THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE SENSE
OF IMMEDIACY IN FICTION

APPROVED:

Alice R. Mitchell
Major Professor

Richard B. Sale
Consulting Professor

Anthony Damico
Minor Professor

E.S. Clifton
Chairman of the Department of English

Robert B. Touloum
Dean of the Graduate School
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE SENSE
OF IMMEDIACY IN FICTION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Wayne Fordham, B. A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1970
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. SARAH</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE SENSE OF IMMEDIACY IN FICTION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. WE THREE</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

SARAH

I.

The setting sun cast long lean shadows from the tall pines, broad ones from their crucified limbs. The shadows extended across a small lake reaching the opposite shore, making their way towards a small farm house where, on a screened-in wooden porch, two men sat.

One man was old. His back was to the sun and he rocked in a wooden rocking chair. The other man was middle-aged. He sat in a straight-backed wooden chair. He faced the setting sun, his face caught in it, burning in it, reddened and inflamed by it and if someone had said you are in hell he would have understood. The old man rocked quietly, relaxed. The middle-aged man sat uncomfortably, expectantly. The old man said,

"That guhl had one cooking in the oven before she even knew where the batter come from."

Only minutes before the old man had had to get up to throw a rock at a coal black crow which had landed in the front yard. The crow had made, first, a sound like an inverted caw: "awwk!" Then the sound became palatal and nasal, a gutturalized trilled "r": "rrrn." Then the old man
had thrown a rock at the crow and it had flown to the top
of a tall pine tree and sat there watching them.

The middle-aged man said, "What? What?"

The old man said again, "That guhl had one cooking in
the oven before she even knew where the batter came from."

The middle-aged man said, "What? How?"

The old man laughed.

The middle-aged man said, "I mean who, when, where,
how?"

"Well now," the old man said and rocked in his wooden
rocking chair.

And the middle-aged man shivered, shivered in the set-
ting sun, sweat upon his face, his wet palms, the back of
his shirt. He sat in a well-kept business suit. His shoes
were neatly polished, though dust-covered now. When he had
walked up to the old man's house, he had gotten dust on his
shoes. "This is going to be a long night," he said on some
level of his consciousness to himself, perhaps not even ver-
balizing it, perhaps not even thinking it but nonetheless he
said to himself, "This is going to be a long night, longer
than I think I can bear, this is going to be a very long
night."

The shadows from the broad tall pines had reached the
screened-in wooden porch but they had not reached the middle-
aged man's face. His face was burning in the setting sun.
If someone had said this is hell he would have understood.
II.

Once upon a time there was a young man who by connections became the warden of a prison. He took his job very seriously and every time a man was condemned to death and brought to his prison to be strapped in the electric chair and the current turned on to end his life the warden felt personally responsible because it was through him that the sentences were finally confirmed or pardons granted. "I will try to make their stay here as pleasant as possible," the warden said to himself. "Even if they are to die, I will try to make them comfortable while alive. I do not hate them and I am sorry they have to die," he said to himself.

So, this warden would go visit the men in death row when they came there, especially if their deaths were imminent. The comic had been condemned to die in the electric chair. The warden went to see him because he would die so soon. There was to be no appeal because the comic had not even wanted a trial. He had told the judge that he would murder his wife too if the judge would let him out for an hour and had promised that he would return and face his punishment and since he would die anyway why not kill off all the bitches in the world and the judge had condemned him to die, not because of what he had said but because of what he had done and the warden went to see him because his death was so imminent.
"I want no blindfold when they hang me," the comic had said. "I refuse your blindfolds and it will be unnecessary to bind my hands and feet. There will be no struggle and you have no cause for fear. When they hang me, for I have a reason behind this, I can do what I want."

"What do you want to do?" asked the warden.

The comic crossed his eyes, stuck out his tongue, pigeon-toed his legs and gave the finger with both hands and said, "Oh shit, I'm dead."

The warden came and talked to the comic every day.

"Why do you come here so often," the comic asked the warden once.

"Because I don't understand you," the warden said.

"Sometimes I feel like God," the warden said to himself, "because I have the powers of life and death. I kill or release." "But you do not kill or release," himself said to the warden, "you are not God. You are only God's agent. You carry out God's commands." "This is foolish talk," the warden said to himself, "I was only talking. I did not mean it literally. I spoke metaphorically." "Your metaphor was incorrect," his self replied.

"Why did you kill her?" the warden asked the comic.

"I will tell you someday," the comic said. "Would you like to play a game of chess?"

"All right," said the warden. "Let us play a game of chess."
"So there were two problems for her parents," the old man continued. "One, to find out who had done it. Two, to tell this child whose concept of babies must have gone no further than the stork that she was going to have one and that it would be coming out of her. We never knew which one came first or if they ever solved the second one, even thought about trying to solve it since we weren't there and three days later she came out of the house black and blue led by her father and down the road to where that other party was.

"And she never had the baby and maybe that was how they solved the second problem since even the Baptist church turned its head while Doc Grove took her to some back room and removed that unborn, unfinished, half-life child from the child, the child that would have marked her to all rather than just those of us who knew. Not that it helped much since she was already being called names that she had never heard and knew not the meaning of, at any rate didn't understand and finally her parents, shamefaced, having lived with shame and guilt and condemnation for so long, moved but not until, when she was just sixteen, she up and left, vanished, she too having lived with shame and guilt and condemnation and names and fingers pointing and boys throwing up her dress saying let me get in too, and left and her parents
told the police of course but the police never really searched because her parents didn't really care that much, her having brought such shame and disgrace on them, having borne her as a cross and now thanking God for their release. So they never hunted very hard."

"What happened?" the middle-aged man asked. "What happened to that kid that did it, that child probably not much older than she the child, that did it to her in some back school room or candy store or lawn or field or wherever two children go in this town to do what they, she, don't even know they're doing: that act with no name; that act of nothing more than feeling; sensation; peking; damp wet touching; fucking; where?; an act they did once and never probably would have thought about if she hadn't noticed her body behaving differently?"

"No, no, you've got it all wrong," the old man said, waving his hand for the stranger to stop. "First of all they lynched him, after ripping his balls off. And second it wasn't just once but many times—at least during two months and possibly more—doing it once a day or once a week—it never was clear because by the time they were getting down to those details she had already been beat up by her parents enough for her to figure out that whatever she had done she shouldn't have and she shut up—anyhow, doing it far more times than they or she would care to admit—doing it as well as she could, as well as they could, as
well as a child of twelve can do it with a grown Baptist minister of thirty-five."

IV.

"I ran up and got Sarah down to see it," the comic told the warden. "It's not often you get to see a man splatter himself all over the pavement and she was upstairs, didn't even know it was going on.

"He stood on the ledge, arms outstretched, Jesus himself you know, the perfect crucifixion, on the seventh story, preparing to make his leap. The fucking pigs were there, telling him to come back in. And a Catholic priest. You know what he wanted. He wanted the guy to make confession and get absolution before he did it. Damned priests. There wasn't any wife though, or any little baby to crawl out on the ledge to beg him to come back in. But everybody was saying come back in, come back inside, don't jump, don't jump, it wouldn't look good, why it takes street cleaners four hours to get all the blood up and your body looks all ugly all crumpled and crushed and it's not good for the children.

"But who cared. They got out the lights and the firemen's circus net and ran underneath him waiting for him to jump. And the people came and gathered and danced in the streets. It was spring you know and they cried give us blood, good rich blood, blood, God, blood, give us good red
blood, God, God, God, give us blood and they danced in the streets, threw off their clothes and fucked in the streets screaming God God give us blood.

"And the poor son of a bitch was so freaked out he was going to go back in. I'd got Sarah down to see it and the son of a bitch was going to go back in. And I said to myself shit it's his fucking right to jump if he wants to I said. And he was going to go back in but only if they'd put out lights. He asked them to put out the lights and to go away and said he'd go back in. So the pigs had to decide whether that was okay since nobody had ever said to put out the lights before just so he could crawl back in the window from the ledge but finally some damned cop started shouting down 'Put out the lights. Turn off the damned lights, He'll come back in. Turn out the lights.'

"And so they started shutting them off, the great big spotlights they'd gotten out for him in his honor. Turn off the lights and he'd go back in. And I didn't think that was very fair but do it they did. Turned off the great big spotlights and the people in the hotel started getting embarrassed since they were dangling out of the windows and staring and they were all turning their lights out so that soon you couldn't even see him up there and the moon went behind a cloud so conniving were they and I said this is ridiculous and shouted 'Jump you son of a bitch jump!'
"There was dead silence. Then somebody giggled. Then somebody else said it. 'Jump you son of a bitch jump!' And then they all started saying it, chanting it. 'Jump you son of a bitch jump! Jump you son of a bitch jump!' And all were chanting loudly, louder and louder. 'Jump you son of a bitch jump! Jump you son of a bitch jump!' and he jumped.

"Splattered all over the pavement, a woman screaming when she felt the wet splash of blood that sloshed her legs and they turned the lights back on, the cop screaming 'Turn on the lights! Turn on the lights!' and they did and he had jumped. Some people were so close they were covered in parts of his body, parts of his flesh, parts of his blood and they were screaming and shouting and trampling each other trying to get away and Sarah was crying hysterically and I kept saying 'He'd wanted to, he'd wanted to and it was his right. Hell it's a scream all of them running to stop him. He had to. You can't let people run over people like that' and they were getting his goopy corpse up and getting it away and Sarah ran back up the stairs to our room and I watched for a while and went back up later," the comic said to the warden.

Where was the warden? What was the warden doing?

The warden was there. The warden was listening.

V.

"Jimmy Tolbert went up there once," the old man said to the middle-aged man. "Some relatives of his sent him off to
the big city. His parents told him to keep off the streets at night but I knew that boy would go up there to see the naked girls, not that he was any different from you or me mind, he just wanted to go in one of them places to see if there really were girls who took off their clothes in public and showed themselves naked to men they'd never seen before.

"That's how we got to know she'd become a stripper, in one of these striptease places where they take it off and who knows what all after the show, that being their job in those big cities, not that Jimmy Tolbert did it to her, not that she had anything left to lose, but Jimmy just wanted to look, to have a little looksee at her naked breasts, that's all they show as I understand it and she was performing in this little club.

"There was a comic there, the kind who tell bad jokes between the acts and keep the leches cooled down so they don't run up and do it right there on the stage. Jimmy Tolbert told me about this comic who'd come out between the acts. He told me how this guy, Jimmy noticed the guy as much as he noticed Sarah because he thought the guy was sad and funny, this guy said how he'd called up his mother one night and said 'Mom, I'm going to go to California. I'm going to go to the big city. I know you've been worried about me turning out all right and I know you never are sure that I'm doing the right thing but I really think this is what's best for me. I really think I'm doing the right thing
by going there. Perhaps I can make a name for myself. Get a good job and maybe get famous. I know you'll worry about me Mom but I'll write and I'll keep in touch and I want you to know that I'll always love you Mom and I hope you can understand why I have to leave and I wanted you to know before I left and I'll always love you Mom.' You know what the old lady said? 'What the hell do you mean calling me at one o'clock in the morning?' Yessir, that's what she said. 'What the hell do you mean calling me at one o'clock in the morning?''

The warden wasn't listening. He had heard it all before. So many times before. He did not even know if it was the old man talking or if it had been he. He was not even listening because he had heard it all before. What did she say then? Before or after the police broke the door down? No come on what did she say? Where's my fucking hypo, that's what she said, she's a good junkie, clean old lady. The warden was not listening. He had stopped listening a long time ago. He did not know whom he was listening to.

"And Jimmy Tolbert told me, as soon as he got back he came over to my house and told me, 'I done seen Sarah. I done seen Sarah and I got to see her naked breasts.'"

VI.

Why should not a woman shed her clothes and show her breasts, her nipples, her furry haired triangle if such be
her choice the warden asked himself. For surely she, who chose to do so, was not just trying to get naked in front of men, not just enjoying being stared at by men with sweaty palms and bulging pants. I believe I have seen her the warden said to himself. I believe I have been to where she was before he killed her. I believe I saw her strip her body. But it was clean. She was clean. A clean body with clean breasts. And I did not feel shame.

"People loved Sarah stripping," the comic had said to the warden. "She let them look and made them feel like they shouldn't feel guilty. She let them look and enjoy. Look and feel clean."

"I saw a stripper like that once," the warden said.
"Was it at the ______?" the comic asked.
"I think it may have been," the warden said.
"That was Sarah," the comic said.

Could it not be an act of love, the warden said to himself, could it not be an act of kindness, an act of grace? For surely she knew how many men there were, lonely, tired, haunted, hunted men who walked the streets and could go home to no naked woman, who had no flesh-bodies to grasp and feel, no flesh-nipples to suck, no flesh-cunts to enter. God made our bodies and He made them clean bodies. Our bodies were not dirty when God made them and why should we look at God's bodies and call them dirty? Why should not God be a vagina? Why should not God stand naked in front of us the warden said
to himself. Did she know that she was performing an act of God by standing naked in front of us? Did she know that she was God naked and clean in front of us? the warden asked himself.

I want you again Sarah the warden said to himself. I want you to stand naked in front of me again. I do not know if I have ever seen Sarah naked his self said to the warden. I do not know if you have ever seen her naked. I see her now the warden said to himself but what he saw was a white light, a white clean light that shone to him. He saw her in a white clear clean light but he could not see her breasts or thighs. Ask the comic to tell you how she looked naked his self said to the warden. Ask the comic to show you pictures. Ask him if he has pictures. Ask him if she was naked when he killed her his self said to the warden. She was not naked when he killed her the warden said to himself. She was not naked and standing clean before him. She was not God before him then. She was not naked in a clean white light before him then. She was not naked before him then. He could not have killed her if she stood naked in front of him the warden said to himself. But I wish she stood naked before me now, stood naked and clean before me now the warden said to himself. I would take pictures of her. I would take pictures of each breast. I would take pictures of her vagina. With her legs spread. With her legs shut. You are lust said his self to the warden. She is clean and I want
to see her, to have her naked the warden said to himself. What does she look like? What is her face like asked his self of the warden. I do not know. That is why I want to see her said the warden to himself. Who is she asked his self of the warden. I think she is God said the warden to himself. I think she was touched by the hand of God.

VII.

"You going to have to leave now?" the old man asked the warden.

"It's very late. I must go home. I have a long way to go," the warden said to the old man.

"Not starting back tonight are you?" the old man asked.

"I have a long way to go," the warden said and rose and went to the door of the screened-in wooden porch.

"It's been nice talking with you," the old man said.

"I have a long way to go," said the warden. "And it's very late. And I have a long way to go."

VIII.

"I had to slap her very hard one night," said the comic to the warden. "She never would listen to me. That was her problem. She never would listen to me. But you listen to me don't you?"

"Yes I'm listening to you," the warden said to the comic.

"It's funny how people won't understand. They have their own little worlds and they won't come out. Their own
distorted little worlds and they won't come out. Don't you wish you could help them out?"

"Through love," the warden said.

"Exactly," the comic said. "Through love. Sarah didn't understand. I mean when two people are in love there are things that they do not do. That's why I had to slap her that night. She started to, I can't tell you. But we were making love, the act of love we were making, and she started well you know kissing my chest and stuff but I didn't realize, I mean she'd never been taught, she'd never known what love was, she was very young you see and she'd come from the country, so she couldn't have known what love was, what you did not do, I shouldn't have slapped her but she had to be taught, but she was just ignorant, and yet I don't understand how she could have done what she did, how she could not understand how debased, how un-love it was. I never dreamed what she was going to do or I would have stopped her but she was just you know kissing my chest and I wasn't thinking that she would try to do what she did. She kept getting lower and lower and then she, I should have realized and slapped her sooner, she licked her lips and I still didn't know until I felt her wet tongue on my thing, you know, and I didn't even move right away I was so stunned you know not until I felt her mouth closing over it and I jerked her away and slapped her as hard as I could three times across her face and she started crying and saying she
was only doing it because she loved me and I had to explain what love was. I asked her quite frankly, could she imagine me doing that to her. It made me sick to think of it and I think she could begin to see and understand. But she couldn't really. She wouldn't listen to me. Nobody ever listens to me. Are you listening to me?"

"Yes I'm listening to you; go on."

"I tried to explain it to her. Yes, you listen to me. You really do. You're listening to me. Isn't it sad how people can't understand. If they would just listen they, they could be so happy. It's like she was wearing rose-colored glasses. It's like everybody's wearing different colored glasses. And she never realized that there were other glasses available, other ways to live and love. Never realized that there were brown-colored, blue-colored, orange-colored glasses. Never realized that she could take hers off and see the world through mine. If only she could have realized, if only people could realize, if only they could understand and cast off their brown and blue and orange-colored glasses, how happy they could be. How happy they could be."

The warden was listening.

The warden was listening.

IX.

The warden had parked his car far away from the old man's house. On the other side of the small lake, up near
the town itself, the warden had parked his car. He walked along the road by the lake. He looked at his watch. The time was 11:45. The warden walked along the road by the lake. He began to fear that he could not find his way to his car. He started to go through some of the foliage surrounding the far side of the lake so that he could get to his car quicker. He wanted to leave. He wanted to leave immediately. He was sorry he had ever parked his car away from the old man's house. He wanted to leave immediately. The thorns and trees began to tear at his clothes. He hoped he would come out near his car. He did not know where he was. He kept walking but he was afraid he was lost. I hope I can find my car. Please help me find it quickly the warden said. I fear I am lost.

X.

"One day she came running in," the comic said to the warden. I was getting pretty fed up with her since she didn't seem to realize anything. I was afraid you see that I'd picked the wrong person. I'd thought she would be the perfect mate you see but she didn't understand. She wouldn't listen to me. I had even thought of marrying her you see but she wouldn't listen to me so I was getting ready to kick her out. I'd really decided that day that that was when she would have to go.

"And she came running up the stairs and bounded in you see, all smiling and laughing and happy and before I could
even tell her to pack up and get out she said, 'We're going to have a child. I'm so happy. I've wanted a baby for so long now. And now I'm going to have a child. You and I are going to have a child.'

"Well of course I was flabberghasted. I started laughing. I mean you can see how funny it was. There I was getting ready to say you've got to beat it bitch and she comes in talking about having babies. And I just stood there laughing because it was so funny and I started thinking of funny things. I started thinking how funny it would be, it was just a joke you know, but I was thinking of funny things. I started thinking how funny it would be if she were to die. Right then. When she was so happy. How funny it would be if she were to die. Just a joke mind you so I said yes Sarah just a minute and went to the chest of drawers and opened them and got out my revolver and spun around and pointed it at her and said 'Now you're going to die' and she didn't say anything. She just stared at the gun pointed at her and started turning white. It was just a joke mind you and I saw she was upset so I started to put it away but she turns like she's going to run out the door and I said 'Sarah wait a minute it was just a joke I was only kidding' but she was grabbing at the door knob and wouldn't listen to me and I said 'Dammit it was just a joke. Listen to me!' but she kept clawing at the door knob and started to open her mouth to scream so I shot her with the gun. I shot her with all
of the bullets because she was going to just run out on me, she wouldn't stop her damned clawing, she wouldn't listen to me at all don't you see? It was just a joke but she wouldn't listen to me but you're listening to me. You're listening to me. You listen to me."

"No, no I'm not," shouted the warden. "I'm not listening to you. I'm not."

"Yes you are," said the comic, "you're listening to me."

"No, no, I'm not listening to you," said the warden and banged on the cell door to be let out.

"Kiss me," said the comic.

The warden screamed.

XI.

The warden was lost. Before him was a fence with ivy entwined on it. The ivy and shrubbery had surrounded the fence so much that the top of the fence, the metal steel wire itself, could not be seen. The warden looked around him. There was no one. He did not see an end to the fence. I must jump it, the warden said to himself, I must hoist myself over it with my hands.

The warden stepped back a few steps. He had not touched the fence. He made a little run and grasped the top of the fence with both hands and hoisted himself, like a pole-vaulter, over it. Such was his intention but suddenly in mid-air, suspended over the fence, he felt the pain piercing
into his hands. He felt his hands being slashed. The fence's top was of pointed piercing steel. The pain he did not feel until he was suspended in the air. But there was nothing he could do except go on over the fence. He felt the wire dig into his palms as he slid over.

Feeling faint he held up his palms in the dark to see what had happened to him. There were long slashes on each hand. I would have thought they would have made holes the warden said to himself. But they did not pierce my hands, they did not puncture them. Instead they have slashed them. Ripped them open. But it is not as though I will die. They have not been pierced so that the blood will flow from them, gush from them. The punctures are surface ones, just long, just slashes. I can wrap something around them when I find the car. He looked around. Which way was his car? Where was he now? He would have to wander until he found it. He had never felt so lost in his life.

XII.

Sacred sainted sanctified was she. She who had given all, had stood naked in front of God and man, had offered her body as a saint offers its blessing, to cleanse, purify, and redeem the world. Never before had the warden realized how sainted she was.

The warden knelt, by his bed, to pray. He had not prayed in years. He would pray now. He would ask God for guidance.
Dear God, the warden prayed, I have not prayed for so long. I do not even remember how. But please God help me to understand why your saint was crucified in vain. Oh God could you not have sent her to me, sent her to me to cleanse and purify me, sent her to me naked and untouched and clean to save me. Why God did you allow your saint to die. For she was a saint God. She was love. I do not know why it took me so long to learn God for I knew she was a part of you. I knew she was your messenger but I knew not what she brought. But now God now I see. Sarah was love. Sarah was divine love come clean and naked as love must always be. My Lord and God and Savior, Sarah, I come now to worship at your feet. I come now to worship at your shrine. I come now to praise holy love and to drink of that cup. Give me rest oh God. Show me the way.

That morning the comic had been executed. That night the warden left to worship at Sarah's shrine. He chose to go to where she was born and there to establish her sainthood for himself, to find the ground she had touched when she was virginal, pure, clean, untouched by the devil, the demon who had killed her, her Judas, her betrayer.

He drove his car at breakneck speed, praying, loving, worshipping as he drove. He drove the car to her home town, praying, desiring, longing to find the ground she had touched, the house she had inhabited, the air she had breathed. He drove his car towards Sarah, Sarah undamaged,
Sarah untouched, Sarah undirtied. He drove his car into the small town and parked it and asked where her home had been, where her parents were. The men he asked did not know. Who would know, asked the warden for he realized that these men had never known Sarah, they had never met her and could not understand. They told him of an old man who lived across the small lake. He might know since he knew everything that had happened in the town for years. But he would talk your head off the men told the warden. He'd keep you there all night. Just drive on around the lake. You couldn't miss it.

But this was a pilgrimage, not a visit, so the warden did not drive. He walked; his feet would carry him the final steps, the final mile. He rounded the lake and knocked and then he and the old man sat on the screened-in wooden porch, the old man in the wooden rocking chair, himself in a straight-backed wooden chair, facing the setting sun.

"Tell me about Sarah," the warden said.

"That guhl," the old man began but the warden wasn't listening. He was completing the sentence for the old man in his mind. "Guhl" the old man said; like "gull." And he knew what the old man was saying, what he had to say, what he had to feel and say; having known her, having lived in the same town with her: "That girl was a saint" was what the old man had to say: "That girl was a saint."

"What?" the warden asked. The old man had spoken too long. The sentence was too long. "What?" the warden said.
XIII.

The warden stood in front of a store window. The night was black. The warden stared at himself in the store window. Carved at the bottom of the store window was a girl's name. The name was Sarah. For a moment the fires burned within the warden again. But then they ceased. It couldn't be her. It wasn't the same one. The warden stared at his reflection in the window, his reflection being cast over the girl's name. The warden's hands were not bleeding badly; they dangled at his side. The warden saw his car parked a block away. The warden raised his arm to look at his watch. 11:45. The warden's watch had stopped. When was 11:45? He did not know. He looked at the window, at his hands, his stopped watch, and the girl's name. He stood there for a long time. Finally he went home.
CHAPTER II

THE SENSE OF IMMEDIACY IN FICTION

The purpose of this essay is to examine the sense of immediacy in fiction, i.e., the sense that the story is unfolding before one's eyes, the sense that the story is happening now. I intend to discuss this sense in regard to my own stories, primarily "Sarah," to discuss what it is and how it can be achieved. Before discussing this particular aspect of fiction, however, I wish to deal briefly with some more general points in regard to what fiction is and how it seeks to achieve what it attempts.

Dorothy Van Ghent has said that "The subject matter of novels is human relationships in which are shown the directions of men's souls."¹ Selden L. Whitcomb, in The Study of a Novel, has carried Van Ghent's idea a bit further.

Probably few critics would oppose the idea that the principle subject of every true novel is humanity, in one or more of its infinite aspects; and this in a sense which really distinguishes the novel from most if not all other forms of art. All art is an expression of the humanity of the artist himself, but the novelist always, in large measure, discovers his humanity by observation of the life of other men.²

For my purposes and my stories, I am regarding these general comments on the novel as also applying to the short story, to fiction in general.

Van Ghent continues her discussion of the novel, saying that it takes from life the conditions for its hypothesis; that is, it starts from the empirical data that are the "given" data of sentient experience. But it selects and organizes them in a way that suggests a purely creative issue—a series of hypothetical events not "given" at all but cogent as cause and effect from the initial selection.

Literature, fiction, then, is a comment on human relationships, bearing, almost by definition, a definite relationship with reality. It is a process of selection and organization of aspects of reality available to the reader or to the reader's senses, forming these into a unified whole. The relationship between literature and reality is discussed by René Wellek and Austin Warren in Theory of Literature.

Literature must always be interesting; it must always have a structure and an aesthetic purpose, a total coherence and effect. It must, of course, stand in recognizable relation to life, but the relations are very various: the life can be heightened or burlesqued or antithesized; it is in any case a selection, of a specifically purposive sort, from life. We have to have a knowledge independent of literature in order to know what the relation of a specific work to "life" may be.

---

E. M. Forster draws a distinction between a story and a plot. The comments of the above critics would apply to stories, novels, fiction using plots, but would not necessarily apply to what Forster calls a "story."

We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died," is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The emphasis on causality, which is necessary to have a plot, leads us to one of the obvious modes of cause and effect, characters. Edwin Muir emphasized that plot does not have to rest on changes in character. If the characters are static, the plot is seen in a new light.

Nor need the action spring from an inner development, from a spiritual change in the characters. It need not show us any new quality in them, and at the time when it is manifested. All it need do is to bring out their various attributes, which were there at the beginning...

Speaking of static characters, Muir says,

Their weaknesses, their vanities, their foibles, they possess from the beginning and never lose to the end; and what actually does change is not these, but our knowledge of them.

6Ibid.
8Ibid., pp. 24-5.
What will the function of plot be? Obviously not to trace their development, but to set them in new situations, to change their relations to one another, and in all of these to make them behave typically.  

I have quoted at length in an attempt to compress a subject worthy of a lengthy book into a few pages. In regard to my own stories, let me say that both are concerned with immediately recognizable aspects of reality. There are no transformations of men into bugs as in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The characters and situations should be within the range of reality, ordinarily understood. The characters are, on the whole, static. Nothing is added to their characters which they did not possess at the story's beginning, though certain aspects of their personalities may have gained a predominance over other ones.

The human element, the empirical base, the concept of plot, and the credibility of characters—these are essential elements for the realistic fiction I am writing and discussing. They serve as the necessary "givens" to my discussion of immediacy in fiction. Edith Wharton discusses how the short story, perhaps more than any other form, needs this sense of immediacy.

... the effect produced by the short story depends almost entirely on its form, or presentation. ... the impression of vividness, of presentness, in the affair narrated, has to be sought, and made sure of beforehand, by that careful artifice which is the real carelessness

of art. The short story writer must not only know from what angle to present his anecdote if it is to give out all its fires, but must understand just why that particular angle and no other is the right one.  

Wharton then suggests, using a conservative approach, how this effect can be achieved.

The effect of compactness and instantaneity sought in the short story is attained mainly by the observance of two "unities"—the old traditional one of time, and that other, more modern and complex, which requires that any rapidly enacted episode shall be seen through only one pair of eyes.  

I have not used the unity of time in my stories for reasons which will be discussed at length below. Wharton's second requirement and the way I have used it, what we will call the restricted point of view, will be discussed below in a broader discussion of point of view.

One of the initial problems involved in creating a sense of immediacy in fiction deals with the relationship of the author to the reader. Percy Lubbock, in The Craft of Fiction, distinguishes two such types of relationships, classifying them as picture and drama.  

When the author uses the pictorial method of presentation, "the reader faces towards the story-teller and listens to him." When the author uses the dramatic method, the reader "turns towards

11 Ibid., p. 43.
the story and watches it."^{13} Lubbock contrasts two authors' approaches, citing Thackeray as an author using the pictorial method. This method allows the author to intrude upon the story. As Lubbock states, Thackeray "likes the personal relationship with the reader and insists upon it."^{14} Lubbock cites Maupassant as an author who uses the dramatic method.

In Maupassant's drama we are close to the facts, against them and amongst them. He relates his story as though he had caught it in the act and were mentioning the details as they passed. . . . The scene he evokes is contemporaneous, and there it is, we can see it as well as he can. Certainly he is "telling" us things, but they are things so immediate, so perceptible, that the machinery of his telling, by which they can reach us, is unnoticed; the story appears to tell itself.^{15}

The implication in Lubbock's comparisons is that only through dramatic method can the sense of immediacy be obtained. The removal of the author from the position of direct commentator loses the intimacy which is established between the reader and authors like Thackeray and Fielding. But the removal of the author allows the reader to establish a more direct and immediate relationship with the story and the characters in it. The reader watches the story unfold rather than watching the author unfold it.

Having chosen the dramatic method over the pictorial method, a question arises as to whether the story gains

^{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 111. \hspace{1cm} ^{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 114. \hspace{1cm} ^{15}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 113.
immediacy from the first or third person narrative technique. A. A. Mendilow, in his excellent essay, "The Position of the Present in Fiction," comments upon these two methods.

Contrary to what might be expected, a novel in the first person rarely succeeds in conveying the illusion of presentness and immediacy. Far from facilitating the hero-reader identification, it tends to appear remote in time. The essence of such a novel is that it is retrospective, and that there is an avowed temporal distance between the fictional time—that of the events as they happened—and the narrator's actual time—his time of recording the events.*

In other words, the story written in the first person is almost by definition an account after the fact. The writer must either reflect on the events or deliberately withhold information now accessible to him in the telling of the story to give the reader the sense of discovering the events as the writer did. Both of these methods form a return to the pictorial method. Using the first person, the writer places himself between the reader and the events. He usually presents them as pictures. He may attempt to present the events dramatically but his presence seems to be ever-intruding.

In my own stories, I have chosen the third person narrative technique rather than a first person technique. By using the third person technique, I have chosen the role of the omniscient author. This technique has many pitfalls.

---

for a writer attempting to create a sense of immediacy although it also has many advantages. A. A. Mendilow discusses how an omniscient author can achieve the sense of immediacy.

When the omniscient author refrains from obstructing himself or his comments into his work, the illusion of presentness and immediacy may persist very strongly in the mind of the reader. The modern novelist will usually use one or more of three ways for cheating the reason of the reader and encouraging his imagination to lose itself in time: the dramatic method, the lavish use of dialogue, and the restricted point of view.17

In The Twentieth Century Novel, Joseph Warren Beach defines the first of these "three ways for cheating," the dramatic method.

The dramatic method is the method of direct presentation, and aims to give the reader the sense of being present, here and now, in the scene of the action. That is why those elements are undramatic which make us aware of an author explaining things: exposition, description, and characterization by the author, psychological analysis, philosophizing, and sentimentalizing about the characters and events.18

And, according to Mendilow, the dramatic method uses direct presentation of scenes, where the fullness of detail, the limitation of time and the exclusion of extraneous comment as explanation, all help to give the feeling of what Beach calls "the continuous dramatic present."19

The "lavish use of dialogue" is self-explanatory; the

---

17Ibid., p. 275.
19Mendilow, p. 276.
"restricted point of view" needs further explication. In *Understanding Fiction*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren state that point of view is used to refer to the teller of the story—to the mind through which the material of the story is presented. The story may be told in the first or in the third person, and the teller may be the mere observer or much more than that.  

Point of view then can refer to an omniscient author such as Fielding or to a character in a story such as the narrator of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." Clayton Hamilton discusses how the point of view is to be restricted.

Therefore, in assuming a point of view external to the characters, it is usually wiser for the author to accept a compromise and impose certain definite limits upon his own omniscience. Thus, while maintaining the prerogative to enter at any moment the minds of one or more of his characters, he may limit his observation of the others to what was actually seen and heard of them by those of whose minds he is omniscient. In such a case, although the author tells the story in the third person, he virtually sees the story from the point of view of a certain actor, or of certain actors, in it.

Of course, in applying this device, it is possible for the author, at certain points in the narrative, to shift his limited omniscience from one of the characters to another. In such a case, although the story is told throughout consistently in the third person, one scene may be viewed from the standpoint of one of the characters, another from that of another character, and so on.

---


This last method is the one I have used in "We Three," the story following this essay, where I enter each of three characters' minds.

In "Sarah," I have restricted the point of view to a single character, the warden. Nothing is presented to the reader that is not in the warden's knowledge. At times, the reader watches the story unfolding directly with the warden. At other times, straight exposition is introduced but nothing is introduced that is not available to the warden's memory, the warden's consciousness. The warden in "Sarah" serves the purpose of providing the restricted point of view, one of the essential elements in a work attempting immediacy.

A problem which arises in striving for the sense of immediacy in fiction is the problem of how to handle exposition. The distinction I am making between part of the story presented in the dramatic method and the part which I am calling exposition is the distinction which Robert Liddell makes between scene and summary respectively.

Scene is that part of a novel in which the novelist makes things happen under the reader's eyes. Summary is that part of a novel in which the novelist says that things are happening, or that they have happened—and sometimes there is a prophetic summary at the end of the book about things that will happen.23

Certain facts must be given to the reader to provide the background for the story as it takes place. Before pursuing this problem it will be helpful to examine what

Mendilow calls the "fictive present." Once the fictive present is determined and grasped, it is easier to see what portions of the story can be referred to as exposition.

The common run of novels too contain different degrees of pastness. Mostly the past tense in which events are narrated is transposed by the reader into a fictive present, while any expository matter is felt as a past in relation to that present.

There is as a rule one point of time in the story which serves as the point of reference. From this point the fictive present may be considered as beginning.

The point of reference in "Sarah," the starting point of the fictive present, is the beginning of the story, the old man beginning to tell his story to the warden. From this point the fictive present moves forward. The fictive present, the part of the story which occurs in the present, is simple and brief. A resident of a small town and a stranger hold a conversation. When the conversation is completed, the stranger leaves the old man and is preparing to leave the town. The time covered is three to four hours. All the information provided in the story beyond this fictive present is exposition.

Mendilow comments on general tendencies in modern fiction in the use of exposition.

The modern tendency is against presenting the exposition in one continuous passage after the preliminary introduction of the chief character.

---

24 Mendilow, p. 263.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 265.
or after the first constituted scene. Instead, writers today prefer to interweave the exposition with the main line of action in the form of short alternating or even intermingling retrospective and anticipatory flashes.\footnote{Ibid., p. 270.}

I have used three methods of handling exposition in "Sarah": destruction of the linear time sequence, dialogue, and direct summary. The most important and most often used is the shifting in time. To maintain the sense of immediacy in these shifts in time is a problem which Mendilow discusses.

Novels which use the device of the "time-shift" to any large degree constantly change their locus; each episode is treated as a fictional present, or as Henry James preferred to call it "a discriminated occasion," without reference to the temporal position it occupies when related to any other episode.\footnote{Ibid., p. 263.}

Thus, in "Sarah," there is no distinction in style between the beginnings of sections three and four. Both sections begin with a speech in process, the first by the old man, the second by the comic. Each section is treated as though it were occurring at the time of the reading, though section four occurs a month before section three.

The time shifts into the past from the fictional present are primarily concerned with the warden and his conversations with the comic. Each conversation is treated as a fictional present. These time shifts provide exposition regarding the warden and his history from the time he became warden to the time when he makes his "pilgrimage" to Sarah's birthplace. But, in addition to providing exposition on the warden's
story, these time shifts provide exposition regarding the story of the comic and Sarah through Mendilow's "lavish use of dialogue."

This second method of handling exposition is used both in the fictive present and in the fictive past. In the fictional present, the old man, through his story, provides exposition regarding Sarah, from the time of her seduction through her leaving the town and taking a job as a stripper. In the fictional past, the comic, through his conversations with the warden, provides the story of him and Sarah, from the time of their meeting up to her murder. Both present and past, in their treatments, are presented predominately as fictional presents. And, in both present and past, the expository process is carried out.

Commenting on such time-shifts and methods of handling exposition, Mendilow says,

The novelty of this technique lies in the exposition being treated as a part of the main action, not as a subordinate adjunct to it. The focus of presentness shifts continually; the relative pastness and presentness are deliberately dissolved; the tenses are confused or rather fused so that the past is felt not as distinct from the present but included in it and permeating it. Every moment is conceived as the condensation of earlier history, and the past is not separate and completed but an ever-developing part of a changing present.29

The effect of reading is similar to that of watching a picture being painted. The artist need not proceed regularly from one corner of the canvas to another; he is under no obligation to finish one section before beginning another.

29Ibid., p. 270.
but is at liberty to distribute the strokes of his brush wherever he thinks fit. The order and precedence of his work is determined by him and him alone, just as the order and precedence of the act of seeing the picture, the movements of the eye of the viewer, follow no fixed rule. The effect of the whole picture is felt when the whole is seen, not in a fixed order of succession but in what psychologists call "a specious present"—a present that has a narrow temporal spread.30

In "Sarah" the "narrow temporal spread" consists of approximately four hours. The rest of the story is exposition devoted to explaining what these four hours mean and why they are occurring.

The third method of handling exposition which I have used is direct authorial exposition. The fictional presents and fictional pasts treated as presents can have the sense of immediacy by being viewed directly through the point of view character. It is in introducing the warden, the point of view character, that I have used the method of direct exposition. But, rather than attempt to trick the reader by slipping in direct exposition, I have tried to announce beforehand the coming exposition in such an obvious manner as to throw the reader off his guard.

Section two begins the direct exposition and it begins with "Once upon a time...." The direct exposition is crammed into this section but it perpetually alternates with fictional pasts being treated as fictional presents. Thus, in the first paragraph of section two, we find the

30 Ibid., pp. 271-2.
first of the many conversations the warden will have with himself. In many ways, section two has the most disoriented time sequence, moving by paragraphs from direct exposition to the warden's conversations with the comic in no particular linear order save for the initial introduction of the warden.

To prevent the reader from relying on direct exposition as authorial comment on the story, I have included other authorial intrusions which add nothing and are simply stating the obvious. Such a technique is used at the end of section four. "Where was the warden? What was the warden doing?" the omniscient author asks. "The warden was there. The warden was listening," the author responds. This technique is also used in "We Three." "Fitz Margaret said is this a serious rap or a bullshit rap? (Fitz divided raps into two categories: serious and bullshit.)" This passage is intended to serve the same purpose as the previous one; to make the reader not dependent on authorial comment by having the authorial comments as frequently irrelevant as they are relevant. The response I hoped to obtain is one of less dependency on the author and a viewing of the author, the narrator, as an impartial figure merely recounting what is happening or what is accessible to the characters' minds and memories.

Another technique I have used to try to create a sense of immediacy is what I would like to call "the time gap." The fictional present begins in section one of "Sarah" and is continued chronologically in every other section, ending
at the thirteenth section. But, between the sections, time elapses. Thus, while the reader is gaining expository material in the fictional past sections, the fictional present sections are proceeding without him. The intended result is an increased alertness on the part of the reader as well as the sense of immediacy.

I have attempted to discuss in this essay the sense of immediacy in fiction, what it is and how it is achieved. Such a sense is what I have striven for in my two stories, especially "Sarah." Whether the artist succeeds in achieving his desired effect or not is a question that he cannot answer. He can only explain his aim and how he sought to achieve it. The true testing ground of the effectiveness of this approach and my capacity to handle it lies in the mind of the reader.
CHAPTER III

WE THREE

First it was he and he. Then it was he and she with he watching. Then it was he and her. And then, they were we three.

We three walked south along the beach at the northwestern corner of San Francisco. To their right and as far as they could see, gazing out to the west, was the ocean. To their left, was the beach, then the highway, then high jagged rock mountains and further east San Francisco. To the immediate north was the tourist trap, Cliff House and Seal Rocks. To the south was Playland at the Beach, a place they went only to get food, hotdogs, drinks, cotton candy, but they had never ridden rides there.

We three walked south towards Playland at the Beach. It was cold and windy by the ocean. Fitz and Bill wore sweaters and Bill wore a light coat too. Margaret also wore a light coat and long woolen stockings to cover her legs.

We three walked south, towards Playland at the Beach, because Margaret wanted some food. Fitz and Bill did not want anything but they walked with her. To their right was the ocean. To their left, the city.

They had not always been we three. But they were always together. And to say it's Fitz and Bill and Margaret
every time they went somewhere and people called out from another room who is it was tiring. So, one night when somebody had said who is it, instead of saying it's Fitz and Bill and Margaret, Margaret said it's we three. It was a silly thing to say and a sillier thing to hang on to but somehow the name stuck. We three was what people called them and even they, since it had been said, had begun to think of themselves as we three.

I'm going to get a hotdog Margaret said. Do you want anything.

We'll wait said Fitz.

No said Bill.

Normally, unless they wanted something to eat, they didn't go up to Playland at the Beach. The tourists were there and the racket from the rides and music boxes. We three preferred the beach and the ocean and would only go to Playland for food. If one of them was hungry, then he would go and the others would stay by the beach.

I'll be back in a minute Margaret said.

You got money asked Fitz.

Margaret nodded and walked up the beach towards the refreshment stand. Fitz and Bill turned towards the ocean and looked at it, waiting.

"I'm sorry," Fitz said. "And there's no reason why you have to leave," Fitz said.

"Let's not talk about it any more," Bill said.

"Are you going?"
"I'm leaving," Bill said. "I said I was leaving and I'll be going in the morning."

"No point in it. I said I was sorry. What more do you want?"

"I don't want anything. I just want to go away."

The city of San Francisco was named for Saint Francis. Saint Francis would walk through the meadows and forests. He would say hello brother flower, hello brother fox, hello brother grass, hello brother bird, hello brother cow.

"You're still mad about last night aren't you," Fitz asked.

"It doesn't matter," Bill said. "I've said I was going to leave for a long time."

"You always say you're going to leave. I've said I'm going to leave. Margaret's said she's going to leave. You don't have to go," Fitz said.

We three loved the ocean. Fitz loved the ocean the best. Frequently we three would come out and spend a day just looking at the ocean. All things came from the ocean, Fitz would say, the ocean is the origin of life. Fitz did not like rivers as much as he liked the ocean. Rivers were contained, their paths formed; the ocean was vast and sprawling; its intensity had not been channeled and rechanneled by man; it was violent here where they came but Fitz thought it was peaceful too; when they looked out to the ocean here, all they could see was ocean.

"Will you tell me why you're so hacked off," Fitz asked.
"What you did last night was cruel, rude. You had no right," Bill said.

"I've told you I don't give a damn what you do in your spare time. But not in my house, damnit, not in my house."

"There's no point in talking about it. You didn't have to be rude. You didn't have to be cruel."

"Did I hurt you?" Fitz asked. "I'm sorry I hit him, whoever the hell it was."

"You didn't have any right."

"I'm sorry I hit him. I'm sorry I told him to get out. I'm sorry I said whatever I said."

"'Goddamn queer' was what you said, among other things."

"Okay, I'm sorry. I don't know what I said."

"Fitz, we've got to drop it." Bill turned to Fitz and faced him. "Let's not spend this last day quarreling. Margaret will be back in a minute. She'll go home if we keep on quarreling."

Margaret thought that they, Fitz and Bill, were still children. When they, Fitz and Bill, quarreled, they quarreled like children. She knew they were quarreling at the beach as she waited for her hotdog. She knew they would quarrel until she returned. Then they, Fitz and Bill and Margaret, would walk along the beach some more. Then Bill would leave. And then, Margaret realized for the first time, they would not be we three any longer. Bill would probably go to New York. They would be we two. Somehow it did not seem so hard to say Fitz and Margaret, in answer to who is it, as
it was to say it's Fitz and Bill and Margaret. We two would never catch on. Fitz already knows this, Margaret thought. Fitz has known this since last night. He hates it, Margaret thought. He hates it.

"I can't see any point in you really leaving," Fitz said. "Can't you just say you'll reconsider. You'll wait a week. Hell, give it a month and then go if you want to."

"There's no point in prolonging this," Bill said.

"A week? What's a week?"

"I'm leaving, Fitz. I'll be gone in the morning."

"All right, today? Can you just consider it for the day? Can you wait to decide until today's over? No time lost. You can wait till the end of the day. You can wait until we all go home to say finally, absolutely, positively whether you're staying or going. Just a little, bitty bit of a wait. Not a great big wait. Just a little one."

"Oh, hell," Bill said. He always reverted to profanity when Fitz became playful. When Fitz was in a good mood he could cheer up everyone. When Fitz was in a bad mood no one could have fun. Bill laughed.

"Good, you'll give it a teeny weeny day, a teeny weeny little thought more, not a great big thought more, just a teeny weeny little thought more."

I am not going to be trampled under by you I am not going to let you destroy me again I am not going to surrender to you Bill thought you will not make me stay here by your disguise of good will your disguise of affection
your disguise of concern Bill thought and Fitz knew that something was wrong.

"What's the matter?" Fitz asked.

"I will make the decision Fitz," Bill said.

"Did I ask you to do anything different?"

"Yes."

"Oh go to hell." Fitz turned toward the ocean. All he could see was ocean. Not even in profanity could he find an outlet for his anger, for the pain that he felt. He could only relieve it through annihilation of it. He looked at the ocean. As far as he could see there was ocean.

"Fitz," Bill said, "I will think it over. I will wait till the end of the day to make my decision. But I will decide, Fitz. But I will wait until the end of the day to decide."

"Do what you want to do."

"Fitz, Margaret's coming back in a minute. I may stay. Just let me think it over for the day. We all say we'll leave sometimes. We all have questions sometimes. I'll wait till the end of the day. Who knows how any of us will feel by then? Maybe Margaret'll leave. Maybe you'll leave. Maybe you'll leave Margaret and me together here."

"Christ it's been a long time," Fitz said.

"A long time," Bill said.

"We'll worry about it later," Fitz said.

Do not dismiss it please do not dismiss it or something dreadful will happen.
"Fine, yes, good," said Bill.

They looked to see where Margaret was. She was coming toward them, leaving the concession stand. Fitz waved.

They will smile when I return, Margaret thought. She had seen Fitz staring at the ocean. They will put their tensions and quarrels away, underneath their words, underneath we three, where I never was, in their childhood land of children.

Fitz and Bill had known each other before they had known Margaret. They, Fitz and Bill, had played together as children, had known each other as children, when they had lived in Dallas. Margaret had moved to Dallas when she was thirteen. Before that she had lived in Galveston.

Hello you two Margaret said smiling.

Hi said Bill.

You want to go over to the cave Fitz asked. I thought we might smoke some.

Let me eat first said Margaret.

We can look at the ocean some more and sit on the beach some said Bill.

Let's move down from here though said Fitz. We're too close to the racket.

Margaret ate her hotdog as we three walked north along the beach, back towards Cliff House and Seal Rocks. The cave was past Cliff House, further north. To their right was the city; to their left, the ocean.
Why don't we stop up there Bill said by those rocks.
And we can sit a bit.

Fine said Fitz.

We three sat on the rocks on the beach by the ocean and looked out at the ocean. The cave was to their north, past Cliff House. But, before the cave, between Cliff House and the cave, immediately north of Cliff House, were the ruins. We three did not know the real story of the ruins. They had asked someone once who was there by the cave what the ruins were and this person had told them a story. We three doubted then whether it was true or not but the story was the kind you wanted, not so much to believe, but to remain untarnished, a story that truth could only weaken, and the story's truth did not matter since it was only a story and a story of ruins and the origin of the ruins did not matter as much as their presence and their presence was enhanced by this story.

The ruins were north of Cliff House. The ruins looked like foundations of mud and adobe brick houses and walkways without roofs or walls. Cliff House, following its name, was on a hill. The road which came to Cliff House wound round a mountain and maintained its height past Cliff House. The road came north by Cliff House and made a sharp turn to the east after Cliff House. There were dirt roads leaving the main road sometimes but just after Cliff House were the ruins, then the cave, and then, around the cave (which was at the water) and to the immediate east of it there was
rugged jagged terrain: sharp gray rocks projecting from the mountain side, bent foliaged trees, twisted paths, and there were no roads there. But this rugged landscape was north of the ruins.

Picture some god of Roman days who, having captured one of Zeus' lightning bolts, hurled it plummeting to earth and it had struck the earth and torn from the earth's crust a patch of land and laid waste to the remains or picture some meteor, hurling through the skies, crashing into the earth ripping and burning the ground, carving out a space of land which it claimed for its own, then burning and vanishing, leaving only the great gaping hole, surrounded on three sides by cliff, its fourth side opening west to the sea, and you can see the ground on which the ruins, when they were not ruins, were built. For the ruins were sunken, as though a patch of land, land and cliff, had been scooped out of the earth, leaving a flat wasteland where only brown prickly weeds and some small shoots of grass would grow. The ruins could be seen from Cliff House but there was a fence running around the scooped out land on two sides, the side by Cliff House and the side following the road. The sides of the cavity were steep, dropping abruptly and directly at Cliff House, rising to a still steep but gentler slower descent to the cave. Its western side faced the ocean. The ruins were separated from the ocean by a low but abrupt wall.

Once the ruins had, so the story we three heard said, been a health resort: great wooden buildings covering an
indoor swimming pool, bedrooms, kitchens, baths, exercise rooms. Story was piled on story, floor on floor; and all of the buildings were interconnected; all of the rooms led to the other rooms; doors, hallways, connecting passages united all the individual cubicles, united the great kitchen with the great bath, the most northern part with the most southern part; and, since there was only a limited space, only a certain amount of land ripped from the earth by the angry Roman god, the resort had to be built up rather than spreading out, so that bedroom was piled on bath and kitchen on pool, until it reached its peak, so the story we three heard went, rising to the point where the top story (the third or fourth) looked directly at Cliff House, looked slightly down toward the cave, looked directly out at the road, and, like all things along the beach, faced the ocean when gazing west.

The health resort was sufficient in itself. One could enter and remain for months, years. One would not even have to go to Playland and Cliff House for food nor step outside to go to the city to get a book, for all was brought into the health resort, all was obtainable in the health resort, all that could be desired was given in the health resort. The clientele was exclusive, limited. Those who came had the money to afford the luxuries provided, the greatest luxury being the absolute privacy, the utter isolation the health resort provided for its customers. Though facing what
Fitz called the tourist trap of California, the resort, which had always had its fence, was set apart and unattainable for all save a few exclusive specimens of mankind, a tiny human race having detached itself from the large mass. Men had died in the health resort; men had gone there to die, isolated from all save the limited ingrown herd which flocked through the great rooms, from the kitchen to the bedroom down to the pool to the baths.

One night, so the story said, when all the doors had been closed (for sometimes in the daytime people would desire to sunbathe, or walk to the cave, or wade in the ocean) when all the doors had been closed and locked and the moon had shone for several hours, a great storm arose on the ocean. The waves (when there was no storm, one could gaze out across the ocean and see tremendous waves on the sea but they were far out, far away from the beach, one could see the whitecaps out on the ocean and the great waves which fell and lost their impact before they reached the beach) maintained their height and ferocity as they came plummeting towards the beach and towards the health resort. They (inside the health resort) probably knew it would storm but they had faced storms. They probably had no fear.

Neither did the waves as they rushed forward, not falling before they reached the beach, but gaining height and strength. And the rains and winds came. Lashing whipping rains and, had there been windows and had the windows
been opened, the rains would have swept along the corridors, hurled by the winds, striking wildly with chaotic fury. And the rains and winds beat the health resort while the waves gathered in the ocean and prepared to rush forward to the beach. And (the story said so much) there was a slight quake (San Francisco was always in danger of the ground opening to swallow it up), a slight reeling in the bowels of the earth which made the top stories of the health resort shake. And, perhaps it was the tremor, some jarring of the foundations which, so the story said, first caused two electrical wires to come too close together, the jarring which stripped back the lining and forced metal against metal, each conducting electrical currents separately, together creating sparks, and, perhaps, that was how the fire started.

So the rains and wind lashed the buildings while the waves gathered and came rushing toward the health resort while the earth quivered and while the fire spread. The waves rose to heights of twenty feet that night, bellowing over the walls of the health resort, while the rains poured down in it from above and the earth trembled below and the fire lashed within. The four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, united in a savage fury, as though the gods had been angered and had sent the elements to chastize the great locked doors, the three or four storied solitude to remind those locked inside of their true essence,
the elements of their origin, the elements of their demise.

And, the story said, the water of the ocean tore at the walls while the fire of electricity inside the walls reduced the walls to mere semblances, tokens of walls, and the rains and winds destroyed the roofs while the quivering earth shook each wall and each floor and each foundation as an angry mother will shake an obstinate child so that the health resort collapsed and the waves jerked the walls away, carrying them back to the ocean, and the fire devoured what remained and the rain and wind mingled the ashes with the dust of the earth and left the health resort, stripped, beaten, and devoured to become mud.

And, there was more, but even we three were not sure that they could believe, not even try to believe, that it was true, but, the story said, that those inside, those who had locked themselves inside the great rooms, those who had come there seeking the ultimate detachment from the hustle and bustle of the city (the city was San Francisco; it had been named for Saint Francis) had gathered together in one last frenzy (for civilized orgies occurred when the doors were locked) and had laughingly refused to throw open the doors, had hurled insult at each new assault of nature, had challenged the elements to do their worst.

The elements accepted. The health resort collapsed. The people, those inside, were found in the debris the next
day. Perhaps, a few, in the last minute, had rushed out, throwing open the doors, only to be swept away by the on-rushing waves, or struck down by the health resort itself, its pieces being ripped away and hurled by the wind towards the legs, skulls, and backs of people.

When the storm cleared, when the fire ceased, when the winds subsided, the waves returned to the ocean, and the earth had finished its shaking, all that remained were the ruins: a labyrinthine maze of foundations, those sunk deeply into the ground and made of brick and mud and mortar, these remained, naked, without any of the man-made garment walls to tell what the ruins were supposed to be, what they had been, what they were. (I'm glad it burned down Fitz had said once. Margaret and Bill agreed. We three did not like the ruins nor what had once been built upon them. We three never went to the ruins.) And so they remained, (Margaret finished her hotdog and drink. Are you ready to go on up Fitz asked. Yes said Margaret.), as we three walked north along the beach. The debris, the clutter, the bodies were removed but the foundations remained and lay there now as we three walked north along the beach toward the cave. (Margaret chewed her ice,) To their right was the city. To their left was the ocean. We three walked north along the beach to the cave which lay beyond Cliff House, beyond the fence, beyond the ruins.

We three walked up from the beach around Cliff House to the road to go around the fence to the eastern
side of the ruins because the slope was gentler going down there.

You want to go to a movie tonight Fitz asked.

Maybe, I don't know said Margaret.

Bill did not answer. Fitz did not repeat the question.

What's on Bill asked.

I don't know said Fitz.

We three walked along by the fence around the ruins. The road turned abruptly east and left them and they continued to walk around the fence. The ground became more rugged. As they reached the northeastern corner of the fenced off area, the ground's slope was gentle enough to be gone down; the fence had been pried apart there too. We three crawled through the fence, Fitz and Bill holding it for Margaret, and Fitz holding it for Bill, then Bill holding the fence for Fitz to get through. The ruins were below and directly in front of them. The cave was down and to their right.

The cave was to the immediate north of the ruins. The side to the north of the ruins was composed of rock and in this rock was the cave. The cave's roof was about ten feet high from the ground. It was a very broad cave, a real cave, extending back into the rock and curving so that the ruins could be entirely hidden from view. If one followed the cave further, an opening appeared in its northernmost side and
could be crawled up to. From here one could go down on rocks to the sea which lapped against the bottom walls of the cave. One could crawl through the opening and sit on the rocks, with the sea around one, and gaze out at the ocean; as far as one could see (save for Seal Rocks which were a few rocks, like the ones one sat on, round and gray, sometimes jagged, sometimes damp, which stood out in the ocean) was ocean.

We three walked around the northern part of the ruins and entered the cave. Often, we three sat in the cave, smoked joints, and listened to the ocean. Once we three had taken acid there but they did not take acid often. It was harder to get and they did not have the time to be that stoned.

We three walked into the cave and walked back to where the ruins were hidden but they did not go all the way back to where the opening was. They sat on the ground, leaning their backs against the cave's wall, Bill closest to the entrance, then Margaret, then Fitz. Fitz drew a joint out of his pocket.

How many did you bring Bill asked.

Four Fitz said.

Christ said Bill do you want to rot here.

Oh hell they're not that strong said Fitz.

The grass was strong grass, possibly gold and they had been smoking it for a couple of weeks.
We can't smoke all that Margaret said.
Nobody's asking anybody else to smoke it. I'll light 'em and anybody who wants some can reach or holler.
I don't know how he goes through that grass Bill said.
Our little dope fiend Margaret said.

Shit said Fitz and he lit the joint and took a hit, inhaling one long hit and then two short hits to hold in his mouth and swallow. Fitz handed the joint to Margaret.

Thank you Margaret said and inhaled deep and long, stifling a cough.

Bill took the joint and sucked it in brief quick sucks. Fitz hated the way Bill smoked dope. It'll never get you high that way Fitz had told him. Fitz was bothered when he was higher than everybody else. But Bill wouldn't smoke it Fitz's way because he said it hurt his lungs.

Fitz exhaled as Bill handed the joint back. Fitz inhaled again and silently the joint returned to Bill. Fitz exhaled his second hit.

God that's good stuff Fitz said.
Margaret and Bill nodded.

We three passed the joint again and then a fourth time silently and then it was too small to smoke. Bill handed it to Fitz anyway because Fitz always took the last hit no matter how little was left. Fitz took it and inhaled one last time, cursing mentally its heat, and then put it out on the cave floor. He took a matchbox out and put the roach in that.
Again Fitz asked.
You've got to be kidding Bill said.
Let's wait ten minutes and see if we still remember that we want one Margaret said.
Okay, okay said Fitz.
We three sat in silence for a moment.
Hmmmm said Bill finally.
Yeah said Margaret.
It'll do said Fitz.
The waves' lapping could be heard around them. The breezes from the ocean moved gently through the cave. All was quiet save the lapping of the waves. When they spoke at first, their speech was soft and slow, punctuated by unnecessary and imaginary commas.
You don't know what's on at the movies Bill asked.
Hmmmm said Fitz let's see, uh, movies?
Anything in particular playing laughed Margaret or do they just run blank reels.
Tonight, no, come on, get this, tonight, Fitz said, they're playing four Marlon Brando flicks straight through.
What are they Bill asked.
Oh come on Fitz Margaret said Bill he's rapping.
Madam I never rap, goddam I'm a little stoned, time for another joint.
Hush you loony.
Ten minutes, ten minutes more, how long has it been now.

A couple of minutes since we finished it, maybe six or seven since we started.

Hell.

Really Fitz. Aren't you stoned?

Hell yes I'm stoned bombed out of my mind.

Fitz always answered in superlatives, in ultimatums when asked if he was stoned.

God I'm bombed Fitz repeated.

This is good grass Margaret said.

Christ yes.

This is good grass.

Yes yes it is.

We three collapsed again in a silent rhythmic heap.

It's remarkably relaxing Bill said.

The ultimate tranquilizer.

Yes.

I'm going to light another one Fitz said getting another joint out.

But

Give up Bill Margaret said you know he'll have to have another one. I don't want any more though Fitz.

Nobody's asking nobody to puff nothin. Just reach if you want it or holler.

Fitz lit the joint and inhaled deeply. His eyes closed.
Inside his head his mind swam in a great spiraling vortex of darkness. His eyes opened. His mind saw the cave and felt the cold damp rock of the cave against the back of his head.

Here Fitz said handing the joint to Margaret.

Margaret took the joint and started to pass it on to Bill but took a hit herself and then handed it to Bill who took one too and handed it back to Fitz. Fitz took another hit and his mind, eyes open now, went black and Margaret took the joint from him and it made the round again and Fitz sat holding it when it returned and nobody reached for it then and Fitz simply held it, having forgotten what it was for.

We have been together an awfully long time Bill said.

(First it was he and he and Fitz, hearing Bill now, said) There's been some damn good times there, some damn good times (thinking about their childhood and how he and Bill had been friends together, hearing Bill say) There sure have been, some very good times (and remembering the times when he and Bill were younger and Bill was not a fag and Margaret was in Galveston without them who were in Dallas and none in San Francisco and the times had been good there and Fitz said) There've been some good times here too and Bill and Margaret didn't understand but said yes and Fitz didn't mind, not knowing that they did not understand.

Christ this joint's still here Fitz said.

I think I've had enough said Margaret.
Hell let's finish it, there's not that much left now anyway said Fitz and Fitz took a hit and passed it and they each took hits and then the joint was too small to smoke and Fitz took one last hit and then put it out and with the other one.

The ocean rushed the rocks of the cave and we three heard the water of the ocean and heard it lapping about the rocks of the cave.

(Then it was he and she with he watching because Fitz and Bill had separated somehow, Fitz didn't remember now just how, but they didn't play with each other any more and Bill played with girls and Fitz hung out with thugs and Margaret came to Dallas and Margaret was Bill's friend which Fitz knew but Fitz didn't hang out with them but Fitz knew Margaret was Bill's friend but Fitz didn't say this out loud because no one liked to talk about the past and Fitz didn't like to think about it most of the time but when you were stoned things just happened)

Remember last summer Margaret said when we were trying to sleep and (Bill started laughing) Fitz said goodnight.

(Goodnight Margaret. Goodnight Bill. (Bill was on the couch and they were on the bed.) Goodnight light. Goodnight chair. Goodnight pillows. Goodnight sheets. (Oh my God Bill said hush Fitz and Margaret was laughing too hard to say anything) Goodnight shoes. Goodnight mattress.)
Goodnight little Teddy Bear in the closet. (Bill and Margaret were laughing hysterically and Bill said hush Fitz hush) Goodnight grass. Goodnight clothes. Shut up yourselves. You ought to be glad there're only four hundred and twenty-seven things I can say goodnight to in this room. Goodnight bookcase. Goodnight record player. Goodnight record on record player. Goodby records against the wall. Goodnight glass of water. Goodby house shoes. Goodby bra. Goodby plate with crumbs. (Hush Fitz hush)

We three was laughing, Bill and Margaret tearilly.

Oh God it's been good times.

The whole is always less Fitz said than the sum of its parts because only certain

Fitz Margaret said is this a serious rap or a bullshit rap?

(Fitz divided raps into two categories: serious and bullshit.)

I don't know yet, I'm not finished.

What was I saying?

The whole and sum of its parts or something Bill said.

Less than sum of its parts, Fitz said, nodding, because only certain aspects of any part can be used in forming any given whole, any unified, conceived whole and the parts always have more than the one aspect but only one aspect is used and if it was in another whole, i.e., conceived to be
another part of another whole then another aspect would be used and others omitted

I think it's a bullshit rap said Margaret.
Tending that way said Bill.

That's probably bullshit said Fitz. I mean the rap. It probably is. I've forgotten it now, I think.

Did that rap relate to anything Bill asked.
That's why I think it's bullshit said Fitz. I can't remember I mean.
(Then it was he and her. Margaret this is Fitz; Fitz, Margaret. It was at a party and they met and they married and then they were we three.)

Do you have any ice left Margaret Bill asked.
I think it's turned to water, no, some left Margaret said and handed it to him.
(First it was he and he. One night Margaret and Fitz had had a terrible quarrel. Margaret said something to hurt Fitz very badly. She had said, "You know why Jack says you hang around Bill so much. It's because you're latent." And Fitz had said, not responded or replied, but said, as though he had already thought of that, had thought of that long ago and already finished with it, "It's more than that," Fitz had said.)

Sometimes Bill thought to himself I think you are just a voice which I can turn off and on at will.
You were kidding about those Brando flicks weren't you

Fitz Bill asked.

What? Oh yeah, yeah I was kidding. I made that up.
Do you know what's on?
No I don't, Margaret do you know what's on?
We can get a paper when we go back up.

(Then it was he and she with he watching. "You ever lay a girl?" Fitz asked Bill once. "I've been to bed with girls," Bill said. "Lay anybody in high school?" "I don't remember." "Oh hell, were you gay in high school, I mean brought out?" "No that happened after I was out, the summer before college." "And you weren't messing around in high school before you got gay?" "You don't get gay, just brought out." "You like the girls you laid?" "I like both Fitz." "What color nipples did they have?")

God sometimes my mind just goes black.
Too much dope you loony Bill said.
Speaking of dope.
No Fitz really not yet.
Do you like it when your mind goes black Fitz asked.
Like what do you mean?
Christ I don't know that I can explain, just your mind turns off and you're in this blackness.

I don't think so but I try not to smoke that much dope Margaret said.
I don't like it Bill said.
I think I sort of like it Fitz said.

(Then it was he and her. Naked, they pressed against each other and kissed. There was a knock on the door. Who is it? Bill. Come on in said Fitz grabbing his bathrobe from the foot of the bed. It's locked Bill said. Fitz let Bill in. Fitz Margaret said toss me my housecoat from in there. I'm getting a coke, take it to her will you Bill. Face averted, back turned, Bill took the pink robe and stood at the bedroom door holding it out. Margaret reached, having to reach around the door to take it. A brown tipped breast showed its nipple.)

The sea is so nice Margaret said I'd like to get naked and run along the beach and into the sea.

Why don't we go out somewhere to where it's deserted on the other side of the bay or down by Big Sur and go sometime said Bill.

Why don't we go next weekend said Margaret we'll have a picnic by the ocean.

A picnic and then play in the water said Bill.

Cause it's too damned cold and I'm not freezing my god-damned ass off that's why said Fitz.

Oh come on scaredy cat said Margaret.

Fitz do said Bill.

Oh hell we can wait till then we aren't going to go doing it now that's for damned sure.

That's true enough Bill said.
I'm not moving for quite a while Margaret said.

Amen you want to smoke another Fitz asked.

If you're blacking out you don't need it said Bill.

I'd forgotten that said Fitz hmmm.

(And then, they were we three. I love you and you love me and I love Margaret and Margaret loves me and you love Margaret and Margaret loves you and I screw Margaret and Margaret screws me but you never get to screw anybody you poor son of a bitch.)

I black out quite a bit on grass Fitz said.

I don't like it Bill said.

Neither do I said Margaret I never know what I'm doing. But I like it when your mind shuts off, it becomes like absolute nothingness, your mind leaving your body and all that crap.

Blehhh said Bill.

I don't like that said Margaret.

I see everything in patterns Fitz said, when Margaret gets mad at me I think of all the other times she's gotten mad at me I see the pattern and react to it but just because you can relate something to reality doesn't mean it's true everything we do is something we've already done it's just that we do it in other ways another way that's why I like it when it blacks out.

He's rapping Margaret said.

Did you understand that Bill said.
I didn't understand it Fitz said.
When shall we go to the beach Bill asked.
Next weekend Margaret said.
I don't know that I'll go swimming Fitz said.
You can come for the picnic Margaret said you may want to go swimming by the time we get there.
We'll see said Fitz.
He'll come said Bill won't you Fitz.
I'll come I just don't know if I'll swim.
It'll be neat wait and see Margaret said.
Fitz drew out another joint. Time to light up Fitz said and lit it.
Margaret and Bill took a hit each and Bill handed it back to Fitz.
That's plenty for me Margaret said.
Me too Bill said.
Fitz held it and took another hit, then he nodded and put it out and set it on the cave floor.
I suppose that blacking out is like death Fitz said except that you don't come back in.
I don't like it Margaret said.
The ocean lapped around the cave, around the rocks outside the cave, around the base of the cave.
I like having my mind shut off Fitz said I like not having to think, the absence of conceptualization and the absence of perceiving, if you could perceive without
conceptualizing if you could perceive without thinking then it would be all right but since you can't I prefer the blacking out because your mind shuts off then.

I sometimes think that you are just a voice which I can turn off and on at will Bill said.

Well fuck you buddy Fitz said pulling his head away from the cave.

No I didn't mean that Bill said.
Screw it Fitz said getting up I know what you meant.
You were talking all about the mind and how it just runs on and on.

He didn't mean anything Fitz Margaret said.
Fitz was standing up.
What are you doing Margaret said.
Going for a walk Fitz said and put his hand to his eyes.

What's the matter Fitz Bill said.
I'm dizzy Fitz said.
Sit down Fitz Bill said I didn't mean anything.
Fuck you Fitz said.
Fitz you've had too much grass you're too dizzy to go walking around you're just having a paranoid flash Margaret said.

Goodby Fitz said and started walking out of the cave.
Fitz come back Margaret said.
Screw it Fitz said and left walking out of the cave and turning left at its entrance.

"I'm sorry Margaret," Bill said.

"It wasn't your fault," Margaret said. "You know how he gets. He'll be back in a little bit."

"He gets so touchy. I really didn't mean anything. I was just thinking that he would like it because he raps so much," Bill said.

"It doesn't matter," Margaret said, "he'll be back in a minute. He's too stoned to walk around much."

"I don't see how he got up," Bill said.

"Are you really going to leave," Margaret asked.

"I don't know. I'd forgotten all about it, I mean it was there but I'd forgotten it," Bill said.

"Stay Bill," Margaret said. "I mean if you can you know."

"I wish Fitz hadn't of gotten mad," Bill said. "Things would have just blown over."

"You know he won't let it blow over Bill. He'll have to have it resolved out in the open," Margaret said. "That's probably why he's so touchy; he's worried about your leaving."

"He's always so touchy, he always has to have every-thing his way."

"You know that's not really true."

"Well, that's the way he acts sometimes."
"That's just Fitz," Margaret said. "He's always been like that and always will be. He's been like that ever since I've known him."

"He wasn't this fussy though."

"No, he's, I think he's upset now about your leaving."

"Well, what difference does it make?"

"You know he cares. Sometimes I think we're all too close, we've known each other too long, too long to leave and too long to stay."

"I know," Bill said.

"He's worried about getting old too," Margaret said. "He thinks twenty-five is ancient."

"Yeah he talks like death was just around the corner sometimes."

"He's afraid to die I think," Margaret said. "He hates death. If you leave, well, I think to him that's a sort of death. You two have known each other so long I think he feels that it confirms his age. He's afraid to die I think."

"I thought things were going well here though," Bill said. "I really hadn't thought about leaving. It was that dope. I was so mad at him when we started coming over."

"You'd been quarreling hadn't you?"

"I'd told him that I would wait till the end of the day to decide whether to leave or not."

"You had?"

"Yes."
"Well he wouldn't take that as good enough of course."

"No, he wanted me to say that I'd stay but I couldn't Margaret."

"Maybe he forgot. The picnic! I'd forgotten. If you leave, we won't be going."

"I'd forgotten too. I wonder if that set him off."

"Maybe. He probably just remembered. But he was awfully stoned too. He may just be being touchy and not thinking about it at all."

Up above the cave, on top of the cave, around the northeastern side of the cave, and to the north and east of the top of the cave were the trees. The trees grew up from the ground, pine and evergreen, but since the ground was slanted, rising from the ocean in rock jagged slope, the trees could not grow up straight. If the trees grew straight up they still were not perpendicular to the ground but at sharp angles to it, the shorter ones touching the very ground they grew from with their hanging topmost branches, so steep was the slope and so jagged and protruding the rocks.

But it was not merely their relationship with the ground which made the trees appear gnarled and distorted. For being on the ocean front the winds from the ocean lashed and whipped the trees so that they had begun to tilt even closer to the ground than they already were. The trees
were bent in various directions too for the winds whipped them from all sides so that tree ran into tree, tree grew around tree, and some even grew together, twisting and bending, their branches intertwined, bent, twisted into each other, twisting around rocks and over them, twisting over the rock jagged, rock jutted slope up the sides and to the top. And even on top, the trees were bent, running into each other, because there, on the top, there was not even the rock jagged slope to guide them, to remove the accessibility of one direction anyhow, and on top, they wound even more drastically, more disharmoniously into each other, turning away, running into one another, and so perpetually bending, twining, twisting around. The trees were no longer the product of mere seeds but rather seeds and wind and rock and terrain and ocean and other trees, an unholy unharmful combination of elements, displeasing to sight and sensitivity, displeasing to any love of beauty, to any love of order, to any desire for continuity or calm, violent shocking aberrations of nature, flung out on the cliff to grow and intermingle until they were not individual trees but some disharmonious yet twisted unified whole, as though to remove one tree would require the removal of a great chunk of land, cliff, rock, tree, and even wind and ocean from the face of the earth.

Some tree lover passing by and taking pity might wish to root them all up, to carry them away from this unhallowed
ground and place them in a virgin forest, to allow them to
grow straight, to branch out, to become tall firm pines,
shining evergreens, as such trees were meant to be but the
tree lover, had he removed them, even if he could, would
have been disappointed. For the trees had grown too long
here and if removed and replanted somewhere else would find
the new soil not only unnatural but destructive and whether
from habit or ingrown nature (for who knew how long these
twisted warped mongrels had grown there by that coast?)
they would have still twisted and turned, running into
other trees, into the ground, and this new soil, the new
forest into which the trees would be transplanted, would
not be conducive or agreeable to this wild twisted nature;
the new forest would not bend politely, would not let its
own branches be entwined with these new creatures; the new
soil would seek to rout out these sea covered, wind twisted
roots and branches. The trees would be transplanted yes but
the soil and their surrounding trees would rise up against
them, and the trees would die, the same way the race of
mankind would perish if suddenly placed on the planet Mars.

"Should I go look for Fitz," Bill asked.

"No. I'm sure he's all right," Margaret said. "He'll
be back in a minute. He's probably wandering around in the
trees."

"Is that a joint," Bill asked pointing to something where
Fitz had been sitting.
Margaret reached out and picked it up. "It's the last one we were smoking," Margaret said, "he didn't put it in the box."

"Do you want any more?" Bill asked.

"Why not," Margaret said, "we're not going anywhere for a while anyway."

Bill got out his lighter and lit the joint for Margaret and she took a hit and gave it to Bill and they each took two more hits and Bill put it out.

"I don't know that I needed it," said Bill, "but in moments of crisis one always feels less stoned."

Margaret laughed. "He'll be all right," she said. "He's just a little touchy."

"How was your trip?" Bill asked.

"Fine, fine, everything was very fun, said Margaret.

"Fitz likes to rap a lot more than he wants to admit," Bill said.

"He does rap a lot. It seems like he does more now," Margaret said.

"I've noticed," Bill said.

"I don't know what's causing it. Age, I guess, and all his fear about death."

"Is he really that afraid?"

"I don't know. I think he is sometimes. He's said that it's time to take stock of things a lot now. He talks about how old we are a lot now. We are older in a way."

"Not that old," said Bill.
"No I mean in our relationship. I mean it's past the courting days and initial love days. You know. I never realized before how long it takes to get to know a person. I thought I knew Fitz pretty well before we got married. And then I thought I really knew him after about our second year. But it seems like we're still going through changes, still discovering parts of each other. I mean we still do pretty much the same things, well, you know that, but you just keep changing. I think we're still pretty immature in some ways," Margaret said.

"Things are going smoothly still aren't they," Bill asked.

"Smoothly? We're still happy together. We'd rather be together than be separated and I don't know that you can ask for more than that," Margaret said.

"He'd seemed gruffer to me and, well, last night was a good example."

"You've always been the hell-catcher in this, you know that. He's just touchy about something now. It's not you or your being gay, he's always used that when he wants to rant and rage. Fitz just freaked last night. He's wanted to see you when we got in and was hoping you might be there by accident. He was really excited when we were coming up. I'm sorry it happened, Bill, I'm very sorry things happened the way they did."
"It didn't matter really. We went out and cursed him for an hour and Henry talked about husky latent queers who have to beat up on people and on and on. Fitz didn't really hurt him, he's not that strong, but it was so crude, so childish."

"Fitz just cracks sometimes, I mean he just starts shouting and pouting and it's usually about nothing. That's why I think it's something he's going through. Things aren't as happy and carefree as they were a while back."

"I know it. It's just that he's got to learn some manners someday."

"Oh Fitz gets so upset," Margaret said, "he doesn't like to see flaws in people he loves, see. I guess no one does really. I don't mean he's a perfectionist or that he's judging our right to be around him, I mean I don't think he's putting himself on a throne or anything. I just think he doesn't want to see it, it hurts him too much to have to think of someone he loves so much as not being perfect because in a way he wants it for them. He wants them to have the joy of being perfect and he's willing to be the one to tell us, to reflect it in his eyes. But everything just happens. You change all the time and all the time you change you never know if you'll still be together, still want to be together, when the changes end. And they don't end."

"You know what?"

"What?" Margaret asked.
"You're rapping," Bill said.

"No, I think that's true," Margaret said.

"I didn't say it wasn't true. You've just been on a rap."

"Do you think we ought to go look for him?" Margaret asked.

"I think he'll be back pretty soon. He'll want some more of the joint if nothing else."

"True enough," Margaret said. "We'll go look in a bit though if he's not back."

Twenty thousand billion light years away, if death, when death comes, brings body to dust, the body turns to dust, the molecules dissolve and become a part of everything else, the reason they can look at it so simply is because they see the bunny rabbit chewing on a leaf over their corpse and maidens plucking up roses and all that, dissolve into bunny rabbits and roses, twenty billion light years away it's not even a speck, not even a twinkle, it's just blackness, dark, just dark, but, they say, it's all one, one becomes darkness in the darkness, bunny rabbit fertilizer, bunny rabbit food, bunny rabbit, and life goes on, but twenty billion light years away it's not just death, twenty thousand billion light years away your life passes, eat, sleep, breathe, crap, screw, passes, and it's just darkness, black, just blackness, dark, just dark, so it's
all just one anyway, darkness in darkness, but it doesn't bother Bill and Margaret because they say they won't know it, that they've dissolved into everything else, but they don't know it now and twenty thousand billion light years away it's the same thing, no You then or now, so if they wonder why I'm so self-centered, egotistical, it's because I realize how dead, how annihilated, how lost lost is.

"Is there any more of the joint left," Margaret asked.
"A hit or two," Bill said.
"Why not?" Margaret said.
Bill lit the joint and they each took two hits and then it was too small to smoke but they each took another hit, Margaret cursing when it burned her lips, and then Bill put it out.
"I love Fitz," Bill said.  "I love you both."
"Don't leave," Margaret said.  "You know we love you."
"I don't know what to do Margaret.  I'm not sure," Bill said.
"I wonder what's keeping Fitz."
"I bet he's just looking around, walking in the trees or something.  If he doesn't come pretty soon, we'll go look for him."

Fitz both feared and desired death.  He longed for it with a lover's longing; he hated it with a lover's hate.  The ocean stretched out before him as far as he could see.  As far as he could see all there was was ocean.  The city
was San Francisco, named after Saint Francis. Hello brother squirrel, hello brother tree, hello bunny rabbit.

"Don't go," Margaret said.

If all is one then all is one and all is nothing, no thing, and where's the goddamned security of that, what the hell good does it do, day to day, minute to minute, that's where we're at, I've got to deal with life, not some abstract all/nothing, moment to moment, there ain't no peace of mind nowhere.

"I'm going to take a look for Fitz," Bill said.

"Okay. Do you want me to come," Margaret asked.

"No, I'll do it. Maybe I can smooth things over," Bill said rising from the floor of the cave. The ocean lapped around the cave.

"Okay," said Margaret.

"You'll just wait here then," Bill asked.

Fitz Margaret said.

Fitz walked into the cave.

We were just going to look for you Bill said.

Hello Margaret Fitz said hello fag, I thought you'd left.

Fitz Margaret said.

That's all I've heard about all day, the fag's got to split, get going, beat it, right?, time to go. I don't know what the hell you're standing around here for.

Fitz I'm not going to take any more of this Bill said.
So get the goddamned hell out, nobody's asking you to take any more of it and you're the only one prolonging it and that's cause you're standing here so get the goddamned hell out.

Goodby Fitz Bill said.
Goodby, hell, goodbye, Fitz said, the door's that way.
I'm sorry Margaret Bill said.
Go to hell Fitz said.
I don't know what's the matter with, oh hell, goodbye Bill said and walked out of the cave.

The waves of the ocean rushed around the cave. All they could hear was the lapping of the waves. Margaret had not risen. Fitz stood still.

"Oh Fitz," Margaret said and started to (but didn't) cry.

"Oh hell," Fitz said and sat down by Margaret after a minute. "It's been one hell of a happy wedding anniversary," said Fitz, "a real happy anniversary." The waves lapped around the cave. Through the cave a light wind blew. "Are you going to talk to me," Fitz asked.

"Why did you do that Fitz," Margaret asked. Fitz got up and walked around.

"Don't talk to me, never mind, it was fun. Our wedding anniversary holiday. It was fun until we walked into the house a day early and saw two fags kissing and it hasn't been fun since. So he's got to go. Got to leave. So let
him go. I'm tired of playing games all day about will he
or won't he. Let him go. He's a grown boy. He can decide
for himself," Fitz said.

"You know Bill's gay Fitz," Margaret said.

"Not in my house, he doesn't have to do it in my house,"
Fitz said.

"Fitz you just keep saying the same old things over and
over."

"I'm so goddamned glad you never repeat yourself. It's
so nice to be around, to be married to, someone who never
repeats themself."

"Why won't you just tell him you want him to stay,"
Margaret said.

"I've told him. I told him. He doesn't want to stay.
He wants to go," Fitz said.

"This is ridiculous," Margaret said.

"Ridiculous to be hanging around with fags at this
stage of life yes. We're too old to play with queers,"
Fitz said.

"I don't understand you," Margaret said.

"I don't either," Fitz said and sat down again. "I
really don't. Our anniversary had been so much fun."

"It would've still been fun if you hadn't of freaked
out," Margaret said.

"He knows how I hate"
"It doesn't matter what he knows. Bill's gay, Fitz," Margaret said.

"And good luck to him," Fitz said.

"It doesn't matter why he's gay, he just is. You liked him when he was a kid. You've always been good friends."

"Not when he was gay. We weren't queers you know."

"It doesn't matter who's gay, you liked him, I liked him, he liked us, why do you have to have everything your way?" Margaret said.

"If I had everything my way a lot of things wouldn't be happening," Fitz said.

"It doesn't matter if he's gay, it doesn't matter why you like him, it doesn't matter if you're a queer, if I'm a queer."

"You think I'm a queer. You ought to know better."

"Fitz nobody thinks you're gay."

"How encouraging to know that. Thank you Margaret," Fitz said.

"Fitz please," Margaret said.

The waves of the ocean lapped the rocks of the cave. The sound of the waves' lapping was all that could be heard.

"You don't want to be gay do you Fitz," Margaret asked.

"No," Fitz said.

"Would it bother you if you were," Margaret asked.

"I like girls, that's all," Fitz said.
"Does it bother you so much that Bill's gay?" Margaret asked.

"I don't care what he is," Fitz said.

"Fitz, you can't like, love someone and not care about what they are," Margaret said.

"You know I wish he weren't," Fitz said.

"But you like him anyway, you know you do," Margaret said.

"I don't like him being gay," Fitz said.

"What difference would it make, he'd be the same, you liked him before, you've liked him since then, you just don't like his being gay, if he weren't gay, he'd be someone else," Margaret said.

"He might be better," Fitz said.

"Fitz we could all be better, we're talking around it, Fitz, we aren't anything, we aren't something you can tie down and wrap up in a box and open when you want to see it, you can't put us in a box, we may not be there when you get back," Margaret said.

"So, I'm confining, I prevent the real you from growing and growing, Fitz the oppressor, Fitz the destroyer."

"You can't prevent anybody from changing Fitz, you can only just close your eyes to it," Margaret said.

"Well maybe I don't like what I see, maybe I don't like your great growing experiences, your great changes, maybe you were better before you changed," Fitz said.
"You can't stop it Fitz, you can't change it, you've got to understand it, live with it, accept it, or close your eyes to it," Margaret said.

"What about me? Maybe I change too. You might practice a little acceptance of your own," Fitz said.

"It's just the way it is Fitz, it doesn't matter how you react Fitz, you've just got to deal with it though, you've got to deal with it or close your eyes to it and you can't close your eyes to it, you, Fitz, can't, it's not in you, so you've got to deal with it some way, all this talking around it, talking, talking, talk, talk, it's not getting us anywhere, you've got to do something besides talk around it, it's killing you, Fitz, it's killing you," Margaret said.

"You're doing a lot of talking to be so down on talk," Fitz said.

"I can't talk to you Fitz," Margaret said. "We can't talk to each other sometimes. We can't talk about certain things. You won't let us," Margaret said.

"Why don't you go see if you can find your gay friend," Fitz said.

The ocean rushed the rocks and walls of the cave, beating against them.

"Don't do that Fitz," Margaret said.

Fitz got up and walked to the opening in the back of the cave at its northernmost side.
"Why don't you go see if you can find your gay friend Margaret," Fitz said.

"What are you doing Fitz," Margaret asked.

Fitz was lifting himself up to the opening in the cave. Through the opening one could crawl out and sit on rocks in the water. The sea would rush around the rocks. As far out as one could see there was the ocean.

"I think you can still catch him if you hurry," Fitz said. "I think you can find him if you run out there."

"Fitz come back," Margaret said.

Fitz was going through the opening and crawling down to the other side.

"I'm just going to sit on the rocks, Margaret," Fitz said. "Why don't you go see if you can find your friend."

"I don't understand what you're doing," Margaret said. "Please come back Fitz."

Margaret could not see Fitz now. He had gone through the opening in the cave and had dropped down to the other side. Margaret watched the cave's opening there. Through the opening were tossed Fitz's clothes, his shirt, trousers, shoes, socks, underwear, his sweater. They landed on the cave's floor, some gently, his shoes and trousers with his billfold and change thumping and jingling on the floor.

"Fitz please," Margaret said rising, but not walking to the opening.
"I'm just going to sit on the rocks Margaret," Fitz said quietly, the cave increasing the volume of his voice. "I'm just going to sit on the rocks and maybe swim a bit," Fitz said. "Why don't you go look for your friend? I'll be out in a while. I'll take care of myself," Fitz said.

"I'm not leaving Fitz," Margaret said. "I'm going to wait here. I'll just sit here, Fitz, I'm not going to come there. I'll just wait here, Fitz. I'm not leaving, Fitz. I'll be here when you get out, Fitz. I'll just sit here and wait for you Fitz. I'll just sit here and wait for you," Margaret said. "I'll be here when you get out Fitz," Margaret said, and then Margaret stopped speaking. "I love you Fitz," Margaret said finally and sat down and waited.

She could not go to him because Fitz was like that. He would feel pressured, he would think she didn't trust him, didn't care for him enough to let him be for a moment by himself. She would wait for him until he got out and came back. Out of the ocean. Off of the rocks. She couldn't pressure him to get out though it was so cold and she began to cry silently. She would wait and he would come back. She heard a splash but she would not move, she would wait and this day would be over and they could go home and try to forget about the day but she would not rush him. She would wait and he would come back. And then they would be, she paused, they would have to find out later who they would be, who they would be after this day, after Bill had left,
when they weren't we three any more, Margaret cried softly and waited, not saying anything, but waiting for Fitz to come back since she knew he would, Fitz would have to come back but he couldn't be rushed Fitz just had to think about things some and he needed to be alone but the water must be ice Margaret thought but I can't go to him because he would do something foolish Margaret thought because he'd feel that I was pressuring him Margaret thought and Fitz gets very rash when he thinks we're pressuring him Margaret thought he might jump wildly into the water and break his leg against a rock or something Margaret thought. She cried softly, not silently now and waited for Fitz to come back because he would come back if only he wasn't pressed, Fitz doesn't like to be pushed. He's felt we've been at him all day. That's why he's so upset, Margaret thought. He wants us to be back together. He doesn't like this tension Margaret thought. But what will we be now Margaret thought. I don't know what to do Margaret thought because his favorite meals and his favorite places, all were designed for three, and Bill wasn't here any more. There was no sound from the opening in the cave except the sound of the waves hitting the rocks and the sides of the cave. I cannot get up, not even yet, Margaret thought, because you won't let me come to you, Margaret thought, I can't get up and come to you because you won't let me, I don't know what you'd do if I came but you would not like it, you have to do things yourself.
Fitz, you won't let us help you, Margaret thought. But the water is so cold Margaret thought as she wiped the arm of her coat across her face, it's too cold today to stay in that water Fitz, please come back Fitz, I will try to help you, I will try to make us happy together Fitz, please don't die, please don't die.

Through the opening in the cave, Margaret heard the sounds of someone rising from the water and through the opening in the cave, Margaret saw a hand clutch the rock side of the cave and start to pull the body attached to it up. But the hand was an ugly purple, the white shade of skin covering it, covering an ugly purple and Margaret felt afraid. And it was then that Margaret heard from the other opening, the door, of the cave, footsteps and they startled her and shaking she turned to see. And Bill entered the cave and said let's try to work this out, I'm sorry I stormed off and stopped, seeing Margaret shaking and the tears on her face and said what's happened and then Bill saw Fitz pulling himself up through the opening of the cave which went to the sea and Bill said oh my God. For Fitz was a deathly purple, his body was pale ugly purple, his lips and his arms and Bill and Margaret went to him and tried to help him over, almost afraid to touch him because he looked so bruised, so deathlike, so ill. And Bill said to Fitz I'm not leaving Fitz, I'm going to stay Fitz, everything will
be all right Fitz, as he and Margaret tried to help Fitz over, Bill seeing the clothes now on the cave's floor and Margaret crying freely now but still softly, though she sobbed occasionally.

And Bill and Margaret gently helped Fitz down into the cave and Fitz looked terrible, his limbs and torso purple, and Fitz began to shake horribly, his teeth chattering and his body shaking like epilepsy, and Margaret could only say oh Fitz Fitz, repeating his name between her tears. And Bill said I'm going to stay Fitz, I'm sorry we fought, I wouldn't have left Fitz, I couldn't have left, don't ever Fitz and Fitz said nothing, his body shaking so badly that he could not move his arms to dress himself and he clung to his body as though to make it stop shaking. And Margaret and Bill began to dress him, helping him raise a leg, an arm, and when Margaret saw his sex, shrivelled and purple, she gave a sob and a gasp and just held him against her for a moment.

And they put on his socks and Margaret took off her long woolen stockings and they put them on Fitz's legs too and they put on his pants and his shirt and sweater and Bill took off his coat and they put that on Fitz too and Fitz kept shaking and didn't say anything and Bill and Margaret tried to help him walk and hold him up and Fitz didn't help them since he was shaking so badly and looked as though he might
pass out but he did not hinder them since he tried to move
his legs and not put his weight on Margaret and Bill and
they began walking together towards the door of the cave and
we three made their way towards home.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


