains her gaze on Frankie to the very end, she does not resolve the polarities she establishes into clear-cut opposites and thus is able to maintain a subtle balance between good and evil and between isolation and connection within the same individual. Frankie is not destroyed by her isolation nor is she punished for injuring or killing the soldier, but, on the other hand, neither is she rewarded with the connection she seeks. Life, for Frances Addams, in the gothic world of The Member of the Wedding, is simultaneously a painful journey in search of an impossible union and a pleasing contentment provided by the attentions of a temporary friend.

In the end, The Member of the Wedding is a direct descendent of the English gothic novel of the eighteenth century by virtue of its general plot structure, the relationship between the protagonist and the world that it explores and the narrative contract between reader and text which it establishes. Although she does not use a castle or even an old, dilapidated house, McCullers does create an ominous mood as well as an atmosphere of suspense and dread and manages to involve her reader in the action of the narrative. She consistently drops hints or clues about what is to happen in the future and then deliberatley withholds actual disclosure to the last possible moment. She forces the reader to fall back on the hermeneutic code to

make sense of the halting motion of the text and she carefully structures the narrative point of view so the reader will sympathize with the heroine's struggles. She places this heroine in a position of isolation and follows her as she attempts to come to terms with the alien world she sees about her. Although McCullers changes the direction of her seeker's quest, her concern in using the quest is the same for she explores the possibilities for human connection in the world and the effect such may have on man's isolated condition. However, because she alters Frankie's movements and allows her to attempt connection and to fail, her conclusions are somewhat different from those of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin. The significance of the strutures presented in The Member of the Wedding seems to be that moral ambiguity is at the foundation of life in this world, since at no time does McCullers ever resolve polarities into diametrically opposed, easily-distinguished moral opposites. In her presentation of twelve-year-old Frankie Addams, Carson McCullers is able to suggest that truth about the universe which Lewis and Maturin can only hint at in their complex characterizations of Ambrosio and Melmoth and which they ultimately dilute with the "happily-ever-after" ending of the secondary narrative. Her vision is darker, finally, because of the key structural change she makes in the gothic quest and because she refuses to counter Frankie's story with a parallel tale of two lovers who achieve the union Frankie is denied.

The Gothic World of William Faulkner's Sanctuary

In attempting to place William Faulkner's Sancturay within the gothic tradition, it is not enough to point out that the novel establishes the necessary contract between reader and text or concerns itself with the relationship between the individual will and collective social institutions and conventions. While Sanctuary does clearly manage both these tasks, it also deforms the standard gothic plot structure to such a degree that few would feel justified in defining this work as a "gothic novel." However, despite the changes Faulkner makes in his cast of characters and in the outward action of the narrative, Sancturay is still based on the structures created in Otranto, Udolpho, and Melmoth and it depends for much of its effect on the reader's prior acquaintance with gothic conventions and clichés. The significance of Temple Drake's destruction, for example, is rendered largely ironic by the fact that the function she fills in the structure of the narrative is that performed by the typical gothic heroine. She is forced into isolation by some representative of evil, threatened with rape and death, and eventually presented with a choice between individual pleasure and moral responsibility to others. However, Faulkner thwarts our expectations governing this gothic role at every turn, permitting Temple to be raped and finally corrupted, and consequently, her characterization functions as a kind of commentary on

the vision of the female heroine generally presented in works by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Charles Robert Maturin.

Throughout the novel, Faulkner begins with the stereotypic gothic characters and the usual confrontations which occur between them, fills those roles with highly unusual individuals, often reverses the nature of the resolution effected, and thus radically alters the final significance of the narrative as a whole. Because the variations Faulkner weaves into the standard gothic theme are almost more important than the original theme itself, Sanctuary appears to be very far removed from The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, and even from Melmoth the Wanderer. Still, those variations are variations on a theme and their meaning derives as much from their relationship to the theme as from the distance established between them and the original air itself. In paraphrasing Roland Barthes' comments on the modern literary text, Jonathan Culler has written that "subversion requires a chiaroscuro."[57] His remark can be fruitfully applied to Faulkner's Sanctuary and its relationship to the genre of the gothic romance. It is easy to see that Sanctuary is not the same novel as either The Mysteries of Udolpho or Melmoth the Wanderer since it obviously defies the conventions of those novels and thus subverts much of what is "said" in them. Yet Faulkner does defy conventions in Sanctuary, and the significance of his defiance is only

made clear when it is considered against the background of what he "should" have done in using the conventions of an already fully worked-out form. Consequently, in my analysis of the various actants and actions which dominate Sanctuary, I will try to make continuing reference to the standard characters and events standing at the center of those works defined as classic examples of the genre.

Where most gothic novels focus on a single character to the exclusion of all others appearing in the narrative, the fabric of Faulkner's complex text is woven of three different skeins, each of which is dominated by a fairly well developed individual whose function in the novel derives from one of the three principal roles found in all standard gothic tales. As a result, it is impossible to say that Sanctuary is only the story of Horace Benbow or of Temple Drake or even of Popeye himself, for their fates are so intricately intertwined that the meaning of one cannot be completely paraphrased without referring to the meaning of the others. Temple is, as I have said, modeled after the typical gothic heroine in that she is young, "virginal," and unfamiliar with the adult world. However, Sanctuary is not simply the story of Temple's initiation into the world for, although that process is chronicled at length, Faulkner also devotes a great deal of attention to Horace Benbow and his confrontation with evil. Horace resembles the standard hero by virtue of his opposition to the individual who threatens the heroine, but his primary

goal in the novel is not to rescue Temple but rather to acquit the man wrongfully accused of her defilement. Thus, the hero and heroine of Faulkner's gothic tale are not presented as lovers nor even remotely connected as a couple. Instead, the function each fills in the novel is defined by the nature of his or her relationship to Popeye, the villain figure of the story. As a result, Temple is initially delineated for us as his "victim" while Horace is portrayed as his opponent.

Popeye is clearly the representative of evil essential to the form but, unlike other gothic villains who function as the protagonist of the narrative, he does not possess any redeeming qualities of excellence or superiority to warrant our identification with him. Nevertheless, he is of central concern in the novel, and Faulkner increases the significance of his fate by including that last chapter which apparently accounts for much of what he does throughout the narrative. However, not only does that description of Popeye's past "explain" his evil nature, but it also places him in a situation not unlike that of Temple, Horace, or other gothic protagonists. All three are, in short, symbolically cut off from the rest of society as the novel opens and virtually everything they do throughout the course of the narrative is the result of a quest--a search for a human connection or for an explanation of why such connection is rendered impossible by the evil inherent in the universe. Faulkner's gothic tale is, then, the story of

three lonely seekers, all of whom have embarked on quests in pursuit of some absolute, and the meaning of the tale is the product of the integration he works out among these three separate journeys.

Even though Faulkner begins Sanctuary from Popeye's point of view and closes with Temple's musings as she sits on a Parisian park bench, Horace Benbow stands both physically and thematically at the center of the novel. Indeed, it is his perceptions which dominate the middle section of the book and it is with him that we as readers are most consistently asked to identify. When Popeye and Temple first appear, Faulkner describes them in such a way that we are immediately distanced by the fact that both seem slightly sinister and threatening. While Popeye's skin has "a dead, dark pallor" and his face fades away "like the face of wax doll set too near a hot fire and forgotten,"[58] Temple has a "bold painted mouth and soft chin," blank eyes, and is described generally as "cool, predatory, and discreet."[59] On the other hand, Horace Benbow is initially characterized as a "tall, thin man, hatless, in worn gray flannel trousers and carrying a tweed coat over his arm. . ."[60] His essential harmlessness is underscored by the fact that he immediately antagonizes Popeye and incurs his wrath.

Faulkner thus uses this initial altercation to establish an opposition between these two characters and to set the scene for the confrontation between the two which will

inevitably materialize. Although Horace and Popeye never see each other again after this chance meeting, their fates become as intertwined as if Popeye had committed a crime against Horace himself. The crimes he does commit, however, do not occur until the thirteenth chapter of the book and the battle is not actually joined until the sixteenth chapter, when Horace accepts the task of trying to get Goodwin acquitted of the crime he knows Popeye committed. As a result, despite his early preoccupation with this stand-off between Horace, the lawyer and defender of social institutions, and Popeye, the gangster and social outcast, Faulkner devotes over one hundred pages, between their first encounter and ultimate confrontation, to a third character, Temple Drake who, at least initially, has no connection to either man.

When we first meet Temple Drake, she is precariously poised on that thin line separating social acceptibility from social ostracism. As a college girl she lives within one of the human community's principal institutions designed for socialization of its young--the school--and although she participates in some of its conventions, she also flirts with expulsion by defying others. Temple dates college boys and attends formal college dances but at the same time she breaks curfew rules and runs around with town boys in forbidden automobiles. On the day the central story of Sanctuary begins, Temple escapes from school to run off unchaperoned with Gowan Stevens to a baseball game.

However, this time her refusal to abide by social conventions gets her into serious trouble. When Gowan gets drunk, she is forced to sever all ties with the community from which she thinks she has only temporarily escaped. Then, when he runs the car into a tree, Temple has no understanding of the fact that she has, in some sense, chosen her own fate. At the moment the crash occurs, she thinks of the event as "the logical and disastrous end to the train of circumstance in which she had become involved."[61] Temple does not see that she has actively chosen to disobey rules established for the protection of the group against the excesses of the few, and she sees herself as a passive victim of Gowan's wanton behavior.

She continues to think of herself as a victim once she is "captured" by Popeye and held "prisoner" within the Old Frenchman place even though she makes no attempt to escape. I use these words deliberately to point out the similarities which exist between Temple's situation and that of every gothic heroine, since Faulkner's use of the isolated, ominous old house recalls the standard use of the gothic castle and Temple's stay there echoes the typical incarceration of the heroine by the villain. Indeed, Temple's refusal to walk up to the house is understandable considering the way it first looms up out of the distance. Faulkner's description is meant to deliberatley evoke recollections of all those gloomy castles and forbidding monasteries which dominate the uninviting landscapes of the

earliest gothic novels.

> The house came into sight, above the cedar grove beyond whose black interstices an apple orchard flaunted in the suny afternoon. It was set in a ruined lawn, surrounded by abandoned grounds and fallen outbuildings. But nowhere was any sign of husbandry - plow or tool; in no direction was a planted field in sight - only a gaunt weatherstained ruin in a sombre grove through which the breeze drew with a sad, murmurous sound.[62]

Like most other gothic houses this one is occupied by a group of people who comprise a strange and disordered family unit. Goodwin and Ruby, for example, are not married and their sickly child is a bastard. In addition, they take care of a blind and crippled old man and a half-wit named Tommy, and are joined by Popeye himself who lives with them from time to time to supervise Goodwin's work. Goodwin, it seems, is a moonshiner and is thus engaged in systematic defiance of society and its laws. In fact, all the inhabitants of the Old Frenchman place live outside the conventional boundaries of "pleasant" society. It is ultimately into their midst that Temple is thrown.

However, it is essential to point out that despite the position some of these people occupy in relation to respectable society, they are perhaps the most civilized figures in the book. Ruby and Goodwin, for example, love each other and both go out of their way at different times to assist each other when aid is most needed. Similarly, although Tommy does not understand much of what goes on around him, he senses Temple's fear and tries to protect

her by hiding her in the barn. Thus, although Faulkner peoples his gothic house with typical social rejects and rebels, he also endows those outcasts with a moral sense found curiously lacking in the more respectable characters of the story, including Temple herself. However, Faulkner does not divulge this information until later. When Temple is first taken to the house she appears to be isolated from all that is familiar to her, and forced to cope with an amoral situation that is not governed by social rules or conventional behavior.

Temple's experience with men prior to her encounter with Popeye and the others at the house has been at least partially controlled by the rigid conventions which prescribe the proper behavior for a young Southern girl. Because of her upbringing, Temple is learned in the art of coquetry and knows very well how to tease, excite and deny. However, she does not understand that this behavior functions only because it is part of a larger context which itself is determined by concomitant social conventions and, as a result of her ignorance, gets herself into even more serious trouble. Although she certainly does not will her own rape or acquiesce in it, she does engage in the one form of behavior guaranteed to arouse and enrage these men, who live outside the bounds of the only society she knows. As Olga Vickery has pointed out, Temple's sexual teasing is an accepted and safe form of behavior in her own world but it becomes a highly dangerous taunt when used in the

context of the Old Frenchman place.[63] Because her behavior does not elicit the expected response, Temple is thrown into a state of utter confusion. She is forced to rely upon her own individual resources and as she grows ever more hysterical, she loses her ability to distinguish between those she ought to fear and those who present no threat at all. For example, she is terrified of Goodwin who wants nothing to do with her and she is horribly frightened by Pap who cannot even see who she is. However, she does flirt with Popeye, the one really dangerous man on the premises. Like all gothic heroines, Temple is cut off from familiar society, forced to turn inward, and thus frightened because all she sees around her suddenly appears alien and totally "other."

The first thirteen chapters of Sanctuary take place in and around the Old Frenchman house and Faulkner accordingly devotes most of his attention to creating that special atmosphere of mystery and dread associated with the gothic castle. While very little actually does happen in these chapters, Temple, like Emily St. Aubert, imagines and anticipates all sorts of things and is alternately overcome by hysterical fear of the men and attracted to them because of the violence and rebellion of their lives. It is this fascination with evil which seems to keep Temple at the house for she makes no attempt to escape even when Ruby impresses her with the necessity of doing so. Because she continues to stay and taunt the men, the tension

increases to the point where we are absolutely sure something must happen. Faulkner expertly manipulates this feeling of certainty when he has Goodwin, Popeye and Tommy stand over the undressed Temple and demand only her raincoat.[64] When they leave her as abruptly as they have materialized, it appears as if the "heroine" will be protected as she always is in the gothic novel and that she will escape with both her virginity and her life. But no sooner has Faulkner lulled us into a complacency bred by familiarity with the standard gothic plot structure than he shocks us by thwarting the expectations he has raised and by permitting the unthinkable to occur.

Just when Temple thinks she is safe from Lee Goodwin, Popeye approaches her from the rear, kills Tommy who is protecting her from imagined danger, and then attacks Temple herself. Faulkner does not tell us exactly what happens here but rather focuses on Temple's frame of mind as she realizes Popeye is standing in the corncrib. Although she is clearly terrified, she keeps repeating "something is going to happen to me. . .something is happening to me. . . .I told you it was. . .I told you. . .I told you all the time," and she almost seems to exult over the fact that she has now provoked the violence which so fascinated and attracted her. Unlike Emily St. Aubert who eventually does escape consummation with evil, Temple Drake's ambivalence brings about that which she has both feared and desired, an act which finally effects her complete isolation from

the social community of her adolescent past and marks her initiation into Popeye's amoral world.

In the fifteenth chapter when the narrative returns to town and respectable society, the focus of the novel shifts from Temple Drake to Horace Benbow. This change in perspective is unheard of in the standard gothic novel but Faulkner manages the shift and at the same time continues to write a "gothic" story. While I have previously characterized Horace as the "hero" of the novel, it is necessary to point out that in many ways he also resembles the typical gothic heroine. Although he is married and close to middle age, he is isolated from his family, an innocent wandering about in a world he cannot comprehend. He is an innocent for he still believes in the high-minded abstractions of honor, truth, and justice, nor does he understand that such ideals are unerringly compromised in the real world. He defends Lee Goodwin because he knows he did not kill Tommy just as he shelters Ruby because he understands she loves Lee and sympathizes with her. It does not matter to Horace that Lee is black and lives with a woman who is not his wife because Horace cares little about social conventions and taboos. He is, in short, set up in direct opposition to his sister Narcissa whom we first see dressed in white "with that serene and stupid impregnability of heroic statuary."[65] Narcissa symbolizes all that is most respectable in white, Southern society and when Horace urges her to consider the reality of Ruby's

situation, she absolutely refuses.[66] Since Narcissa and the other white, Christian ladies of the town live their lives and judge the lives of others according to rigid social principles, Ruby's human need can never erase the fact that she lives in sin with a nigger. But Horace refuses to be cowed by his sister's "imperviousness," continues to mount Goodwin's defense, and challenges the society to which he belongs and whose laws he is trained to defend.

Faulkner brilliantly plays off Horace's encounter with his sister's rigidity and her society's civilized violence against two related themes which appear intermittently throughout the rest of the novel and which underscore Horace's growing sense of despair and disillusionment with life in the real world. The events in Sanctuary take place in late May and early June just as the delicacies of Spring give way to the fully-developed, almost violently vital growth of summer. Faulkner's first description of the heaven-tree near the jail is particularly significant for it is through Horace's reaction to this tree that he chronicles his increasing estrangement from the world in which he finds himself. We are told "the last trumpet-shaped bloom had fallen from the heaven-tree at the corner of the jail yard," and that "they lay thick, viscid underfoot, sweet and oversweet in the nostrils with a sweetness surfeitive and moribund, and at night now the ragged shadow of full-fledged leaves pulsed upon the barred window in shabby

rise and fall."[67]

Later, Faulkner characterizes these full-grown leaves as "the ragged grief" of the heaven-tree and he likens the fallen blossoms to blood by describing them as a "viscid smear."[68] What is most significant, however, about this is that Horace is irritated by the tree's natural growth and at one point complains, "they ought to clean that damn mess off the sidewalk. . . Damn. Damn. Damn."[69] We are meant to recuperate these descriptions symbolically, for Faulkner juxtaposes the decay of the trumpet-shaped blooms of the heaven-tree with the moral decay of organized religion as it exists in the Baptist Church. For instance, immediately after the tree is first described Horace angrily recounts for Miss Jenny what has been going on down town after Goodwin's arrest. He is particularly outraged by the fact that so-called "Christians" are more hypocritical than those they condemn:

> They knew what he was doing, but they waited until he was down. Then they all jumped on him. The good customers that had been buying whiskey from him and drinking all that he would give them free and maybe trying to make love to his wife behind his back. You should hear them downtown. This morning the Baptist minister took him for a text. Not only as a murderer, but as an adulterer; a pollutor of the free Democratico-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha county. I gathered that his idea was that Goodwin and the woman should both be burned as a sole example to that child; the child to be reared and taught the English language for the sole end of being taught that it was begot in sin by two people who suffered by fire for having begot it. Good God, can a man, a civilized man, seriously. . . .[70]

But Faulkner's point is precisely what Horace can't yet say aloud--that the minister is not civilised--and that the Church itself is not moral but as decayed as the trumpet blooms that lie rotting under foot. Miss Jenny excuses the townspeoples' righteous behavior because "they're just Baptists," but her dismissal is made all the more ironic by the fact that it is the churchwomen who run Ruby out of town and Narcissa herself who guarantees Goodwin's destruction because she reveals to the district attorney that Temple can be found to testify. In short, what Horace learns as a result of his involvement in Goodwin's fate is that religion is morally bankrupt and the principles it teaches empty platitudes offering no guidance or advice on how to behave in an evil and violent universe.

Although Horace thus rejects one of society's principal institutions early in the novel, he continues to cling to his belief in justice and in the efficacy of social law. In fact, he thinks the two are synonymous for he believes the law will protect Lee Goodwin and justice will ultimately be done if that law is permitted to function properly. Accordingly, he tries to persuade Lee to divulge the fact that Popeye was at the scene of the murder but Lee refuses because he is sure Popeye will immediately have him killed. Horaces's characteristic response is that "the law, justice, and civilizaiton" are behind him and he urges Lee anew to stop obstructing that justice.[71] Horace continues to believe in these abstractions throughout most of the novel

and his search for a way to get Lee acquitted is really a version of the standard gothic quest.

What Horace is actually looking for, however, is a way to prove to himself that these ideals function in the real world and that good is ultimately distinguishable from evil. Because he lives in a state of almost complete innocence and thus truly believes in these abstractions, he is able to judge those in the society around him who do not live up to his noble ideals. But as Olga Vickery has commented "the very ideals which make him an unerring judge of society render him incapable of fighting [it],"[72] and indeed, as the narrative progresses, we see Horace counter cruelty with self-righteous anger and hatred with empty words. He truly believes that by passing enough of the right laws, society can control evil and he is convinced that somehow Lee will be freed and Popeye punished for the crime he committed. However, Horace, unable to translate his beliefs into constructive action, wastes precious time available to him for preparation of a defense in making speeches and voicing his indignation. He is, in short, immobilized by his ideals and he seems to deliberately resist acting in order to avoid contact with evil. Nevertheless, it is forced on him by his encounter with Temple Drake.

As Faulkner chronicles Horace's quest to re-establish reason and order in the world of Yoknapatawpha county, he contrasts his flight from evil with Temple Drake's

continuing attraction to it. He switches back and forth between Jefferson and Memphis where Popeye has imprisoned Temple in a whorehouse, an alternating structure which serves to emphasize the incredible power of evil. No sooner are we impressed by Temple's growing inability to resist the pleasures and excitement of Popeye's way of life than we are confronted with Horace's ineffectual attempts to counter the harm done to others because Popeye leads the life he does. As a result, evil itself dominates Sanctuary and Faulkner splits the typical gothic protagonist into three separate characters in order to consider the kinds of responses it evokes in the individual. Although Popeye is at first presented as the human incarnation of evil and the simple villain of the novel, Faulkner later qualifies and clarifies his relationship to evil by appending the story of Popeye's past to his account of what that past has prompted him to do to others. On the basis of this additional chapter I feel justified in arguing that Faulkner is as concerned with Popeye's reaction to the evil present in the universe as he is with Horace's and Temple's response to it. However, since this concern is not revealed until just before the novel ends and since Popeye functions throughout the better part of the narrative as the representative of evil, I think it best to discuss how Faulkner modifies the typical gothic descent into the dark reaches of the world by alternating his focus between Temple Drake and Horace Benbow as they confront the "black" world in

which Popeye lives.

When the narrative returns to Temple after the scene in the corncrib, he makes it clear that she has indeed been raped by Popeye. However, this violation seems to produce a curious reaction in her for when he leaves her alone in a gas station, she makes no attempt to escape. In fact, instead of running away from her attacker altogether, she hides behind a barrel to avoid being seen by a boy from school. Temple is really more concerned about maintaining the appearance of virtue than she is about its loss. Faulkner continues to develop her ambivalence once she is locked in her room in the Memphis whorehouse. She is clearly frightened and shamed by all that has happened to her and when a doctor is brought in to examine her, she cries "hopelessly and passively" like the child she really is. Furthermore, when Popeye returns for the first time she "cringes upon herself in as complete an isolation as though she were bound to a church steeple."[73] But at the same time this cringing movement is accompanied by a strange grin which appears to be prompted partially by fear and partially by her old seductive habits. Although Faulkner gives no explanation or interpretation of Temple's behavior, by noting her grin he suggests that she is still in some way fascinated by Popeye's violence and all he represents.

He confirms this rather gruesome suggestion in chapter twenty-three when Temple and Horace meet personally for the first and only time. Although Horace exerts little

effort on his own to find Temple, when Clarence Snopes tells him she is in the Memphis whorehouse he travels to see her in order to persuade her to testify for Lee Goodwin. Faulkner makes it clear that Horace still pursues his dream of realizing truth, honor and justice in this world, for when Miss Reba questions him about why he wants to pester Temple, his reply is as idealistic as ever. "And don't you consider this good reason," he asks, "that a man is being tried for his life for something he didn't do?"[74] Ironically enough, his argument does persuade Miss Reba who, like Goodwin himself, consistently defies society's conventions and still manages to remain civilized, kind, and generous. As Miss Reba says to Temple, she has never double-crossed anybody in her life. Furthermore, we are also told that she is capable of love and affection and truly mourns the loss of Mr. Binford for whom she had cared deeply. In fact, like Ruby and Lee Goodwin, Reba lives outside the conventional boundaries of respectably society and yet her behavior toward other human beings is more moral than that of the ladies of the Jefferson Baptist Church. Faulkner thus delays Horace's encounter with Temple just long enough to develop Reba's character in depth in order to contrast her response to the world in which she lives with the response that same world provokes in Temple Drake.

Because Reba understands the notion of moral obligation and recognizes that Temple ought to testify if she did see the murder, she allows Horace to question her.

Faulkner's description of Temple as she faces Horace for the first time is meant to suggest that she has not abandoned her seductive behavior nor has she been emotionally destroyed by the violence visited upon her. Instead, she actually appears more brazen and forward than she ever has before and the implications of her hostility toward Horace are obvious. It is, furthermore, significant that it is Miss Reba who urges her to testify and to be more modest as well.

> Temple flung the covers back and sat up. Her head was tousled, her face puffed, two spots of rouge on her cheekbones and her mouth painted into a savage cupid's bow. She stared for an instant at Horace with black antagonism, then she looked away.
>
> "I want a drink," she said, pulling up the shoulder of her gown.
>
> "Lie down," Miss Reba said. "You'll catch cold."
>
> "I want another drink," Temple said.
>
> "Lie down and cover up your nekkidness, anyway," Miss Reba said, rising, "you already had three since supper."[75]

That Temple has grown accustomed to life with Popeye is made even clearer when she insists to Horace that she is not afraid to tell anyone what has happened to her. She describes the night of fear she spent at the Old Frenchman place in detail and Horace is appalled to discover that she recounts the experience "with actual pride, a sort of naïve and impersonal vanity, as though she were making it up."[76] However, in her description of the fantasies she engaged in as Popeye approached, we also get a sense of

the terror she suffered as a result of the rape. Faulkner makes it clear that although her behavior may have provoked Popeye's attack, she did not at first desire that attack nor did she acquiesce in it. As Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, prior to her experience in the corncrib she had no understanding of good and evil and believed only in proper and improper behavior. She thought the world could be controlled by her father's money and power and she is horribly shocked to discover she cannot protect herself with her father's position. Temple discovers that evil is a very real force in the world but we are never given the sense that this discovery brings with it disillusionnment and destruction. Rather, the whole experience seems to prompt self-recognition for what she learns as a result of the rape is that she is fascinated by violence and sexual passion and that she too has a capacity for evil. In fact, we are finally told that when Popeye dawdled over her, she repeated to herself "Coward! Coward! Touch me, coward. . . . Do you think I'm going to lie here all night, just waitin on you? . . .Let me tell you what I'll do."[77]

Once Temple has completed her recitation, Faulkner deliberately contrasts her initiation into evil with Horace's reaction to her story. Although Horace does not have to suffer the physical affront Temple was forced to withstand, his response to the knowledge that such things do occur in this world is more despairing than hers and prompted by profound disillusionment. He is deeply shocked

by what he has heard and thinks to himself that it would be better for Temple if she were dead. But the fact that he also thinks he should be dead indicates that in recognizing the evil which has enveloped both Popeye and Temple, Horace admits to himself that if evil is so powerful it must inevitably enshroud him as well. In fact, Faulkner tells us that Horace "thought of her, Popeye, the woman, the child, Goodwin, all put into a single chamber, bare, lethal, immediate, and profound: a single blotting instant between the indignation and the surprise."[78] Horace continues to himself that "that [is] the only solution. Removed, cauterised out of the old and tragic flank of the world. And I, too, now that we're all isolated."[79]

Like Ambrosio the Monk, Horace acknowledges that complete isolation is extremely attractive, because he understands for the first time that if evil really pervades the universe, the only way to escape implication in that evil is to withdraw into a single, bare but also lethal chamber. As Horace reasons to himself, once man admits that there is a logical pattern of evil in the universe he has one of two choices--he can submit to its power as Popeye and Temple have done or ignore its existence by completely withdrawing from the world. In either case, the result is annihilation. Ultimately there is no difference between the despair of Temple's moral and emotional death and "the cooling indignation, the shocked despair" he had "once seen in the eyes of a dead child, and of other dead."

I agree with Olga Vickery's argument that Horace's "imaginative world of moral and aesthetic perfection" is violated and ultimately destroyed by his "one excursion into the world of concrete experience,"[80] for after he leaves Temple, he is overcome with desire for his stepdaughter and physically sickened by the self-knowledge thus thrust upon him. This central chapter finally closes as Horace identifies Little Belle with Temple and both with himself as he imagines himself being raped in the corncrib. In the end, it seems clear to me that Horace Benbow is as much a victim of the destructive power of evil as is Temple herself.

Although this crucial scene between Temple and Horace is followed by several more chapters, I think their fates are already sealed when Horace departs for Jefferson. Indeed, all we are told about Temple after chapter twenty-three serves only to confirm what Faulkner has already led us to suspect. She has, in fact, begun to enjoy her life with Popeye because she desires Red, the surrogate lover Popeye provides to make up for his own impotence. However, her feelings for Red are not love nor even affection but simply desire, for she is willing to jeopardize his life just to have sex with him. When she realizes Popeye intends to kill Red, her bereavement is short-lived and desire takes over. We are told she thinks "it will never be again" and that she sits "in a floating swoon of agonised sorrow and erotic longing, thinking of Red's body."[81] Temple's corruption is complete by the time of

Red's murder for although she does not actually pull the trigger, she is implicated by the fact that she calls Red even after Popeye has forbidden it and has threatened to kill him if she disobeys. In effect, she denies her responsibilities to others and refuses all moral commitments. Later, her perjury at the trial does not come as a complete surprise either to Horace or to the reader. Although we do learn that in spite of his confrontation with Temple and the reactions that encounter produces, Horace continues to believe she will testify if he really needs her, we are also told that Horace learns of Red's murder and that Temple and Popeye have fled. Coupled with his earlier understanding that she would be better off dead, this information prepares him for what he now knows is inevitable. As he walks through "the gothic entrance" of the court, Horace stops just inside the door, sees the "Jew lawyer from Memphis," and says to himself, "I know what I'll find before I find it . . . she will have on a black hat."[82]

Faulkner never makes it entirely clear whether Temple commits perjury because she has been corrupted by her descent into the underworld, or because she fears Popeye, or because her respectable father and brothers force it upon her. However, given the information Faulkner does reveal to us about her behavior toward Red, it is reasonable to conclude, as Cleanth Brooks has done, that "in her lassitude and docility she [is] willing to carry out Popeye's command."[83] By emphasizing once again Temple's painted

mouth shaped into a "savage and perfect bow," Faulkner deliberately stresses her fundamental viciousness and amorality. In the end, this child-woman who is held up by the court as a symbol of pure, white, Southern womanhood unwillingly defiled, mechanically condems Lee Goodwin to death even though she knows he didn't commit any crime. Like the other "civilized" ladies of Jefferson's Baptist church, Temple Drake is neither generous nor kind when it is not in her self-interest to be so, and Faulkner makes it clear that her quest for excitement has led only to her own ruin. Although the Drake family unit is restored to wholeness once again with Temple's return, that reunification does not restore order and harmony to the universe because it is founded on one man's unjustified destruction and because Temple's degradation can never be denied. Thus, Faulkner ends his heroine's story in the traditional way by permitting the family to regroup about her. However, even though the form of the ending is standard, its significance is not, because Temple's relationship to others and to the world is not the same as it would be if Faulkner had chosen to use the gothic form empirically.

In the final analysis, Temple Drake is responsible for the deaths of Red and Lee Goodwin and thus never establishes real connection with others by reaffirming her moral responsibility and commitment to them. We last see her in the midst of a Parisian autumn as alone and isolated as she has ever been, and although accompanied by her father,

they neither speak nor acknowledge each other's presence. Instead, Temple occupies herself with her own reflection in a compact mirror and sees "a face in miniature sullen and discontented and sad." Her future does not extend happily before her as it would were she the typical gothic heroine but seems to promise only emptiness, idleness, and despair. Faulkner's last sentence confirms what Temple's fate appeared to be back in chapter twenty-three. It is, consequently, a complete and devastating reversal of the expected "happily-ever-after" conclusion to this gothic heroine's tale. That evil has conquered Temple Drake and effected her complete destruction is finally undeniable.

> She closed the compact and from beneath her smart new hat she seemed to follow with her eyes the waves of music, to dissolve into the dying brasses, across the pool and the opposite semicircle of trees where at sombre intervals the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused, and on into the sky lying prone and vanquished in the embrace of the season of rain and death.[84]

Before discussing the similar resolutions Faulkner supplies to Horace's and Popeye's stories, I want to point out that in this bleak and hopeless world of Sancturay even those who love and establish commitments to others are violently destroyed. Although we never learn the extent of Red's feelings for Temple Drake, Faulkner does reveal to us through the ludicrous funeral scene that Red was generous with his friends and appreciated by them. Gene the bootlegger donates free liquor for the funeral party and tells any and all who will listen, "I couldn't a loved him no

better if he'd a been my own son."[85] But despite the obvious affection Red inspires in his friends, he is brutally shot in the center of his forehead and his funeral dissolves into a macabre brawl which only subjects his corpse to one more horrible indignity. Red's body tumbles "slowly and sedately" out of its resting place, his cheek is pierced by a floral wire and the wax plug for the hole in his head falls out and is lost. In the end, he is buried with his cap pulled down over his eyes to hide this gruesome reminder of the final violation and corruption all men must suffer.

Lee Goodwin, like Red, also violates society's laws and conventions and yet manages to live a more ethical life than those who profess to respect those laws. He truly loves Ruby and cares for his child. His only request to Horace is that he "promise to get the kid a newspaper grift when he's old enough to make change."[86] Despite his evident worth, however, Lee Goodwin is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Furthermore, he fully understands that he cannot hope to survive this injustice because he knows the judicial system cannot protect him from Popeye even if it does acquit him of Popeye's crime. As he explains to Horace, "Do you think for one minute that man is going to let me walk out of that door and up the street and into that courthouse, after yesterday? What sort of men have you lived with all your life? In a nursery?"[87] Lee is neither as innocent nor as naïve as Horace Benbow and although he is not killed in the way he had anticipated,

he dies because the conventional legal and judicial system cannot protect him from the evil that exists in other men. Subjected to perhaps the most horrible physical violation described in the novel, Lee is then immolated by the pious townspeople of Jefferson who commit this outrage in the name of moral retribution. If the fates suffered by Red and Lee are any indication, then the world of Faulkner's Sanctuary is a world without hope where evil is stronger than good and all things kind, generous and valuable are extinguished by death and destruction in the end. Because the only loverswho appear in Faulkner's gothic novel are violently denied the union they seek, we must conclude that even human connection is powerless to control the evil which permeates the entire universe represented in the radically altered gothic structure of Sanctuary.

Faulkner's treatment of his gothic "hero" reinforces such an interpretation, for although Horace manages to survive his confrontation with evil, he fares little better than Temple Drake, who serves as the agent of his initiation. He is not surprised when Temple suddenly materializes in court to testify against his client but neither does he have any idea of how to combat the amorality she represents. When the district attorney tries to suggest that Temple's rape "is no longer a matter for the hangmen, but for a bonfire of gasoline," Horace can only object on a point of law and, although his legal objection is sustained, that action has no power to prevent Lee's death in just such a bonfire.

Indeed, what Horace discovers as a result of his quest and journey into the real world is that law cannot control the evil which runs rampant throughout the universe. While a law may differentiate between good and bad and moral and immoral behavior, it can provide no guarantee that it will be applied even-handedly. Because essentially evil men such as the Jefferson district attorney (who suborns perjury) are responsible for the enforcement of the law, that law is rendered impotent in its fight to control man's immoral impulses.

In spite of Horace's belief in honor and justice, Lee Goodwin is convicted of a crime he did not commit and condemed to die. Horace can only weep at the loss of his perfect world and when he sees a snow of locust blooms on a driveway resembling the smear of the heaven-tree blossoms, he mutters to himself. "It does last . . . Spring does. You'd almost think there was a purpose to it."[88] What distresses him more than anything else is that Spring promises so much, as if there is a purpose behind its glory, and yet it decays into a viscid smear of dead blossoms on the hard pavement of a driveway. Like Spring, the law also promises a good deal, just as the Church does, and both purport to exist for the benefit of man. However, the perfection they promise is also never realizable in the world of actuality and Horace is emotionally destroyed by the understanding that man must content himself with a good deal less than the ideal if he wishes to remain a member of that world.

Beaten by this merciless awareness, Horace returns to his home in Kinston and to the wife he no longer loves. She does not acknowledge either his departure or his return and when he prompts her with the comment, "I came back," her only response is to ask him if he locked the door.[89] It is important to note that Horace's new-found understanding does not carry with it any suggestions on how he might better carry out his assault on evil. In fact, when he thinks to himself that "summer nights are hard on old people" his response to the problem is the same as it has always been. He replies to himself, "something should be done about it. A law."[90]

Olga Vickery has pointed out that although Horace learns to recognize the fact that "justice and law, truth and belief, dream and reality" will always be separated, "the task of reuniting them, which is the necessary prerequisite to the salvation of man and his society, is beyond his powers."[91] Horace can propose no solution to the problem of evil in this world. In response, we are forced to conclude once again that the novel has no solution to offer to the reader either. Like the traditional gothic heroine, Horace Benbow returns to the family fold and re-establishes physical proximity with the members of his family. However, like Temple Drake, he is unable to restore emotional closeness and through this subtle shift in the resolution of the traditional gothic plot, Faulkner creates an even darker vision than that of The Member of the Wedding. Human

connection is not proposed in Sanctuary as a counter force to evil nor as a means of mitigating the suffering evil causes. Instead, Faulkner suggests that every human relationship is as much a victim of evil as are those ideals, once so dear to Horace Benbow, of truth, honor, and justice.

In the light of what I have said about evil and its central importance to the meaning of Sanctuary, I think it particularly significant that Faulkner does not allow Popeye to remain the cardboard character he is throughout the better part of the novel. By including the last chapter on Popeye's family history he erases the early impression he creates of Popeye as the allegorical incarnation of pure, naked evil. Faulkner gives him humanity finally by showing us the horrible circumstances of his childhood. While Faulkner does not intend to excuse Popeye for his crimes or to absolve him of guilt, he means to suggest that like Red, Lee, Temple, and Horace, Popeye too is a victim of the evil which is an integral part of human existence. The fact that he was born of syphilitic parents and brought up by his mad grandmother does not excuse his murder of Tommy and his rape of Temple, but it explains those acts and permits us to attribute Popeye's malevolence to that force in the universe which is forever responsible for distortion, destruction, and decay. Like the other two most "gothic" characters in the novel, Popeye also tries to return home to establish connection with the only family he has left, but he is arrested in Birmingham for a murder he

did not commit. When the policemen and judge ask him if he wants to hire a lawyer to defend himself, Popeye's only response is "What for?" He already understands, as Lee had, that the law cannot save him and all he wants to do is to "get it over with all at once."[92] He refuses the help of a lawyer-friend from Memphis and ignores the aid offered by the minister; in the end, all there is left to life for Popeye is the deliberate placing of cigarette stubs in carefully marked-off spaces. This meaningless act, however, is no more meaningless than the lives Temple and Horace will lead. As a result, we must finally conclude that Faulkner, at least in this novel means to say that no matter what response to evil man is able to devise the result is always the same--for evil is ultimately more powerful than good and is, therefore, the controlling principle in the universe.

In speaking of Sanctuary's indebtedness to the English gothic novel, after we have noted Faulkner's creative use of the traditional plot structures and characters and have acknowledged his concern with standard gothic themes, we should also note his establishment of the typical gothic contract between reader and text. Cleanth Brooks has remarked that André Malraux once compared Sanctuary to a detective novel,[93] a credible comparison since there is a clear similarity between the way information is released to the reader of a gothic text and the way it is given to the reader of a detective novel. Faulkner is a master at

building suspense because he can so successfully describe scenes of action without providing the details necessary to attribute a particular significance to those events. For example, by gradually revealing the details of Popeye's impotence, Faulkner is able to create a sense of foreboding and horror about Temple's rape as well as conjectures about the extent of Popeye's viciousness. When a description of that rape is finally given, because our expectations have been raised to such a feverish pitch, the horror and disgust we feel about her violation with a corncob is almost unbearably intensified. By keeping us in a state of semi-ignorance through the narrative, Faulkner draws a pall of foreboding and dread over the entire text so that each discovery only serves to confirm what we feared but hoped could never occur. Like other gothic novelists, William Faulkner suggests, implies, and alludes to unspeakable horrors. However, unlike most of his predecessors Faulkner does not stop at suggestion, implication, and allusion, but allows the seeds he plants to come to fruition. As a result, we realize our worst fears. The shock thus produced because we do not expect that final surprise is central to the experience of reading Sanctuary and, it seems to me, Faulkner's penultimate goal.

Sacntuary is, in short, an extraordinarily bitter novel. Much of its power to shock derives from Faulkner's ability to echo gothic conventions and thus to establish certain expectations which he then deliberately demolishes.

Although I suspect it is possible to read and interpret Temple Drake's story without making reference to the gothic tradition, I think her fate takes on added depth and significance when we recognize the similarity between her situation and that of the typical gothic heroine. Temple's destruction is, in itself, frightening, but that destruction appears even more terrible when we realize that it is meant to be contrasted with the happier fates of Isabella, Agnes, and Emily St. Aubert. What this contrast does, then, is to place an even greater emphasis on the hoeplessness of man's condition in the contemporary world. If the recognition that modern man's existence is characterized by an impossible ambiguity is alone distressing, then that realization can cause even greater sadness when it is contrasted with the picture of a more comforting world (presented in earlier gothics) where evil is clearly distinguishable from good and certain kinds of behavior can be recommended as the means to a relatively happy life.

While the contemporary, surface significance of the structures used in Sanctuary is immediately available to any serious reader of the text, that significance is enriched by the past history which those structures evoke as part of the sedimented meaning clinging to them--a meaning which is itself the result of the way the structures have previously been used. For example, Faulkner's initial presentation of Popeye evokes disgust and horror in the reader just as the eighteenth century portrayal of a gothic villain

does. However, Faulkner intensifies that disgust and horror with his wholly unexpected suggestion that Popeye too must be seen as a helpless victim of evil. By first presenting Popeye as a clear-cut villain, Faulkner makes an implicit reference to the world of the eighteenth-century gothic in which such a villain appeared. Then, by "deforming" that presentation with atypical details and qualifications, he not only presents the picture of a new world but also emphasizes the distance which separates the two. It is, then, this distance which intensifies the revulsion experienced by the reader. The fact that the separation between the two worlds cannot be denied or overcome leads to the despair and sense of hopelessness produced by an "informed" reading of the text. Sanctuary must, therefore, be read as a gothic novel if the full force of its impact is to be felt and the full measure of its significance is to be understood.

The Question of the Literary Continuum and Borderline Cases

The texts I have selected for analysis in this case study seem to belong at opposite ends of the literary continuum proposed in the third chapter. It is fairly easy to see, for instance, that Phyllis Whitney's "romantic novels of suspense" are formulaic uses of the genre created in England in the late eighteenth century. On the other hand, it is equally obvious that beneath the substantive

differences of The Member of the Wedding and Sancturay lies a pattern of relationships among crucial actants and actions similar to that structure which serves as the skeleton of The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk and Melmoth the Wanderer. However, if my notion of the literary continuum is truly descriptive of the range of differences among literary texts, it would seem likely, though not necessarily certain, that I would also be able to identify texts which straddle an imaginative line between empirical and creative use of the gothic genre. This, however, has not proved to be the case at least in that I have found very few novels to place between Whitney's The Golden Unicorn and McCullers' The Member of the Wedding.

While I have, certainly, discovered texts such as André Norton's Velvet Shadows and Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca which modify specific characteristics of the gothic characters, those modifications do not alter the essential or functional relationships among characters and events and thus do not "qualify" as meaningful deformations of the form. For instance, although André Norton develops her gothic heroine in more depth than Phyllis Whitney does, she does not alter that heroine's role as questor nor does she prevent her from solving the necessary crime and joining the hero at the end. As a result, her novel is structurally identical to The Golden Unicorn and Spindrift just as its themes are a mirror image of the themes which dominate those two novels. Similarly, although Daphne DuMaurier spends

considerable time drawing a complex picture of the "villain" in Rebecca, that is, of Rebecca herself, her real concern is still with the narrator and Max de Winter and their ability to overcome Max's victimization by evil with love. Although we learn Max, the hero, actually did commit the crime which is at the center of the novel, we also discover that he was goaded into it by the cruel and self-centered Rebecca who wanted only to hurt him. As a result, despite these changes in standard character presentation, DuMaurier clearly separates the evil from the good and stresses the ameliorating effects of human love and connection. Once again, the significance of her novel is fundamentally no different from that of the novels written by Phyllis Whitney. Still, content changes in the individuals who fill standard gothic character roles are changes nonetheless and they thus serve as a means of distinguishing Norton's and DuMaurier's novels from those more formulaic works of Whitney, Norah Lofts, Victoria Holt, and Mary Stewart. Therefore, while I would argue that Velvet Shadows and Rebecca are closely related to The Golden Unicorn and Spindrift, I would also maintain that the variations they include within the standard formula, while minor and of relatively slight significance, set them apart from Whitney's novels and thus place them at least a little closer to the more radical deformations of Carson McCullers and William Faulkner.

By the same token, I think it obvious that The Member

of the Wedding is closer to the early gothic novels in structure and significance than is Faulkner's Sanctuary. Indeed, when McCullers' novel is read carefully with reference to such works as Otranto, Udolpho, and Melmoth, it becomes clear that this contemporary work is, in fact, a modern version of the gothic quest in which the goal is once again human connection. However, because McCullers deliberately modifies the direction of Frankie's search, she subtly alters the nature of the relationship between her gothic heroine and the universe, thus changing the final outcome of Frankie's odyssey. Because her journey echoes the journey into darkness undertaken by Isabella, Emily St. Aubert, and Agnes, the qualified nature of her success is implicitly contrasted with the happier, more complete resolution of difficulties contained in the stories of these earlier heroines. As a result, McCullers is able to stress the limitations inherent in communication and connection even though she permits Frankie some measure of growth and friendship with another at the end. Faulkner's novel, however, is even further removed from its progenitors by virtue of its radical reversal of the typical gothic "return from the underworld" and by its wholesale rejection of any form of comforting resolution. In Sanctuary, in fact, the evil which merely threatened the world of the eighteenth century gothic novel, now reigns triumphant. Furthermore, because Faulkner can suggest no sure way to differentiate this force from that which is not

evil, Sanctuary itself asserts that the universe is controlled by evil and that while those who commit foul deeds may sometimes be punished, such punishment has no real effect in the end on that malignant force which is an integral part of the universe.

In generalizing, therefore, about my examination of these and other contemporary gothic novels, I would argue that while no two novels are ever completely identical, they do tend to separate themselves into two rather large groups clustered around either end of the theoretical literary continuum. I have, in fact, discovered a large number of novels closely related to each other and to my abstract notion of "the gothic novel," at least with respect to the ways in which they use traditional gothic characters, confrontations, and resolutions. On the other hand, I have also discovered a good many works which tend to play with those same conventions, reject the standard gothic resolution, and finally tend to darken the typical gothic vision. It seems necessary, therefore, to account for this peculiar polar distribution if we are to retain the notion of the continuum as it is introduced in this study.

Consequently, I would like to point out that the "cluster-effect" noted here is the direct result of the fact that I have examined the texts in question with respect to only one set of literary conventions, specifically with respect to those relating to the genre of the gothic novel. I have not, therefore, explored the ways

in which these texts use the English language itself and thus have not made any attempt to detect differences in their dependence on purely linguistic competence. Neither, however, have I explored the ways in which these works adhere or do not adhere to those standard rules and conventions governing creation of the novel in general. As a result, I have been forced to group works such as Rebecca and Velvet Shadows with works such as The Golden Unicorn and Spindrift when they may actually be differentiated from each other by variations in the way they use language to create a world. Furthermore, I have been prompted to link The Member of the Wedding and Sanctuary more closely perhaps than they would be were we to consider the entire range of literary conventions governing narrative technique, the presentation of literary time, and creation of a point of view. I suspect, in short, that had I the space and time to examine all contemporary novels derived from the eighteenth century gothic romance in conjunction with a much broader range of conventions governing textual formation as well as in conjunction with James Edie's first three levels of meaning, that is, with respect to the immanent, transcendent and syntactic levels of significance, I would find much greater variation among the novels and they would then appear to be distributed more liberally across the entire range of the proposed literary continuum.

Therefore, because I have had to circumscribe the scope of my investigation by limiting my case study to an

exploration of the changes made by specific literary texts in a single set of generic conventions, a great deal of work still remains to be done before we can say with any certainty that popular texts are indeed structurally and functionally different from elite texts and that they are different in definite, identifiable ways. For instance, if we wish to assert categorically that any text which uses language or literary conventions conservatively by refusing to operate outside reader expectations should not be classed as art or elite literature, then we ought to first demonstrate empirically that popular novels typically depend on clichéd phrases and wholly familiar types of description just as they depend on formulaic use of certain generic structures.

Furthermore, we ought to show that those works we call high art or "Literature" tend to use language creatively by founding new metaphors and by formulating new meaning just as they say new things by deforming generic conventions. Such a demonstration could easily be carried out with respect to the gothic novel for it seems to me the language used in the popular gothic romance bears a marked and peculiar resemblance to the language used in "ladies' magazines" such as Family Circle, Woman's Day, and The Ladies' Home Journal. It would be possible, therefore, to come to some conclusions about the familiarity of the language used in the popular gothic by studying the frequency of appearance of certain phrases and descriptions of the gothic

novels in the women's magazines previously mentioned. One might then contrast the ready availability of this language with that used by McCullers, Faulkner, Melville, or O'Connor to detect whether their novels actually tend to renew the language and to create meanings for the first time by using familiar words in wholly unfamiliar and unexpected contexts. Of course, this would have to be done with the help of a good historical dictionary for we would need to know when the meaning of a word changed in order to assert that a particular literary text had directly influenced that change and augmented the significance associated with the sign in question.

While this study would alone be a huge undertaking, it needs to be conducted not only on gothic novels but on other kinds of novels and literary genres as well in order to determine whether popular literary forms generally differ from elite forms by virtue of their conservative use both of language and of the specific conventions governing construction of the particular generic types which they exemplify. If such analysis can then be coupled with a broad examination of the ways in which popular texts use the conventions dictating the formation of the novel, the poem, or the drama in general, I think we will be able to say with some conviction that popular texts appear less complex than elite texts not because they are less successful or artistic but because they use their materials conservatively and in such a way that their meaning is readily available to almost

any reader.

In other words, if we can demonstrate that formulaic texts composed of familiar language never tamper with a basic literary form and thus never challenge our conceptions of the gothic, the western, or the detective story, our standard ways of describing reality, or our notions of the novel, the play, or the poem, then I think we will be justified in stating that certain texts must not be dismissed simply because they are formulaic and easily understandable. It will be possible to maintain that they appear so <u>because</u> it is their deliberate intention and necessary function to fulfill reader expectations and thus to remain comprehensible to the normal range of interpretive or meaning-giving procedures. To recognize, however, that certain texts can and do intend to employ linguistic and literary conventions conservatively, is to admit at the same time that such conventions can also be ignored and defied. Therefore, I think it will be necessary to acknowledge that another large group of texts must be differentiated from this first group by virtue of the refusal of some works to respect reader expectations and by their resistance to standard interpretive operations.

However, even if we demonstrate empirically that the basic distinction between conservative and creative use of linguistic and literary conventions is observable at all levels, that is, in the use of language, in the employment of specific generic conventions, and in the use of general

rules governing construction of a broad literary form, because we have acknowledged the importance of competence and the conventions of which it is composed to the problem of text classification, we must admit that there can be infinite variation in the extent of compliance with the specific conventions in question just as their can be infinite variation in the extent to which they are defied. Therefore, it will be essential to acknowledge that texts do not in reality fall into two entirely separate categories defined by exactly opposite uses of certain requisite materials and conventions. We will simply have to admit that the meaning of all literary texts is dependent on a reader's linguistic and literary competence and that each text uses the conventions and rules of that combined competence in a wholly unique way.

In the end, however, should we wish to work out an abstract scheme for convenient classification and thus attempt to group texts according to the general nature of their use of the linguistic and literary systems, we must first describe both systems in detail before we can identify what constitutes a creative or an empirical use of either. To accomplish this task, it will be necessary to identify what sort of person is reading or writing the texts and to describe the exact nature of the linguistic and literary competence he uses to make sense of them. Then, in the process of explicitly formulating the conventions, rules, and expectations which are the substance of

that competence, assuming the competence itself to be shared by others, we will simultaneously provide a picture of the potential linguistic and literary systems put to actual use in individual texts. Once we have a relatively complex understanding of the scope of the linguistic and literary systems as they exist at a given moment, it will be possible to distinguish those texts which use elements of both systems empirically from those which defy conventions and use elements of both creatively in order to extend the possibilities for signification contained within them. Only at that time will it be possible to describe two new categories designed to take the place of those discredited in chapter one because of their inability to discriminate among texts on the basis of consistent criteria. At that point, instead of identifying a given literary text as a "popular" novel or as a work of mass entertainment, we will be able to classify it as a Conservative work because it adheres to most conventions of the linguistic and literary systems. Furthermore, in place of classifying some other text as a work of "Art" or as "Literature," we will be able to identify it as a Creative work because it defies either linguistic or literary conventions. In the event that these suggested studies can be carried out and that both the linguistic and literary systems can be mapped, we will finally possess a new method for determining the structure and function of particular texts as well as a new scheme of classification for discriminating among them.

NOTES

[1]"How to Identify, Display and Sell the Gothic," Lansing, Michigan: Suits News Co.

[2]Pam Proctor, "Phyllis Whitney: She Writes Best Sellers the Old-Fashioned Way," Parade, November 2, 1975, p. 20.

[3]Phyllis Whitney, "Writing the Gothic Novel," The Writer vol. 80, no. 2 (February, 1967), pp. 9-13, 42-43.

[4]Whitney, "Writing," p. 9.

[5]Whitney, "Writing," p. 10, (emphasis added).

[6]Whitney, "Writing," p. 10.

[7]Proctor, "Whitney," p. 20.

[8]Whitney, "Writing," p. 12.

[9]Whitney, "Writing," p. 12.

[10]Whitney, "Writing," p. 13.

[11]Whitney, "Writing," p. 13.

[12]Whitney, "Writing," p. 13.

[13]Whitney, "Writing," p. 43.

[14]Whitney, "Writing," p. 43.

[15]Phyllis Whitney, The Golden Unicorn (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1976), p. 38.

[16]Whitney, Unicorn, p. 37.

[17]Phyllis Whitney, Spindrift (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1975), p. 29.

[18]Whitney, Spindrift, p. 114.

[19]I use the feminine pronoun because those gothic novels which "allow" the protagonist to return to the world

are always the story of a female heroine. I have equated these women with the villain-heroes of novels such as The Monk and Melmoth because their initial position of isolation in the story is identical and because they are confronted by the same problem as the narrative progresses. Although their fates are resolved differently, the meaning of the resolution is the same in each case. The villain-hero is destroyed because he attempts to set himself outside or above human social institutions, while his counterpart in the female-centered gothic is rewarded with her true love because she refuses the freedom of total isolation.

[20]Irving Malin, New American Gothic (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962).

[21]William Van O'Connor, The Grotesque: An American Genre (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962).

[22]Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding, Bantam Pathfinder Editions (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 1.

[23]McCullers, Wedding, p. 2.

[24]McCullers, Wedding, p. 4.

[25]McCullers, Wedding, p. 6.

[26]McCullers, Wedding, p. 7.

[27]McCullers, Wedding, p. 15.

[28]McCullers, Wedding, p. 22.

[29]McCullers, Wedding, p. 25.

[30]McCullers, Wedding, p. 39.

[31]McCullers, Wedding, p. 7.

[32]McCullers, Wedding, p. 38.

[33]McCullers, Wedding, p. 44.

[34]McCullers, Wedding, p. 50.

[35]McCullers, Wedding, p. 50.

[36]McCullers, Wedding, p. 55.

[37]McCullers, Wedding, p. 65.

[38]McCullers, Wedding, p. 67.

[39]McCullers, Wedding, p. 109.

[40]McCullers, Wedding, p. 110.

[41]McCullers, Wedding, p. 112.

[42]McCullers, Wedding, p. 113.

[43]McCullers, Wedding, p. 114-115.

[44]McCullers, Wedding, p. 115.

[45]McCullers, Wedding, p. 129.

[46]McCullers, Wedding, p. 130.

[47]McCullers, Wedding, p. 133.

[48]McCullers, Wedding, p. 135.

[49]McCullers, Wedding, p. 138.

[50]McCullers, Wedding, p. 139.

[51]McCullers, Wedding, p. 140.

[52]McCullers, Wedding, p. 146.

[53]McCullers, Wedding, p. 147.

[54]McCullers, Wedding, pp. 148-149.

[55]McCullers, Wedding, p. 151.

[56]McCullers, Wedding, p. 152.

[57]Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 191.

[58]William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Vintage Books, 1931), p. 5.

[59]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 29.

[60]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 1.

[61]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 38.

[62]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 40.

[63]Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 107.

[64]Faulkner, Sanctuary, pp. 77-78.

[65]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 102.

[66]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 114.

[67]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 122.

[68]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 130.

[69]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 130.

[70]Faulkner, Sanctuary, pp. 123-124.

[71]Faulkner, Sanctuary, pp. 127-128.

[72]Vickery, Faulkner, p. 112.

[73]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 154.

[74]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 204.

[75]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 207.

[76]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 209.

[77]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 212.

[78]Faulkner, Sanctuary, pp. 213-214.

[79]Faulkner, Sanctuary. p. 214.

[80]Vickery, Faulkner, p. 114.

[81]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 230.

[82]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 274.

[83]Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale Universtiy Press, 1963), p. 126.

[84]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 309.

[85]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 239.

[86]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 265.

[87]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 271.

[88]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 285.

[89]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 292.

[90]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 292.

[91]Vickery, Faulkner, p. 114.

[92]Faulkner, Sanctuary, p. 303.

[93]Brooks, Faulkner, p. 118.

CHAPTER VI

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT NON-LITERARY READING PATTERNS, POPULAR LITERATURE, AND AESTHETIC ANALYSIS

All I have said about the literary continuum and the classification scheme proposed in the last chapter has been based on certain premises which must be accepted if we wish to use these notions in our attempt to understand and judge "popular" texts. In placing popular novels on the same continuum with "great works of art," I am assuming that such texts are fundamentally similar to elite works and that they can be read in the same way, using the same procedures we employ to make meaning out of "literary" works. As I pointed out early in chapter four, I have deliberately ignored the disturbing question of the differences between literary and non-literary texts and defined a literary work as any written text which can be read as literature using the strategies and procedures of a specifically "literary" competence. Furthermore, I have assumed that we can read formula novels as literature, without automatically disparaging them as less successful or aesthetically pleasing than their elite counterparts, by recognizing that such works are attempting goals which, though different from those of an elite work, are yet equally valuable. By accepting these decisions as logical postulates, I have been able to work out the concept of a single, unbroken

literary continuum, composed of texts which can be read in a similar way even though their intentions may vary widely and they may appear structurally and functionally dissimilar.

Specifically, then, I have argued throughout that popular gothic novels can be read as we would read any work of literature, because such works signify or mean in a manner fundamentally similar to that of a literary work of art. That is to say, I have assumed all gothic texts, whether traditionally labelled "popular" or "elite," are composed of certain necessary materials combined in a structure peculiar to the gothic in particular and to the novel in general. Because the combinations produced in actual texts may vary widely within the necessary skeletal framework, the texts in question can be so unlike each other as to appear to be wholly different in kind. That this is not the case, however, has been demonstrated in chapter five. Consequently, it is unnecessary to dwell on my principal conviction that while "popular" and "elite" novels may appear to be entirely different sorts of texts, they are actually composed of the same raw materials, that is, of linguistic and literary units which are themselves joined together by an author into certain irreducible linguistic and literary strings. Because these texts are wrought of the same basic substance, and forged into a form which tends to be altered in certain limited ways, they can be encountered in a similar manner and made to signify by using identical procedures.

To say, however, that "popular" novels can be deliberately and consciously read as literature is not to say that such texts can only be read in that particular way. I suspect, for example, that many women who read popular gothics would object to my assertion that the gothic story possesses a thematic significance beyond that of the plot itself. Such readers do not consciously pick up a popular gothic because the narrative explores the relationship between the individual and social institutions, but because the text tells a story that is somehow pleasing to them. While the thematic significance of the gothic's flirtation with rape, for example, always exists as latent meaning in the text, it can only be fully actualized for that reader who knows how to apply the semic code to the necessary lexias, thereby discovering that larger sense associated with them. If the typical reader of popular gothics has not been formally introduced to the literary system and thus has not learned how to recuperate an object or event symbolically or thematically, then those objects and events peculiar to the gothic novel appear to possess nothing more for him than the significance they would ordinarily contain as a house, storm, or darkly complected male. Furthermore, although all readers must possess some ability to operate the semic code in order to identify character traits and to understand the personalities of the individuals involved in the narrative, I suspect that many readers of popular novels do not extend semic comprehension much beyond those descriptions which explicitly state

"He was dark and brooding," "She was kind and generous," or "He was almost entirely without good points."

What I am suggesting here is that even though popular novels are composed of those same linguistic and textual units which are the foundation of all great literary works of art, it is possible that both kinds of novels may also be read, understood, and enjoyed by people who either do not possess an extensive literary competence or who do not choose to use that which they do possess. To make this suggestion, however, is to raise that same question I begged earlier--about the exact composition of literary competence--by relying on Roland Barthes' description of the procedures he uses to make a literary text signify. Before we can say that certain readers do not rely on an exclusively "literary" competence when they encounter popular novels, we must have a better understanding of what that literary competence entails; how it goes beyond a purely linguistic competence; and whether the procedures of which it is composed are different from those we use to understand other forms of written discourse such as newspaper articles, historical descriptions, and scientific treatises. I suspect that many of the objections raised by popular culture devotees to the literary analysis of popular novels can be explained by the fact that some of them do not actually read those novels in the same way a literary analyst does. To assert, however, that they do not read in a certain way is a far cry from providing a definitive description of the manner in which they do read. It is this latter task to

which I wish to direct my attention.

While I have formulated a hypothesis and can make a few suggestions, those suggestions have not yet been verified since I have not conducted an empirical study of the typical audience of the gothic novel nor have I made any attempt to determine what procedures that audience uses to make sense of the words printed on the page. Furthermore, because I have not written that complete poetics called for by Jonathan Culler, my conception of literary competence is limited to an elaboration of the codes proposed and described by Roland Barthes. Although this in no way negates the worth of my hypothesis, it has affected the way I think of the entire problem of reading words clustered together in units larger than sentences.

As a result, my conception of the procedures traditionally used in the reading of a popular novel is actually a modified or limited version of Barthes' notion of the literary codes. I point this out here only to caution the reader that the competence commonly employed in reading texts published for mass entertainment may be more closely related to the procedures we follow in reading non-fictional forms of discourse than those we use to read literary fiction, assuming, of course, that something broader than a purely linguistic competence is necessary to the deciphering of any unit significantly larger than the sentence. But again, to make this comparison, we need a theory and description of the procedures needed to make sense of non-fictional texts. Since

neither the theory nor the description is yet available, and because the formulation of them is not the subject of this paper, I have had to consider the problem of the popular text-reader from the literary perspective.

I suspect, first of all, that every reader who can derive sense from strings of sentences and discover a fictional "story" told through those strings understands implicitly how to operate the proairetic and hermeneutic codes described by Roland Barthes. If, indeed, the reader of popular novels could not isolate crucial details and events, he could not construct a linear plot sequence. Without that ability, I doubt whether such a reader could see more than a random conglomeration of sense-less sentences in any text. Since nearly every popular gothic novel is printed with a cover boasting a two or three sentence summary of the story-line, I think we can safely conclude that the typical reader of such novels knows how to construct a plot in the process of reading and that he may very well read the gothic novel primarily because he knows it will contain that plot once he has approached it with the proairetic code.

The cover of the gothic novel also suggests that the reader understands the hermeneutic code, for the pictorial shorthand of the cover portrait poses a mystery to which it does not give the solution. The picture of a terrified young woman fleeing from a dark and dilapidated mansion into a stormy night immediately challenges the reader to discover the cause of her fear and the reason for her flight. The

cover thus suggests that the typical gothic reader is able to make sense of details which pose a problem or state an enigma, and that he knows how to hold those details in suspension while he searches for the necessary solution. Consequently, I think some of the most prominent characteristics of the gothic novels suggest that readers of popular texts operate at least with implicit knowledge of the two codes governing plot construction, that is, with an ability to use the procedures and strategies of the proairetic and hermeneutic codes.

Internal evidence contained in the gothic novel also implies that the referential code is a standard possession of the typical reader of the genre. In examining popular versions of the contemporary form, for instance, I have found not only general references to familiar objects and proverbs which exist in the "real" world, but also a peculiar sort of descriptive phrasing which seems to refer to a specific realm or sub-culture contained within that world. I am speaking here of such phrases and sentences as "I plucked at the sleeves of my blue cashmere," "the slit in her pale jade satin showing a leg that was still shapely," "the easy chair wore a muted pattern of green vines and tiny red flowers on a cream background," and finally, "Theodora Moreland lay on her back on the green carpet beyond the bed, her legs sprawled beneath the hem of her citron-yellow robe, and blood seeping from a wound on her forehead."[1] These descriptions seem incongruous particularly if we are expecting the language of

such novels to sound like the language we use in every-day conversation or that we encounter in other literary texts. Obviously, it resembles neither.

However, this language is directly related to that of fashion and home-decorating magazines where a simple dress is always a "teal-blue chiffon" and an ordinary tablecloth is transformed into "mocha-hued linen."[2] Descriptions such as these have little bearing on the development of the story, but because they appear so ubiquitously throughout the novels, we cannot avoid the conclusion that these special referential lexias serve some crucial purpose for the reader. What they do, in fact, is to tell her that the world of the gothic novel is contiguous with the very world she inhabits and with the magazines she reads. Such reassurance, then, tends to reinforce her identification with the heroine and permits her to apply the solutions and lessons of the heroine's story to the situations of her own life.

Whether the typical reader of the popular gothic ever does relate the implications of the story to her own predicament is, however, open to debate. Furthermore, if we could answer this question we would be able to state categorically whether such a reader uses Barthes' semic and symbolic codes to construct textual meanings larger than the surface significance of plot developments and simple descriptions. Again, although I suspect a typical reader of gothics would accuse me of having read too much meaning into a story intended only as entertainment, I also suspect that the thematic significance

I have detected as the integral companion of the plot is at least subconsciously understood and appreciated by her. To say, however, that the heroine's love-hate response to the hero is actually an exploration of the contemporary woman's fear of rape is not necessarily to say that such a reader possesses the ability to isolate the significance of this particular plot development from the undifferentiated fabric of her global, existential awareness or that she knows how to "construct" that meaning for consciousness. I am inclined to think, therefore, that many readers of popular novels do not read semically, consciously constructing thematic interpretations--either because they do not possess the competence required to perform such an operation, or because they choose not to use the applicable portions of the competence they do possess.

To all those faithful followers of popular literature who so vociferously object to thematic analysis of popular novels, I would respond that while such novels may be read using only the hermeneutic, proairetic, and referential codes, nothing contained in the novels themselves prevents us from using the semic code to unlock whatever additional significance they may contain even if that additional significance never comes close to the symbolic and thematic complexity of creative works. I would also point out that because "literary" readings based on the use of this code can and do produce consistent and rewarding interpretations of such texts, the texts can be said to contain that significance as an

invisible companion of the visible words employed.

However, I would also caution the literary analyst that just because that significance is "there" and can be objectified in the process of reading, this does not mean that everyone is obliged to read in that way in order to feel the full impact of the text in question. Because such a reader cannot or deliberately chooses not to approach a text as a thematic statement about some aspect of the human condition, her inability or her refusal to read consciously in this way does not necessarily prevent her from perceiving and understanding themes at some preconscious, inarticulate level of awareness. In a case involving this sort of unconscious "knowing," the novel's impact on the total body-subject may be the same as it is on another body-subject who is additionally able to give conscious existence to both that impact and its cause. As a result, although my conception of the popular gothic novel, constructed with the help of a literary competence, may sound both foreign and pretentious to a typical reader of such novels, I suspect that if such a reader possessed the desire and the ability to articulate all that she absorbed in the process of reading, her consciously objectified conception of the text would not then seem so different from mine.

This theory of the strategies and procedures used by the typical reader of popular literature raises some immediate and very important questions about the relative merits of this reading pattern and that other pattern informed by literary competence which I followed throughout chapters

four and five. If the primary difference between these two sets of procedures is only that of levels of awareness, might we not argue that it should be the goal of every reader to give objective existence to all she knows at the preconscious level of existence and thus to bring her total "bodily" comprehension of a text to conscious awareness? This is obviously an extraordinarily difficult question. Furthermore, in proposing an answer to it, we cannot avoid also making implicit suggestions about the goals of education, the nature of entertainment and enjoyment, and ultimately about the purpose behind individual existence. While this may sound ridiculous, I don't think it is, for to answer the question about how someone ought to read, we must first make a value judgment which has broad implications for areas other than reading.

If I argue, for instance, that every reader should strive for total awareness and complete conscious comprehension of all that is contained in a text, and that he should thus be taught all those procedures which might produce such articulation, I am first assuming that conscious understanding is somehow better than tacit, preconscious comprehension. While there is, in itself, nothing wrong with such an assumption, we must acknowledge that the assumption is not an a priori given, but rather a qualitative value judgment based on criteria extrinsic to the texts themselves. In other words, there is nothing contained within a literary text which tells us how we must or should read it. Although such

a text contains certain possibilities which can only be realized in a specific way, it does not impose strictures on us nor require us to bring what is only potentially contained within it to actual existence. The decision to carry out such a task is just that--a decision--and can only be based on the prior belief that it is generally our duty or to our advantage to bring what we primordially know and only subconsciously perceive to the level of conscious, reflective existence. While I personally believe that to attempt to understand consciously all that we possibly can about the nature of our insertion in the world is both a duty and a pleasure that is beneficial to us, I also see the need for entertainment, enjoyment, and play. Furthermore, I suspect that when most people read popular literature, they are actually engaging in a task more closely related to play than to the cognitive articulation and comprehension of traditional literary analysis.

In developing his theories about cognitive development in children, Jean Piaget has formulated a coordinate notion of play which can be directly adapted for our purposes here. "Unlike objective thought," he writes, "which seeks to adapt itself to the requirements of objective reality, imaginative play is a symbolic transposition which subjects things to the child's activity without rules or limitations." He continues that "it is therefore almost pure assimilation, i.e. thought polarized by preoccupation with individual satisfaction. Since it is a mere expansion of tendencies, it freely

assimilates things to one another and everything to the ego."[3] Piaget argues further that play is not an activity engaged in because it produces learning and conscious comprehension, but rather an activity undertaken because it enables the child to impose actions and behavior he already "knows" on any and everything in his environment. Play, Piaget concludes, is a "happy display of known actions."[4]

If we recall that popular forms of expression are characterized by their conservative use of linguistic and literary materials, as well as by their tendency to remain within the limits of the competence generally used by their readers, I think the connection between nonanalytic reading of such forms and childlike play becomes evident. Because I have argued that most readers of contemporary popular gothics do not consciously construct thematic interpretations of the texts, it is possible to maintain that even though evil is dealt with in the novels, and its appearance may be understood and integrated at the preconscious level of existence, it is never permitted to prove really troublesome to the reader because it is not brought to explicit awareness as a symbol of his world in this particular reading process. As a result, all that might challenge the individual ego of the reader is blocked in the subconscious, if it is realized at all. Furthermore, the process of encountering the text is made even more pleasurable because the words of which the story is fabricated appear to give way easily before the meaning-giving strategies and procedures the reader brings

to it. This happens because the author had to use language and literary forms in familiar ways in order to create an empirical or "popular" text in the first place. Consequently, such texts contain very little which cannot be understood easily and automatically. To read an empirical or popular text is, therefore, to apply familiar procedures to a phenomenon and to have the resulting interaction confirm the efficacy and power of those very procedures employed.

In essence, then, it is the nature of the texts themselves which guarantees this pleasurable, ego-gratifying experience. Whether we construct the meaning of such works relying only on the proairetic, hermeneutic, and referential codes, or even if we also apply the semic code to them, by definition, such texts will contain almost nothing that could possibly contradict our most basic assumptions about the world or our most fundamental ways of making meaning of its phenomena. To read them, then, is to happily display certain known actions or, as Roland Barthes says of the text of culture, to engage in a "comfortable" practice of reading.[5] The empirical text, therefore, pleases its reader in a fundamental way because it permits him the experience of confronting a strange phenomenon and succeeding rather easily in discerning and understanding its significance. Its goal, aside from using the linguistic and literary systems conservatively, is to please its reader, to underscore what he already knows about his culture, and to confirm the power of the procedures he uses to make sense of that culture. The empirical text is,

in short, designed to conserve and to delight. In reading it, therefore, the individual can be said to "play" because he assimilates or subjects something outside himself to that knowledge and ability he already possesses.

In returning to the question of whether all readers ought to approach popular forms of expression as literature, thus attempting to bring everything "contained" in the text including themes stated implicitly to conscious existence, I would argue that since the basic role of such works is that of objects designed for play, when and if "literary" construction destroys that play, it should not be undertaken. Whether it accomplishes this destruction however will, of course, depend on who the reader is, what sort of competence she possesses, and what she already believes about her world. If, for example, in bringing to the level of awareness her tacit understanding that one of the underlying concerns of the gothic novel is the potential threat to the self posed by physical connection with a man, that reader must also recognize that she is frightened of her own husband, then conscious articulation of that theme will only upset the balance between fear and need that she has been able to work out in her daily life.

Reading "literarily" for this individual, then, is not play but an activity closer to learning, education, and cognitive understanding. If, however, another reader already understands that this fear of the "Other" is an inevitable part of all human relationships, then the literary activity

of constructing this thematic interpretation continues to be play for her because the activity itself is familiar, because it works, and because she discovers nothing she did not already know. In this case, literary reading remains a form of play because of the conservative, empirical character of the text itself.

In both cases, it is because the author has initially used linguistic and literary materials conservatively that the empirical text permits its reader--whether he be literary or not--to approach that text using familiar procedures, knowing full well that the encounter will be a "safe" one for him. Indeed, it will be safe primarily because there is nothing contained in such texts to force him to see that which he does not wish to see just as there is nothing in them to cause him to forge new procedures for giving order to that which he does perceive. Thus, whether it be read with the aid of a literary competence or with the help of procedures less rigorous than that, the empirical text can hardly upset the reader's balance because it always remains within his culture and thus within the limits of what he already understands and knows how to do as a member of that culture. The empirical text, or "popular literature," if you will, is therefore necessary to human endeavor not only because it tends to reinforce the linguistic and literary systems out of which it created, but also because it provides some individuals, though not, certainly, all, with the opportunity to engage in play by allowing them to exercise their own powers and by

enabling them to feel the incomparable satisfaction of imposing the order they desire on unfamiliar phenomena.

In exploring the analogy between language and literature, and in proposing the literary continuum, my primary purpose has been to describe and document both the similarities and basic differences exhibited by empirical and creative texts. However, I also wish to point out that if we accept the idea that empirical texts are deliberately constructed the way they are because they are meant to function as objects designed for play, then we must also admit that the relative merits of such texts ought not to be judged on the basis of the same criteria applied to works of art created for an entirely different purpose. Indeed, to recognize, on the one hand, that a creative text is meant to deform conventions, to challenge familiar procedures, and to upset the reader's balance, while on the other hand an empirical text is meant to use those conventions, to rely on familiar procedures, and to confirm that reader's balance, is to acknowledge just how preposterous a task it is to evaluate the success of both on the same basis.

Although profundity, veracity, and complexity may be admirable goals for an author hoping to write a creative text, since each of these qualities provides a significant challenge to the reader's previously worked-out schemas for dealing with the world, I doubt that any one of these three aims is necessary or even desirable in a work deliberately seeking to make that reader feel safe and comfortable. In

fact, profound truth-to-life will probably only destroy the reader's play, since it is doubtful any truly mimetic representation of human existence will allow him to impose the order he desires on it. Furthermore, complexity and intricacy of organization can conceivably squelch play, since it is unlikely that the reader will be able to easily and automatically unravel the significance contained therein. As a result, a new set of criteria must be devised before we can begin to distinguish between an empirical text which accomplishes its purpose well and one which does it poorly.

Even though the creation of a new evaluative system ought to be the subject of some subsequent dissertation, I would like to make a few suggestions which might help to guide future study. In order to determine the relative success of certain empirical texts, it might first be useful to inquire more carefully into the nature of play. This could be done empirically or by relying on the numerous case studies described by Jean Piaget himself and by other child psychologists such as Virginia M. Axline.[6] This might prove particularly beneficial if it resulted in the isolation of qualities, activities, and techniques which make play more satisfying and thus more "successful" for the child. If we could state, for instance, that a certain amount of complexity or variation in situations makes play more interesting because it enables the child to impose his desires and abilities on ever more diverse phenomena, we might then find it possible to state that an empirical text is also rendered more

interesting by its ability to incorporate minor innovations and change within a fundamentally familiar structure. On the other hand, if we discover that a child enjoys play more when the situations he confronts are wholly familiar and the activities he engages in totally repetitive, we might then assert that the "best" empirical texts are those most conservative ones which remain entirely within the reader's competence by refusing to deviate from any conventions at all.

In any case, what we discover about play itself could then be compared with what we might learn from questioning typical readers of popular literature. If such readers separately indicate that the texts they "enjoy" most are the more conventional ones, and if that kind of judgment parallels what we have already learned about play, it would probably then be safe to assert that the "best" popular texts, or at least those which are most successful at accomplishing their goal of pleasing the reader, are those that are most rigorously conservative.

On the other hand, if such readers express a preference for works which tend to be "quirky" manifestations of a standard formula, and if that preference accords with the child's appreciation of some variation and change, I think we could argue that variety is fundamental to all forms of human expression and thus as desirable in an empirical text as in a creative one. In the case, however, that our conclusions from one study do not bear out those of the other, it would then be necessary to account for the discrepancy

or to scrap the whole comparison between reading popular literature and play. While I don't expect this to occur, it is a possibility which should be anticipated since my assertion that the reading of conservative texts is really a form of play is still only a hypothesis that must be tested empirically and shown to be an accurate description of a relationship actually existing between the two phenomena.

Although this is certainly not the only way to proceed in attempting to establish criteria for the judgment of empirical texts, I think it might prove particularly successful because it will enable us to consider such texts on their own terms. By bracketing out the creative end of the literary continuum, we will avoid the inevitable problems created when simple texts like The Golden Unicorn and Rebecca are compared, even implicitly, to vastly different works like Sanctuary and The Member of the Wedding. Indeed, if we can admit that popular literature, like play, is meant to entertain and to reassure its readers, we might find it easier to accept the accomplishments of such works even though they are far removed from what we have traditionally defined as excellence in a literary text. I hope that once we have learned to value empirical works for the conserving functions they do perform, we will then be more sensitive to the differences they exhibit among themselves although such differences are neither as great nor as significant as those appearing among the creative texts deliberately designed to be unique and different. Only when we are able to see "popular" literature

clearly, for what it really is, will we begin to understand why some texts are more successful and hence more popular than others. If we can, in short, develop this sort of appreciative comprehension, we will be able to provide much-needed descriptions of the procedures and forms used by the extraordinarily popular text to accomplish its dual purpose of conserving linguistic and literary forms while simultaneously pleasing an enormous audience.

NOTES

[1]Phyllis Whitney, Spindrift,pp. 17, 33, 113, 139.

[2]This peculiarity of the popular gothic is dealt with at length by Joanna Russ in "Sombody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think Its My Husband: The Modern Gothic," Journal of Popular Culture, VI:4, Spring, 1973, pp. 666-692. Russ writes, for example, that "when the Heroines of Gothics are not noticing other people's clothes (or their own) or being thrown off cliffs, or losing the men they love, they often spend their time thus:

> I unpacked quickly, showered, and put on a cool dress of black linen with touches of lime green. I slid my feet into high heeled black sandals and fixed gold star earrings in my ears. (Gabriella, p. 14)."

Russ continues, "these novels are written for women who cook, who decorate their own houses, who shop for clothing for themselves and their children - in short, for housewives. But the Heroines - who toil not, neither do they spin - know and utilize (sometimes bizarrely) the occupation of their readers. 'Occupation Housewife' is simultaneously avoided, glamorized, and vindicated." (p. 670).

[3]Jean Piaget, Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood, trans. by C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 87.

[4]Piaget, Play, p. 93.

[5]Barthes, S/Z, p. 14.

[6]Virginia M. Axline, Dibs: In Search of Self (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964). See also Play Therapy: The Inner Dynamics of Childhood (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947).

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