AMERICAN LITERARY PRAGMATISM:
LIGHTING OUT FOR THE TERRITORY

THESIS

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

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Peter S. England, B.A.
Denton, Texas
August, 1998

This thesis discusses pragmatist philosophy in the nineteenth century and its effect on American literature of the time. William James' and John Dewey's works form the critical bulwark of the paper, and Richard Rorty's works lend a contemporary vocabulary. Chapter Two is a discussion of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and how Huck's journey on the river is a metaphor for the pragmatist experience. Chapter Three, which focuses on *The Song of the Lark*, by Willa Cather, shows the influence of pragmatic thought on a woman who endeavors to develop her artistic skills, ultimately sacrificing her expected role in society for one of her own making. *The American*, by Henry James, makes up Chapter Four. Henry James, the younger brother of William James, serves to show that the philosophical movement infiltrated the social air of the time and manifested itself in literature.

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Pragmatism, growing from the early nineteenth-century continental tradition fostered by Nietzsche and Hegel, and drawing still more material out of the shadows of Emerson, Thoreau, and DuBois, became, and to a large extent still is, the prevalent American philosophy. William James established the beginnings of the method by which ideas were examined not for their own merit, but by their consequences. James' approach is a break from more traditional, Cartesian-based philosophies which emphasize an idea's importance in and of itself. Cartesian philosophy also emphasizes ideas outside of the world of action and consequence. Pragmatism seeks to get rid of the middle man, so to speak, and allow theory to mix freely with practice. My argument is that, in concert with the growth of pragmatism, a new kind of narrative appeared in American literature emphasizing a more open approach to truth and experience. Three books that particularly exemplify this approach are Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Henry James' The American, and Willa Cather's The Song of the Lark.

Discussions of pragmatism focus largely on literature because of pragmatism's innate relationship to fiction. Pragmatist thinkers, like Giles Gunn, argue that the critical tools with which we analyze literature are "no less figurative than the material
of which they are composed and the strategies by which they sometimes hold us so destructively in their thrall" (Gunn 15). Our language and the way we use it to describe ourselves, to confine our world, is the product of individually and experientially-driven choice. A person describes events and phenomena using the words that correspond most closely to that person's perception. These words, then, are chosen based on that person's experience with whatever phenomenon most closely matches the new events the person is attempting to describe. The attempt at truth through words is the chief way in which we communicate. Therefore, literature in its reflection of the way an author describes the world around him or her is thoroughly enmeshed in the author's ideas concerning truth and experience. Pragmatism seeks to do away with the notion that truth as an entity is experienced, embraced, and then forever held as an unchanging marvel. A pragmatist recognizes truth as a changeling and therefore is always trying to describe, then re-describe, its appearance. Truth is a category into which variables fall, stay for a time, and then exit to make room for others. A pragmatist reading of literature can reflect this scenario.

Until the late nineteenth century the study of literature and the study of philosophy in America were relegated to the intellectual and upper-income classes. Late nineteenth-century America afforded a large, increasingly middle-income reading public the opportunity not only to engage in more intellectual reading practices, but to match current philosophical thought with current literature. Pragmatist thinkers in America have been involved with literary figures from the beginning of their school of thought. William James and Mark Twain maintained a relationship consisting of meetings and letters in which they endorsed each other's work. Henry James regularly
consulted his older brother as to whether he was enjoying Henry’s novels and other writings. Other writers of the period, including William Dean Howells, maintained the sort of close relationships with other authors, including both the Jameses, that would certainly have inspired and influenced the growth of pragmatist thinking. William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty constantly involve their writings with works of literature and discussions of art. If pragmatism is the philosophy that engages the question of whether this action or that will bring about the most favorable consequence, or what will happen when this theory or that is adopted, then literature is the laboratory in which the experiment is conducted.

Where does the difference between earlier American literary works - before the late nineteenth-century--and the later, pragmatist works lie? Until the end of the nineteenth-century, American expansion westward had been continuous and productive. The drive towards new frontier land was so powerful a factor in American life that Frederick Jackson Turner, the great American historian, wrote that

In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of the reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. (61)
With the arrival of more and more settlers on the West Coast (indicating that maybe our frontiers had been exhausted), and the Civil War, Americans felt that conventional politics, and the morality on which these politics were based, did not hold the answers to the questions the American public was now asking. How does religion answer the problems of racism and slavery? What is the ultimate good in westward expansion? The Civil War and rapid, unparalleled industrial progress, led a steady exodus from the countryside to the city, from a more cohesive community mentality, to a more diverse society-oriented mindset. Americans discovered they had cheated, and almost wiped out, the Native American population. African-Americans, once held in slavery, found a new world of problems fighting for suffrage and equality. Our frontiers exhausted, America turned to the machines of industry and commerce for a new economic frontier. Writers began to question whether the right attitudes were in place, and whether ideas like "progress" and "free market" meant good for all or good for some. Out of this cultural melee came new narratives, such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which brought to light the pragmatist ideal of truth as experience, not as a manifest and universal Moral Sense, as Kant would have it.

In Europe, where similar conditions existed, literature and art began the journey towards existentialism. Europe had long ago lost its frontiers and continued to crowd its cities, fighting for what was left of its monarchies while trying to institute more democratic forms of government. America, however, still had undiscovered countries. There were race problems. There were vast tracts of land which, although explored, remained largely uninhabited. Around our industrial centers there was still room to breathe and discover, whereas Europeans were closed in with border disputes and old
politics. Americans had an unprecedented influx of multicultural emigres, all of whom had to get along somehow within the country's vast borders, struggling with placing the still new theory that all people are equal alongside practices that did not match with that idea. The European philosophers seemed to go straight from logical positivism to existentialism. The Americans could not afford to espouse the questioning or extinction of God so quickly, but developed pragmatism so that as long as a person realized that context and experience played a large part in the development of personal truth, there was encouragement to continue the quest. The growth of pragmatism in American literature follows the growth of social struggle in America.

An important event in the latter half of the nineteenth-century also had a profound effect on philosophy worldwide. The introduction of Darwinian biology suggested to the world that nature was only concerned with population growth, the struggle for survival, and deadly competition. There was no place for hope, redemption, or spiritual discovery in this new science that was quickly invading the intellectual world. How could one embrace science and religion simultaneously? William James saw in Darwin's theories the chance for an individual to reconcile science with his or her view of the world. James thought that the search for meaning should be continuous and immerse the mind in the "stream of consciousness." He argued that the world is shaped by the goals and expectations of the individual observer, thus leaving plenty of room for divinity, and for the science of evolution. Out of the moral malaise of the Gilded Age arose pragmatist philosophy and pragmatist literature, reflecting the social concerns of the intellectuals as well as the regular public.
If pragmatism is the philosophy that connects itself with experience and perception, and with mating theory with practice, then it is only natural that it is keenly reflected in literature. Since pragmatism focuses on experience and perception, we can say that pragmatism is context-oriented. People can evaluate themselves within a context like a character in a story. Literature takes us into new worlds, situations, and sympathetic characters in context with a contrived circumstance. What better example of the pragmatic method? A pragmatist examines life the same way a literary critic examines a text, working with the same assumptions concerning truth, practice, and context. Both pragmatism and literature deliberately match people, action, and perception in context with various situations intended to force a particular series of events. The way in which those elements are interpreted make up the theories of the pragmatist reader.

A pragmatist character begins with a set of values that are changed during the course of the story. This in itself is not an unusual pattern in fiction. The difference is that the change results from the character's experience and from the character's perception of that experience. Stories, made up of events and characters and joined together in a plot, are not necessarily pragmatic. But a character whose evolution throughout the story hinges upon action resulting from a joint participation of event, consequence, and perception, is definitely pragmatic. As John Dewey writes in Art as Experience:

An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship. To put one's hand in the fire that
consumes it is not necessarily to have an experience.

The action and its consequence must be joined in perception. (44)

Therefore, the character does not merely react, but bases a reaction in direct response to his or her previous experiences, previous perceptions, and the newly-acquired revaluation of these past perspectives. For example, Huckleberry Finn, in his famous "I'll go to hell" scene in Chapter thirty-one, reflects upon what he knows, what he has just learned, and what will happen depending upon what sort of decision he makes. He successfully mates experience with consequence and perception, and the entire novel is effectively different because of it. His whole character is changed.

Conversely, a character whose change is the result of religious revelation will mate experience, consequence and perception. But this character will not come to the conclusion that perception hinges upon the two other elements. Instead, the newly religious character will be certain that his perception of the truth will now always remain the same, safe within the hands of an unchanging metaphysical reality. Not so with the pragmatist.

After the initial change in perception, a pragmatist character, now aware of his or her pragmatism, functions more smoothly, albeit tentatively, within his or her environment. To William James that subsequent experience does not wholly change perception. The event is more of an adjustment than a reversal. In the essay "What Pragmatism Means," he writes:

The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space,
cause and effect, nature and history, and one's own
biography remain untouched. New truth is always a go-
between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old
opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of
jolt, a maximum of continuity. (James 31)

Huck is not original in his abolitionist decision nor does he necessarily believe himself
to be the first person to come to this conclusion. He is, however, new to himself.

Pragmatism does not pretend to represent truth as much as it represents the
nature of truth. "Truth happens to an idea" (James 92). A person does not, as
Nietzsche would have it, go forth making new laws. Instead, he or she goes forth
assimilating new information and mixing it with the old in order to come up with the
transient new—transient because the person knows the new will pass into the old just
as soon as a new experience is assimilated, sponge-like, into the consciousness. After
the experience, the pragmatist character is not finished changing. There is a growing
awareness that he or she has not uncovered some eternal, metaphysical truth. Each
character in the three novels that I shall discuss is aware that, although his or her
world has been redescribed in some way, the world is not suddenly revealed in its
certainty. Unlike Plato's primeval philosophers, emerging from the cave to find the
light of the truth, a pragmatist character is made aware only that a particular view is
now made more relevant to his or her own stock of truths (to use the Jamesian
metaphor). This stock of truths will inevitably change, as explained by James in "The
Notion of Truth".

Yet since almost any object may some day become
temporarily important, the advantage of having a general stock of extra truths, of ideas that shall be true of merely possible situations, is obvious. (James 93)

In the novels I shall discuss, this realization leaves the characters' motives and philosophy much less defined. For example, as Huck closes his narrative, we are left with the mysterious message that he is "lighting out" for new territories. The reader senses that Huck is much more adult now that he has helped to free Jim, but that he is still rather unsettled as to how he will live his life. He has realized that each event in his life will require a new solution that incorporates newly-acquired information mixed with older notions of truth, resulting in a synthesis that is entirely practical, but not entirely new.

Richard Rorty, the most notable modern proponent of pragmatist thought, writes in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, that a pragmatist consults with a party concerned with, but outside of, the action. This person is more experienced in the sort of experience that the main character is enduring. The pragmatist's advisor, or "literary critic," has a broader range of knowledge than the character, and thus serves as a provider of information and possible avenues of action.

Ironists read literary critics, and take them as moral advisers, simply because such critics have an exceptionally large range of acquaintance. They are moral advisers not because they have special access to moral truth but because they have been around. They have read more books and are thus in a better position
not to get trapped in the vocabulary of any single book.

(Contingency 81)

A character such as Christopher Newman, protagonist in Henry James' *The American*, has a friend like Mrs. Tristram, who always seems to be one step ahead of him. She is more intimately familiar with how to read the social text of Parisian relations, and so advises Newman in his quest for relations. Mrs. Tristram serves as Christopher Newman's personal literary critic.

Each of the three books discussed here in depth represent to me a different take on the pragmatist approach, but each shares some things in common. First, each character experiences a change. That, in itself, is unremarkable in the field of literature. But each character experiences that change in such a way that prepares that character for future changes. Each character explores a new frontier. Whether it is Huck Finn “lighting out” for the territory or exploring the Mississippi, Christopher Newman traveling in ever more exclusive social circles in a new country, or Thea Kronborg finding a new voice in the wilderness of New Mexico and then traveling to Europe to become famous, each persona is shaped by some sort of travel, some new frontier. Lastly, each character accepts change with a sense of irony and loss. The sense of closure offered by so many other novels is not present in this group. Instead, the end represents the beginning of a new chapter in the character's life, and the reader is imbued with the forlornness that results from experience outside the realm of past practical knowledge.

Thea Kronborg, in Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, experiences a poignant loss as the result of pragmatist experience. Both William James and John Dewey
would have predicted Thea's distressed state. James speaks of an "inward trouble" (31) that results from taking in new experience, and Dewey says that experience leads to "reconstruction which may be painful" (41). What is it about pragmatism that might lead to such a condition? For explanation, we must turn to Richard Rorty, who defines pragmatists as ironists. An ironist is one who doubts that his or her current range of experience, and the vocabulary necessary to define it, is in any way final or absolute. An ironist is in a continual struggle to define his or her world, but is aware that this definition will be superseded by yet another. This realization leads to a kind of existential angst, a revelation that leaves the ironist aware of his or her own crucial role in deciding upon truths and consequences. Pragmatist characters are always in the process of gaining new insight and experience, but instead of benefitting from and becoming more satisfied with the way things are due to these experiences, the character leaves the reader with the impression that something has been lost rather than gained. The character adds to a growing list of experiences the sense that nothing is as reliable as he or she once believed, and his or her view of things will change rapidly and often.

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* speaks to us from the heart of the Western canon. Huckleberry Finn, in his interest in Jim's livelihood, comes to the decision that the practical result of helping a slave to escape, or turning in a friend to the authorities, is the same, and that therefore he might as well construct his own theory regarding Jim's status as a black man in the community. When he helps Jim to escape, it is with none of the personal guilt he would have felt had he turned Jim in, and this is Huck's own reward. Furthermore, Huck consults his friend Tom as to the
soundness of his theory. Tom thus serves Huck as both friend and literary advisor, a person who has had more experience in this, a theoretical matter. In the end, as Huck says good-bye to his reader, we are left with the unmistakable impression that he has some issues to sort out for himself, and that possibly his pragmatist experience has left him doubtful about many more subjects than just the nature of slavery in the United States.

Henry James’s The American serves as a direct complement to Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. James writes of a man whose frontier lies in the social sphere, far removed from that of Huck Finn. Christopher Newman (note the Nietzschean name), having realized his fortune in the American business world, goes to Europe in search of a new world for himself. Newman sets himself adrift, not in the Mississippi, but in the stream of high society Paris. His relationship, and engagement, to a financially embattled French Countess forces upon Newman a change that he could not have expected. Instead of the detached, humorous, easy-going optimist that he portrays in the first part of the story, Newman’s alteration is so complete that he does not see anything in the world, including and especially himself, the same anymore. His belief in his own credibility is so irrevocably shaken that the reader is left with the feeling that Newman may never slip out of his depression. The pragmatist experience is, for Christopher Newman, imbued with such irony as to be tragic. What he wanted was a new world, but what he gets is a new set of theories on the old one.

In The Song of the Lark, Thea Kronborg, as an artist, is pragmatic from the beginning of the story. She, as much as any Jamesian philosopher, is ready for and desirous of change. She has been raised knowing that new experiences will change
the way that she thinks, and each change comes as no surprise to her. However, she is a very spiritual woman with strong Christian sensibilities. The change in her life is undoubtedly one she is expecting since she leaves home in deliberate pursuit of new worlds. But Thea's resultant change of perception is quite shocking to her. Later in life she seems comfortable with a pragmatic viewpoint, but that is certainly not what she was expecting. From the beginning of her relationship with Fred Ottenburg, the reader gets the impression that she senses the change of experience coming on and that she is prepared to embrace, although reluctantly, the price she has to pay for her new store of goods. She is more complex, more ethereal, than Huck Finn or Newman. She, as an artist, is always embroiled in the numinous world of musical artistry, but her pragmatist change challenges her earliest childhood beliefs and perhaps changes her more than my other two main characters. Since she thinks she is prepared for what will happen, she is that much more affected by its occurrence.

The pragmatist texts I will use as a critical background are three that echo the beginning, development, and contemporary pragmatist thought. William James' collection of pragmatic essays, entitled Pragmatism, are generally regarded as the basis of American pragmatist thought. Although published in 1907, a later date than most of the literature to be discussed, the essays are based on ideas that James had been developing for some time. William James focused mostly on perception and how an event may be perceived by the individual in more than one way at different times during that individual's life. John Dewey's Art as Experience, a collection of lectures published in 1931, shows pragmatism as it is applied to art and literature. Dewey's writing is mostly in relation to experience and how it shapes reality. Richard Rorty,
currently the most notable pragmatist thinker, published *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* in 1989. Rorty is important because he focuses the discussion of personal philosophy so closely upon discussions of literature.

There are other American novels besides the three discussed in detail here, of course, that include similar, pragmatist-oriented experience. I incorporate within the chapters examples from William Dean Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. This list of works, as well as the three novels central to the thesis, all appeared during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time William James and John Dewey were spreading pragmatism as a philosophy. It is my belief that this event in philosophy is paralleled by the literature of the time, and thus deserves study.

Arguments leveled against pragmatism hold that it is simply relativistic and refuses to take a stand. In that case, any work of fiction could be labeled pragmatist in that it reflects the view of the author. However, pragmatism is not merely the practice of choosing the most convenient or easily explained theory to correspond with the most convenient, available action. It does not concern itself with arguing for or against the existence of God, solipsism, or theories about the creation of the universe. Pragmatism would focus on such questions and consequences as result from believing that slavery is bad or whether this or that political theory fits with current social practice. It is relativistic in a sense, but not in any way that is relevant to its avowed purpose. Rorty writes:

> James and Dewey are, to be sure, metaphilosophical relativists, in a certain limited sense. Namely: they think
there is no way to choose, and no point in choosing,

between incompatible philosophical theories of the typical

Platonic or Kantian type. Such theories are attempts to

ground some element of our practices on something

external to these practices. (Consequences 167)

Since this thesis is concerned with discussing pragmatist elements in specific works of

literature and not the pragmatic nature of literature as a whole, the issues at hand are

not ones that need be concerned with accusations of relativism. I will focus on

narratives that embrace experience over ideology, and theory well-matched with

practice.
CHAPTER TWO

MARK TWAIN'S ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain and William James, contemporaries who maintained an epistolary relationship, first met in Florence, Italy, in 1892. They were both on vacation, but each one inspired in the other a spurt of writing (Horn 4). In their writings and their personal lives, both were involved in the examination of how knowledge and morals are developed and retained by the individual. Each had his own way of communicating this to the outside world: James lectured and wrote essays while Twain devoted himself to fiction. Each one had a similar message: perspective is gained through experience. James is celebrated for his pragmatist philosophy and its influence on American thought, and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn represents the sort of pragmatist philosophy that James was developing. Huck's experience of truth makes him a pragmatist in the most basic sense of James' philosophy.

One of pragmatism's most important contributions to the study of philosophy is the idea that "truth is made...in the course of experience" (James 98). This denies the existence of a metaphysical truth in which humanity may place faith. In Jamesian terms, the consequence, or "cash-value," of this proposition is that an individual encounters truth only in so much as it is experienced. Each person carries a set of words out of which he or she seeks to bring the most cash value, or practicality, concerning his or her theories of the world. These words can include "God, Matter,
Reason, the Absolute," or "Energy" (James 28). With ever-changing meanings, the person is free from the constraints of trying to force all of his or her experiences into the same set of static theories. James indicates that people and truth exist like words on the printed page. The context is what decides the meaning of that particular experience and all of its possible connections. All this is not to say that pragmatism is the philosophy for people who desire convenience. In fact, pragmatism only seeks to bind practice with theory. If one believes in a particular theory, but comes up against a situation in which the desired course of action would belie that theory, then it is necessary, according to James, to change the theory to match the course of action.

Pragmatism, unlike other philosophies, does not establish theories in order for people to follow them. Instead, pragmatism is the way in which a theory is established in order to correspond with actions, experience and perception. Similar to existentialism, pragmatism seeks out honest correlations between theory and action.

William James, in a series of essays entitled Pragmatism, published collectively in 1907, laid out his philosophy. Inspired greatly by Darwinist theory, James sought to explain how a person engaged in the struggle to survive might still retain some piece of internal freedom. He wrote, "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true" (James 26)? A result of this line of reasoning is the idea that truth is relative to experience and that a statement that contains truth may be true at one time and then not true at another. A corollary of this thought is that a person's mental picture of truth will evolve, to use the Darwinist term, through time and according to
environmental stress, in this case, personal experience. Mark Twain was obviously someone who dealt with issues of truth on a regular basis. As a matter of fact, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* could be said to be one long adventure in the search of social honesty. Huck and Jim search for the truth concerning freedom, the truth concerning their relationship, and the truth about race relations in America.

The main focus in this chapter is on how Huck's central moment of introspection in chapter thirty-one marks him as an ironist according to the definition set forth by contemporary pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty. This is important in that it will show how Huckleberry Finn's development as a character does not meet with any gradual uncovering of truth, but is rather a steady series of realizations that lead him to the conclusion that his theories concerning the world can and need to match closely with his own personal actions. These theories reflect another of Huck's realizations that the way in which one makes the world, one's descriptions of relationships, one's environment, theories and actions as well as truth, justice, God, the universe, etc., are by no means final. These descriptions are constantly changing, allowing one to re-describe one's world in ways that reflect a changing fund of experience.

Since pragmatism is a philosophy which connects itself with experience and perception, and with mating theory with practice, it is only natural to focus on Huck's narrative. Since pragmatism focuses on experience and perception, we can say that pragmatism is context-oriented. People can evaluate themselves within a context like a character in a story. Huck's re-evaluation of himself, from a young boy concerned only with fun to a blossoming abolitionist, speaks to the reader from the heart of early
American pragmatist thought. What better example of the pragmatic method? Huck examines his life the same way a literary critic would examine a text, working with the same assumptions concerning truth, practice, and context. Huck matches people, actions, and perceptions in context of various situations with the intention of developing new theories concerning human action. The way in which those elements are interpreted make up the theories that Huck will use to explain his actions, whether to himself or to others.

William James' metaphor for life was the "stream of experience." Certainly Huck's journey down the Mississippi mirrors this concept. If one realizes the contingency, therefore, of the journey, and Huck's experiences on the river, one can re-contextualize the journey in order to reveal its effect on human perspective. The same is true for people or for truth. A person's actions only have value in so far as they have context. Once the context is changed, so is the truth or the person. This is the sort of experiential nature of truth we see in Huck's journey down the river with Jim. Huck's encounters with other people show the reader how facile Huck is with interpreting, and re-interpreting, the journey in order to suit his goals and his context. Later in the chapter, I shall discuss how T. S. Eliot's view of the river can enlighten the reader as to the pragmatic nature of Huck's journey.

Pragmatism, at its heart, is a practice which admits to its own non-falsifiable nature. In particular, a pragmatist ironist, as described by Richard Rorty, is a person who admits that his or her own "final description," the words he or she uses to describe events within the context of existence, changes with the intake of new or previously unknown information. So if I am to argue that Huck Finn is a pragmatist, I
must first allow for the argument that, according to pragmatism, *everyone* is a pragmatist. Pragmatism is not a philosophy that must be followed or embraced. According to James and Rorty, it is the way people act in everyday life. Everyone re-interprets social theories to meet his or her own practices. And one changes, no matter how little, his or her personal philosophy at one time or another in response to a new experience or piece of information. What I am attempting, however, is to read Huck Finn's behavior in such a way as to highlight its pragmatic nature. This, I hope, will serve to tighten the philosophical connections between the thought of James and Twain, two American thinkers and writers who deserve credit for finding and identifying ideas that help to explain human behavior.

Huck says, "I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another" (Twain 3). His personal relationship with truth issues is, to say the least, very important. As readers of the story, we know that he regularly makes up truths to fit any occasion, and works best when he is protecting himself or others. So as readers we can assume that Huck is in a unique position to realize the contingency of truth. Any good liar like Huck knows that truth is whatever you need it to be. Moreover, he is fairly open to other's ideas concerning truth because at the beginning of the book he partakes in wild and gregarious fun at the behest of his pal Tom Sawyer. When Tom Sawyer organizes the band of robbers and leads them through raids on other children, Tom's imaginative descriptions are what get his friends interested in joining the band. Tom has adventure and fun as his practical consequences to any truth. But Huck resigns because he "couldn't see no profit by it" (Twain 17). Or, to use James' words, he found no "cash-value" in believing the same things that Tom believed. However,
Huck has already indicated that he is willing to accept the possibility that someone else may have a closer idea of the truth than he. He wanted to believe that the little band of highwaymen would come across treasure and adventure. But increasingly we see that Huck is getting closer and closer to the pragmatist interpretation, which is that each of his experiences forces him to look at himself in a slightly different light.

Huck knows that people tell the truth to suit themselves, just as he knows that his friend Tom is lying about the scene they saw at the Sunday school ambuscade. Whether wittingly or not, people position themselves in such a way as to get the most practical value out of everything they do. Miss Watson admonishes Huck to pray, as she does, and he will receive whatever he prays for. We can be sure that Miss Watson only prays for the things that will preserve her faith, thus matching her behavior with James' ideas concerning the way people perceive the world. That is to say, she will pray for things that will certainly come true no matter what. If she prays for "God's will to be done," then no matter what happens tomorrow she can be glad that God's will has indeed been done. Huck, however, needs a different, more practical prayer. He sees a great deal of practical value in fish hooks, but his prayers for fish hooks go unanswered. Huck wonders why people do not pray for material possessions, such as Deacon Winn's money or Widow Douglas' silver snuff box. As a pragmatist, Huck desires immediate practical value out of any action. His truth differs from Miss Watson's truth in just this fashion. She encounters the truth factor of prayer by praying for intangibles whose presence can be based on faith, and Huck encounters the non-truth factor in prayer by praying for things which will almost certainly not materialize regardless of his faith. Huck experiences prayer such that, for him, there is
"no advantage about it," and he will "just let it go" (Twain 16).

Huck's behavior is such that he recognizes the necessity of re-evaluating his belief system. It is not the case that he simply decides, off-hand, to behave a certain way because it is more convenient than another. Huck makes the decisions he does because, in true Jamesian fashion, he draws from each experience only what he is capable of within the confines of his previous experiences and expectations. When Huck forces himself to change the theories that no longer match with his actions, when he decides to risk eternal damnation ("All right, then, I'll go to hell") rather than lose Jim as a friend, is the point at which he exemplifies most the pragmatist nature of American experience. He decides that it is no longer necessary to concern himself with damnation since his own theory is that Jim's friendship is a more practical gain than social salvation.

In chapter thirty-two, Huck has a conversation with Aunt Sally which seems to do injustice to his recent conversion to the "go to hell" attitude. After Huck describes a steamboat explosion, Aunt Sally queries, "Good Gracious! anybody hurt?" To which Huck answers, "No'm. Killed a nigger." And then Aunt Sally: "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." David Smith uses Huck's close relationship with Jim to invalidate the meaning of his exchange with Aunt Sally.

Huck has never met Aunt Sally prior to this scene, and in spinning a lie which this stranger will find unobjectionable, he correctly assumes that the common notion of Negro subhumanity will be appropriate. Huck's offhand remark is intended to exploit Aunt Sally's
attitudes, not to express Huck's own. (106)

This is a good example of Twain’s intellectual kinship with William James. To James’ way of thinking, Huck has not actually lied. He has protected himself by utilizing his knowledge of the socially constructed fiction of a black person’s non-humanness. By this point in the story, Huck has experienced the cash value of a good lie and knows best how to draw from his own fund of experiences in order to play circumstances to his own advantage. The pragmatic truth here is that Jim needs to be set free, and Huck cannot accomplish it without being nearby. He must construct a situation which condones his presence at the Phelps’ farm, and his story about the boat sounds real to Aunt Sally, who then is ready to accept his presence at the house (especially since she is expecting a visitor anyhow: Tom Sawyer). Therefore, he has done the right thing for the situation. At the point in the novel where Huck sits down on the raft and decides, in the end, to suffer possible damnation instead of turning in his friend, Huck has encountered truth in various forms and is ready to feel out the practical results of two avenues open to him.

Jason Horn introduces us to Huck’s introspective encounter through the eyes of James’ texts on psychology. “Twain more fully describes his concept of the divided self in chapter 31, as he sets Huck’s will in opposition to a now much stronger conscience, one threatening to dam ("damn") the entire stream of thought” (Horn 58). Horn’s observations can benefit from discussion of James’ pragmatist view that "truth is made, just as health, wealth and strength are made, in the course of experience” (James 98). In a pragmatist reading of this passage one must come to the conclusion that Huck is simply weighing the consequences of two actions, or the products of
"funded" experience, to use James' term. Horn is correct in that Huck is indeed a divided self, but William James might also argue that what Huck was doing was examining the practical consequences of two different ideas. On the one hand, if he helps Jim he is a "dirty abolitionist." On the other hand, if he turns Jim in he will have done a very distasteful thing. In a Jamesian reading, his final decision would not be based on any sort of moral truth or universal fact of human understanding, but rather on the fact that Jim's friendship is more important to him than anything else.

According to Rhett Jones, Huck's experience with Jim consists of shifting between two layers of white consciousness. Huck belongs to a society in which white people simultaneously deny blacks their humanity for the sake of slavery and embrace blacks specifically for that humanity which, as a race, was denied. The stereotypical darky in the field, happily picking cotton and eating watermelon on the porch after dinner, was a quaint and human picture to upper-class whites of the period. But the other side of that white consciousness is the denial of that peaceful existence for the sake of retaining the black labor in the fields. Huck's day-to-day experience with Jim teaches him that "Jim ill fits the stereotype of the ignorant darky" (Jones 177). Jim proves himself to be cagey and wise, and a person who cares deeply about Huck. Again, it is Huck's experience, his practical application of theory to praxis, which shows him the flaws in the theory. He arrives at the truth of the situation, which is that Jim's humanity is stronger than the white denial of that humanity which keeps him on the run. Huck's pragmatic interpretation of that truth motivates him to continue helping Jim regardless of what he has been taught.

When Huck is on the raft figuring out what he should do, he is actually
figuring the consequences of each idea available to him. He is, in true Jamesian style, employing the pragmatic method. "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences" (James 26). If he helps Jim escape he will be a "dirty abolitionist," someone who he has been taught will burn in hell. The consequence, therefore, is damnation. On the other hand, if he decides to turn Jim in to the authorities his conscience will never let up and will continue to "grind on" him. The consequence is that he will not rest easy here either. He will be in his own hell. So, according to James, the consequences of the ideas are practically the same. Therefore, Huck is pragmatically correct in choosing the one which has most value for him. At least he gets Jim's friendship to keep. James also wrote, concerning the pragmatic method:

But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word (words which seek to solve, such as God, Reason, the Absolute, etc.) as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed.

*Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest.* We don't lie back upon them, we move forward, and, on occasion, make nature over again by their aid. (28)
Huck’s experience has taught him that prevalent religious belief is flawed. He knows that Jim is more than the socially constructed myth of the contented darky-slave. He brings out of the words "dirty abolitionist" their "practical cash-value" and decides that they do not mean enough to him to allow them to shape his actions. In his "stream of experience" upon the mighty Mississippi, he has learned that his truth does not jibe with that one. He will seek to change the "existing realities" and to alter the natural order of things he has been taught is right. As I mentioned earlier, Twain and James share such similar thoughts on the nature of experience that even their metaphor for change is the same. James talks of the "stream of experience" and Twain uses the river as a constantly changing environment which fosters intellectual reflection.

In Chapter Sixteen Huck realizes for the first time that he is engaged in helping a slave gain his freedom. As he sits pondering his actions, his conscience speaks to him as if to another character, and says, "What had poor Miss Watson done to you, that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you, that you could treat her so mean?" (Twain 130). According to Henry Nash Smith:

In the earlier debate the voice of Huck's conscience is quoted directly, but the bulk of the later exhortation is reported in indirect discourse. This apparently simple change in method has remarkable consequences. According to the conventions of first-person narrative, the narrator functions as a neutral medium in reporting dialogue. He remembers the speeches of other characters
but they pass through his mind without affecting him.

(91)

So if we are to take Smith's perspective, Huck's internal moral bantering is merely the relation of data passed on to him from other people, related here to inform the reader of Huck's previous experience with slavery propaganda. But, as Smith goes on to point out, previous experience has a great deal to do with how Huck responds to his dilemma in Chapter Thirty-One:

But when he paraphrases the admonitions of his conscience they are incorporated into his own discourse.

Thus although Huck is obviously remembering the bits of theological jargon from sermons justifying slavery, they have become a part of his vocabulary. (91)

During the first debate, Huck versus Huck's conscience, the closing arguments are put off by the intrusion of two men in a skiff out looking for runaway slaves. By the end of the chapter, Huck has reached no firm conclusion as to whether he should turn in Jim or continue to help him in his flight. Huck, in declaring "I was stuck," effectively shuns any more introspection that might lead to the painful conclusion that he is himself a true criminal, or worse yet that he should turn in Jim at the next available opportunity. As Smith points out, by the time Chapter Thirty-One and its pivotal moment arrive Huck has taken to heart what people have told him his whole life. His decision cannot be put off any more; he is forced to weigh the consequences of each course of action open to him. Just like Henry James' character Christopher Newman, Huck's philosophizing leads him to conclude that nothing will change if he gives up
on conventional morality. Newman decides that, rather than deal the social equivalent of a death blow to the Bellegarde family, he will simply spend his time trying to heal the wounds he has already incurred. Huck decides that he will still feel (and one is led to understand that Huck's feelings are the most practical commodities he has in judging philosophical rightness) that he doing wrong in aiding Jim, but as he points out to himself, he was "brung up" to "wickedness." Huck therefore argues, as Henry James would later, that he is the "product of circumstances" and could do no other than follow the course laid out by his perception of his own experiences. Smith, in focusing on the importance of Huck's private vocabulary, paves the way to a more contemporary pragmatist discussion of Huck's decision making process.

Richard Rorty, the most notable contemporary American pragmatist, has a great deal to say about Jamesian pragmatism. However, in his 1989 book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty defines a specific type of pragmatist which he labels an "ironist." An ironist has a "final vocabulary" consisting of "the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's 'final vocabulary'" (*Contingency* 73). His definition of an ironist is as follows:

I shall define an "ironist" as someone who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present
vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these
doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her
situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer
to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not
herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the
choice between vocabularies as made neither within a
neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt
to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply
by playing the new off against the old. (73)
Rorty explains that his ironist will consult literary critics for wisdom. It is the job of
literary critics to
spend their time placing books in the context of other
books, figures in the context of other figures. This
placing is done in the same way as we place a new friend
or enemy in the context of old friends and enemies. In
the course of doing so, we revise our opinions of both the
old and the new. Simultaneously, we revise our own
moral identity by revising our own final vocabulary. (80)
Lastly, an ironist turns to literary critics because
such critics have an exceptionally large range of
acquaintance. They are moral advisers not because they
have special access to moral truth but because they have
been around. They have read more books and are thus in
a better position not to get trapped in the vocabulary of any single book. (80-1)

Having talked about Huck in a pragmatist way, we can now discuss the book's ending using ironist-pragmatist vocabulary. Huck, as a pragmatist, has attempted to re-define himself during a particularly introspective scene on the raft. After doing so, he engages himself whole-heartedly in living up to his new "final description." He is now an abolitionist and as a practical consequence he knows he cannot possibly get into any more trouble than he is already in, so he resolves that there is nothing he will not do to get Jim out of danger. Furthermore, he consults Tom Sawyer as a "literary critic," specifically in the capacity described by Rorty's quotes above. Tom is more widely read than Huck, and therefore has a greater acquaintance with jail-breaks. Tom will be able to place Jim in the context of Tom's own experience through literature. However, Huck is not willing to swallow Tom's plan wholeheartedly, even though he knows it "was worth fifteen of mine for style" (Twain 294). Huck does take Tom as his moral adviser, but leaves room in the agreement for continual re-description of the plan. They both agree to "let on" that they are digging Jim out with case knives, and to "let on" that they have been at it for decades (Twain 306-7). Even as a co-conspirator, Huck retains his pragmatic sense of truth to the end, willing and able to re-furbish the truth until it fits with his plans of freeing Jim from slavery.

As noted by T. S. Eliot, Huck's experiences with the Mississippi River result in his own awareness of practical consequence. When Huck is reprimanded by Jim for playing a mean practical joke, he is brought closer to his own self than other boys his age. Reminded that he and Jim are on a mission in which life and freedom are at
stake, Huck's personal maturation surpasses that of other characters in the novel, except possibly Jim. Eliot writes that Huck "is more powerful than his world, because he is more aware than any other person in it" (64). Part of his awareness is a result of the river itself, a constant reminder that the stream of experience is due in part to individual circumstances, and in part to the interpretation of those circumstances. The river, like the book and like Huck himself, offers both opportunity and struggle, home and homelessness, and a path as well as a destination. "We come to understand the River by seeing it through the eyes of the Boy; but the Boy is also the spirit of the River. Huckleberry Finn, like other great works of imagination, can give to every reader whatever he is capable of taking from it" (67).

As contemporaries, Twain and James were part of a generation struggling with the internal conflict of biological determinism versus personal freedom (James xiv). Although Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was written before the two became friends, the book was written to reflect a deep and pervasive change taking place at the heart of American philosophical thought. The ironist-pragmatist character of Huckleberry Finn was the ideal platform for Twain's own attempt to sell to America the idea that truth is based on experience instead of metaphysical law. The continual experience embodied by Huck's journey down the river is the essence of the pragmatist experience and reflects the air of the times in which it was written.
Willa Cather’s The Song of the Lark, portrays the life of a woman from girlhood on the frontier to womanhood and great success in the global arena of opera. Thea Kronborg, daughter of a minister, grows up in a small Colorado town with a simple life and simple values. Traditional Christian rules and morals guide her through everyday life, and she has the assurance that, no matter what, her family will always love her. Thea’s early years are based on the theory that truth is an unchanging, unbending, guardian angel. Beginning with adolescence, however, a series of experiences teaches her otherwise. Thea’s experiences, and the resultant changes in her philosophical outlook, match closely with the definition of experience as given by John Dewey in his book on pragmatism, Art as Experience. Thea’s reaction to these experiences and the personalized education she gains from them is indicative of the pragmatist frame of mind. Because of these indicators, and because of the historical fact that Willa Cather was alive during the main thrust of the pragmatist philosophical movement in America, it is evident that pragmatism, and specifically Deweyan pragmatism, exists in this story. This philosophy affects Thea’s life and her perceptions, to a degree that the story is unquestionably related to the pragmatist movement in the early years of the twentieth century.

The early years of Thea’s life are full of messages that she is happy and
untroubled. But underlying these messages are reminders that her childhood must come to an end. After a happy night out with her mother and Thea’s soon-to-be boyfriend, we read that, "She curled up on the seat again with that warm, sleepy feeling of the friendliness of the world—which nobody keeps very long, and which she was to lose early and irrevocably" (Cather 157). Thea’s boyfriend is killed in a train accident. This incident is the marker for the end of Thea’s childhood. One may read this incident as the metaphorical death of Thea’s early years, but more significantly, this death is the first indicator Thea has that life is not only transitory, but it is studded along the way with events which mark a person permanently. The death of Ray Kennedy brings with it a completeness, a roundness, of experience. Her growth through childhood, and into young adulthood, is connected with a definite point in time, and with a definite feeling, and with a definite perception of that time and feeling. John Dewey, in Art as Experience, differentiates between everyday experience and an experience in the following way:

In contrast with such experience, we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political
campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience. (35)

Ray Kennedy's death begins Thea's life as an artist in that it serves as the culminating experience of her childhood years. From that point she is concerned only with developing her skills as a musician. She has learned whatever lessons one can glean from the death of a first love, has begun to learn "self-sufficiency," and has certainly endured the experience's "individualizing quality."

When Thea is a teenager she travels to Chicago to study piano in the big city. Her first instructor, Harsanyi, teaches her the beauty of music and the soulful side of artistic expression. But Thea is troubled. She cannot seem to compete very well with the other students, and her studies begin to suffer. Her problem is that she has always had the belief that hard work and dedication pay off with success. However, Chicago teaches her that that is not always the case. Thea experiences a dangerous time during which she keeps trying the same method for attaining success. Only when she alters her perception of herself, and of the world of music around her, does her progress continue. She discovers that her real talent lies in her voice. She moves on to a new instructor, Bowers, who is supposed to teach her how to sing. However, in addition to voice lessons, Bowers teaches her how to be a petty and mean-spirited person who, instead of glorying in the beauties of the human voice, directs her energy into envy and hate. His comments are personal and biting, and he forces Thea to sing within guidelines based on masters of the voice, guidelines which Bowers himself seems to
have learned at the knees of some very stern teachers. Bowers embodies Cather's version of Dewey's model of the misdirected critic. Dewey writes that the imitation of past masters is a misguided effort, and that the derivation of so-called "rules" results in the encouragement of imitation instead of creation. Dewey writes,

In general, it is safe to assume, I think, that reliance upon rules is a weakened, a mitigated, version of a prior, more direct, admiration, finally become servile, of the work of outstanding personalities. But whether they are set up on their own account or are derived from masterpieces, standards, prescriptions, and rules are general while objects of art are individual. (300)

In contrast to Thea, her eldest sister, Anna, is the model of what Dewey here is writing against. Cather writes that,

Scarcely anything was attractive to her [Anna] in its natural state--indeed, scarcely anything was decent until it was clothed by the opinion of some authority. Her ideas about habit, character, duty, love, marriage, were grouped under heads, like a book of popular quotations, and were totally unrelated to the emergencies of human living. (166)

After two years in Chicago, Thea has the opportunity of traveling to a ranch in Arizona to vacation by herself for a brief period of time. Her trip through the wilderness of Arizona marks the stripping away of learned bad habits, negative
experience, and other influences. In Chicago, her time with Harsanyi only served to confuse her, and her time with Bowers only served to harden her towards others. When she travels to Arizona she experiences for the first time the frontiers of her own body and mind, and the individualizing process of experience.

William James wrote that with each change, most of what originally made up an individual stays behind and is present in the new self, like adding spice to a stew. "The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space, cause and effect, nature and history, and one's own biography remain untouched" (James 31). In this way Thea becomes a new version of herself. She discovers the ruins of a Pueblo Indian community, and she dubs the extinct tribe the Ancient People. Her time in the ruins of the Ancient People teaches her that perspective motivates individuality. Among the still-present realities of what must have been a harsh life for the primitive Ancient People, Thea finds that they still had time for the love of art. Broken pottery shards, all that remains of beautiful work, carry a message of existential forlorness, of a person's lonely place in the universe. However, they also teach her hope. Thea notes that her voice improves dramatically while visiting the ruins, and that her time there is good for clearing out Bower's indoctrination into the world of out-dated musical style. However, she does not, as William James wisely instructs, totally neglect the teachings of others which are based on past masters. Instead, Thea allows her isolation to bring out the individual in her that could successfully combat the outside world in such a way as to bring about the success for which she has worked so hard. She is the same person in many ways, but Thea has reached a point in her life where the focus of her individual self is necessary.
The next complete experience in Thea's life is her relationship with Fred Ottenburg. Ottenburg is a wealthy young man and patron of opera singers, and he and Thea develop a tight bond during his visit to her in Arizona. However, Ottenburg notes several times that Thea always seems to be hiding a secret, or not letting him get as emotionally close as he would like. This new version of Thea, different from the one he knew in Chicago, is ready to fall in love. She is not, however, ready to give up her drive for artistic success. Truth, in Thea's eyes, is relevant only in so far as it supports her career as a singer. In fact, Thea's new devotion to her art serves as an impediment to her relationship with Ottenburg. Their relationship exists for Thea as a happy coincidence on the road to success, maybe even as a subordinate portion of her larger experience, but not as her primary source of emotional contentment. The fact that Fred Ottenburg is married to someone else, of course, also presents an obstacle to intimacy.

Ottenburg's marriage does not present a moral obstacle to Thea so much as a social one. Previously, Thea would never have considered having relations with a married man. But time spent in a primitive setting has helped guide her to the realization that the philosophy and morality within which she previously supposed the world operated is no longer valid to her. It is not that they are wrong so much as that her struggle for artistic success is a very individualized journey. Fred cannot legally marry her, but they both want to be together. The book makes no specific mention as to whether they break the sex taboo, but Thea indicates near the end of the book that it would not have mattered to her if they did. She and Ottenburg are obviously drawn to each other, and their experiences together negate, for the purposes of the story,
whatever societal taboos exist concerning their behavior.

For a meaningful comparison, one may turn to Theodore Dreiser's character Carrie Meeber (Sister Carrie, 1900). Carrie also becomes involved with a married man, G. W. Hurstwood. Like Thea, Carrie has had her first love destroyed by, to quote Cather, the "emergencies of human living" (Cather 166). Like Thea, Carrie is aware of the man's marital status, but becomes involved regardless. At almost any point in the relationship Carrie could have broken things off, and indeed one is led to believe that she is full of only the best intentions. However, Carrie is very much aware that without a man to support her in urban America she will be in a difficult position. Her social position is on a more tenuous footing than Thea's. Hurstwood does not leave his wife because things between them were bad, nor does he ever openly admit that he is married. Both women are involved with their men for the same reason; they both want success, they both derive at least marginal happiness out of their relationships, and they are both honest with themselves as to why they need Ottenburg and Hurstwood, respectively. One important distinction remains; by the end of Sister Carrie, Carrie Meeber has decided that there are some moral rules she is willing to break, whereas Thea Kronborg does not believe these rules exist in such a way as to be relevant to her.

Thea's art, her vocal performance, is of major pragmatic importance. The artistic experience, according to Dewey, is the mating of education, through historical knowledge and instruction in the work of past masters, with personal experience. This mating results in unique but recognizably personal interpretations of past works and individual expressions. Like the American Constitution, it is a blend of the old with
the new such that enough of the old is left over to provide continuity, and enough of
the new allowed in to provide that continuity with a path to the future. Thea's voice,
in conjunction with the music of Mozart and Wagner, makes a huge impression on the
world of opera once she learns to let enough of herself into the music. Thea is her
voice, and her voice becomes her in expression and through experience, which makes
for a praxeological approach to musical theory.

Thea discovers, in the desert, what she does with her voice. Most pragmatists
argue that ideas develop and grow within communities. Using this as a premise, one
may argue that Thea, out among the long-dead Ancient People, is among the
community to which she belongs, that of artists who commune with nature. It is here
that she makes a powerful discovery. Every artist, out of necessity, must discover
what he or she does. Specifically, a painter must take time to figure out what to paint
and how, and a poet must discover what is important about his or her work. Thea
discovers what she does with her voice:

The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but
an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison
for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life
itself--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong
to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it
in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art
Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion.
In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils
and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale
of natural intervals. (378)

This realization, that her singing is not art reflecting life, but rather a vessel in which life itself is momentarily contained, is a very powerful image. It shows the reader that Thea has now let go of her past life as a shy little girl and is cast adrift in the stream of experience. But now that she has abandoned herself completely to life she has gained a kind of control, a control that lets her choose which streams to wander through and which eddies to explore.

Thea’s discovery links art and consequence; a true pragmatist mating. Thea believes that her singing has "caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals" (378). Her metaphor matches Dewey’s interpretation of an experience. Dewey says that an experience is a series of events resulting in a "consummation not a cessation" (35). Thea’s musical scale metaphor of life compares a moment of experience with the eight-tone progression from tonic up through the octave that sounds so harmonious and complete to the Western ear. To extend Cather’s metaphor, one could even say that Thea’s life up until that point could be represented by one larger, longer scale. Thea, progressing upwards with her musical ability and her relationships with other people, became stuck and frustrated in Chicago because no one could give her the key to personal fulfillment. Thus, her life was stuck on the leading tone of a giant scale, having led her up, step by step to a point from which she could not turn back, but did not know how to push through. Her contentment and relief in Arizona were a result of getting back to her musical roots, returning to the tonic which started her in the first place. One would not be out of place to say that the land serves as a tonic for Thea.

While living in the ruins, Thea falls to a close examination of the Ancient
People’s lives. Her education, both growing up at home and in Chicago, seem to be parts of far away places no longer connected with her life. The values, rules, and social obligations fall to nothing in the face of the rocky, dry evidence that people have been living perfectly happy lives, doing just what they want, for a very long time. Thea examines closely where the fires of the ancients left flakes of carbon on the ceiling. She takes daily baths in the same stream where other women, now far in the past, also bathed. All the encumbrances of western, everyday, civilized life fall away from her in the stream of experience. The time in the desert washes her clean of everyone else’s, her family, her teachers, her former loves, desires for and pressures on her future. Thea comes to the conclusion that she truly wants to be a great singer, and with excellent Deweyan form devises a practice to match her theory. The conclusion of the book shows that she has matched theory with practice so well as to have kept most of her friends far from her.

Before Thea goes off into the desert, and before her piano instructor sends her off for voice lessons, we learn some valuable insight into Thea’s personal approach to music. Harsanyi, her piano instructor, notes that “she could not think a thing out in passages. Until she saw it as a whole, she wandered like a blind man surrounded by torments” (Cather 241). If we may take a musical passage and think of it as an idea, one may assume that her dilemma is directly related to the pragmatic method of discovering the practical consequences of a theory or idea. Thea’s philosophical approach to music is to assure herself of the intended consequence of the performance and of how the individual passages fit together to best bring about her own interpretation most fittingly. Moreover, this philosophical approach has so intensified
by the end of the novel that she applies it to people, including herself. Upon meeting an old friend, Dr. Archie, for the first time in several years, Thea says, "I haven't got a sense of you yet . . . You haven't been here. You've only announced yourself, and told me you are coming to-morrow. You haven't seen me, either. This is not I. But I'll be here waiting for you to-morrow, all of me!" (Cather 506).

By the end of the story, Thea's sense of herself and of her own pragmatist nature is fully developed. She admits openly that she searches for honesty in her life, for a real combination of theory and practice. Thea says to Fred Ottenburg that she cannot possibly tolerate a person who does not sing well. Her reasoning is that if she tries hard to sing a part correctly then how can she get along with someone who does not? Pragmatically, her reasoning is sound. An artist, one who approached his or her art with the utmost in effort and performance, could not be philosophically honest in pretending to be friends with another who did not apply the same standard to his or her own performance. However, Thea discovers that her philosophical approach to life has not earned her many friends. She is at the height of her career and is more praised than any other singer of the time, but does not have anyone with whom she feels a close bond. At this point in the novel Cather writes that "Artistic growth is, more than it is anything else, a refining of the sense of truthfulness. The stupid believe that to be truthful is easy; only the artist, the great artist, knows how difficult it is" (571). William James argued that knowing the truth of a situation was to know that any situation may require more than one truth, and that finding the right truth for the right situation was not easy. Thea Kronborg fully develops this sense of what truth and truthfulness are, but it certainly does not help her attain happiness in her
relationships with other people. As someone who is a fully developed artist, she has found for herself one of the only niches in life that will allow her to make "an instrument of an idea" (Cather 571).

Thea's particular instrument gives Cather an effective way to voice her approach to individual interpretation, one of John Dewey's favorite philosophical platforms. In a conversation with Thea's long-time friend, Dr. Archie, Fred Ottenburg explains the experts' interest in Thea's vocal talents:

There's the voice itself, so beautiful and individual, and then there's something else; the thing in it which responds to every shade of thought and feeling, spontaneously, almost unconsciously. That colour has to be born in a singer, it can't be acquired; lots of beautiful voices haven't a vestige of it. It's almost like another gift—the rarest of all. The voice simply is the mind and is the heart. It can't go wrong in interpretation, because it has in it the thing that makes all interpretation. (509).

Cather wants the reader to know that, although vocal excellence has historical continuity in that "that colour has to be born in a singer," the result is one of total reliance upon the individual for interpretation. Thea's technique is to study the music until she understands every last nuance of the performance, and then make sure she relates to the story of the music on a personal level. One could argue that this depth of commitment is what makes relationships difficult for her. With each performance she allows herself to become someone else, and so estranges those like Ottenburg or
Archie who were formerly close to her.

When, at the peak of her fame, Thea makes a particularly effective
performance, one can read further into Cather's pragmatist interpretation of art. "That
afternoon nothing new came to Thea Kronborg, no enlightenment, no inspiration. She
merely came into full possession of things she had been refining and perfecting for so
long" (Cather 571). This scene is fully pragmatic in that it admits to the reliance of
the individual on the idea that history simply repeats the same stories over and over,
leaving the individual in the position of having to make use of his or her ability to re-
interpret things in such a way as to maximize individuality. It is pragmatist in that it
denies divine "enlightenment" or "inspiration" and instead relies completely upon
whatever capabilities humans have at hand. The fact that Thea had been "refining and
perfecting for so long" marks her as a pragmatist willing to move within the stream of
experience, and to be involved in artistic and personal creation as an on-going process
and not as a means to an end product. This scene is the last glimpse the reader has of
Thea before the novel ends. Her career grows ever more successful, but the last
chapter is told from the perspective of an old spinster aunt who lives in Colorado.
Cather leaves the reader to assume that, once a particular level of artistic excellence is
attained, a certain remove is necessary in order to adequately picture the trajectory of
the artist.

For the sake of historical comparison, one may examine the experiences of two
contemporary, literary characters, Lily Bart of Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* (1905),
and, as mentioned earlier, Carrie Meeber of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900).
Lily Bart, whose journey into adulthood begins with the death of her father and her
mother's insistence that a successful marriage will save them both, never seems to learn anything from any experience. Lily expresses her fondness for Lawrence Selden but then chases after the money, and unhappiness, of another man. Her unsentimental decision marks the pattern for the rest of the book. Whenever Lily is on the brink of happiness, she chooses to follow the path staked out by her now-dead mother, which inevitably results in unhappiness. Lily's reliance upon supposed moral constants is her downfall. The message from Wharton is that one can be certain of sorrow if the important lessons available from experience are not learned. Lily never truly becomes an individual, at least not in the Deweyan sense. Therefore, her life never gains value.

On the other hand, Dreiser's Carrie Meeber is almost completely re-molded by each passing experience. Carrie allows each experience in her life, with her first love, her first illicit affair, and her second illicit affair (this time with a married man) to shape her perception in such a way that by the end of the story she is a successful, although saddened, individual. Carrie is successful because she has learned what it is she is willing to do in the face of experience. The last period of her life that involves a man takes place in a seedy, run-down apartment. Hurstwood has totally abandoned any idea of gainful employment, and Carrie ends the relationship by simply disappearing from his life. Dreiser's message is that a pragmatic outlook on life can at least be instructive concerning human nature, and can sometimes enable a person to cause pain to another in order to save oneself.

Carrie Meeber and Lily Bart also differ from Thea Kronborg in that neither exist in a community from which they can draw strength. A pragmatist is aware of the community from which he or she draws and discusses information about the world
and about truth. Thea Kronborg finds her community among the Ancient People in the American southwest. Carrie Meeber does not find anyone until the end of her story when she finds success in the field of acting, but she has already formed too many barriers to let people into her life. Josephine Donovan notes that "Lily [Bart] is in a condition of fundamental exile, alone with no supportive women's community and no emotional connections. She wanders in a patriarchal underworld governed by the economic ethic of social Darwinism, unchecked by the humane personalist values of the mothers" (Donovan 58). Donovan further notes that Lily is "rarely able to move beyond aesthetic judgments" (58). Dreiser and Wharton make evident the claim that both Carrie and Lily suffer from a lack of philosophical freedom, whereas Thea Kronborg makes herself free.

Susan Hoover accurately points out the pragmatic nature of The Song of the Lark when she notes that readers judge Thea more harshly because she is a woman. Hoover's criticism of such analyses as John Randall's in The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value focuses on the failure of past critics to note that a traditional, woman's-role interpretation naturally tends to make light of success in the face of loss of family life. Since Thea's life is one of discovery and freedom, her personal relationships should not be held against her. Her choices reflect the historicity of changing roles for women as well as artists. Randall may interpret Thea's abandonment of relationships and friends as cold-hearted and somewhat irresponsible, but had Thea been male her drive for success would be seen as aggressive and practical. Hoover argues that Cather had trouble integrating two narrative voices, one authoritative and patriarchal, and a "Moonstone" (Thea's
hometown) voice that emphasizes relationships and reaching out to others in a motherly fashion. Hoover writes, "Perhaps Cather is using the patronizing language intentionally to highlight the tensions which might influence Thea, as they do others, to abandon her pursuit for her sense of herself and her art" (Hoover 262).

Pragmatism, in its concern for truth in theory and practice, argues that the individual's perception of truth-value is informed by a community of voices. Thea's community of voices includes two distinct voices which tug at her in different directions. The "patronizing" and masculine voice, the voice of Thea's father and, sometimes, Fred Ottenburg, emphasizes Thea's duty to family and society. The feminine role, according to the patriarchal community from which Cather herself was trying to escape, is rooted in service. Thea's commitment to her relationship with others through her relationship with music is informed by the "Moonstone" voice, the voice that drives her to simultaneously care for others while searching for herself through music. The pragmatist turn is that Thea, while successful in her art, is oftentimes seen as unsuccessful in her relations with other people. A pragmatic reading makes evident Thea's practical and truthful solution. She does not totally dissolve her contact with friends and family; she only pursues more ardently her own desires. Had Thea consented to bigamy with Ottenburg, or stayed behind in Moonstone, she would have abandoned the practical application of herself to her art, a non-pragmatist solution because it admits to the falsity of her actions. The fact that Thea's mentors are all men, Dr. Archie, Mr. Wuntsch, and Ray Kennedy in Moonstone, Harsanyi and Bowers in Chicago, Fred Ottenburg in Chicago, Arizona and abroad, demonstrates her desire for achievement as defined by the masculine voice; however, the reality of Thea's
achievement contradicts her role as defined by this same masculine voice. It is her pragmatic, "cash-value" approach to her career that gives Thea her problematic character that combines a feminine quest for selfhood with a masculine drive for success.

Randall also criticizes Cather's portrayal of an artist, in that "instead of portraying Thea dramatically in some operatic role, Willa Cather reports conversation of her admirers" (Randall 47). Despite the fact that Cather does indeed portray Thea "dramatically" performing opera, most notably in a beautiful scene just before the Epilogue, Randall overlooks the approach at truth that Cather makes. Thea's male admirers who spend so much time discussing the beauty of her voice are engaged in the act of paring the truth down to its essentials. Their descriptions, and subsequent redescriptions, allow the reader to get closer and closer to an idea of what Thea really sounds like, and why it is her voice is so wonderful. Cather steps out of the narrative spotlight to let other characters speak for her, and perhaps to her, so that more insight into Thea's talents may be gained than if one simply read of her performances on stage. Each time the reader encounters another account of Thea's performance capabilities, he or she is reminded of the changes going on in Thea's life and in her career.

In his book, Bergson and American Criticism: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens, Tom Quirk argues that the French philosopher Henri Bergson directly influenced Cather's development of Thea Kronborg's character. Bergson, a French philosopher, offered his idea of "vitalism" to a hungry American public, and as Quirk notes, "in the public rhetoric of the day, vitality, optimism, confidence, progress,
and hope were accepted bywords" (Quirk 1). For one of the first times in its history, America was on the cutting edge of philosophy. William James, the great pragmatist himself, endorsed Bergson's words. Quirk's arguments follow the same lines as this thesis; to trace philosophical history through the development of major literary works of the same period. Quirk's discussion of The Song of the Lark parallels a pragmatic interpretation.

Quirk writes that a casual consideration of Thea's artistic success would "seem to mark Thea's destiny and to make her one of fortune's favorites. Her rise, superficially considered, is as inadvertent and fortuitous as Carrie Meeber's" (Quirk 144). Quirk goes on to characterize Thea as a "populist überdame" whose "story is rather an affirmation of human freedom in a world still in the making" (144). In retrospect, Thea's life may seem to lead inevitably to its conclusion of success and happiness. The attitude in historical studies that causes must lead to an inevitable effect was dying out in America, Quirk says, and it is easy to argue that what may seem unavoidable is instead the result of choice on an individual's part. Thea's trip to Panther Canyon, and her stay among the ruins of the Ancient People, trim away from Thea's psyche the impulse to describe past events as leading to a certain future. Thea does indeed link herself to the past through an exploration of the lives of women among the Ancient People. The connection she feels is through the handiwork of the ancient women, the pottery and the simple designs painted on it. The pragmatic connection Thea makes is only to the age-old desire to create art; her time alone does not link her to a deterministic course of action, but merely sets her mind free to wander in and out of its own caves of experience. Quirk, in his Bergsonian analysis,
also makes the pragmatic judgement that Thea has acquainted herself with "the relevance of creative power to the uses of life (Quirk 153).

Carrie Meeber and Thea have a great deal in common. They both went to the big city, fell in love with married men, and later experienced a great deal of artistic success. Each is buffeted about by the world until they are very different from their original form. It is as though life, like a strong wind, blows away superfluous matter. This same wind brings with it new material, some useful, some not, to replace the old. After the wind is gone, the person is recognizably the same, but has different materials at his or her disposal. One comes to the conclusion that Cather and Dreiser are driving at the same conclusion, that experience is the driving force that decides moral right and wrong, and that a person will derive a particular idea in a different way in the face of new experience.

In Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Carrie Meeber's life is divided up into Deweyan experiences. Each event has a clear beginning and end, with each separate experience resulting in a changed perception for poor Carrie. She, like Cather's Thea, winds up very successful in her chosen art form. Both women learn that their lives are not governed by metaphysical truths which apply to everyone at all times. Instead, events are capricious, and each person gathers from an experience, or a relationship, only what that person is capable of taking based on antecedent perceptions. However, each experience brings with it some individualizing element which works its way into the person. For Carrie Meeber, this means a continuing downhill slide of morality. For Thea, experience teaches her that relationships are not as important to her as artistic success.
Lily Bart, the main character of Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*, faces a similar set of decisions at different times during her life, and each time she treats the decision to be made with no perceptible change of philosophy. Lily's descent into infamy culminates with blue-collar employment, and death, without ever making a sincere effort to redeem her life. Lily adheres to the belief that she is destined to find a good husband within her highly-select social circle. Lily's metaphysics takes the form of her position in her own social stratum, imbued with the idea that she can never be removed from it. After Mrs. Dorset's open attack on Lily's character, she is still unaware of its consequences. Wharton, in demonstrating the value of pragmatism through Lily Bart, shows that it always pays to be aware of consequences. Lily's fall from grace continues almost without abatement until she is reduced to the "dinginess" she abhors. Unlike Thea Kronborg and Carrie Meeber, Lily Bart is not herself a positive role model for pragmatism. On the contrary, she is the example by which Wharton expresses her belief that a person who does not question the consequences of philosophical ideals, and the individualizing process of experience, will inevitably be disappointed and underdeveloped as an individual.

Cather's message may be that the pragmatist method is ideal for the expression of art, but not for the maintenance of human interaction. Moreover, one finds it possible to glean this lesson from Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, or indirectly from Wharton's Lily Bart. The lesson is indicative of the struggle that the artistic and philosophical communities of America at the turn of the century, and of any period, had in reconciling the subjective expression and experience of art and life, with the objective view necessary to carry on a relationship with the rest of the world. Perhaps if Thea Kronborg were capable of
turning her artistry on and off, she would have had more successful relationships with other people. What is revealing, however, is that Thea actively reflects the new and growing philosophical standard of her contemporary America.
CHAPTER FOUR

HENRY JAMES' THE AMERICAN

In his wonderful and instructive book, Henry James and Pragmatistic Thought: A Study in the Relationship between the Philosophy of William James and the Literary Art of Henry James, Richard A. Hocks directs the reader's attention to the remarkable similarities between William James' philosophy of pragmatism and Henry James' work as a novelist. Suggesting that, "whereas William is the pragmatist, Henry is, so to speak, the pragmatism," Hocks makes reference to the later period of Henry James' writing and its narrative style. As described by his brother William, Henry's later novels describe the action of the plot "by dint of breathing and sighing all round and round it, to arouse in the reader who may have had a similar perception already (Heaven help him if he hasn't!) the illusion of a solid object, made (like the "ghost" at the Polytechnic) wholly out of impalpable materials, air, and the prismatic interferences of light, ingeniously focused by mirrors upon empty space" (Hocks 22). Henry James' earlier novels do not in fact follow this particular style since they focus more on action than introspection; however, James' characters do reflect William's philosophy in that they are products of their own experience. Christopher Newman, the protagonist of The American, plays a role defined by Henry James' perception of the quintessential American, and this novel reveals the author's pragmatic nature through its characters and their choices rather than through its literary style.
The on-going discussion of the relationship that existed between Henry and William is a field rich with valuable information as well as conjecture. Since Henry James' death in 1916, several volumes of his letters have been collected and edited for publication. Most notable are the collections edited by F. O. Matthiesen and Percy Lubbock, since they include letters to many different literary figures of the day, as well as members of the James family, ordered chronologically. The field continues to grow and to specialize as shown by the most recent addition to the James epistolary canon, Selected Letters of Henry James to Edmund Gosse, 1882-1915: A Literary Friendship, edited by Rayburn S. Moore. Until recently, very few works have focused on the relationship between Henry's writing and William's philosophy, and those that do are primarily concerned with Henry's later phase, or are strictly philosophical investigations supported with biographical material. Examples include Harvey Cormier's "Jamesian Pragmatism and Jamesian Realism" and Ross Posnock's instructive book, "The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Trial of Modernity" (mentioned later). There is, nonetheless, a wealth of information directly concerned with Henry James' The American, some of which is cited here as the proof of the (pragmatistic) pudding.

Through their correspondence, the Jameses continued a relationship which has been the source of many contradictory viewpoints, but was obviously quite brotherly. They were often critical of each other, but through most of their writings one can discern a strong loyalty. William, being older, seemed ever more quick to criticize the younger brother's writings while Henry often simply praised his older brother's work in philosophy. In 1907, after William published collectively his philosophical essays in a
book called *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Henry wrote a letter to William partly in response to the letter that contains the quote above, and partly in response to reading *Pragmatism:*

I can't now explain save by the very fact of the spell itself (of interest and enthralment) that the book cast upon me; I simply sank down, under it, into such depths of submission and assimilation that any reaction, very nearly, even that of acknowledgement, would have had almost the taint of dissent or escape. Then I was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have . . . unconsciously pragmatised. (Lubbock 83)

Henry's admission is not used here to indicate instant validation of any theory that links his writing with William James' philosophical theories. Henry admits only that he himself has "pragmatised," and this letter was written in 1907, long after he penned *The American* (1875-6). This letter is mentioned only to indicate that Henry believed that he himself had been a pragmatist all along, and it is the underlying assumption of this paper that pragmatist philosophy, lingering in the social discourse of the age, found its way into the novels of the time.

*The American* serves as a direct complement to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in that both novels have a protagonist who embodies a particular American social ideal. James, however, writes of a man whose frontier lies in the sphere of high society, far removed from the frontier of American social equality explored by Huck Finn. Christopher Newman, having realized his fortune in the
American business world, goes to Europe in search of a "new world" (James 35).

Newman sets himself adrift not in the Mississippi, but in the stream of high society Paris. His relationship and engagement to a financially embattled French countess forces upon Newman a change that he could not have expected. Instead of the detached, humorous, easy-going optimist that he portrays in the first part of the story, Newman’s alteration is just sufficiently disturbing enough that he does not see anything in the world, including himself, the same anymore. His belief in his ability to understand other people is so augmented by new experience that the reader is left with the feeling that Newman may never recover his old jocularity. Unlike Huckleberry Finn, who must realize the pragmatic nature of his decisions, Newman is a pragmatist from the beginning, albeit a naive one. James' description of him reiterates Newman's position as the archetypal American, a sort of western Benjamin Franklin.

In his introduction to the 1907 edition of The American, Henry James wrote that not only is the fictional character's experience of importance to the reader, but the author's part in telling the tale is also important. According to James, the author's image of the story is related in such a way as to inform the reader of both the objective portion of the tale and the author's subjective rendering. According to James, it is a case "not of an author's plotting and planning and calculating, but just of his feeling and seeing, of his conceiving, in a word, and of his thereby inevitably expressing himself, under the influence of one value or the other" (James xv). Thus, the reader moves through the story using the eyes of a character who is seen first through the eyes of the author. Indeed, James makes a few first-person authorial
intrusions, further adding to the personal nature of Newman's experience. In Chapter Three, for instance, when describing Mrs. Tristram's attempts to gain popularity despite plain features, James writes, "How well she would have succeeded I am unable to say. . ." (James 37). What is unusual is that James makes use of his intrusions to remind the reader that the author is present in the storytelling. He writes as though he does not wish to intrude upon the reader but realizes the unavoidable necessity of his presence and so allows himself to appear only every once in a while. James' style indicates to the reader that his personal experience is tied inextricably to Newman's, and that both of these are combined with the reader's experience of the text itself.

Newman, though not at all new to the varieties of experience, is new to Parisian society. However, his unfamiliarity with the motives and ideals of his new acquaintances, particularly at the party thrown for him by the Bellegardes, puts him in an unfair position of vulnerability. After Madam de Bellegarde has introduced Newman to her circle of friends, we find him in an awkward situation. Rather than spending his time with Madam de Cintre, his intended, we get the effect, as Henry James himself put it, "of an evening at the opera quite alone" (James xxii). James comes to the defense of his character by making light of the Parisian social scene. "As a result, James himself is a very active character in the novel, his satiric voice being in evidence whenever his hero is treated shabbily" (Poirier 47). This activeness on James' part focuses the reader's attention on the fact of the author's presence throughout the novel. Since James is aware of the pragmatic nature of Christopher Newman, that he is only a product of experience, James feels compelled to bring his greater expertise into play so as to protect Newman. Some have argued that
Christopher Newman echoes James' initial experiences in Parisian society. I will say that Newman could represent either William or Henry James. Newman, as the quintessential American, could be representative therefore of the quintessential American philosopher, William James, embodiment of American thought. On the other hand, James' defense of Newman could be read as a frank admission on James' part of his own initial failings upon entering Parisian society. Either way, Henry's authorial intrusions give the reader a clue as to the author's personal involvement in the telling of the story.

The engagement party scene sums up the solitary perspective of the whole novel. Other than James' narrative perspective, the reader never experiences any view except Newman's. None of the other characters do anything but reflect his perspective. One may read the party scene as the epitomization of the novel's narrative point of view. Henry James wrote that "we are each the product of circumstances and there are tall stone walls which fatally divide us" (Hocks 227).

Newman spends the whole of the novel immersed in Parisian experience trying to gain what practical knowledge he can. The whole novel reflects the problem manifested at the party; and the fatal turn of the romantic relations between Newman and Madam de Cintre reify their philosophical differences, heretofore difficult for each to understand, into something tangible that neither can forget. Their ultimate parting is what William James would have called the "practical consequence" of their philosophical differences. Newman realizes that the courses of action available to him will not result in Madam de Cintre's return to him. Once this realization is complete, the only recourse left to him is to cut off ties to the Bellegarde family and spend time trying to reconcile this
new experience into the context of his previous experiences.

The title of the novel, *The American*, plays a crucial role in introducing the reader to Christopher Newman. In Chapter One, James describes Newman as "the superlative American" (James 2), and, indeed, Newman, as a "national type," stands as James' model of the American. America, as a country propelled both by industry and history into the global fore-front, had encountered political and philosophical problems unique to its existence. Americans had embraced, on paper if not in practice, the idea that all people are equal. Philosophically, the pragmatist movement had embraced the idea that experience is what shapes and molds a person's experience of truth as well as his or her perception of truth. James writes that in Newman's eye one "could find in it almost anything you looked for" (James 4). Just as Captain Ahab's gold coin reflects what is in the heart of each sailor, this description indicates not only Newman's pragmatic nature, that he held many possibilities and had experienced things that shaped his outlook, but James' own conviction that Americans are pragmatic beings whose experience determines the context within which one seeks to define the character of another.

In opposition to Newman's pragmatic American nature is the rigid and fixed character of the Europeans. "James allows for the inference . . . that the factors which cause the failure of hope and ambition are distinctly European--they are associated with the mysteries of tradition. . . ." (Poirier 45). The characters who are pragmatic, "free" as opposed to "fixed," are Newman, Valentin, and Mrs. Tristram (Poirier 44). They "are people who are still exploring the possibilities of their own characters and whose perceptions are not warped by social allegiances or blighted by self-absorption"
(Poirier 44). Poirier also notes that Claire de Cintré is a member of the "free" category, but her allegiance to a failing familial ideal mark her otherwise. The "fixed" characters, who are not to be marked as unintelligent or congenial, but who simply fail to meet the pragmatic criteria, are Tom Tristram, and Madame and Urbain de Bellegarde. All three are content with things the way they are and have no use for the flow of experience which shapes and re-shapes the other characters.

Newman has brought a great deal of the working-class American to his status as a wealthy man. He is not formally educated, he has little knowledge of foreign languages, and he knows practically nothing of intellectual matters. But Newman is certainly no fool. He carries with him the sort of native intelligence one could describe as "Yankee wit." His naïveté is great only when it comes to European social graces, and one learns that "he had never read a page of printed romance," thus indicating that Newman, in acquiring his very American fortune, had not found the study of humanity's foibles to be of interest (James 39). Newman is one of a growing group of Americans who, at the time, had acquired the financial wherewithal to spend an evening, or a weekend, in pursuit of intellectual pursuit and betterment. A lack of formal education and a lengthy, varied work experience guide him towards a looser, less structured philosophy unencumbered by jargon or a rigid system of rules that has no practical applications. Like William Dean Howells' Silas Lapham, Christopher Newman is the product of hard times and hard work, and like Lapham, Newman intentionally seeks out a new world of experience in the realm of an old, established society family. In each case, rather than sticking with the only business he truly understands, the protagonist is rejected by an ideology which, so far as he can tell, are
not grounded in any experience he understands. So as Lapham delves into the high society of Boston, Newman "lights out for the territory" of Europe, and each seeks a new variety of experience.

Newman's search for new experience begins in a scene presented by Newman himself, relating the events which led him to reunite with his old friend Tristram. Newman, on his way to get financial revenge on a person who had done him some wrong, undergoes a transformation and decides to get out of business. He says, "I had money enough, or if I hadn't I ought to have. I seemed to find a new man inside my old skin, and I longed for a new world" (James 32). The presence of a transformation would seem to indicate the presence of a metaphysical power or truth, exactly the sort of thing that pragmatist philosophy argues against. But I argue that the transformation itself is the result of Newman's accumulating all the money that he feels is practically necessary. The pursuit of monetary gain is dear to Newman's heart only so long as it is a necessary precondition for survival. The moment he has acquired so much money that the pursuit itself is no longer practical, he gives up and goes in search of a "new world."

Newman lets Madam de Cintré know that he has chosen her because she fits his preconceived notion of what his wife should be. Never was there a character who more closely fits with William James' ideas concerning the individual's perception of an experience. According to pragmatism each person gets from an experience only what he or she is ready to receive, based on previous experience and perception, and only what he or she can make practical use of. Newman's commodification of Madam de Cintré is based on his previous experiences as an American businessman. What
changes the relationship is that de Cintre's actions reveal the falseness of Newman's basis for evaluating her. Newman learns that materialistic appraisal is not entirely applicable when searching for a mate. Madam de Cintre's attraction for Newman is initially based on quantity of observable advantages, but then changes to the quality she brings to his life. Unfortunately, she is not able to change herself based on someone else's perception of her, and in her view of things she and Newman are incompatible as mates. Madam de Cintre is only capable of acting based on her training; she is not so flexible as Newman. Newman demonstrates his flexibility in partially accepting her nature, but initially he only perceives her inflexibility as a flawed bit of child-rearing on the part of her parents.

Pragmatist thinkers William James and Richard Rorty agree that words play a large part in defining truth. William James wrote that a word "names the universe's principle, and to possess it is after a fashion to possess the universe itself. 'God,' 'Matter,' 'Reason,' 'the Absolute,' 'Energy,' are so many solving names. . . . But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest" (W. James 28). These words, to James, are "magic" words. To Richard Rorty, words constitute a "final vocabulary" which people "employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. . . . It is 'final' in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language" (Contingency 73). For William James the pragmatic method involves testing words to find whether they work within one's "stream of experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities
may be changed" (James 28). For Rorty, a pragmatist, called here an "ironist," comes to the realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies, puts them in the position which Sartre called "meta-stable": never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change. . .

(Contingency 73-4)

For Christopher Newman, both James' and Rorty's language mean that he is unable to ultimately define himself, or others, without casting doubt on his ability to circumscribe adequately himself or others using words. When Newman is traveling about Europe he makes the acquaintance of a Unitarian minister, Reverend Babcock. Disturbed at Newman's "gross intellectual hospitality," his ability to accept, like or be amused by anything, the young minister attempts to instill in Newman some of his own "spiritual starch, but Newman's personal texture was too loose to admit of stiffening. His mind could no more hold principles than a sieve can hold water. He admired principles extremely, and thought Babcock a might fine little fellow for having so many" (James 70). Newman, as illustrated here, does not subscribe to the idea that he can be held to a position simply by the application of the right words. His approach to understanding a thing does not involved active understanding at all; simply experiencing the thing will do. When Babcock becomes irritated with Newman
and declares that they "don't understand each other," Newman replies,

"Don't I understand you?" cried Newman. "Why, I hoped I did. But what if I don't; where's the harm?"

"I don't understand you," said Babcock. And he sat down and rested his head on his hand, and looked up mournfully at his immeasurable friend.

"But why should you mind that if I don't?" (95)

As Newman's philosophical foil, Babcock repeatedly dints his words against Newman's pragmatic armor. Babcock's disgust at their failed friendship is rooted, as he sees it, in their failure to agree totally on the nature of life and the proper pursuit of learning. Babcock says, "I try to arrive at the truth about everything. And then you go too fast" (James 96). Newman's approach to life does not concern itself with "truth" in the same way as Babcock's approach because Newman is simply out to experience life without placing himself in a position to judge ideas or events. "He had not only a dislike but a sort of moral mistrust of thoughts too admonitory; one shouldn't hunt about for a standard as a lost dog hunts for a master" (James 87). His strongest attempt at reaching a conclusion is that "orchestral music, in the evening, under the stars, was decidedly a great institution" (James 100). When Babcock relates to Newman the story of his first encounter with a friend's infidelity, Newman applies "an epithet of an unflattering sort to the young girl" (James 93). Newman, upon questioning by Babcock as to the accuracy of the word, and whether Newman was too hasty in passing judgement with his choice of vocabulary, answers that "you can take your choice" of words because the practical result is still the same; the girl had
engaged in activities which require no particular label to understand.

Mrs. Tristram always seems to be one step ahead of Newman. She is more intimately familiar with how to read the social text of Parisian relations, and so advises Newman in his quest for success in high society. Like Tom Sawyer to Huck Finn, Mrs. Tristram serves as Christopher Newman’s confidante and advisor in things political and philosophical. Rorty’s definition of an ironist, a person who does not take his or her final vocabulary seriously because he or she can readily see how it might have to change, or undergo "redescription," to use Rorty’s term, helps to explain the role of Mrs. Tristram in Newman’s life.

Rorty defines an ironist as someone who

has radical and continuing doubts about the final
vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself.

(Contingency 73)

Using this definition of an ironist, Rorty goes on to say that such ironists, like Christopher Newman, consult people whose greater experience and wider range of acquaintance allow them to dispense advice to the ironist concerning possible sources
of final vocabularies. These people, according to Rorty, may be termed "literary critics," not because such critics are not engaged in contemplating the relative merits of books, but are constantly "placing books in the context of other books, figures in the context of other figures," much the same as, and taking the place of, traditional philosophers (Contingency 80). A conflation of books and people as equally accessible texts allows one to come to the conclusion that a social advisor may easily fit the requirements of "literary critic" as given by Rorty. Thus one can say that Mrs. Tristram, like Tom Sawyer to Huck Finn, performs the role of literary critic for Christopher Newman.

In Henry James's Psychology of Experience, Granville Jones attempts to reconcile Newman's relationship with the Bellegardes in light of James's apparent fascination with innocence and experience. Jones writes,

The Bellegardes try to believe that they can accommodate themselves to Newman, but they finally realize they would rather have Claire buried in a nunnery than face a lifetime with her married to an ignorant, vulgar, socially inferior husband. They reject Newman not because they are evil but because they are cultivated and he is crude.

Their purely social orientation is no more narrow-minded than his predominantly materialistic one. What they do, in fact, is to teach him two lessons: one in legalistic discrimination, the other in social discrimination. They are ingenious; he is naive. (209)
Jones is thorough in pointing out the consequences of Newman's innocence and his materialistic approach to life. However, his analysis begs the question of what to make of Newman's experience as a result of his innocence. On the one hand, Jones describes the Bellegardes as "cultivated" and Newman as "crude," but on the other he neglects to focus on the practical consequences of their respective characters.

Newman spends his time trying to come to terms with the Bellegardes' apparent revulsion toward him, while the Bellegardes do little or nothing. Their "cultivation" has resulted in a firm entrenchment based on false notions of honor and family, and virtually no relations with people other than those in their own circle of friends.

Newman's experiences making his fortune have taught him to embrace his innocence as a basis for new experience. Unfortunately for Newman, because of James' theory that each person is the result of "circumstances," the end result of erasing one's innocence is to build ever higher the "tall stone walls which fatally divide us" (Hocks 227). The stone walls surrounding the Bellegardes were not put there by themselves, but are the result of philosophical inbreeding of the idea that they are always behaving correctly. To return to the pragmatic method, the practical consequence is that Newman may in fact become more and more like the Bellegardes, eventually unreachable through the vast layers of experience and circumstances. Given Newman's irrepressible nature, however, it is more likely that he will, no matter how badly cauterized by his relations with Parisian society, simply become more and more aware of his own limitations and the barriers erected by others around him.

Jones also points out that the Bellegardes are honest in letting Newman know that their objection to him is not personal. Madam de Bellegarde states that, "it's not
your personal character that we object to, it's your professional--it's your antecedents" (James 371). What Jones does not focus on is that the Bellegardes' "antecedents" include involvement in the death of Monsieur de Bellegarde and a lifelong pursuit of indoctrinating the rest of the family into thinking that to be a Bellegarde is to be miserable. Newman's "antecedents," while from the Parisian point of view are less than respectable, do not include any actions that the Bellegardes could possible view as immoral. In short, a William Jamesian reading of the conflicting philosophies involved would lead to the conclusion that Madam de Bellegardes' statement belies hypocrisy in her criteria for viewing the world. Newman, honest in his generation of theory according to practice, and vice versa, is only "crude" in that he is too naive to know that the Bellegardes do not regard hypocrisy as morally irresponsible. Newman does not seek revenge on the basis of morality versus immorality, but only seeks to free Madam de Cintré from what is from his view point a philosophical outlook based on a false premise.

If one wished to undertake a detailed investigation of Henry James' pragmatistic practices and how they relate to William's writings on pragmatism, one could hardly do better than to start with Ross Posnock's 1991 book, *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Trial of Modernity*. Posnock seeks to reconcile Henry's actions with William's writings using Rorty, Habermas, Dewey and others major figures of twentieth-century philosophy and criticism. Posnock's contribution hangs mostly upon Henry's life and later writings, so his contribution to a pragmatic reading of *The American* is limited to a brief note. Posnock writes that Newman's escape from the stock market, and the fact that Newman later allows the
Bellegardes to escape from him, indicates that "Newman . . . and Henry James share a relaxation of will that permits them to open themselves up to others as well as to their own internal otherness" (Posnock 316). Posnock's claim directly contradicts Henry James' theory of "stone walls" which "divide" individuals. The initial instance of Newman's "letting" things "utterly slide" takes place inside of Newman's consciousness and is then related verbally to Tristram (James 31). As the story shows, Newman is almost completely unsuccessful in relating his feelings to Tristram regarding his escape from Wall Street. Posnock is correct in surmising that Newman has discovered, or uncovered, something new about himself and has thus become closer to what makes him an individual, but this experience only serves to make him more of an individual, separating him more from those around him. His failure to communicate effectively with Tristram only reinforces James' theory that experience and "circumstances" serve to separate rather than bring together. Newman's breaking with the Bellegardes, and his subsequent decision to remain in Europe, only serve to render him more problematic to the reader. At the end of the novel one is more in touch with Christopher Newman than at the beginning, but the pervading feeling is that Newman is becoming more and more inscrutable. As to whether Henry James possessed the ability to "relax" his will and "open up" to others, perhaps the enormous field of criticism dedicated to discovering the nature of Henry's personal relationship to his brother William would not be so necessary if Henry had communicated his feelings in such an unfettered way.

In The American, the central turning point is Madam de Cintré's refusal to marry Christopher Newman. The very foundation of Newman's experience teaches
him that the truth of a situation reaches to the heart of a person's experience, and that if the situation changes in such a way that the applicable truth is altered, then the person's experience must be altered as well. However, the problem he encounters with Madam de Cintré is his inability to fit her theories concerning her family with any sort of practical application. Newman does not understand, once the truth is known concerning de Cintré's relationship with her family, why she will not consent to marry him. For Newman, the truth has the power to alter one's perception of circumstances. For de Cintré, however, knowing the truth does not change her relationship to her family; she must always see herself in the same light. The strain that all of this puts on Newman is very great and should not be underestimated. Newman all but puts into action a plan for exacting the greatest revenge on the Bellegardes, but, like the transformation he undergoes in the "hack" at the beginning of the novel, he resolves to let things alone. Newman does not give up, though. He continues to be the product of his own experience. At the end of the story, one sees him almost dedicated to the idea of drifting about Europe for the rest of his life instead of going back to America. His character is not so jovial and optimistic, but he is recognizably the same. William James wrote that

The observable process which Schiller and Dewey particularly singled out for generalization is the familiar one by which any individual settles into *new opinions*. The process here is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain. Somebody
contradicts them; or in a reflective moment he discovers that they contradict each other; or he hears of facts with which they are incompatible; or desires arise in him which they cease to satisfy. The result is an inward trouble to which his mind till then had been a stranger, and from which he seeks to escape by modifying his previous mass of opinions. (31)

Thus we arrive at the "inward trouble," spoken of by the elder James brother, that results from an encounter with a truth that puts strain on a person's attempt to fit it into his or her existent stock of truths. The facts that Newman finds incompatible with his "stock of old opinions" are that he cannot exact revenge upon the Bellegardes, and that Madam de Cintré will not marry him. His resultant "inward trouble" is that which compels him to stay in Europe, perhaps looking for new truths to release him from the pain involved in trying to reconcile new experience with old perception.

The American is pragmatic in the same way that Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Song of the Lark are both pragmatic. James' protagonist is someone who is not interested in finding out the one truth, or permanent set of truths, behind European society. Newman is instead only interested in what things are like and what he can see and experience that is new to him. James' involvement in the text, as a first-person narrator, can give one an idea of what Paris must have been like for James himself, and how he wants to show it through the eyes of Newman as well as through his own.

William James' philosophy is present in this book in the reality of its "free"
characters, principally Newman, who do not fall back on tradition or socially-constructed truth. Instead, Newman's will is dominated by his own immediate past. Whatever shortcomings he might have one are mitigated by the overall feeling that Newman's philosophy is preferable to that of the Bellegardes. Henry James, perhaps inadvertently, shows his readers an example of putting pragmatism into action, which is the philosophy's intended purpose. A brief inspection of American intellectual history, and the novel itself, accompanied by some of the letters the Jameses wrote to each other, will inevitably reveal that pragmatism is certainly evident in Henry James' The American.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The process through which an author constructs a plot, designs characters, and formulates the setting in which to place plot and characters is based on what the author perceives to be the best way to relay his or her particular piece of information. The work may seem to be more than the sum of its parts, but when taken apart and examined by the author the story becomes different pieces of the author's own experience, and a reader could argue that the author's perception of these pieces will be contingent upon his or her own experiences before writing, as well as the experience gained while using those pieces to build a story. Pragmatists argue that life experiences, when taken apart and examined, reveal the same pattern of personal experience mixed with the new perceptions gained through examination.

If daily experience is examined as a product of past experience, then a pragmatist may argue that decisions made based upon a person's perception of right or wrong actions are simply the result of past experience with what that person believes to have been right and wrong. A book can reflect this process in such a way as to both remove and involve the reader. The involvement comes naturally as a result of sympathizing with the activities and experiences of the characters, while the remove develops when the reader contemplates the book as merely a construct, a piece of experience materially separate from his or her life. This contemplation, both removed
and involved, is part of the pragmatistic movement that developed in America during the nineteenth century. As William James demonstrated, the pragmatic method is to measure the personal value of a word or experience, and then "set it at work within the stream of your experience" (28), which means to place it within the context of a person's own life. The connection between the context of a piece of literature and a person's life is thus made clear.

The pragmatist movement developed in America during the late nineteenth century, though there are theorists who point to middle and late twentieth-century writers as products of the pragmatist movement. As shown in the previous chapters, the philosophical movement was concurrent with the appearance of literary characters who functioned in very pragmatic ways. The intellectual climate of the time lent itself readily to an adaptable, functional, and very non-systematic philosophy, and the literature of the time, when placed in context with the historical event of the burgeoning pragmatic movement, reflects the pragmatic method.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, Americans began to work through their collective social problems by adapting, then re-adapting, political philosophy and social ideals. In fact, then as now, almost all facets of American society pointed toward an epistemology of philosophical evolution, of reaction to environmental stress. The pragmatist comes to the realization that not only is truth a matter of experienced truth but that truth is experience, and the works I have discussed illustrate this point. The works also illustrate the idea that the action of choice, of choosing one alternative over another, involves the pragmatic investigation of past experience and possible future consequence, and is a point of discussion necessary to the pragmatic ideal.
When an individual is aware of the consequences of his or her decision, and that the decision will not be based on what is independently right or good about the choice at hand, but that what is right or good will be reflected in their own perception of the decision, then that person has behaved pragmatically. William James wrote of this decision-making process as bringing out the "cash-value" of a proposition (28). Literature illustrates this point in its ability to show us the mind of an individual. The reader can see the character's mind sort through facts, nuances, and choices. With a character such as Huckleberry Finn, Christopher Newman, or Thea Kronborg, the reader can see a character who is passing decision-making data through a kind of experiential sieve in order to discover that what they find is only what he or she is prepared to find.

Of major importance in discussing Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is that Huck and his friends are working-class Americans presented to us by a working-class Mark Twain. Huck, Jim, and Tom, the novel's central characters, are not born into households in which philosophy is discussed at the dinner table. They represent the people who have to work with each other each day, and who can learn to appreciate each other's strengths and weaknesses regardless of commonly-held beliefs regarding temperament and ability based on race. From a philosophical vantage point, Huck approaches his problem in a very advanced fashion, sorting out action and consequence with practiced skill. From a working-class vantage point, Huck approaches his problem in a very basic and natural way, finding the solution which works best for him. Both points of view, taken together, represent in one package the social atmosphere at the time Twain wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The
intellectuals and the workers were beginning to share ideas in everyday living.

Twain, in writing about a young boy’s journey into a more enlightened intellectual existence, uses a metaphor for experience that echoes the one chosen by William James. The mighty Mississippi upon which Huck and Jim find their way is quite literally the "stream of experience" of which James and Dewey wrote so frequently, and which critics such as T. S. Eliot have identified as the focal point of the novel’s experience. This concatenation of metaphorical usage is instructive to readers in that one can see the pervasive attitude of the time that experience is not the result of biological necessity or epistemological certainty, but rather a result of individual circumstances, the same circumstances that Henry James later wrote would build "tall stone walls which fatally divide us" as individuals (Hocks 227). Perhaps it can even be said that Twain, like Henry James, had "unconsciously pragmatised" (Lubbock 83). At the end of the book, after his break with accepted attitudes towards slavery, Huck "lights out" for the frontier which Frederick Jackson Turner described as the foundry of the American experience. The pragmatic nature of the frontier gave birth to Huck Finn as well as the experience which mixes theory and practice so as to make Huck aware that if his decision is based on his own perception of slavery then so must all attitudes towards slavery be based upon the same contingencies. Huck’s enigmatic exit leaves the impression that he has discovered something that is fundamentally disturbing to him and that he needs time to re-evaluate what he knows.

Born not on the frontier, but certainly in a place of similar spirit, Thea Kronborg speaks to the American experience of pragmatism in a different, more subtle way. Instead of approaching social issues and politics with the philosophy of personal
experience, Cather created a character whose focus is on herself and her art. Thea's introduction to a personal epistemology does not arrive with a dramatic moment of introspection. The reader comes away with the impression that her father's Christianity was never an accepted dogma in her life, but that Thea has always been in the process of chasing down her own truths.

Thea's real frontier experience materializes when she journeys to Arizona to rest after her stay in Chicago studying music. During her stay in the abandoned pueblo dwellings, Thea develops a rapport with the women of the past, and she realizes that her strength lies in adapting her art to the everyday business of life. Thea begins to act upon the Deweyan assumption that "rules are general while objects of art are individual" (300). The concept of art's role as a fluctuating ideal, a developing interpretation instead of a permanent goal, allows Thea to develop a critique of herself that was previously impossible. In her awareness of this critique comes her ultimate dissatisfaction with traditional female roles. As her singing becomes more and more a part of her self offered up for public inspection, instead of a simple mimicry of past greats, Thea withdraws more and more from those who know her; and however unhappy she may be in her loneliness, the reader can be sure that it is what she prefers to a life without her art.

Thea presents a problematic character in that a reader will naturally try to categorize her as successful or unsuccessful, as comic or tragic. Whereas her career as an artist is imminently successful, Thea does not fit neatly into the stereotypical feminine role. She does not seem to care too much for relationships or for marriage. However, as a pragmatic reading reveals, the reader does not need to be concerned
with her success as a woman trying to please others around her but rather her success at simply being Thea Kronborg. With respect to Jamesian pragmatism, Thea seems to suffer that "inward trouble" which results in a search for "some idea that mediates between the stock and the new experience and runs them into one another most felicitously and expediently" (William James 31). Thea's inward trouble results from trying to find a middle ground between successful artist and being the woman that her male companions want her to be. Thea's vocal performances offer pragmatism in the form of truth on a performance-by-performance basis, in that each time she performs she does so with the full knowledge that she has become, to a certain extent, that character in that moment, and that she has also in part molded that character to fit herself. The mixture of Thea and operatic character shows how Cather understood the nature of pragmatism. Thea's conclusion that her singing was a "vessel" in which life is only momentarily caught shows Cather's willingness to equate art and life as quantities that can only be described at the moment in which they appear, but that removed from context, neither art nor life has any meaning. Cather's use of the stream metaphor to describe both life and art is further evidence of a pervasive pragmatic attitude influenced by Dewey and James.

Critics have already begun lengthy discussions as to the pragmatic nature of Henry James' later novels, but most of those discussions revolve around his narrative style and depth of psychological analysis. In *The American*, a very early work, we can still see that Christopher Newman has a pragmatic nature whether or not the narrative style reflects stream of consciousness, although James' first-person intrusions on the narrative serve to remind the reader of the subjective rendering of the story, and
that if there is truth to be found it will have been filtered through Newman, then through James, and then through the reader.

Christopher Newman, as the archetypal American businessman, serves as the more sophisticated adult version of Huckleberry Finn. Newman, like Huck, hits upon the idea of seeing new lands and new peoples after experiencing a kind of moral transfiguration during which he lost (at least temporarily) his taste for the business world. His search for new experience lands him in Europe, the very opposite, both culturally and geographically, of the American frontier. If the American experience is to mix frontier and European practices (as theorized by Frederick Jackson Turner) thus creating an American solution, then Newman has taken a step towards investigating the historicity of experience by traveling back to Europe in order to explore new worlds through his American eyes. Parisian society also represents the frontier for Newman, but he finds that this is an area of experience that does not mix with outside influences. As a community bent on perpetuation of old standards, the Bellegardes confound Newman's attempt to understand them, thus providing him with an opportunity to learn more about himself and others. Newman, like Thea and Huck, is troubled that his own attempt to find truth results in the conclusion that his perception of the relationship between himself and Claire de Cintré was entirely dependent on his own previous experience. Discovering the truth about the Bellegardes' past brings to light both his own error, in assuming the truth would only serve to help and bring good, and theirs. Furthermore, Newman discovers that perhaps all he has is truth, instead of the truth, and that this realization will only serve to widen the gap between himself and the world.
In portraying a character who is essentially alone, and who becomes even more so during the course of the novel, Henry James demonstrates his belief that experience, while bringing more and more information, will ultimately serve as the dividing gulf between ourselves and others. Christopher Newman, for all practical purposes, finds a new world of experience in Europe. However, as William James' famous illustration of trying to decide if the squirrel circles the tree or the tree circles the squirrel, Newman's new perspective on things serves to prove the contingency of perception, and that what he originally saw as the right course of action is no longer one he can stomach. Newman experiences so many possibilities that he is inundated by circumstances. Unlike the "fixed" characters, the Bellegardes, Newman's personal tragedy results from his own freedom to do as he likes and to understand his own freedom as the result of his own choosing. Like Thea Kronborg, Newman's success should not be measured by whether he consummated his quest for a mate, but by how much he discovered about himself in the process. Like Huckleberry Finn, the choice Newman is the most comfortable with is not the one he would have expected to make.

Before his break with Parisian society, Newman is portrayed as someone who throws himself in the very path of experience. His openness is so actively apparent that he actually alienates poor Babcock, the minister, who decides that Newman's presence is too disturbing to his own categorical view of the universe. Indeed, it would seem that Babcock is experiencing the William Jamesian "inward trouble" associated with trying to bring new experience into old. However, the minister's experience of Europe is to forcefully engage it on his own terms, making Europe fit into his own notions. In contrast, Newman's own examination of Europe is to open
himself up to every possible circumstance, to simply float down the "stream of experience" like Huck on the Mississippi.

Richard Rorty's idea that truth is like an object that we keep trying to describe, then re-describe, each time changing our words in favor of others that seem to do the job better, is consistent with the comparison I have made between pragmatism and literature. The argument here is not that every revision on an author's part is a Rortyian re-description, but that the two notable instances involving extensive revisions point toward the pragmatist view of experience.

Finally, for the 1907 New York edition of The American, Henry James heavily edited his original work. After the passage of thirty years, James began to make revisions to the novel. The changes he made "constantly move in the direction of the specific, the concrete, and the explicit" (Gettman 279). Gettman notes that James "looked upon Newman as a conscientious biographer looks upon his subject: he had no right to change in 1907 what Newman said and did in 1877, but he could speculate about the states of mind back of those deeds and words" (Gettman 290). James' narrative style had certainly changed, but the revisions he made to The American do not reflect the "stream of experience" style of his later works; rather, his revisions show that he had spent time thinking about the story and had come to the conclusion that it could be told better. Newman's motives and thoughts could be characterized a little more clearly, mental background scenery could be brought into tighter focus, and the flavor of the whole novel could be adjusted just enough to bring a sharper image to the reader's mind. Experience as a writer had altered James' idea as to what story the novel should tell and how he should go about telling it. By the time the revisions were made, Henry
had already written his famous letter to William declaring that he had "unconsciously pragmatised" (Lubbock 83), and the newer version of The American shows Henry's willingness to alter something done in the past in order that it might operate a little more effectively in the present. Secondly, Willa Cather, by her own admission, cut out several thousand words for the 1937 edition of Song of the Lark. Critics have argued that the novel's length hinders its effect upon the reader, and Cather may well have decided, based upon over twenty years' experience gained after first publishing her work, that the critics were right and that Thea's story needed a redescription by way of excision.

Whatever arguments may be leveled against the existence of pragmatist American fiction at the turn of the century do not do justice to the pragmatic actions of the authors and characters of these three novels. Pragmatism has a very practical relationship with literature. Pragmatist theorists argue that the way in which perspective and experience inform a narrative, the way in which literature reflects what a particular community has to say about life and truth, and the malleable nature of the writing experience itself all serve to connect the two fields in what is, ultimately, a very pragmatic fashion. Pragmatists point out that the critical dialog we use to discuss the world around us is just as founded upon contingency and experience as the dialog we use to discuss literature. Literature reflects how people construct and dissect their own personas, and is easily discussed in a fashion that allows the reader to view the work as a construct itself. Since pragmatism also views perception as a construct placed within a given context, it is only natural that we compare the two. The novels discussed in this thesis display the historical evidence necessary to argue that pragmatism crept into the literary world at the same time it crept into the public world.
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