THE DEVELOPMENT OF MYTH IN POST-WORLD-WAR-II AMERICAN NOVELS

DISSERTATION

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Most primitive mythologies recognize that suffering can provide an opportunity for growth, but Western man has developed a mythology in which suffering is considered evil. He conceives of some power in the universe which will oppose evil and abolish it for him; God, and more recently science and technology, were the hoped-for saviors that would rescue him. Both have been disappointing as saviors, and Western culture seems paralyzed by its confrontation with a future which seems death-filled. The primitive conception of death as that through which one passes in initiatory suffering has been unavailable because the mythologies in which it was framed are outdated. However, some post-World-War-II novels are reflecting a new mythology which recognizes the threat of death as the terrifying face the universe shows during initiation.

A few of these novels tap deep psychological sources from which mythical images traditionally come and reflect the necessity of the passage through the hell of initiation without hope of a savior. One of the best of these is Wright Morris's *The Field of Vision*, in which the Scanlon story is a central statement of the mythological ground ahead. This gripping tale uses the pioneer journey west
to tell of the mysterious passage the unconscious can make through the contemporary desert to win the bride of life. It serves as an illuminator and normative guide for evaluating how other novels avoid or confront the initiatory hell.

By the Scanlon standard, some contemporary mythology is escapist. Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Cat's Cradle* express the youthful desire to arrive almost automatically at a new age, either with help from a new Christ or through practicing a simplistic morality.

Other novels tell of the agony of modern Grail questers who sense that a viable myth is possible, but cannot completely envision it nor accomplish the passage through the void to gain it. The hindrances in each case are powerful forces which exert control over society. These forces are scientific objectivity and racism in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and an unbeatable Combine which forces people to be rabbits and like it in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* makes clear that the confining forces are sustained because the secret of life has been lost, and man needs protection from the void which he cannot face without the secret.

Saul Bellow deals directly with mythologies in Mr. Sammler's *Planet*. On the one hand is the popular view which ignores what every man knows is right and asserts
instead that whatever one wants, he should have. This view replaces the archetypal sustaining images with a myth of continuous progress which, now that progress has faltered, makes living seem overwhelmingly hopeless. However, Sammler believes that meaning is established in life even as it collapses. The good man is part of an elite which is unusually intelligent and discerning, able to develop the will to carry out the contract with life and to enjoy the mystic potency in living.

The novels in this study indicate a trend toward a reformulation of the basic mythological structures of Western man. Possibly the belief is weakening that something from somewhere will save him from his given situation, and a mythology is emerging which tells of significant life in the common, discovered through an awareness of the archetypal consciousness.
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CHAPTER I

WESTERN MAN'S LOSS OF Viable Myths

For the last hundred years Western man has been involved in a radical transition away from civilization toward a new stage in his evolution.\(^1\) The reality of the transition can be experienced by every person in Western culture in, for example, the acceleration of his experience and activity, the extension of his senses by electronic media, the shift away from agriculture as primary occupation toward advanced technological activity, the continuously increasing rate at which knowledge about the world is expanding, and in the alteration of social institutions such as the family, economics, and the state.\(^2\)

\(^1\)"Civilization" is used here as Kenneth Boulding uses it, to refer to society organized into cities in order to produce enough food surplus so that "the kings, priests, soldiers, builders, and artisans of civilization can subsist." Post civilization is organized primarily in order to discover, disseminate, and use knowledge. The Meaning of the Twentieth Century: The Great Transition (New York: Harber Colophon, 1964), pp. 1-5.

\(^2\)"If anyone in an advanced society today were to be suddenly thrust back into the world of only a hundred years ago, he would feel utterly alien and strange. A considerable part of his vocabulary would be meaningless to the people around him. He would find it hard to adapt to the inconveniences and to the restricted life which he would have to lead." Boulding, p. 180. For similar views of the transition, see Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam
However, in mid-twentieth-century Western man appears to have faltered in the transition, unable to retreat into the past and unable to gain the courage to plunge coherently into the future. In the past decade, a chorus of observers has blamed science and technology for the impasse, but others suggest that the more basic problem is Western man's loss of a comprehensive, dynamic concept of the world.


5 See Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963); Campbell; Ferkiss; Harvey Cox, "Feasibility and Fantasy: Sources of Social Transcendence," The Religious Situation: 1969, ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon, 1969); and Sam Keen, "Reflections on a Peach-seed Monkey or
The latter position is a more fundamental analysis of the causes of paralysis than is the former. Scientific rationality was adopted as the primary mode of knowing in Western culture chiefly because Western man lost the ability to relate meaningfully to comprehensive life-stories. Since traditional sources of security and meaning have been lost, much of the general populace seems to assume that science will provide it with a security and affluence which will overcome the need for life-stories. However, as one of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s characters suggests, without stories people die, either of "petrification of the heart or atrophy of the nervous system." 6

Lack of adequate meaning-stories, not the use of science and technology, is the fundamental problem. Science, although it provides knowledge, cannot provide myths which enable men to develop satisfying relationships to their world. 7 Technology uses the findings of science to provide useful

6Cat's Cradle (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 156.

7Science does not, because of its nature, deal with all important questions. According to Thomas S. Kuhn, the scientific approach makes no claims for the future since it is not by nature future-oriented, nor does it deal with that which cannot be treated "with precision and detail. . . . Though science surely grows in depth, it may not grow in breadth as well." The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 168-69.
benefits, but it seems at present to be overwhelmingly controlled by individualists who are making piecemeal, economically based decisions which only worsen man's opportunities for the future. The creation of a liveable future, then, does not depend on the abolition of science and technology, but instead depends on an alteration of the general mindset that tends to elevate these disciplines into saviors.

Some signs are appearing now which point to the creation of comprehensive life-stories which both take scientific knowledge seriously and go beyond that knowledge into the mysteries of man's unverifiable collective or transpersonal intimations for their form and content. The purpose of this study is to explore such contemporary myth-building as it is occurring in certain post-World-War-II novels in the United States.

The choice of the novel instead of, for example, poetry or the short story, is based primarily on Eliade's argument that

in modern societies the prose narrative, especially the novel, has taken the place of the recitation of myths in traditional and popular societies. More than this--it is possible to dissect out the "mythical" structure of certain modern novels, in other words,

8Ferkiss, p. 149. Also see Buckminster Fuller, "The Declaration of Cultural Revolution," The East Village Other, rot. in The Underground Reader, ed. Mel Howard and Thomas King Porcadc (New York: Plume, 1972), pp. 147-51; and Morton Mintz and Jerry S. Cohen, America, Inc.: Who Owns and Operates the United States (New York: Dell, 1971).
to show the literary survival of great mythological themes and characters. . . . From this point of view we should say, then, that the modern passion for the novel expresses the desire to hear the greatest possible number of "mythological stories" desacralized or simply camouflaged under "profane" forms.9

This does not mean that novelists are either copying old myths or inventing new ones; instead, they are probing the sensibilities and character of contemporary life and discovering ancient themes in it. As Joseph Campbell points out, "living myths . . . do not spring from books. . . . They are not invented but occur, and are recognized by seers, and poets, to be then cultivated and employed as catalysts of spiritual (i.e., psychological) well-being."10

One of the difficulties of dealing with myth in the twentieth century is that myth has always been associated with the sacred, which usually refers to something set apart, or holy. But contemporary man is for the most part secularized and as a result finds the "sacred" a difficult concept to grasp. Eliade's definition of myth, for example, includes the idea of the sacred:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." . . . Myth, then, is always an account of a creation, it relates how something was produced, began to be. . . . In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred into the world.11

9Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 191.
10Campbell, p. 6.
11Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 6.
Eliade is describing what myth has been for the primitive, who thinks of the world as having at least two parts, the sacred and the secular. If one believes that the mundane part of the universe he lives in has been created by those who live in the sacred part, then he can be fairly clear about what is sacred. Penetrations by the builders from the sacred world into this created one are occasions for myth; if one tells the story of the breakthrough in dramatic form, and if the story is passed down because it reveals a model of the universe which gives a meaning to the world and human life, then it is a myth. However, if one no longer believes there is another realm, yet finds myth necessary in order to apprehend his world as "intelligible and significant Cosmos," then myth needs to be defined without reference to the sacred as belonging to another sphere of existence.

Joseph Campbell uses the work of Carl Jung to arrive at a concept of myth which shifts the meaning of "sacred"

12Ibid., p. 145.
13Ibid.
14One alternative is to agree that the world is simply absurd: myth is gone with the pantheon of gods who populated the myths. Still, one has to arrive at the position that the world is absurd through a process, and he finds that he must dramatize that process and the image of the world he lives by, as did Sartre and Camus, for instance, and each dramatization of that process is a myth of the absurd posture if it grips someone as the story of his life.
to a quality of experience. In this sense, "sacred" means that which is "grave and constant, irreducible, inevitable."¹⁵ Man experiences the sacred, for example, when a story "arrests" him with an impression of that which is grave and constant in the human; he experiences it when he senses an "ego-shattering, truly tragic pity [which] unites [him] with the human--not with the Communist, Fascist, Muslim, or Christian--sufferer."¹⁶ That is, the story awakens that within him which is most profoundly capable of breaking through his will to gain self-satisfaction and unites him momentarily with the suffering and terror of all men. One character in Wright Morris's novel The Field of Vision reaches this point while he is alone in an old hotel room. He comes to experience in the furnishings of the room the eternal personality of man:

In the room he felt the presence of a strange personality. One that was part of the room, the enduring personality of life itself. It joined him, sad as it seemed, in the pity life seemed to feel in the presence of such a fugitive thing as life. Not just pity for Lehmann, nor for the flies, but for pity itself.¹⁷

Thus Lehmann in this passage experiences the sacred, not in an intrusion from another world, but in the depth of his


¹⁶Ibid., p. 164.

experience of pity; not only in his compassion for the suffering in life, but in his compassion in some mysterious way for the grief and pity which the enduring personality of life has for its momentary manifestations.

The "enduring personality of life itself" may seem to be a way of getting the "other world," or the sacred, into myth by calling it a name less offensive to modern ears, but such is not the case. Carl Jung's explanation of the Collective Unconscious not only clarifies this "enduring personality" but at the same time makes clear that myths have always been the depth responses of collective humanity to that which is grave and constant in his world. Campbell has summarized Jung's work as it is relevant to mythology in the following passage:

Jung distinguishes two orders or depths of the unconscious, the personal and the collective. The Personal Unconscious, according to his view, is composed largely of personal acquisitions, potentials and dispositions, forgotten or repressed contents derived from one's own experience, etc. The Collective Unconscious, on the other hand, is a function rather of biology; its contents are of the instincts, not the accidents of personal experience but the processes of nature as invested in the anatomy of Homo sapiens and consequently common to the human race. Moreover, where the consciousness may go astray and in the interest of an ideal or an idea do violence to the order of nature, the instincts, disordered, will irresistibly protest; for, like a body in disease, so the diseased psyche undertakes to resist and expel infection: and the force of its protest will be expressed in madness, or in lesser cases, morbid anxieties, troubled sleep, and terrible dreams. When the imagery of the warning visions rises . . . from the Collective [Unconscious] the signals . . . will be of the order . . . of myth; in many cases even identical with the imagery of myths of which the visionary or dreamer will never
They will thus be actually presentations of the archetypes of mythology in a relation of significance to some context of contemporary life, and consequently will be decipherable only by comparison with the patterns, motifs, and semiotics of mythology in general.\(^\text{18}\)

If Jung is right (at this time not enough information is available to show whether he is), then the probable causes of certain wide-spread neuroses can be explained with his theory of the Collective Unconscious. If, for example, madness is the dominant trait of people in our times, as Saul Bellow assumes in Mr. Sammler's Planet, and if that madness expresses itself in ways which seem decipherable in terms of the patterns and motifs of mythology, the madness could be a warning from the "enduring personality of life itself," or the Collective Unconscious, that violence is being done to the orders which are required if humanity is to survive.

Regardless of whether one agrees completely with Jung's theories, many sensitive observers suggest that Western man has in some way lost contact with the deep sources of significant life. Perhaps the popularity of Carlos Castaneda's accounts of his apprenticeship with the Yaqui Indian don Juan is in large part due to our ready identification with

Castaneda as a lost man who is not sure of his explanations of things:

"A phony sorcerer tries to explain everything in the world with explanations he is not sure about," [don Juan] said, "and so everything is witchcraft. But then you're no better. You also want to explain everything your way but you're not sure of your explanations either." 19

Castaneda's way of explaining reality is the way of scientific objectivity, or, in its more general form, of Western rationality. These explanations work well when applied to how natural things react and work, but they leave one unsure of himself when applied to all that is and why it is. The objective method can properly be used to deal with only a limited number of phenomena; 20 when a society comes to believe that anything that cannot be explained with this method does not therefore exist, that society is ignoring part of reality and warning signs will appear.

19 Carlos Castaneda, A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan (New York: Touchstone, 1971), p. 155. Also see Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler, who senses the inadequacy of explanations: "Being right was largely a matter of explanations. Intellectual man had become an explaining creature. . . . The soul . . . had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on superstructures of explanation, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly." Mr. Sammler’s Planet (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Crest, 1970), p. 7.

20 "The areas investigated by normal science are, of course, minuscule; the enterprise now under discussion [normal-scientific research] has drastically restricted vision. But those restrictions, born from confidence in a paradigm, turn out to be essential to the development of science. By focusing attention upon a small range of relatively esoteric problems, the paradigm forces scientists to investigate some part of nature in a detail and depth that would otherwise be unimaginable." Kuhn, p. 24.
Western society is troubled, but the primary cause is neither science nor its displacement of "God"; it is the apparent loss of man's ability to tell and find his significance in believing stories which arrest the mind and probe that which is grave and constant in human affairs. Sam Keen maintains that the loss of this ability explains the present sense that the sacred has gone out of life:

I . . . suggest that telling stories is functionally equivalent to belief in God, and, therefore, "the death of God" is best understood as modern man's inability to believe that human life is rendered ultimately meaningful by being incorporated into a story.21

He further suggests that man lost the ability to believe in the power of stories because he was convinced that he could know only with his intellect and could verify only with his senses:

In the bungaloid world that we are able to know with intelligence untouched by tenderness and can verify with senses which have been disciplined to exclude ecstasy, there is no transcendence. Even where the modest self-transcendence of love has remained a source of identity, there is deep suspicion that those who claim, by fire or prayer or sacred authority, to transcend the time-bound capsule in which we are all exiled are fools trafficking in dreams, fantasies, and illusions. It now appears that the ahistorical attitude created by the triumph of technological mentality and American ideology may be destroying the function of the story as a source of metamundane identity. The hero of the American story is Adam--the man without a history, living in the wonderland of the innocent present. Henry Ford stated the American dream in a manner that can hardly be surpassed: "History is bunk." In the non-story we tell in the new world, a man's identity is fashioned by doing rather than remembering; his credentials for acceptance are the skills of a trade rather than the telling of stories.22

21Keen, p. 34. 
22Ibid.
Whereas Keen's description of the present situation is accurate, it seems more likely that Western man accepted objective intelligence and verification with the senses as the primary way of knowing because the stories he had been telling had begun to break down. The scientific story was accepted as what appeared to be the best replacement available.

In this study, I will explore some of the historical causes of the loss of the ability to tell stories, then I will consider eight novels written in the post-World-War-II period which in effect tell stories that provide at least some people with a story or myth by means of which they can relate meaningfully to their universe. Some of these novels appeal to certain parts of society more than to others, whereas some (the most successful in terms of dealing with that which is grave and constant) seem to awaken a response among a more general company of sensitive people. These novels have been chosen because of their mythical qualities. They seem, in addition, to represent three overlapping stages in the development of a contemporary mythology, formulated without gods, and, at least in the second two stages, with science dethroned as the primary way of knowing the world.

The first stage is represented by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Cat's Cradle* (1963) and Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in*
Strange Land (1961). Both of these novels assume a world emptied of meaning by science, and neither makes a serious attempt to recover the richness of human experience that was once thought possible in the world. Vonnegut invents a story, but the most sensitive and intelligent people in the novel regard the story as only a useful set of lies that can be used to reduce the suffering of miserable and ignorant people. Heinlein assumes a world so drained of possibility that an intervention from Mars is necessary if any meaning is to be derived from life.

The three novels representing the second stage are Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952), Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), and Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). This kind of novel explores the possibility that a numinous transcendence might be alive in the world, somehow buried underneath the empty rationality of the dominant world and opposed to it. Such novels indicate that there are some people who are in touch with the transcendence, either a suffering minority or those who have withdrawn from ordinary life into the underground.

The third stage is represented first in a novel by Wright Morris, The Field of Vision (1956). This novel is highly symbolic and prophetic of the hellish ground that needs to be covered if Western man is to recover the significance of story, or myth, in relating to the multiple
possibilities of life. A second novel, Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), has as its central figure a man who, in being able to tell a story about his life and thereby to recover its significance, has told the story of Western men at this time in his history, and at least has shown the possibility of recovery for many people.

However, before dealing specifically with these novels, it will be necessary to show in more detail how Western man lost the ability to tell comprehensive stories about the grave and constant in human life and as a result elevated the scientific method into the place the gods once held in our mythical structure.

**Societal Trends**

An increasing number of commentators are arguing that the evolution of man is at a critical point. There is some disagreement about just how critical the time is, but most would agree in general with Kenneth Boulding that

> the twentieth century marks the middle period of a great transition in the state of the human race. It may properly be called the second great transition in the history of mankind.\(^2\)

Almost everyone who proposes that we are at such a radical juncture fears the outcome. For example, William Irwin

\(^2\)Boulding, p. 1. For context, Boulding adds that "the first transition was that from a precivilized to civilized society which began to take place about five (or ten) thousand years ago."
Thompson suspects that man will panic as he senses his values shifting under him, making possible a new and disastrous collectivization of mankind:

The Homo Sapiens of Eros and Thanatos may be coming to an end, and Homo Sapiens seems unconsciously aware of this, but this terrified awareness only generates an apocalyptic hysteria which in turn convinces the behavioral engineers that rationality cannot be achieved without fixing man.24

If hysteria or the robot-life of a "fixed" race are the most obvious alternatives, then it is not surprising that modern man senses himself to be at a dead end, confronted with a future full of mystery and threat. Without a story which enables him to live with mystery, he prefers to avoid the future. At the same time, the future seems to rush at him in such a way that he cannot avoid it, even when the societal orders which formerly carried him through such crises have seemingly vanished. Joseph Campbell asserts that life, in both its knowing and its doing, has become today a "free fall," as to say, into the next minute, into the future. So that, whereas, formerly, those not wishing to hazard the adventure of an individual life could rest within the pale of a comfortably guaranteed social order, today all the walls have burst. It is not left to us to choose to hazard the adventure of an unprecedented life: adventure is upon us, like a tidal wave.25

24Thompson, p. 136. For another view of possible hysteresis in the form of "shock," see Toffler, Future Shock.
The effects of confronting a radically altered future without the mythological structures that have supported man in the past have been devastating. Soengler and Toynbee, as Inah Hassan points out, "locate modern man at a critical juncture of history and attest to his growing alienation from his 'true' self."26

Whether modern man's alienation is from his "true" self would be difficult to determine, since what the true self is depends so completely on the perspective of the observer. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to establish that modern man senses that he is alienated from something that is vital to his existence. Nietzsche perceived the sense of loss and insisted that it was God we had lost; we had murdered him in the churches with our rationality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in the 1940's, agreed in part but did not accuse man of the murder of God. He thought instead that the displacement of God was precisely what was needed. It is good that "man has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis."27 This advance could be interpreted as the will of God: "God is teaching us that we must live as men who can

26Hassan, p. 13.

get along very well without him." Therefore, for Bonhoeffer this is not really a disappearance; the effect is to get rid of a God men depend on to save them from their difficulties and to allow the realities with which man is always confronted to take their place as our final concern. Bonhoeffer was hoping that man was on the verge of dealing head-on with realities instead of looking for something to save him from the real. Most men failed to catch Bonhoeffer's clues, however; they felt that something was gone and that the loss was not good.

Precisely what has been lost is more difficult to determine than is the presence of the sense of loss. For Bonhoeffer the idea of God used as a Deus ex machina to which man can appeal in his distress is gone. This is close. From Natty Bumppo standing forlornly in a cathedral of trees, realizing that the wilderness will not form men to match its grandeur, to Melville's Bartleby, preferring no change at all to the alternatives America offers, to the disappointed anti-heroes of the 1960's, American fiction is overwhelmingly populated with those who expected that some force would make their world right; when it did not, they seem almost uniformly to retire from reality. Wright Morris suggests the places the authors have taken their heroes in order to avoid meeting the present:

28 Ibid., p. 39.
In the nineteenth century the writer took to the woods or the high seas, literally as well as figuratively. In the present century the same flight is achieved through nostalgia, rage, or some such ruling passion from which the idea of the present . . . has been excluded.29

The realities of the present have been excluded because man has lost, along with the idea of some deus ex machina, the ability to see his life as part of a comprehensive story. According to Sam Keen,

It is only within the present century that the metaphor of the story and the outline of the traditional drama which have been commonplace in Western civilization have been radically criticized and widely abandoned. For the contemporary intellectual the metaphysical myth has ceased to provide the context for identity. The conviction is gone that history tells a story or that reality may be appropriately known in dramatic terms. While we retain and share such political myths as those clustering around the labels "democracy" and "communism," we have lost the mundane myths and even the confidence in their possible usefulness.30

Science and the objective mentality are not primarily to blame for the loss of myth; these are substitutes for the deus ex machina that had been used for centuries to hold together a seriously flawed basic myth. In the last half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, there was a subtle shift from God to rationality as that which will produce a new world, but now, when rationality and its technical applications seem to have produced a mess worse than

30Keen, pp. 89-90.
before, man is doubly disappointed, abandons any significant story at all, and loses his context for meaningful identity.

Nevertheless, several recent writers tend to embody the old devil in science, now that it has proven incapable of producing a new paradise. Even the devil has both good and bad in him (as he usually has) in Theodore Roszak's Neo-romanticism:

Science is not, in my view, merely another subject for discussion. It is the subject. It is the prime expression of the west's cultural uniqueness, the secret of our extraordinary dynamism, the keystone of technocratic politics, the curse and the gift we bring to history.31

According to Roszak, although science is a gift, it is more a curse, precisely because it was allowed to become "the subject." Francis Bacon was the chief culprit in selling the new idolatry. He promoted an objective method in which the observer disciplined himself not to become involved in what he observed. He knew, Roszak reports,

that there exists within us the strange capacity to contract our consciousness back and away from the moment in which experience embraces us. That contraction is the essential gesture of single vision.32

Bacon promised that those who would reduce their ways of seeing to the single, objective vision, would gain power over nature and other men, since, as it appeared, God would

31Roszak, Where the Wasteland Ends, p. xix.
32Ibid., p. 149.
no longer do this as he once did for the Israelites. Bacon's promise was correct, but the condition imposed by the method was radical: to get the power we must alienate ourselves from the environment, establishing objectivity between it and us.  

The effects of wholesale adoption of the method have been more enfeebling than was dependence on God to save us from the present. Roszak points out that if an epistemology of total objectivity is unattainable, a psychology of objectivity is not.  

Indeed, the capacity of people to depersonalize their conduct--and to do so in good conscience, even with pride--is the distinctive psychic disease of our age.  

The experience of being a cosmic absurdity, a creature obtruded into the universe without purpose, continuity, or kinship, is the psychic price we pay for scientific "enlightenment" and technological prowess.  

However, if one sensed that his myth had begun to lose its effectiveness, then he felt he was a cosmic absurdity already; science in this case would look like the new savior, and if depersonalization of one's conduct was necessary in order to get things in order again, it was worth trying.  

There is, in fact, little convincing evidence that Western culture would have adopted the scientific method as its primary way of knowing if a more appealing alternative had been available. In the first place, cultural history does not suggest that the scientific method is irresistibly

33Ibid., p. 155.  
34Ibid., p. 154.
Attractive. Loren Eiseley points out that

A scientific civilization in the full sense is an anomaly in world history. The civilizations of the sun never developed it. Only one culture, that of the West, has, through technology, reduced the religious mystique so long attached to agriculture. Never before have such large masses of people been so totally divorced from the land or the direct processing of their own foodstuffs. 35

That is, the adoption of the scientific mentality may not be primarily due to the apparent virtues of science, but could be more a result of a failure in the concept of the world that prevailed when Bacon and others began selling the culture on science in the seventeenth century.

In the second place, not only is the scientific method not universally attractive, but its adoption as a basic mode of thought might have been in large part a result of Western men's expectation that some part of the universe will come to his aid in opposing the evil in the universe. This became obvious in the wide-spread disturbance which met Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859. The objection to his theory was not to his concept of evolution, which had been accepted for years, but was to his assertion that evolution moves only on the basis of what has been and not toward any goal set by God or nature. 36 If teleology plays

35Eiseley, p. 82. Also see Kuhn: "Only the civilizations that descend from Hellenic Greece have possessed more than the most rudimentary science. The bulk of scientific knowledge is a product of Europe in the last four centuries" (p. 167).

36Kuhn, pp. 170-71.
no part in the development of the earth, it seems that all meaning is removed from the very process that had seemed to lead to man, since indeed that meaning was removed. Such a "conceptual transposition"37 could have freed Western man to see the earth as a unity and life as something that simply is, or, as Loren Eiseley puts it, "life was never given to be bearable," but was simply given.38

Wherever Darwin's theory was accepted, it struck so powerful a blow at the Western myth that God or nature was replaced by the scientific method and technology as the deus ex machina that would defeat evil, do away with suffering, and bring life to perfection, just as God had been expected to do before. Eiseley pushes the process even further back:

Science has risen in a very brief interval into a giant social institution of enormous prestige and governmentally supported power. To many, it replaces primitive magic as the solution for all human problems.39

The process of replacement has been particularly evident in science-fiction, in which God often appears as a technological marvel:

In a book appropriately titled God Drives a Flying Saucer (one of the many imitations of Erich von Daniken's best-selling Chariots of the Gods) the author claims that "God is not supernatural but rather supertechnological . . . and is capable of all acts and all characteristics hitherto attributed to

37 The term is Kuhn's, p. 170.
38 Eiseley, p. 81.
39 Ibid., p. 90.
miraculous powers. That he created man in his image is not a myth or a parable; but God, while humanoid, is nevertheless immortal through technology."

This view could almost pass for a creed of "religious" sf--except that God is more likely to be presented as a robot (as in John Burnner's "Judas") or a computer. In one often-quoted story by Frederic Brown, a computer replies to the question of whether there is a God by saying: "There is now." Polish author Stanislaw Lem's "Diary" recounts the tribulations of a computer who thinks he is omnipotent--and he is, but only within the limits of his own circuits; he proceeds to create one world after another solely to find out about himself.40

Thus, for almost everyone in Western culture, science and technology have replaced God as the omnipotent provider.

Now, ironically, a little over one hundred years after Darwin, we are faced with another conceptual transposition, this time one in which, according to Thomas Kuhn, science itself is being understood as "evolution-from-what-we-do-know" and not as the method which will bring us closer to any "ultimate goal."41 This is a difficult transposition because Western man has, due to a conceptual weakness, been forced to throw science into the place once occupied by God, expecting it to overcome the evil forces of the world. Something vital was lost long ago which imposed upon us the need to create such heroes as science and God, and this is a weakness that touches the core of our being. The problem


41Kuhn, p. 170.
is not simply that ideas are changing, but is that Western man, having lost faith in the value of telling stories or participating in effective mythologies, is left without a usable account of his existence.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus what has been lost is not a vision and desire for a whole self. The technocracy and the scientific mentality have as their aim the production of goods and methods which will free men from the burdens of labor, disease, and hunger so they can pursue freedom at their leisure. What man has been alienated from is his archetypal knowledge of what freedom is and how it is attained. It is this loss which has brought him to the edge of a new age without his being able to proceed into it, that has caused him to deal only with resolvable problems and to avoid the mystery, and to wish in general with regard to how his forefathers brought him to this time, "I just wish to God they never had."\textsuperscript{43}

The loss occurred somewhere around the beginning of the Christian era, although the Greeks provided the possibility. Mircea Eliade clarifies the nature of the loss in connection with his discussion of initiatory rites among primitives. After recounting what appears to Westerners

\textsuperscript{42}Amos Wilder suggests that "it is harder to change the archetypes, symbols and myths of man than it is to change their ideas and doctrines." "Theology and Theopoetic II: The Renewal of the Religious Imagination," Christian Century, 5 Dec. 1973, p. 1196.

to be needlessly horrible sufferings inflicted on people during initiation rites, he concludes that the people understood that the torture was being done by the demons of initiation, who thereby killed the profane condition of the initiates, permitting the birth of a new man. "Our conclusion, therefore, must be as follows: that sufferings, both physical and psychic, are homologous with the tortures that are inseparable from initiation."44

Only masochists have desired suffering, but men have endured it when it seemed to bring something worth having, such as adulthood. However, Western man has been less inclined than most to endure suffering as a positive force because of a subtle and much-neglected shift in his understanding of the role the demonic forces, or suffering, play in life. Eliade states this shift almost as an aside in discussing the dynamics of the primitive initiatory rites. He is using the monk Anthony as an example of a Western man who endured sufferings homologous to those inflicted on a primitive man during initiation rites.

In confronting all these ordeals victoriously—that is, in resisting all the "temptations"—the monk Anthony becomes holy. That is to say that he has "killed" the profane man that he was, and has come to life again as another, a regenerated man, a saint. But in a non-Christian perspective, this also means that the demons have succeeded in their aim, which was just that of "killing" the profane man and enabling him to regenerate himself. In identifying the forces of evil with the devils Christianity has deprived them of any

44Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 208.
positive function in the economy of salvation; but before Christianity the demons were, among others, masters of initiation.45

It would be difficult to overstate the impact on Western attitudes of this identification of the forces of evil with the devils. In spite of the central symbol of Christianity being a sign of suffering from which new life was to come, the general attitude is that suffering is sheer evil caused by the enemy, that Jesus suffered for us so that we will not have to, and that no one deserves to suffer. Freedom is often described as being freedom from suffering, whereas such an attitude enslaves one, preventing him from being free to endure suffering when necessary.

Thus the primitive could readily believe that suffering, when it must be experienced, could be caused by a demon who was providing the opportunity for growth. But Western man seems to assume that it is simply suffering because it will not fit into his story about life, or, if he gives it any metaphysical content, thinks of it as punishment against his will with little positive value. Consequently, when Bacon proposed that the scientific method of controlling nature would provide comfort, he found ready takers among those for whom suffering could only be something to be overcome, and who could perhaps believe that the creation of physical comfort would remove even the demons from the world.

45Ibid., p. 207. The underlining is mine.
When Freud uncovered the demonic again, this time inside the psyche, the methods of science were again directed toward it with the hope of eradicating the enemy. Western man has thus been conditioned for centuries to avoid suffering, to believe that when life goes as it should, suffering will not occur, and to conceive of life as divided between goods which will bring comfort and evils which cause suffering. Thus if initiation requires the death of the old man through positive suffering, Western man has been conditioned to avoid the death.

Therefore, not only suffering but death has been treated by Western man as absurd, or as being the nothingness which should not be since it does not fit into his incomplete story about life. Having lost the positive meaning of the anguish associated with death, modern man is paralyzed. Eliade makes this clear in a discussion in which he wants to show

how certain cultural habits, which have grown so familiar to us that we regard them as the natural behaviour of every civilized man, disclose unexpected meanings as soon as they are viewed in the perspective of another culture. 46

He uses Western man's "passionate, almost abnormal" interest in history, both as historiography and as philosophy, as the cultural habit to be illuminated. The passion is different from anything found before in that it is a simple scientific

46 Ibid., p. 233.
passion only to know and become aware of what has happened. All previous instances of historical interest were in order to provide exemplary models, or stories about life.

Eliade points out that in many religions, the history of one's life is remembered as a thing in itself only when death is imminent. If one considers the Western passion for history from this perspective, he could conclude that Western man senses his own imminent death as a culture and, "as it has often been said, the anxiety of modern man is obscurely linked to the awareness of his historicity, and this, in its turn, discloses the anxiety of confronting Death and Non-being."47

Therefore, the recent philosophy of Western man has been deeply concerned with the anguish man experiences before nothingness and death. However, as Eliade points out, this would seem strange to a non-European culture, since

Death is never felt as an absolute end or as Nothingness: it is regarded rather as a rite of passage to another mode of being; and for that reason [is] always referred to in relation to the symbolisms of rituals of initiation, re-birth or resurrection.48

Those who have such a story know the agony, but interpret it in their mythology as being "indispensable to the birth of the new man. No initiation is possible without the ritual of an agony, a death and a resurrection."49 The outcome of the contemporary Western world's anguish and recounting of

48Ibid.
49Ibid., p. 237.
history should be a new being, with new possibilities for maturity and responsibility; however, the culture seems to have become paralyzed by its anxiety before nothingness and cannot move beyond it. Here the ancient myths are especially helpful in interpreting the contemporary sickness. As Eliade points out,

in archaic and "primitive" culture, as well as in India, this anxiety is not a state in which one can remain; its indispensability is that of an initiatory experience, of a rite of passage. In no culture other than ours could one stop in the middle of this rite of passage and settle down in a situation apparently without issue. For the issue consists precisely in completing this rite of passage and resolving the crisis by coming out of it at a higher level, awakening to consciousness of a higher mode of being. It is inconceivable, for example, that one could interrupt an initiatory rite of passage: in that case the boy would no longer be a child, as he was before beginning his initiation, but neither would he be the adult that he ought to be at the end of his ordeals.50

The point is that Western man's basic story about life has been defective for centuries in that he has deprived suffering of its positive function and has sought to avoid it or defeat it.51 Confronted now with a passage into an awesome future, he senses that his latest hero, science, will not ease the passage; with no positive sense of suffering,

50Ibid., p. 243.

51For how a culture has a basic story, see Campbell: "The myths and rites [of a culture] constellate a mesocosm—a mediating, middle cosmos, through which the microcosm of the individual is brought into relation to the macrocosm of the universe. And this mesocosm is the entire context of the body social, which is thus a kind of living poem, hymn, or icon, of mud and reeds, and of flesh and blood, and of dreams, fashioned into the art form of the hieratic city state." The Flight of the Wild Gander, p. 155.
he is paralyzed or tries to avoid the passage by flight away from it. A similar point is made in dramatic fashion by the Indian sorcerer don Juan. Note Castaneda's utter discomfort in the following conversation dealing with death; he typifies Western man, whereas don Juan, in contrast, uses death as an adviser.

"The thing to do when you're impatient," he proceeded, "is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death. An immense amount of pettiness is dropped if your death makes a gesture to you, or if you catch a glimpse of it, or if you just have the feeling that your companion is there watching you."

He leaned over again and whispered in my ear that if I turned to my left suddenly, upon seeing his signal, I could again see my death on the boulder. His eyes gave me an almost imperceptible signal, but I did not dare to look.

I told him that I believed him and that he did not have to press the issue any further, because I was terrified. He had one of his roaring belly laughs.

He replied that the issue of our death was never pressed far enough. And I argued that it would be meaningless for me to dwell upon my death, since such a thought would only bring discomfort and fear.

"You're full of crap!" he exclaimed. "Death is the only wise adviser that we have. Whenever you feel, as you always do, that everything is going wrong and you're about to be annihilated, turn to your death and ask if that is so. Your death will tell you that you're wrong; that nothing really matters outside its touch. Your death will tell you, 'I haven't touched you yet.'"

He shook his head and seemed to be waiting for my reply. I had none. My thoughts were running rampant. He had delivered a staggering blow to my egotism. The pettiness of being annoyed with him was monstrous in the light of my death.

I had the feeling that he was fully aware of my change in mood. He had turned the tide in his favor. He smiled and began to hum a Mexican tune.

"Yes," he said softly after a long pause. "One of us here has to change, and fast. One of us here has to learn again that death is the hunter, and that it is always to one's left. One of us here has to ask death's
advice and drop the cursed pettiness that belongs to men that live their lives as if death will never tap them.  

When an entire culture seems to feel, as Castaneda did, that almost everything is going wrong and it is about to be annihilated, yet can do nothing about it, the implications should be clear. Western man is in for an ordeal of transition, but if dominant trends continue he might not complete the ordeal. The basic difficulty seems to be that the stories which once unified the world have broken down because of basic weaknesses with regard to the positive values of suffering and death. Thus, as Sam Keen points out, "Lacking any metamundane principle of unity, we can have no assurance of any continuity between past and future: thus, remembering and planning are equally futile. Spontaneity has replaced storytelling as the mode of authentic life." He goes on to show that if we had stories which maintained the unity of the world, then we would, like traditional man, be able to take courage from the knowledge that we have roots in what has been and that our memory and deeds will be preserved in what will be. But however one states the reasons that we have stalled in the transition, the basic implication is that we are no longer innocent children in a whole world, nor are we adults equipped with stories of responsibility.


53 Keen, p. 91.

54 Ibid.
which could enable man to create a new world. The crisis is that of an initiation not yet completed.

There are signs that the situation is changing, however. Beginning with Carl Jung's work in the first half of this century, an interest in living mythology (as distinguished from the nineteenth century interest in historical mythology) has developed, awakening some observers to the seemingly unquenchable sources of symbols and myths in modern man. This approach does not deny the importance of history but suggests that historicity is not necessary to confirm the importance of ideas. For example, many Western Christians have insisted that if the Biblical stories could be shown to have actually occurred, then their truth and validity for determining human behavior would be confirmed. Joseph Campbell, on the other hand, argues that such an approach establishes what man "ought" to be instead of allowing him "to be ... what he is, actually and potentially, such a one as was never seen before."55 That is, the insistence that history validates morals and cosmologies imposes an authoritarian view on man which does not permit the full development of what actually is in the present. Campbell suggests to the Christians who argue for historicity "that if, instead of insisting that their own mythology is history, they would work the other way and dehistoricize their

mythology, they might recover contact with the spiritual possibilities of this century."56

The desire to confirm one's intimations with some objective correlative, especially a historical one, is not confined to Christianity. William Irwin Thompson, desirous of undermining the "cocky assuredness" of "the positivist's distrust of myth," sets out to show that "myth is the detritus of actual history."57 The argument, like that of many Christian apologists, is that if myth can be corroborated by history, which is similar to saying that it can be certified by the scientific method (archaeological evidence is adduced by Thompson to support his version of history), then it must be true. Thus Thompson yields to the desire to get myth out of the unconscious, where it is difficult to verify its claims, and into history, where it can be objectified and tested. He knows better: "Our view of the past is a fiction we create to rationalize our position of power in the present, and our view of the future is simply a magnification of our present."58 Nevertheless, the mistake is a common one in a scientific age. More helpful in venturing into the future is the assertion of Chief Bromden in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: as he prepares to tell his story, he insists, "But it's the truth even if it didn't

56 Ibid., p. 225.
57 Thompson, pp. 184, 208.
As Sam Keen argues, following Freud, when an individual rediscovers his own hidden personal history, finding "both the wounds and the gifts which gave the unique character to his biography," he finds that he has recovered the story of every man:

For example, when shame and fear dissolve and I am able to confess that I hated as well as loved ... the father who nurtured me, I discover that I am one with Oedipus. It is only a step from this insight to the realization that hating the father and rebelling against God are inseparable. Thus, being Oedipus, I am also Adam and Prometheus and all of the heroes and antiheroes of history. The more I know of myself, the more I recognize that nothing human is foreign to me. In the depth of each man's biography lies the story of all men.60

Now, if one agrees with Keen's definition of the holy or the sacred as "that irreducible principle, power, or presence which is the source and guarantor of unity, dignity, meaning, value, and wholeness,"61 then stories such as Bromden's do at times reflect a dimension of reality which is sacred. Thus, as Keen argues further, contemporary story-telling, or mythology when it points to the sacred, deals "with the principles, powers, and persons which are presently operative to make and keep human life luminous and sacred."62

History is important in that if I am to know that my story is the story of every man, I must know what stories have

60Keen, p. 95. 61Ibid., p. 96.
62Ibid.
been told. Understanding that I am Oedipus, Adam, and Prometheus enriches and expands my history into a unity with all others who have experienced the "grave and constant" in human affairs.

In the following passage, Nikos Kazantzakis shows how the earth is contained in each man and at the same time indicates dramatically the relationship of myth to that experience:

And I rejoice to feel between my temples, in the flicker of an eyelid, the beginning and the end of the world.
I condense into a lightning moment the seeding, sprouting, blossoming, fructifying, and the disappearance of every tree, animal, man, star, and god.
All Earth is a seed planted in the coils of my mind. Whatever struggles for numberless years to unfold and fructify in the dark womb of matter bursts in my head like a small and silent lightning flash.
Ah! let us gaze intently on this lightning flash, let us hold it for a moment, let us arrange it into human speech.
Let us transfix this momentary eternity which encloses everything, past and future, but without losing in the immobility of language any of its gigantic erotic whirling.
Every word is an Ark of the Covenant around which we dance and shudder, divining God to be its dreadful inhabitant.
You shall never be able to establish in words that you live in ecstasy. But struggle unceasingly to establish it in words. Battle with myths, with comparisons, with allegories, with rare and common words, with exclamations and rhymes, to embody it in flesh, to transfix it.6

Myth is thus the effort to establish in a story the mysterious sense that we do, through something like a Collective

Unconscious, contain within ourselves the struggle of the Earth itself to "unfold and fructify." But when a culture has repressed this sense, the mythological consciousness which should reproduce the story anew for every generation is unable to do so, and the realities of the present appear to be overwhelming.

One of the most valuable brief examples of the mythical consciousness in action occurs in Herman Melville's *Pierre*. In the incident, Pierre first remembers a scene from his youth, a wooded hill with huge rocks at its base which had fallen from the hill. This scene triggers in Pierre a dramatization of the myth of Enceladus. Then, when he sleeps, he dreams that he is Enceladus, or that his story is Enceladus's story. However, in the third stage of the incident, Pierre fails to heed the warning given in his dream, and he later dies as a result. First, the scene he remembers:

In mid field . . . you paused among the recumbent sphinx-like shapes thrown off from the rocky steep. You paused: fixed by a form defiant, a form of awfulness. You saw Enceledus the Titan, the most potent of all the giants, writhing from out the imprisoning earth;--turbanded with upborne moss he writhed; still, though armless, resisting with his whole striving trunk, the Pelion and the Ossa hurled back at him;--turbanded with upborne moss he writhed; still turning his unconquerable front toward that majestic mount eternally in vain assailed by him, and which, when it had stormed him off, had heaved his undoffable incubus upon him, and deridingly left him there to bay out his ineffectual howl.64

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Pierre then dreams that he is himself Enceladus storming the heights hopelessly. Pierre, a truly modern man in his desire to conquer the universe, fails to gain from the fable:

Possibly because Pierre did not leap the final barrier of gloom; possibly because Pierre did not wilfully wrest some final comfort from the fable; did not flog this stubborn rock as Moses his, and force even aridity itself to quench his painful thirst. Melville comments that if the fable had rendered some aid to Pierre, it would have been that it is according to eternal fitness, that the precipitated Titan should still seek to regain his paternal birthright even by fierce escalade. Wherefore whoso storms the sky gives best proof he came from thither! But whatso crawls contented in the most before that crystal fort, shows it was born within that slime, and there forever will abide.

Pierre, in other words, is not the Titan from the sky, but is man from the most, and whatever comfort there is can be derived from acknowledging that truth. Pierre failed to see that: "he resolved by an entire and violent change, and by a wilful act against his own most habitual inclinations" to overcome his physical limitations and to assault the sky as the Titan had (and as Western man has been doing since). Concerning what can be expected in such a world, Melville concludes his grim tale with a surprisingly delicate image:

And even so, to grim Enceladus, the world the gods had chained for a ball to drag at his o'erfreighted feet;--

65Ibid., p. 483.  
66Ibid.  
67Ibid., p. 484.
even so that globe put forth a thousand flowers, whose fragile smiles disguised his ponderous load. The world, that is, which seems only a ponderous load to one who wishes to escape it, can be seen as putting forth flowers with "fragile smiles" for those who have determined that the earth is their home.

Thus, the truth by which man can live and which he seems to have lost, is "down" in the slime of the most, in the "most habitual inclinations" against which Pierre was exerting his will. Jung believes the source of such habitual inclinations is the past experience of man:

The greatest and best thoughts of men shape themselves upon . . . primordial images as upon a blueprint. I have often been asked where the archetypes or primordial images come from. It seems to me that their origin can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity.

It is possible that a new awareness of these primordial images, supplemented by concretions such as those of Pierre,

68 Ibid.

69 Thompson makes a similar contemporary prose statement, although he oversimplifies the situation: "One part of mankind wishes to take us into rockets, computers, and a cultural unity that comes from computerized medicine, computerized music, poetry, and film, and cybernetic organisms in which the education of the mind is achieved by hooking up the cells of the brain directly to teaching machines. The other part of mankind is struggling to develop consciousness so as to obviate the need for machines. If one has pratyahara (yogic control of the sense), he has no need of drugs . . . if one has samadhi (cosmic consciousness), he has no need of moon rockets." At the Edge of History, pp. 220-21.

70 Jung, p. 131.
can enable Western man to create a contemporary story about life that will unite him with his cosmos through reminding him of his limitations, of the consequent positive nature of suffering and death, and of the "fragile smile" that the earth has for those who know it is their home.

This approach downward cannot, of course, ignore the contemporary situation of man. It is impossible to turn to our intimations effectively without a profound grasp of present trends which can indicate what the crisis is and produce the clues necessary for interpreting the myths so that their meaning is not missed. Joseph Campbell argues for the necessity of both the inward and the outward:

Obviously, an outward-directed intellect, recognizing only . . . historical ends and claims, would be very much in danger of losing touch with its natural base, becoming involved wholly in the realization of "meanings" parochial to its local time and place. But on the other hand, anyone hearkening only inward, to the dispositions of feelings, would be in equal danger of losing touch with the only world in which he would ever have the possibility of living as a human being.71

It is time now, according to the novelists considered in this study, to hearken inward because we have hardly done so for three hundred years.

Literary Trends

The literature to be analyzed in this study indicates, more or less tentatively, that effective life-stories can be created which do not depend on any force beyond the earth for

their power. These stories are not created lightly, nor are they based on any unfounded optimism about the future. Instead, these novels represent a minority trend in writers whose stories emerge against a tide of despair in contemporary literature, but who recognize fully the causes of despair and tell constructive stories in spite of those causes.

American novels since World War II seem to be filled with characters so intensively sensitive to the chaos and challenges of the times that the dominant trend seems to be to escape from the task of telling a story which might order the fearful chaos for at least some people. The pervasive terror expressed in these novels seems to be caused by a sense that there is no suitable way to make the passage into the future, nor can one be confident that such a passage is desirable. Teilhard de Chardin suggests why man is uncertain:

The whole psychology of modern disquiet is linked with the sudden confrontation with space-time. . . . The men of today are particularly uneasy, more so than at any other moment of history.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The [cause of anguish is] sickness of the dead end—the anguish of feeling shut in. . . . This time we have at last put our finger on the tender spot.

What makes the world in which we live specifically modern is our discovery in it and around it of evolution. And I now add that what disconcerts the modern world at its very roots is not being sure, and not seeing how it could be sure, that there is an outcome—a suitable outcome—to that evolution. 72

72 Teilhard de Chardin, pp. 227, 229.
Ihab Hassan, basing his opinion on the fiction of this century, agrees with Chardin that the problem is the anguish of uncertainty. His interpretation, however, suggests that man feels shut in not only by his terror of the future, but that he also senses the abyss in his roots and cannot decide whether it is possible to live over such a chasm:

For the major writers of our century . . . the idea of man's alienation is axiomatic and the ontological problem of man's being—not merely his struggle or defeat, but the stark encounter with nothingness—is the central question. . . . Between nihilism and sainthood, the modern self wavers, seeking still the meaning of life.73

Thus the modern fictional hero has been put to flight by nothingness (which, far from being unique in modern man, is an ancient problem),74 primarily because his stories, or the mythic American Self, led him to expect something more favorable to his personal existence. The basic quality of this American Self, as Hassan suggests, is radical innocence:

It is the innocence of a Self that refuses to accept the immutable rule of reality, including death, an aboriginal Self the radical imperatives of whose freedom cannot be stifled.75

This image of innocence and desire for freedom has deep roots in Western tradition, but it was encouraged especially

73Hassan, p. 19.

74For examples from the Hebrew tradition, see Jeremiah 20.14-18, and the first parts of numerous Psalms, such as 6.1-7; 10.1-11; 13.1-4; and 22.1-2.

75Hassan, p. 6. See also Tony Tanner's analysis that the abiding dream in American literature is that an unpatt- terned, unconditioned life is possible, but the abiding dread that accompanies the dream is that someone else is patterning our lives. City of Words (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). See especially the introduction.
by the hope for a new Adam who was expected to develop in the untouched wilderness of America. Yet it is a patently unrealistic image, and, as Hassan points out, "the disparity between the innocence of the hero and the destructive character of his experience defines his concrete, or existential, situation."76

Thus Western man, especially the American, has not been equipped with a viable myth. He has expected that his desire for freedom to do what he wills as long as he wills it, would be met, if not by a doting God, then by science and technology. Now at last it has become clear to some that the God is nowhere to be found (or if present, is anything but doting), and technology is limiting our freedom even while it provides many comforts.77 At this point the story has collapsed and man is met with a "stark encounter with nothingness." Again, the encounter is an ancient experience; the new thing is the starkness of the encounter. That is, this time man has come upon nothingness without a myth which could define his relationship to it and to the world in which he concretely experiences it.

Raymond Olderman confirms this interpretation in his analysis of the novel in the 1960's. He believes that the novelist felt that men had "a growing sense of the mystery

76 Hassan, p. 7.

77 See Ferkiss, p. 239; Thompson, pp. 220-21.
of fact itself and a loss of confidence in our own power to affect change and to control events."

At first glance, or from the perspective of ancient mythologies, this would seem to be a step that needs to be taken. Scientific man lived by the illusion that there were no mysteries and that events could be controlled. Now comes the disillusionment as a possible prelude to finding man's proper place in relation to his world. That is, for man in a more primitive age, the concrete fact nearly always pointed to the mystery beyond. This was a mystery with which man had to deal, and, as Loren Eiseley points out, the world has not really changed in that respect:

> the atmosphere . . . still persists, like an autumnal light, across the landscape of the aborigines. . . . The divine beings still exist, even though they may have shifted form or altered their abodes. Man survives by their aid and sufferance. He did not come into existence merely once at their behest. They are still his preceptors and guides. They continue to order his ways in the difficult environment that surrounds him.

These "divine beings" have not of course really shifted forms or abodes, but man's perception of where the mysteries are confronted has changed, and it is these mysteries with which he must finally deal. Yet, as Olderman points out, man in the 1960's does not look upon this as a favorable prospect—confrontation with the mysteries might lead to the

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78 Beyond the Waste Land, p. 3.
79 Eiseley, p. 112.
discovery that his image of complete freedom is sheer illusion. Thus Olderman suggests that the novelist seems to fear that if he pushes the mystery of fact very far, he might find the "monstrous power that controls us," and this power is not the God which once seemed to care for us. It is instead a power which provides no purpose for us. Since nothing seems ready to furnish man with a purpose, he is left with a sense of hopelessness before this power, which novelists often conceive of as "they."30

This looks much like man running away from a real and mysterious world which his pseudo-myths have not prepared him to face. Behind the concrete facts are, to be sure, terrible and monstrous powers without which man could not live (some partial metaphors for these are birth, death, limitation, abyss, relatedness, and passingness, or time). Now man is confronting them again, and when they are confronted without adequate myths, they all look like nothingness.

Thus, Hassan suggests that we are living by ignoring the terror, but that some novels, which he calls novels of outrage, at least succeed at times "in creating a genuine metaphor of the terror," and by doing so appeal "for profound changes in man's condition."31 Their function, that

80Olderman, pp. 3-5.

of confronting modern man with a condition which he does not
care to face, is valuable; even so, these novels carry man
only to the point of asking if he can "still hope to dispel
the void in humanity by the magic of the Word? And if terror
indeed acts as a space machine, turning Flesh into dust, can
we still hope to find surcease in the play of consciousness?"
Thus, in these novels, "it is not myth that provides [the
authors] with the basis of spatial form; it is terror; it is
the threat of nothingness. This is probably owing to their
perception that man is not only 'in disequilibrium with the
cosmos'; he is also in a state of ontological jeopardy."

However, such terror might be the result of failing to
perceive our present state as possibility. There is evi-
dence that the threat of nothingness is the appalling face
that the powers of the universe show during initiation,82
and it is probable that entire cultures go through initia-
tory periods (or fail to go through them and die). Nietzsche

82"More is involved [in initiation] than a mere rite of
passage out of one age group into another. The initiation
goes on for years, and the revelations are of several orders.
There is, to begin with, the first and most terrible reve-
lation, that of the sacred as the tremendum. The adolescent
begins by being terrorised by a supernatural reality of
which he experiences, for the first time, the power, the
autonomy, the incommensurability; and following upon this
encounter with the divine terror, the neophyte dies: he dies
to childhood—that is to ignorance and irresponsibility... He will have undergone a series of initiatory ordeals which
compel him to confront fear, suffering and torture, but
which compel him above all to assume a new mode of being,
that which is proper to an adult—namely, that which is con-
ditioned by the almost simultaneous revelation of the sacred,
of death and of sexuality." Eliade, Myths, Dreams and
Mysteries, pp. 195-96.
was in a way predicting initiation when he sensed that nihilism would be dominant in the twentieth century because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these "values" really had.\textsuperscript{83}

This is similar to the experience of the adolescent who at first lives by his parents' values, then, after a painful initiation into adulthood, develops his "own" values, which are his own even if they are identical to his parents'.

Hassan, considering post-war novels to 1961, concluded that we are at a time of initiation, but he doubted that we would go through it. The crucial time for American authors has been initiation because it entails reconciliation to time, endeavor in history, the final acceptance of death. In the process of initiation, dreams surrender to reality. It is no wonder that initiation in America has seldom borne the fruits of completion. The process is either truncated or interminable. All the initiates we have met [in this study] evade the full burden of confirmation; they cannot compromise with death.

In the last hundred years, the burdens of initiation have become heavier, the alternatives to compromise more crushing. The trend seems almost irreversible.\textsuperscript{84}

Thus Western man, unequipped with a myth which will empower him to make the passage through the death of what he has been, has struggled to avoid the warnings that the passage must be made, and finally is left only hesitating. Loren 83Quoted in Hassan, \textit{Radical Innocence}, p. 19. 84Ibid., p. 328.
Eiseley, for example, after recapitulating man's evolution through the natural world to the modern world of thought suggests that, because man unconsciously questions "his right to be there," he has sensed that he must do something grand to prove that right. But now something more than doing something grand is required:

Some act unknown, some propitiation of unseen forces, is demanded of him. For this purpose he has raised pyramids and temples, but all in vain. A greater sacrifice is demanded, the act of a truly great magician, the man capable of transforming himself. For what, increasingly, is required of man is that he pursue the paradox of return. So desperate has been the human emergence from fen and thicket, so great has seemed the virtue of a single magical act carried beyond nature, that man hesitates.85

My contention is that there is evidence in some contemporary novels that not only is the hesitation being dealt with (if hesitation can be considered a step beyond sheer terror), but tentative steps are being made into the passage to adulthood through the formulation of new Western myths. The point is not that this myth need be radically different from ancient myths; at least in basic form it will perhaps be almost identical. Even if it is, it will permit a more useful relationship to the world than did the pseudo-myth of the American Self, and it will still be a Western myth. 85

Eiseley, p. 150.
CHAPTER II

WRIGHT MORRIS AND THE MYTHOLOGICAL GROUND AHEAD

Wright Morris's 1956 novel *The Field of Vision* can be read as a profound intimation of the mythological ground which followed it and can act as an illuminator and normative guide for understanding how other novels tend to avoid or meet the contemporary imperatives indicated in Chapter I of this study. If the culture of the United States is at the beginning of an initiatory period, Morris's work, especially the Scanlon story, makes utterly clear that if we are to complete the passage through initiation, then we must be prepared to go through hell.

The events which happen in the present in *The Field of Vision* are almost entirely triggers for flashbacks and musing by the five main characters; since almost all the action takes place in their minds, the setting seems at first to be unimportant. However, the event which acts as the trigger for reflection is a bullfight complete with the symbolic trappings that Hemingway and others have used. In

1(New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956). Subsequent references to *The Field of Vision* will be in the text.
addition, Boyd, one of the characters, suggests that the ring is the "sanded navel of the world," in which each man sees only himself (p. 59). That is, if the navel of the world is the point at which life flows into the world, then the main characters are present at an examination of how each of them has treated this flow of life. For Boyd, the sand of the ring is also water to walk on in an effort to be the hero, and on another occasion it is the bottom of the sandpit pool into which he sinks, signifying final degradation.

For Lehmann, another of the five characters, the bull is the minotaur, which to him is a symbol of the emergence of man from beast. For Scanlon, the sand is the legendary desert of the pioneering passage west, which must be crossed if life is to be found. Finally, for Walter and Lois McKee, the other two characters at the bullfight, present events reveal that their only mythology is Boyd. The only time life had poured into Lois was thirty years before when Boyd daringly kissed her. Since then she has been waiting for something else to happen, but at the same time she has been preventing it and is frozen.

Walter McKee is frozen in a similar way. He and Boyd grew up together in Polk, Nebraska, with Boyd always the

actor and Walter the witness to his acts. McKee is a man who "couldn't be happier," which Boyd takes to mean that he's only as happy as he could be, given his limited imagination and frozen wife, and that is not very happy. Everything McKee notices at the bullfight reminds him of something that Boyd did, or recalls his teen-age visit to an uncle in the Texas Panhandle. Beyond those events he seems to know almost nothing, and, since he can't handle much life at once, he is continually disoriented and dizzy at the plunge of the bullring down to the navel of the world.

Scanlon was found almost literally frozen in the old hotel in Lone Tree, and, since the newspapers printed the story, Lois feared that she would be accused of neglect if she did not bring him home. Her fears were unfounded; even so, she insists on taking Scanlon (her father) to Mexico for Christmas because she is afraid that her neighbors in Lincoln will find that he prefers staying alone in Lone Tree to living with them.

The McKees have not seen Boyd for years. They meet by accident in Mexico City, where Boyd has come with Lehmann, his analyst, and Paula Kahler, Lehman's patient-companion. They have come to Mexico because Lehmann studies transformations and, having seen a photograph of a goring in which the matador looked as if he were emerging from the bull, he was determined to see a bullfight. Mexico was the closest place he could find one, and Boyd was invited.
The novel begins with two quotations which suggest the direction Morris intends the novel to go:

The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.

John Milton
Paradise Lost

You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element.

D. H. Lawrence

First, Morris intends to suggest with these quotations that it is the mind, or imagination that creates heavens and hells, and that whatever heavens and hells appear in this novel are in reality in the mind. Events themselves will be secondary. Second, the individual is only a momentary stage in something like "the enduring personality of life itself" (p. 123).

The first point is one Morris developed from his interest in photography and viewpoint. The camera catches only the moment and makes it static. However, this is not the truth about the moment. The "enduring personality" is a becoming, not a static being (see Boyd's argument to this effect on p. 195), and the truth is in the way people are in the process of creating and molding events in their minds. One incident clarifies the relation of the photographic image to the truth. The matador has been gored and Morris
thinks what the story will look like in the newspaper:

The headlines would read DA SILVA GORED, the photograph show him froglike, as if leaping the horns, or crumpled like a broken toy as they carted him off. The camera did not lie. A pity, since the lie mirrored the truth. The camera would report what no pair of eyes present had seen (p. 154). The objective view, like that obtained by a camera, a scientist, or a person with no feelings, while it might be accurate, has little to do with truth. The truth, as Lawrence intimates, is developed by using "a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise." Thus the novel is about viewpoints and interior truths, of heavens and hells contained in the minds of people and therefore all making up "states of the same single radically unchanged element."

The second major point, that each individual is a momentary form of this unchanged element, or the enduring personality of life itself, is crucial for understanding the form which the novel takes. None of the five viewpoints need be said to have the "correct" view while the others are erroneous. The views are simply there, and together they make up the shape of the enduring personality at that time and place. However, some viewpoints seem to contribute more imaginatively to the continuation of what has been and perhaps will be the nature of that enduring personality.

3 The concept of the "lie," or the created account of life, as the truth was also used by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., in Cat's Cradle seven years later.
(Scanlon and Lehmann), while others seem to be "frozen" or shut off from that source of life. Their views are not "incorrect" or untruthful, but they, to the extent that they are frozen, detract from the liveliness of that corporate personality. Thus Walter McKee lives by clichés which he seems unable to question and Lois is so frozen that she sees like a camera (p. 76); neither of the McKees creates stories that will enable them to participate in the risks and gifts of life. Boyd conceives of himself mythically, but the myths are of abortive efforts to be a hero. He seems almost desirous of failure and has wrapped himself in a shroud for twenty years, as Lehmann observes, lying "cocoon-like. . . . Out of this world, in the deep-freeze of his adolescent dreams" (p. 109).

These three characters represent the great bulk of the population of the United States. The McKees are the middle part, frozen into their efforts to gain respectability, but fearing that something might happen to upset the status quo at the same time they fear they will die before something does happen. As a result, they are fascinated by the American rebel, Boyd, who goes against the conventions of

4In one "Boyd" chapter, Boyd sees himself as Icarus, who failed; as one who failed at walking on water and should have drowned, but failed to; as the tempting serpent in a dust-bowl garden; as a grey-haired youth who "slew" the minotaur with pop; as a fool; as an Issac for his mother Sarah and thus a god for her, but the only god in her pantheon that failed (pp. 100-111).
society. Yet Boyd's rebellion is adolescent; he is also interested above all in succeeding, but he wants to succeed at failure in order to mock the clichés of the middle class. He finds only clichés of failure, however, and is never transformed into adulthood. Neither of these three characters passes through initiation. All live primarily on the porch where Boyd kissed Lois; all were adolescents then and still are.

The two creative figures in the novel are Scanlon, who sees only what he chooses to see and who conveys a "true" hero-story and life-lesson to the one who can hear it, and Lehmann, who is a "timeless man" who "had gazed into the sightless eyes of the minotaur" (p. 63).

If the assumptions made thus far are correct, then Scanlon's story is central in the novel. This is contrary to the general critical opinion of Scanlon's role. He is usually thought of as an example of how easily one can become stuck in the past. Scanlon did indeed refuse to enter the twentieth century, but he did so with good reason. He was not so blind that he could not see what the century was like; he knew his own children and correctly guessed that they were essentially hog-killers, which is the lowest form

of humanity. Some elements in the Scanlon story are analogous to the Grail legend. If Scanlon is the king (the father), then he finds that his kingdom is impotent and he will not enter it (the twentieth century). McKee has a corn cob in place of a phallus and Lois is frigid. Together they somehow produce one child, but he looks like, acts like, and is named after Gordon Boyd. Gordon's only product is another Gordon (the boy in The Field of Vision). Boyd, after whom they are named, is also impotent. He is caught, an adolescent, on the porch with the others and never marries or finds a new story about his life.

Granville Hicks is the only commentator who has been impressed with the importance of the Scanlon passages. He believes they are a "fundamentally accurate rendering of the essence of a thousand tales of the transcontinental crossing." If this so, then Scanlon's story is a myth, and a powerful one, but in The Field of Vision no one except the boy, Gordon McKee, hears the myth. Only Boyd is aware that it is being told, that, as he says, "heaven, hell and God knows what else were being bandied about," but he does not hear the story itself. He hears only the message which Scanlon bears, and since the message needs the story for its authentication, he pays little attention.

If we use Joseph Campbell's description of a living myth and of the hero, then Scanlon tells a living myth and, whether he is himself a hero or not, he tells a hero story and bears the message from that story to a generation he thinks can hear it. According to Campbell, living myths "are not invented but occur, and are recognized by seers, and poets, to be then cultivated and employed as catalysts of spiritual (e.i. psychological) well-being."7 The myths are evoked by the recognition of the occurrence of the "grave and constant" in human affairs, which is then structured in such a way that it aids those hearing the story to negotiate the passage into the next stage of life. Myths are "structuring agents, functioning to bring the human order into accord with the celestial."8

Scanlon did not invent the story he told, but he recognized it and was captured by it; he thought it was told by an immortal man, "his mind full of deathless deeds" (p. 47). When that man, his father, died, Scanlon died too, in that he retired from the twentieth century with his story, seeing a "bumper crop" on "a metaphysical landscape" where others in the century see empty plains.9 Thus Scanlon is a "seer," a man of imagination who "sees" a story which has captured

8Ibid., pp. 110-11, 159.
his imagination and structured his universe. The story
grew from that which was grave and constant in the exper-
ience of the thousands who made the western passage, and
Scanlon uses it to prepare Gordon (as the next generation
able to hear the story) for his spiritual journey.

It can also be argued that Tom Scanlon is himself a
hero even though the events he recounts are those his father
told him, and those stories were probably a compendium of
stories the old man had been told along with some events he
might have participated in himself. Thus Tom Scanlon tells
Gordon stories of what "they" did, but which he, as he be-
gins to remember the stories, transforms into his own
account (p. 51). His hero status rests on his recognition
that his father's tales were of "deathless deeds," which
Tom Scanlon then relived spiritually (psychologically), and
from which he distilled the healing message: "Shortest way
to heaven's right smack through hell" (p. 56), which the
boy Gordon learns (p. 191). Campbell defines the hero as

the man or woman who has been able to battle past his
personal and local historical limitations to the gen-
ernally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's
vision, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the
primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they
are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating soci-
ety and psyche, but of the unquenched source through
which society is reborn. The hero has died as a mod-
ern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific,
universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn
task and deed therefore . . . is to return then to us,
transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of
life renewed.10

10The Hero with a Thousand Faces, pp. 20-21.
Although Tom Scanlon did none of the deeds he relates to Gordon, he has battled past the limitations that bind the McKees and Boyd (the twentieth century) into pre-set reactions, or clichés, and tells a story which is "eloquent ... of the unquenched source through which society is reborn." He died and is now reborn ("after being as good as dead for four generations, Tom Scanlon had suddenly turned up alive" [p. 47]). He takes upon himself the second task of the hero when he finds a receptive audience in Gordon and teaches him a universal lesson with his story.

All the other characters in the novel except Lehmann are "frozen" at adolescence because they don't have a story which relates them to the world novel, or source of life which enables individuals and societies to be reborn. Only Boyd understands to some degree that his problem is that he is without a comprehensive story. He knows that somehow rebirth must occur and even aids Gordon in negotiating his passage from childhood to adolescence by getting him into contact with first-hand hero activity. However, this is the only passage Boyd knows about. His own act is that of the adolescent hero who tries to prove his worth in order to win life. He is unable to pass successfully through the death of his old self (symbolized by his retention of Ty Cobb's pocket all his life), and cannot therefore "strive for a higher goal than he can safely reach," which one must do if he is to "surmount the obstacles between adolescence
and maturity.\textsuperscript{11} Boyd's acts are, on the contrary, basically self-preserving. For example, he would not ask Lois to marry him because he feared her refusal. If she represented for him the bride of life, as Samantha does in the Scanlon story, Boyd was afraid to journey back from his failure at walking on water to ask for her. In Scanlon's story, on the other hand, whatever there is that the hero cherishes (his best self) dies in the sand and the victory won is beyond his capacities, requiring the aid of forces beyond himself. Finally, Scanlon asks for the bride instead of hoping that she will somehow be given to him.\textsuperscript{12}

That Scanlon's story is central in the novel is evident not only in the hauntingly beautiful way it is told, but also in the way Scanlon is described by Morris. For example, Scanlon has a seaman's eyes and lives on a plain that looks like and has a wind like the sea. He likes it because it is lonely and there is no place to hide (p. 43). Scanlon is in effect surrounded by the sea, which can "signify the abyss out of which forms arise and unfold their

\textsuperscript{11}Joseph L. Henderson, "Ancient Myths and Modern Man," \textit{Man and His Symbols}, ed. Carl G. Jung (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 122. See Henderson's more complete analysis of the hero-role: "the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness--his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses--in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him. Once the individual has passed his initial test and can enter the mature phase of life, the hero myth loses its relevance. The hero's symbolic death becomes, as it were, the achievement of that maturity" (p. 112).

\textsuperscript{12}For the role of the guide in achieving this passage, see \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces}, p. 23.
potentialities within existence." At Lone Tree, Scanlon is where he wants to be. "Nothing had changed" there, so that "he saw things in their places without the need to look at them. They were there, in case he wanted to see them, in his mind's eye" (p. 51). The "things" he wanted to see were the "deathless deeds" which had filled the mind of his father. The twentieth century, which he didn't care to join, seemed to be a "closing off": "His father had opened the West, his brothers had closed it, and his children had gone East. Everything had been done. Everything, that is, but just stay put."

Lone Tree itself, where Scanlon decided to stay put, is the place where "the century [Scanlon] didn't care for turned on its axis" (p. 42), which could mean that it is the core, or the heart of the way things are in this century. Whenever Lone Tree is described, much is made of the single cottonwood tree for which the town is named, which stands at the center of the axis of the twentieth century. Trees symbolize many things, but one of the most common uses is

13Juan F. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, tr. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 230. The sea can also represent the collective unconscious, especially when the sun rises out of it, representing the spirit (p. 230). Cf. the following passage from The Field of Vision: "The view from his window--the one in Lone Tree... was every bit as wide and as empty as a view of the sea. In the early morning, with just the sky light, that was how it looked. The faded sky was like the sky at sea, the everlasting wind like the wind at sea, and the plain rolled and swelled quite a bit like the sea itself (p. 43).
as a symbol for the "growth and development of psychic life."14 This tree represents the life of the twentieth century. It stands "to the east," which is where people go who join the century, and the way it looked just as the century was beginning was "like a man stripped for action," since it was "dead at the top but with clumps of leaves near the bottom" (p. 46). Scanlon's intention then was to watch it grow, but as it turned out the dead top was more prophetic than was the live bottom. The psychic life of the twentieth century, though stripped for action, failed to grow, and, by the middle of the century, the tree is dead.15

Scanlon apparently could not have said why he disliked the twentieth century, although when he saw his grandchildren he could see that "what the world had been coming to, had arrived. What could you expect of the younger generation if they had fathers like McKee, a hog shooter? Nothing. Which was pretty much what they got" (p. 49).

From Scanlon's perspective, the deathless deeds done in wondrous places could not be done in this century because

14Henderson, p. 153. Also see Frazer's lengthy list of examples such as the following: "In some parts of Fiji the navel-string of a male infant is planted together with a coco-nut or the slip of a breadfruit-tree, and the child's life is supposed to be intimately connected with that of the tree." Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, abridged ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 790-92.

15Ceremony in Lone Tree, p. 6.
such deeds were performed on the journey west, into unknown lands. The present journey is back east, into already-settled places which close off the possibility of a desperate adventure into hell. Without that possibility one cannot take the "shortest way to heaven," (or maturity) since that way is "right smack through hell" (p. 56). If the others had known the story and message Scanlon bears, they would not have been lost. According to Joseph Campbell, "It is only those who know neither an inner call nor an outer doctrine whose plight truly is desperate; that is to say, most of us today, in this labyrinth without and within the heart."16

Scanlon's story is written in three episodes which correspond roughly to Campbell's analysis of the three parts of the monomyth, which is the "composite adventure of the tales . . . of the world's symbolic carriers of the destiny of Everyman."17 Briefly, it is this: the three major parts are "separation--initiation--return."18 In the basic story, "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of super-natural wonder [in Scanlon's story, the wagon train leaves the settled East;  

17. Ibid., p. 36.
18. Ibid., p. 30. All quotes in this paragraph are from p. 30.
they reach the desert, or hell, where everything is upside
down]: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive
victory is won [the devil follows them and some are killed,
including the narrator's best self, but he wins the victory
by going straight through hell]: the hero comes back from
this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons
on his fellow man [Tim Scanlon inherits the story and relates
it to his son, "who found more to live for, looking backward,
than those who died all around him, looking ahead" (p. 44)]."

In the first Scanlon episode (pp. 94-99), the people
in the wagon trains left their homes expecting that where-
ever they were going would be the same as the places they
left. However, the farther they went into the desert, the
more they had to leave behind because of the difficulty of
the passage. This was a testing, in that "you could see what
a man valued most in his life from where he put it down"
(p. 96). Finally friends and relations were put out, even
when this broke vows made in the "common world" never to
part. Deep into the desert it became clear that things
were valued more than people, since, although things were
put off first, people continued to pick up things others
had left on the trail, but "none of the wagons ever stopped
to pick people up" (p. 96). Thus the "world of common day,"
in which people are settled into accepted modes of activity
and can affirm high values, is left behind.
The specific nature of the new region makes clear that they are entering a place of "supernatural wonder," since this is "the Devil's country" (p. 97). Everything is upside down, "with the Devil upstairs and the Lord in the basement," which means the Devil is in control, doing the opposite of what the Lord would be expected to do. He "turned the rivers into sand, and the lakes into salt" (p. 97), and the more the Reverend Tennant prays (to the wrong God, since they are in the Devil's country), "the drier it got." Scanlon is the only one on the journey who realizes the implications of their being where they are. That is, the Devil is the one to whom they should be praying, Criley's map (which they decide to follow even though it means leaving the usual trail) seems to Scanlon to be the Devil's trick to get them to go into Hell, and, above all, the bird which is following them is the Devil, trailing along "because he was human--lonely, that is" (p. 98).

This bird is the most fascinating and ambiguous symbol in the story. First: Scanlon's description of him:

The Devil himself was that fly speck they saw in the sky. A bird? If a bird could croak at you like a frog. A bird, if a living thing could smell like the dead. They could see him wheel, drawing this circle like a kid would do with a stick on water, but without any ripples, just this speck at the center of it. All around them the mountains, not so much blue as black, the valley like a dead sea in between them, and overhead was this bird—if that was what it was (p. 97).

Birds symbolize many things, but one use seems more relevant to Scanlon's image of it than do others, and that is its
connection with the shaman. According to Campbell, "one of the most persistent features [of the mythological motifs of European and North American primitives] is the association of the shamanistic trance with the flight of a bird." 19 Scanlon's dreamlike, highly symbolic story can best be read as a shamanistic vision for our times. Note, for example, that Scanlon's life at almost ninety years of age need not be thought of as fossilized: 20 it can as easily be considered the last stage in the shaman's journey. In that stage, according to Campbell,

illusion is enlightenment, engagement disengagement, and bondage is freedom. There is nothing to be done, no effort to be made; for in our bondage we are free, and in our very striving for release we are linking ourselves more to bondage—which is already freedom. 21 Scanlon knows that "everything had been done. Everything, that is, but just stay put" (p. 45). He was free to do as he liked, had all he needed in his "mind's eye" without striving for it, and lived at the axis of the times (pp. 48-51). That is, he sees "plenty. No matter where he looked," whereas others see only empty plains. 22

Scanlon as shaman takes on added significance if one agrees with Campbell that

19 The Flight of the Wild Gander, p. 166; also see the list of examples of the shaman-bird connection in Henderson, p. 149.

20 Madden thinks of him as a fossil. See p. 137.


22 Ceremony in Lone Tree, p. 5.
today, when the mandala itself, the whole structure of meaning to which society and its guardians would attach us, is dissolving, what is required of us all, spiritually as well as corporeally, is much more the fearless self-sufficiency of our shamanistic inheritance than the timorous piety of the priest-guided Neolithic.23

Therefore Scanlon, far from being a fossil, is a sign at the axis of the century, pointing the direction it has lost—toward psychic growth, not toward empty-minded action and escape into two-level McKee-like houses. Naturally, the others in the novel, when they think of Scanlon at all, think of him as a fool. However, since they are all "frozen" in adolescence, they have no way of recognizing him for what he is. Yet he is the one who, as will be shown later, is intimately connected with the strange spirit-bird.

Thus the Scanlon-narrator knows the kind of journey they are in for, and this enables him to play the hero-role. That is, life is not divided for him into an entirely evil sphere (the Devil's) and an entirely good one (the Lord's) as it is for the Reverend Tennant.24 This permits Scanlon to accept more fully the nature of the world they are entering, and to know that the Devil has characteristics not unlike those which humans have: he is lonely, at a "certain

24"Tennant" is a play on "tenet," meaning opinion, doctrine, principle, or dogma. Thus Reverend Tennant is like Western man journeying into the unknown. He cannot make it because he divides the world into good and bad, living by his pre-set doctrines instead of taking it as it comes.
disadvantage" in that he wants companionship but cannot seem to take it," and has to "tag along, like a kid, and see how it worked out" (p. 98). Scanlon is different from the others on the journey, then, in that he believes in what things mean in his imagination, whereas they "wanted to believe in what they saw, so they did" (p. 98).25 The others want to believe what they saw on Criley's map; therefore, they follow a trail that does not exist anywhere except on the map. They also want to believe things are not as bad as they are (they cannot imagine hell in the future) and that the Lord rules as they believe he always has. Scanlon, on the other hand, believes in the trail made by the wagons because he knows what Criley's map leads to, believes in the nature of the area as the Devil's country, and believes in the character of the Devil as he imagines it from the nature of the bird.26 That is, Scanlon as hero knows the

25 The underlining is mine. See pp. 51-52 of this paper on how the camera view misses the truth.

26 Scanlon later is accused of refusing to admit anything he does not believe (p. 240). In McKee's sense (he makes the accusation) this is true, but what Scanlon is doing is refusing to participate in a century the qualities of which he rejects. That is, the century is one in which people want to believe that life in the "common" world is all that is required, since the universe is somehow on our side, whereas Scanlon knows that one must go through hell to get to the heaven that the twentieth century generation wants to take for granted. Only when he finds another Davy Crockett man, one who does not fear hell, does he come out of retirement into himself in order to tell his story.
nature of the journey and does not support himself by trying to believe that things are the same as they have always been or the way one would like for them to be.

In the second episode of Scanlon's story, "fabulous forces are there encountered" (pp. 142-51). This part of the journey begins in present time with people in the bullring shouting for agua to wet the matador's cape, but in the context of Scanlon's thinking agua means life-giving water. This introduction is helpful in showing that Scanlon is not completely shut off from the century; he knows enough about it to know it is populated with Eastern fools who do not know where to look for water, or life, in the West (in hell). Boyd, as an example of an Eastern man, even uses Pepsi-Cola for water and teaches the boy Gordon to use it. When Gordon is squirting pop into his mouth he doesn't hear Scanlon tell about the agua that gives life; he is captured by Boyd's Eastern foolishness. At the end of Scanlon's account of hell, he spits on the Pepsi stains and shouts for water as he envisions his own death--again indicating the foolishness of playing with Pepsi when life and death are the stakes for those who have eyes to see (p. 151).

The pervasive imagery in this episode is death. Agua cannot be found in the desert, nor is there any living thing in it other than Scanlon and the people with the

27 In Campbell's account of the monomyth, the victory occurs in the second episode, but in Scanlon's story it occurs in the third one. This is not a significant difference.
wagons. Scanlon can hardly believe that even the people in the wagons are alive, not only because the desert is empty of other life, but because their actions are incongruent with their location. That is, they are in the desert because they want the very things they left in the East, and now, in the desert, they act as if they were still in the East. For example, "Reverend Tennant would read to his kids how they should sit and eat with the knife and fork, while they were scrounging around like coyotes for what bones there were left" (p. 144). They still want "to believe in what they saw, so they did," which again means that what they saw was not the Devil's country, but their desire for the settled life they had left. Scanlon knows they are in a place of death (pp. 143-45, 150).

The "fabulous forces" encountered are those of the Devil. Only Scanlon senses that the Devil can be something of an ally; as a result, only Scanlon knows where they are headed and can admit it, since he doesn't fear it. Perhaps because he was lonely himself, he identified with the loneliness of the bird-devil in the first episode, and now that identification is strengthened by an event in which (as the story is told) the Devil gives a sign that he has a streak of humanity in him. This, as the story turns out, shows that the Devil will play guide for Scanlon. He imagines the Devil woke him up crawling out of a hole beside him, leaving some little pointed rocks around the hole which
signify for Scanlon the humanness of the Devil. He develops a "shameful liking" for the Devil and suspects that he "might even need food and water for himself" (p. 146). Scanlon puts the rocks in his canteen not because they do any good (although "they raised the level so that it looked like he had more water than he did"[p. 146]), but because they remind him that the Devil might be for him more than he is against him.28 Thus he is the only one in the party who trusts the situation as it is and finds some comfort in it. For the others, sheer hostility is arrayed against them; they pray to the wrong power to intervene and save them, and they gain their comfort by thinking of other places.

After Scanlon receives the stone amulets, he climbs a mountain and sees hell for the first time. When he sees it, he also sees the way out of it. There, running right through hell, is a canyon; once one is in the canyon, the only way out of hell is straight through it, following the canyon (pp. 146-48).

When he returned to camp to tell what he had found, he discovered that the party had been prepared by the Devil to enter hell. Samuels (whom Scanlon expects to bring his

28"The first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure . . . who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass." The rocks serve this purpose for Scanlon. Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 69.
death in *Ceremony in Lone Tree* has killed himself because "there was so little water left he couldn't bear to drink more of it" (pp. 146-47). This "killed off something in all of them," so that they seemed to be dead people riding a funeral procession into hell. Scanlon understands that they are against forces beyond themselves.

This is even more clear to him as he scouts the canyon to find a way to get the wagons down into it. The "fabulous forces" of the place seem to have thrown huge rocks about "as though some giant had been playing with them" (p. 147). A shadow, one with wings, seems to accompany him on this journey, although he cannot see the bird. He "had a pretty good idea" that the canyon led to hell, but he is not frightened; he knows they are destined to go, so "if it was hell they were going to, he wanted a look at it" (p. 148).

Again, because of the symbolism Morris uses, Scanlon's journey seems to be into the unconscious, or the underworld of the psyche. "The shadow" is a Jungian concept representing the "other side" of a self. According to M.-L. von Franz, "the shadow usually contains values that are needed by the unconscious, but that exist in a form that makes it difficult to integrate them into one's life." Scanlon's "shameful liking" for the bird could perhaps be applied to the shadow without the bird and so to his "other side."

The Devil and his country is the enemy to the others in the party, but not to Scanlon, who feels some companionship with the Devil. Thus, "whether the shadow becomes our friend or not depends largely upon ourselves... The shadow becomes hostile only when he is ignored or misunderstood."30 It is clear that the others are ignoring the shadow because they misunderstand where they are.

When the party begins to lower the wagons down the slope into the canyon, the fabulous forces are encountered in an increasingly obvious way. After two wagons have been lowered into the canyon successfully, the third crashes. Samantha then shoots the bird, as if it were to blame, and it falls on the shattered wagon as if that were its target. The ladies, seeming to relish the stink as animals would, clean it and cook it. They seem no longer human: Mrs. Criley, who used to fear death, now seems pleased by it, and "nobody troubled to thank the Lord" for the bird—perhaps both because they are like animals and because they sense that the bird is not from the Lord (p. 149).

Samantha's appearance in the story is sudden; she has played no role in the story until she shoots the shadow-devil-bird. Later Scanlon saves and marries her. Perhaps she is Scanlon's "anima," or the feminine element in the male psyche which, in myth, the hero often rescues.31

30 Ibid., p. 172.
31 Henderson, p. 123.
When the hero rescues her, overcoming the demon-forces, "the 'feminine element' no longer appears in dreams as a dragon, but as a woman; similarly, the 'shadow' side of the personality takes on a less menacing form."32 This is what happens when Samantha shoots the bird; she takes its place in the story, the feminine replacing the menacing aspect of the shadow, and together these indicate a major advance toward wholeness in Scanlon. Again, this evidence indicates that Scanlon's journey is one into a dream-world, the shamanistic trance, and, through this, into the unconscious where the basic mythological impulses dwell.

While the bird is being cooked, a strange wind starts where they are and sucks out the fire. A "crazy-looking cloud" scrapes up the canyon and drops dry rain on them which "scared Scanlon worse than no rain at all"; then a mule died (pp. 149-50). As in many ancient stories, the people have violated the spirit of the place by killing and eating its protector like animals, and that spirit, which is the Devil in this case, warns them of what is in store for them by sucking out the fire and killing the mule--that is, their lives are in danger of being taken.

Scanlon, however, is not afraid of death, though he is afraid his fellow humans will eat him after he is dead. He leaves them in order to die by himself (being off by

32 Ibid., p. 128.
himself made him feel so good that he "ran around like
crazy, hooting like a kid" [p. 150]) and comes onto a black
place like a dead sea. It is a completely unearthly place
which utterly disorients him:

He couldn't tell you if he walked backwards or for-
wards, or to the right or the left. He couldn't tell
you if he thought that was right or wrong. As a
matter of fact, he didn't care, but the one thing he
could tell you, if you asked him, was exactly where
he was. He was in Hell. Knowing that, he didn't
seem to mind it so much (p. 151).

Thus Scanlon has encountered fabulous forces in a region
of supernatural wonder.

In the third episode, Scanlon wins a decisive victory
and, in accordance with Campbell's schema, "comes back from
this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on
his fellow man."33 The victory consists of his successful
confrontation with his own death, after which he leads the
helpless members of the wagon train through hell with the
aid of the Devil to "Heaven," arriving there with the power
to tell stories about the way life is.

The victory occurs in a curious, dreamlike tale of
Scanlon in hell. What concerned him was that he could not
know what time it was so he would know "when he had done
what he could" and therefore "ought to give up" (p. 186).
Finally he stumbles on the body of a man "who had been dead
for some time." The wind makes a "ghostly music" come out
of his mouth, "a wild hollow sound, like a shell."

33The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 30.
Scanlon had the feeling he had seen him somewhere, and he had. The crisp yellow beard was his own. The dead man was himself (p. 187).

This is not surprising to him because he knew "there were two men within him, and he knew for sure that one of them had died" (p. 187). He suspected it was the better man who was dead, and that he had died of knowing he was in hell.

The "better man" in Scanlon is the part that knows the good and hates the evil, as it is in most Western men, and it probably died when Samantha shot the bird, thus permitting the unification of his psyche. The "shadow" no longer haunts him; the part of Scanlon that is left is that which felt a liking for the Devil, whereas that in him which was ashamed of this affection, the "better man" as Tennant would define him, is dead. The man who is left knows he has a guide through hell, which means he is prepared, with the aid of the demonic, to make a difficult yet trusting passage through the initiatory hell.

The discovery of his own death also gives Scanlon new knowledge which changes his situation. First, the man who had died made tracks into hell, whereas Scanlon had made only grease spots. The tracks changed the nature of hell just as Scanlon's knowledge of his death changed him:

But it was not the same sort of Hell, with tracks in it, anymore than Scanlon was the same sort of man, now that he knew who had died, and what time it was. (p. 187).
The tracks in hell seem to mark it, making it more real and more penetrable. In a similar way, Scanlon, knowing his better self has died, is able to orient himself with relation to time. The Devil has already killed everything in him it could want (his "radical innocence" as Hassan uses that term), so in that sense it is too late to do anything else to save those qualities. However, the effect of this knowledge is to free him to journey without fear across hell; there is nothing he can lose.

Back in camp, Scanlon is confronted with three non-believers (in hell). They believe only in themselves as favored, valuable beings, and in the things which they think give them value. Mr. Criley and Mr. Baumann encourage Mrs. Norton to put on all the clothes and jewelry she can so they can take it with them as they leave to save themselves. That is, their "better selves" (the American Self) are not dead yet, so they make preparations to save them. Since they are non-believers, they will not listen to Scanlon, who knows that "the thing about hell was that you had to go in, if what you wanted was out" (p. 189). They try to skirt around hell and all three die; when the others find Mrs. Norton, Morris observes that

no one had taken the rings from her fingers, the money from the purse at her throat, or the gold from the extra teeth she had brought along (p. 190).

Those like Scanlon who know they are in hell and that it is time to make the passage through it, have no use for
this kind of extra baggage.

The three who tried to skirt around hell are in one sense like Walter and Lois McKee and Boyd, none of whom will go through hell and all of whom are weighted down with baggage from their past and present, which they carry around trying to preserve. As long as they keep it and try to skirt around, they are dead. If Boyd and the McKees are typical of a large part of American society, one implication of the story is that unless that part drops its baggage and goes straight into hell, it will not make it out. All the Nortons, McKees, and Boyds think Scanlon is crazy, of course, but this should be expected if his tale represents a "mystical participation" in the desert journey; such tales are meaningless to them. According to Jung, what psychologists call psychic identity, or "mystical participation," has been stripped off our world of things. But it is exactly this halo of unconscious associations that gives a colorful and fantastic aspect to the primitive's world. We have lost it to such a degree that we do not recognize it when we meet it again. With us such things are kept below the threshold; when they occasionally reappear, we even insist that something is wrong.34

However, Scanlon, with his "better self" dead, is not intimidated and does not insist that something is wrong with his fantastic view of what is happening and where he is. He takes the women, children, and Reverend Tennant straight into hell. When they are well into it, they

discover "water cupped in a rock, and one of those little six sided stones at the bottom of it" (p. 190). The stone, signifying the protective nature of the Devil, indicated that it is he who has brought them through, just as he led them in. Thus, when finally they are out, Scanlon does not accept Reverend Tennant's interpretation when he gives "thanks to the Lord for bringing them alive through the jaws of Hell" (p. 190-91). From the first, Scanlon has been clear that Tennant was wrong to pray to the Lord in the Devil's country. If anyone brought them through Hell it was the Devil.

The point of this analysis is to show that Scanlon's story follows the pattern of ancient hero-savior stories and that his story is particularly relevant to the last half of the twentieth century. Western man is faced with an initiation into a new age and the question is, will he go through it or try to skirt around? Eliade argues this point in a passage that also serves to indicate in part the meaning of the Scanlon story:

The anxiety of the modern man would seem, then, to be aroused and to feed upon the discovery of Nothingness. . . . And if we could translate the anguish of the modern man into the experience and symbolic language of the primitive, he would say something like this: This is the great initiatory trial; it is the entry into the labyrinth, or into the bush haunted by the demons and the souls of the ancestors, the jungle that corresponds to Hell, to the other world: it is the great fear that paralyses the neophyte at initiation, when he is swallowed by the monster and finds himself in the darkness of its belly, when he feels himself being torn to pieces
and digested, in order to be reborn a new man. . . .

In the eyes of the primitive, this terrible experience is indispensable to the birth of a new man. No initiation is possible without the ritual of an agony, a death and a resurrection. . . . the anguish of the modern world is the sign of an imminent death, but of a death that is necessary and redemptive, for it will be followed by a resurrection and the possibility of attaining a new mode of being, that of maturity and responsibility. 35

Thus the Scanlon story is a retelling of an ancient understanding, this time in the mode of the frontier conquest. This is a particularly appropriate mode for Americans, for whom the pioneer westward movement has provided the foundation for much folklore and mythological content.

Scanlon is thus an example of those whom Morris says "face backward while their countrymen resolutely march forward." 36 However, Morris makes clear that neither facing backward nor marching forward are in themselves desirable, but that, in fact, the problem with artists and countrymen is that they tend to do one to the exclusion of the other. To accept either the past or the present only as it is on the surface, as fact, is deadening. The past is necessary, but it must be repossessed in an act of reappraisal instead of being accepted as raw material, according to Morris. This enables one to include the present within the past.


36Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead (New York: Atheneum, 1963), "Foreward" (n. pag.).
Art should be a synthesis, with the past struggling in a confrontation with its antithesis, the present. Scanlon's facing backward is this kind of synthesis, in which the present is anticipated at the level of, and in the patterns of, the Collective Unconscious. Morris has, in this story, succeeded in being "supremely conscious" according to his own definition:

To the extent that the artist is supremely conscious, his impressions will anticipate the future as richly as they evoke and incorporate the past.  

Scanlon's vision, although it evokes the past, is at the same time congruent with Morris's description of what the territory ahead looks like for the artist. First, he says that it is "conceptual power, not style or sensibility, that indicates genius," since it is conception that permits the artist to become conscious and thereby create his universe.  

The most essential thing for an artist is his freedom to be after strange gods. It is by their strangeness that he will know them, since he conjured them up. They are, by definition, the gods that beckon him into the territory ahead. . . .

His old individual talent, if he has one, will displace an old god with a new one—but the new one will bear an astonishing resemblance to the one it displaced. . . .

He will know this new world by [the absence of clichés]. He will know it by the fact that he has not been there before.  

Morris seems more free "to be after strange gods" in the Scanlon story than he does in his other fiction.

37Ibid., p. 196.  
38Ibid., p. 229.  
39Ibid., pp. 229-31.
Further, only the gods that appear in that story seem capable of beckoning anyone in The Field of Vision into the future. Everyone in the novel except Scanlon, Lehmann, and perhaps little Gordon at the end of the novel, is trying to skirt around his initiation, so that each of them is frozen. Those who see the beckoning demon-gods and trust them make the journey into the underworld, then return with a "boon" to grant.

Scanlon grants this boon to Gordon in three parts after he has finished telling his story. First, the boy must be clear about where he wants to go, "to squirt pop, or to heaven" (p. 191). Squirting pop is closely associated with Boyd's style; he has done it most of his life, and his method of performing the heroic act (overcoming the bull) is that of fizzing pop on the bull's snout, which even Boyd knows is a clown's act, not a hero's. Scanlon's opinion is that Boyd is silly: he spits on the Pepsi stains. The question is, then, do you want to play the fool with life or go to heaven? "Heaven" in the novel has nothing to do with life after death, but specifically has to do with getting to Mountain Meadow, "where there was food and water," and with marrying Samantha, the bride of life, which amounts to unifying one's character into a living whole. Gordon decides that he prefers heaven.

40 Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 345.
The second part of the lesson is that "the shortest way to it is straight through hell," which is the central statement and has been treated in detail. The third part is contributed by Gordon: Davy Crockett was one who feared neither man nor beast, "And hell itself he feared the least" (p. 191). Not only does the true hero know he must go through hell to get to heaven, he also knows that he need not fear it. If he does not fear, then some protector will guide him, just as the bird with the six-sided stones guided Scanlon.

However, Scanlon's shaman-vision is not enough in itself to effect a transformation in Gordon, the one who hears the story. He makes the only clearly established passage in the novel, leaving childhood for adolescence (Boyd touches bottom and shoves off, but not convincingly). Scanlon's vision provides the necessary construct, or myth, which enables Gordon to act; he would not have done so, however, if Boyd had not told him what to do. Scanlon is the thesis, a hero-message from the past; Boyd is the antithesis, who wants to live originally with nothing from the past. Without Boyd to encourage Gordon, the Davy Crockett story would not have been re-enacted in the bullring, and Gordon would have had no more than the knowledge granted him by the Scanlon myth. However, Boyd is an expert in adolescence only; he could probably not guide anyone in the passage to adulthood, since he has not been there
himself. Boyd, even as antithesis, is woefully incomplete; he is almost entirely the present without the enrichment of the past and signifies many of the ills Morris sees in America. Boyd is, more precisely, much like Morris understands Thomas Wolfe to be: the paradigm of the American character, stuck in "a central American assumption that life, raw life, and material, raw material, is superior to the form, the abstraction, that the mind must make of it." For Morris, the "synthesizing act of the imagination" transforms people and nations into wholes that can create the future. However, Morris suggests ironically that in this country what counts is adolescence, with its intense perceptions, and Wolfe was luckier than most since his adolescence lasted the length of his life. His greatest piece of luck, that is, was that he never grew up. He was Huckleberry Finn Wolfe, out on one raft or another, carried along by Time and the River toward the never-never land of heart's desire, the territory ahead. He got away from Aunt Sally by growing bigger, but without growing up. The dream of adolescence is the giant who remains a boy at heart.

Something in American sentiment and sensibility prefers it that way. We want our raw material raw. We often want it rarer than it actually is. On a practical, day-by-day level this is the preference we have for the man who feels, and the distrust we feel for the man who thinks.

41 Morris, The Territory Ahead, p. 27.

42 Ibid. Also see Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s agreement that most people distrust the thinker: "A winded, defeated-looking fat woman in filthy coveralls trudged beside us. . . . She turned to examine Dr. Breed, looking at him with helpless reproach. She hated people who thought too much. At that moment, she struck me as an appropriate representative for almost all mankind." Cat's Cradle (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 31.
Boyd, for one, typifies this central American preference.

Leopold Lehmann, on the other hand, is a man of imagination who could help with the transformation to adulthood. He is a student of transformations, and he comments on them frequently, often using myth to do so. In this way he is helpful in understanding that Morris intended "to be after strange gods" in this novel. Lehmann is a man who imagistically conceives of his life in terms of an ancient myth which serves to order his life as well as to enable him to meet the future. Almost everything, according to Lehmann, can be grasped in terms of its relationship to the minotaur myth.

Lehmann is first introduced as one who "had gazed into the sightless eyes of the Minotaur. Half man, half myth, the emerging God, dream-haunted, gazed toward the light with eyes in which the pupils had not been drilled" (p. 63). Morris uses the minotaur for his own ends by reversing its usual construct. It usually represents the dominance of the beast over the higher qualities of men. Instead of the usual bull's head and human body, he has the man emerging from the beast as he appears to be when a bull gores him from behind. At that moment, "Man, his arms spread wide, could only take wing on the thrust of his past, and at the risk of toppling forward on his face" (p. 114). Thus, for Lehmann, the beast in man, or his basic life forces, provides the necessary thrust for the risk-filled journey (through
hell) toward the light that makes the mind work. In the
description cited above, the minotaur gazes toward the
light, although it is as yet sightless, which suggests that
man has not emerged enough to see the light. This minotaur,
like man, is not so much half beast as he is half myth,
"dream-haunted" with the deposits of his primitive begin-
nings present in him as myth and dream, providing the thrust
toward the light. Only as long as both the beast and the
man are functioning does an emergence take place, or a trans-
formation.

Lehmann thinks his conception out in an imaginative
statement of basic Jungian theory:

A simple human mind, not really his own since he had
inherited most of it, like luggage, and had possibly
worn out more of the linen than he had acquired. A
mind that went back, that is, to the beginning, that
in order to think had to begin at the beginning, since
every living cell did what it had once done, and no-
thing more. It was there, then the word came, and it
multiplied. In this manner the juices percolating in
Lehmann, in the mind loaned to him that he tried to
look after, had the same bit of froth on it that
flecked the primordial ooze. So long as he lived and
breathed he was connected, in a jeweled chain of being,
with that first cell, and the inscrutable impulse it
seemed to feel to multiply. . . . And in the bubble
at the top, flickering with smog lights, this spec-
tacle that taxed the imagination, that is, the lumi-
nous jelly that spread like a salve over the spectacle
The thinking organ? So one would suppose. But
if that pipe line to the lower quarters was broken,
if the cables with the wiring were severed, all
thinking ceased. . . . Some connection with the first
cell had been destroyed, the cable that carried the
protozoic orders, the word from the past, and without
this word there was no mind. It seemed to be that
simple. There was no mind if the lines to the past
were destroyed (pp. 203-204).
Thus Lehmann conceives of himself and others as the man emerging from the beast, but whose necessary state of being is emergence. Without the connection with the past, no thinking man emerges. Lehmann is even imaged by Morris as "early man" (pp. 64, 65, 73) or "timeless man" (p. 120) who can comment on the characters in the novel from the universal perspective of one who is conscious of himself as a moment in a continual emergence and who has a myth which expresses the mystery of that consciousness.

At this central point of meaning, the Scanlon myth derived from the nineteenth century journey west and Lehmann's ancient myth intersect, both suggesting that if man is to be transformed, he must overcome his terror in face of the greatest threat to himself. Both stories suggest in effect that if man cannot survive the death of himself as he is, then no transformation is possible. In the Scanlon story, if the hero does not pass his best self dead in hell, he will not enter hell, where he must go if he wants out of hell. In Lehmann's minotaur myth, man must allow his past to thrust him into the future or he will be static, which is to be dead.

This intersection of the two stories clarifies the importance of the Scanlon tale for the novel. The place of the man of the past is that his story is the one which can provide the thrust the three Nebraska characters need if they are to become unfrozen. However, they dismiss his
story as that of an insane man. The McKees and Boyd "fear help," according to Lehmann; that is, they refuse to give up their adolescent interests, which means that the "help" offered to them (Scanlon's story) appears only as threat: Lois fears that her reputation as a respectable woman might be tarnished if she takes Scanlon seriously; Walter McKee fears disorientation if he is taken forward (everything takes him back, but not to his own life), and Boyd fears losing himself (he stays alive because he fears he will muff his death).

A part of the minotaur myth is also used to indicate the significance of Lehmann's experience in Chicago, where he has gone to unravel the history of his patient, Paula Kahler. He stays in an old hotel room where a fly falls on him as he lies on the bed. While he considers whether to kill it or help it recover, he realizes he is "at the heart of the labyrinth" (p. 120). Whereas entrance into the labyrinth is similar to entering the initiatory Hell, Joseph Campbell points out that those who know the hero-stories should not expect to meet death at the labyrinth's center:

we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center.

43 Eliade, p. 236.
of our own existence; where we had thought to be 
alone, we shall be with all the world. 44

This is exactly what happens to Lehmann in the hotel room, 
and is much like Scanlon's experience in Hell. Both knew 
they were in strange places because of the timelessness, 
but the essence of the experience was that they discovered 
sympathy and pity at the heart of the labyrinth, whereas 
others expected an abomination. Lehmann felt the presence 
of the enduring personality of life itself. It joined 
him, sad as it seemed, in the pity life seemed to 
feel in the presence of such a fugitive thing as life. 
Not just pity for Lehmann, nor for flies, but for pity 
itsel (p. 123).

Similarly, Scanlon felt that the Devil was "human" and 
concluded that the passage through Hell could be made be-
cause of that humanness. Lehmann's experience was more 
conscious than was Scanlon's; to the degree that it is ex-
plained in the telling it is less a myth. Nevertheless he 
finds in the room that when he penetrates to the center of 
his own existence, he is, as Campbell said, "with all the 
world." Thus, at the center of the labyrinth, Lehmann con-
fronts the mystery of the transformation that he was concerned 
about in the bullring, symbolized by the minotaur. That 
mystery is not a battle in which someone is killed, however; 
it is, instead, the discovery that all things need help and 
that the attitude of the god he finds there ("the enduring

44 The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 25.
personality of life itself") is one of pity. Lehmann needs help, not only to survive, but to survive as a pitying man. His discovery that whatever forces there are in life have compassion for his compassion (pity for pity itself) later leads to his conclusion that man is meant always to exceed himself. Therefore, things are not as they are meant to be, since things are always becoming something more—but only, in the human instance, when a man’s nature is conducive to the change (pp. 204-206). Thus, Lehmann meets and knows about the mystery of the way things are, whereas Scanlon overcomes the trial in hell and returns with the story which can enable people to be more willing to make the risky ventures which result in transformations.

Thus the Scanlon and Lehmann stories are profound mythical statements of the positive value of suffering and the terrifying entrance into the labyrinth, or hell, and of the surprising though painful companions found therein. These themes run contrary to the dominant trends in post-World War II fiction, in that they make clear that no benevolent being protects us; neither a supernatural power nor science and technology will automatically pull us through into the new world. The dominant trend is characterized by "radical innocence," or the expectation that personal freedom should be granted by a favorable universe, so that each man should simply pursue what he would like to have. In this fiction, if the hero attempts to gain more personhood
than is possible, he is thought to be noble (not a fool like
the three who skirted around Scanlon's hell and died). 45
Or if he actually or symbolically shoots himself like
Samuels did because there was not enough water (or life)
to go around, he is often recognized as a noble anti-hero.

Thus, as Campbell concludes,

modern literature is devoted, in great measure, to
a courageous, open-eyed observation of the sicken-
ingly broken figurations that abound before us,
around us, and within... In comparison with all this, our little stories
of achievement seem pitiful. 46

On the other hand, the Scanlon and Lehmann stories
recall ancient mythical themes of initiation in a culture
which is for the most part paralyzed by the nothingness
through which the initiate must pass. These stories, in
contemporary imagery and up-to-date cosmologies, have in
them an indication of the power needed to carry the human
spirit forward. They contain the

initiatory images so necessary to the psyche that if
they are not supplied from without, through myth and
ritual, they will have to be announced again, through
dream, from within--lest our energies should remain
locked in a banal, long-outmoded toyroom, at the
bottom of the sea. 47

Nevertheless, The Field of Vision, winner of the Na-
tional Book Award in 1956, is out of print. The 1960's

45 "The hero is the man of self-achieved submission," not the man of inflated ego. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
46 Ibid., p. 27.
47 Ibid., p. 12.
were a chaotic desert, and the stories of Morris and others like him apparently had little impact. There have been, however, other, more popular authors who have struggled to find keys to the spirit of the times. The next two chapters of this study will consider the efforts of five of these authors to create a contemporary vision and symbols that will carry the human spirit forward as mythology has helped to do in the past. Most of these efforts were less complete than Wright Morris's, yet even their flaws are significant in suggesting what human fantasies have tended to hold the spirit back and what must therefore be used to release it and enable it to go forward.
CHAPTER III

THE YOUTH COUNTER CULTURE'S FLAWED MYTH

One of the most obvious myth-building movements in the 1960's was the youth counter culture movement. It consisted of youths who objected strongly enough to major trends in the United States to protest actively, retire as "hippies," or do both.¹ The movement apparently never involved more than ten or twelve percent of the youth population,² but through its activism, distinctive style, and good press coverage, it made an impact on the late 1960's, and at least in life-style, ecological attitudes, and the

¹A major theme in the most popular comic book stories of the counter culture is that protest and its rhetoric can and perhaps should be tried, but the opposing forces are too ruthless for serious opposition to be successful. Therefore, retirement to the woods or private enjoyment is best. See R. Crumb's stories of "Lenore Goldberg and Her Girl Commandos" in Motor City Comics, April 1969, and Motor City Comics No. 2, Feb. 1970. Another major writer is Gilbert Shelton, whose "Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers" are fools. Their lives are oriented around drugs, and they are unable to fit into any society. They never do more than occasionally dream of opposing that which they dislike, but instead operate almost entirely as victims. For evidence of the popularity of these cartoonists, see T. Marenos, "Underground Cartoons of the Late '60's," New York Times Magazine, 1 Oct. 1972, pp. 12-13+.

quest for self-knowledge, its influence continues to be felt.³

The movement was not simply a response to external problems such as the Vietnam War, nor was it simply a result of the burgeoning adolescent population, although these were important causes.⁴ It was more fundamentally a development of the kind that could be expected when a significant segment of the population discovered and could admit that "all the inherited ideological concepts had lost their credibility. This, more than anything else, set the young generation apart from their elders and impelled them to look for new guiding principles."⁵ The strongest part of the movement was this protest against the flaccid ideological concepts of its elders.

However, the movement was a failure politically and socially: Andrew Greeley argues that "serious Marxist analysis--of the sort that one rarely heard from the Movement--would not hesitate to conclude that the Movement was a capitalistic counter-revolutionary plot against the working class."⁶ Moreover, although the movement protested against


⁵Ibid.

⁶Andrew M. Greeley, "The End of the Movement," Change
outmoded guiding principles, it was unable to establish viable alternative principles. The protest was loud, or at least amplified, but little was proposed as an alternative to a technological society which operates so pragmatically that no ideological concepts are necessary. As Greeley argues, the movement "was above all a search for something to believe in and something to belong to, and it turned out to be incapable of providing either faith or community. It was one more god that failed." 7

Not everyone concludes that the youth movement failed. Theodore Roszak believes that it is still possible that the directions toward which the movement pointed us are indicators of hope for the future:

Big science and Big Technics race on ever more productively; but everything that once joined them to a participative culture withers away. So now we see a recrudescence of mystical religion, primitive lore and ritual, occultism, disciplines of meditation . . . a determination, by no means restricted to the young, to open out consciousness beyond the limits of scientific expertise. . . .

The scientists and their many imitators will become for them an arcane priesthood carrying on obscure professional ceremonies and exchanging their "public knowledge" within the inner sanctum of the state temple.8

April, 1972, p. 45. Also see David Deleon, "The American as Anarchist: Social Criticism in the 1960s," American Quarterly, 25 (Dec. 1973), 528: "Even the IWW and other labor-originated groups came to consist more of students, hippies, dropouts . . . than of workers [which gave it] mainly a middle-class content.

7Greeley, p. 47.

Nevertheless, the movement was finally a failure even though valuable strands remain. The failure, it may be argued, was due to a gap in the mythology of the movement which is evident in Roszak’s statement. He believes, as the movement did, that a new emergence of mysticism, primitivism, occultism, and meditation will somehow of itself alter the basic orientation of Western society. What is lacking is a clear vision of the journey across Scanlon’s desert, or, practically put, the movement has been woefully lacking in strategies. It has sensed that because it was on to the truth, then the heaven beyond hell would be reached almost automatically. Almost all critiques of the movement point out that reform movements simply cannot dream of skirting around hell if they are to see a new society come into being. G. William Domhoff argues that

if those who talk of revolutionary change are going to connect with the various kinds of exploitation and suffering by Americans of different social strata and ethnic origins, they will have to go beyond critiques of corporate capitalism, however telling those critiques may be, and beyond ringing calls for a “new social order,” however decent and humane those calls may be. They will have to help create alternative visions of United States society that are not general but specific, not vague but concrete—visions, in short, that are at the level of detail of “blueprints” for a post-capitalist America.9

Instead of creating concrete visions of society, the movement tended to agitate for individual freedom, “often to

gratify one's own immediate desires with little operative concern for the long-term common good." Thus Deleon and William Irwin Thompson both suggest that the goals and much of the behavior of the movement are similar to that of the American middle class, both in their desire for immediate, more or less self-serving freedom, and in their use of drugs to obtain freedom or an illusion of freedom.

As a result of faulty vision, then, the movement is nearly dead. On the one hand, its critique of the dominant culture was in large part valid, but on the other hand, the vision of what should be was almost never concretized with realistic plans. Writings from the movement almost inevitably criticized or condemned the dominant culture for choosing secular, scientific thinking over mystical, wholistic intuition, for practicing rampant consumerism, and for permitting the breakdown of government and humane business practices because greedy, power-hungry people

10Deleon, p. 535.


12See Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor, 1969), for the best account of this criticism. "The paramount struggle is against ... 'the technocracy,'" which, Roszak argues, is based on "the myth of objective consciousness" (pp. 4, 208).

were allowed to run them.\textsuperscript{14} Over against that, the movement developed a wholistic philosophy, a childlike sensibility, and a desire for community.\textsuperscript{15} However, the critique and the vision were seldom connected, except to say that when the doomed culture collapsed, either from its own interior disease or from some natural disaster, then the counter culture would be present to replace it.\textsuperscript{16}

This movement, like most such movements, created several dramatic forms which embodied its critique and its vision, often with more wisdom than one might at first suspect. These forms contain, or have been thought by those who adopt them to contain, a numinous dramatization of their intuitive grasp of the world and their relation to it. Insofar as some novels, poems, and songs embodied that grasp, they were expressions of the myth of the movement.

Several novels were thought to be extraordinarily illuminating by those in the counter culture movement, but two of these, \textit{Stranger in a Strange Land} and \textit{Cat's Cradle},\textsuperscript{17} seem not only to have been popular but also to have some literary merit. They were written during the formative

\textsuperscript{14}Buckminster Fuller, "The Declaration of Cultural Revolution," \textit{The East Village Other}, rpt. in \textit{The Underground Reader}, p. 149; Thompson, p. 97.


\textsuperscript{16}Oglesby, for example, says capitalism has only a choice of moralities left (p. 195). Thompson expects natural retribution against society as Edgar Cayce predicted (p. 172).

\textsuperscript{17}Robert H. Heinlein (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1961); Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Dell, 1963).
period of the movement (1961 and 1963), but both seem to capture major aspects of both the weaknesses and the strengths of its vision in dramatic fashion.

Stranger in a Strange Land was an underground best-seller. In writing it, Heinlein seemed intent on telling a story which would contain the new truths and trends which he sensed were emerging, and he was desirous of doing so in a religious, or mythical form. To the extent that he succeeded, Stranger in a Strange Land is an element of the myth out of which many youth were living in the 1960's. However, it could hardly last much longer than the movement as a force in creating the images society must have in order to live, since it embodies more of the weaknesses of the movement than it does the strengths.

The first and perhaps major weakness was to assume that the two basic themes of the movement justify a division of the world into good and evil or into the "inside" and "outside" groups (the "don't trust anyone over thirty" idea—which implies that almost everyone under thirty is trustworthy). In Stranger in a Strange Land, the inside group is well-defined, participating in a gnosticism which, when all the other people in the world have either been sold the new gnosticism like mouthwash or have been destroyed, will

create a new "heavenly garden on earth." In the meantime, those on the "outside" are full of "wrongness" and can therefore be "disincorporated" (an euphemism for "killed") without hesitation or regret—as many as 450 per day (pp. 398-99). Those without the secret knowledge seem obviously less intelligent, less sensitive, and less able than the insiders, who "grok" (understand or grasp) the world so well that they can be successful in all things.

Even youthful fantasies about appearance are fulfilled by the "insiders": they are all young and beautiful—except Jubal Harshaw, who, nevertheless, fills the role of the desired father-figure. He is anti-establishment, raises questions about the new movement which can be easily answered and which persuade him of its value, and provides free legal advice and "nesting grounds" for those in the movement.

The second major weakness which the story embodies and encourages is to assume that the world's problems are not structural or institutional in anything other than a symptomatic sense; the problems are psychological, not in any complex way, but a way that any sexually sensitive

19 Heinlein, p. 376. Subsequent references to this novel will be in the text. Note that "kingdom" in Christianity, which implies obedience, is replaced by "garden," which implies freedom and harmony with nature. Also, Ben says of Mike (the Christ figure), "he's the ultimate anarchist... Freedom of self—and utter personal responsibility for self. Thou art God" (p. 372). Total freedom and anarchy is fine for angels, as Jubal says, but not for humans (p. 398). However, the inside group considers
adolescent can sympathize with and understand. Heinlein suggests that "all human motivation, all men's hopes and fears, were colored and controlled by mankind's tragic and oddly beautiful pattern of reproduction" (p. 90). Sexual repression is the basic human problem in this novel; the new gnosis releases that repression and enables the inner group to communicate deeply and unashamedly through their sexual contacts. Sexual repression has been one of Western man's most profound shortcomings, but to suggest that all human motivation is controlled by sexual patterns is surely more than any knowledgeable observer except perhaps the most literal Freudians would venture today. Yet Michael Smith, the messiah in the novel, suggests that "romantic physical love," being the source of "all that makes this planet so rich and wonderful," is the precious gift that "we-who-are-God" will spread through the universe (p. 397). Heinlein has, to be sure, chosen a significant problem to put at the heart of his novel; but to propose that repressed romantic love is the problem, and its

itself to be made up of angels. Mike, for example, instead of taking a seat of rulership after his death, as did the first Christ, becomes a member of an angelic bureaucracy.

20Underlining mine.

21Freud said that "sexuality plays the principal part in the pathogenesis of hysteria," but that is not nearly as inclusive a statement as Heinlein makes. Freud is quoted by Robert W. Marks, "Introduction," Great Ideas in Psychology (New York: Bantam, 1966), pp. 28-29.
practice and demonstration to the world is the mission, is
to encourage belief in special knowledge, which often results
in a lack of self-evaluation. These are the chief faults
of those who consider themselves to be saviors of the world,
and, since the "secret" solution is oversimplified in this
case, it can lead easily to discouragement.

The third major weakness which Stranger in a Strange
Land embodies is that of constructing a sloppy and senti-
mental "religion" out of a concern to make the cosmology of
an ancient religion (Christianity) current. The result is
almost always to fail to distinguish between problem and
mystery, which leads to the assumption that the reason
the old myths have lost their meaning is that they need ex-
plaining. However, a myth once explained is no longer a
live myth, since it no longer contains the mysterious nu-
minous quality that makes a myth "live." Stanley Romaine
Hopper explains that the "numinous" is

the mystery of the "unplumbed Mystery," which is
always more than any of the names assigned to it by
the creative imagination; it has also to do with the
mystery of the Self as being always more than itself
in the depth of its own being and always less than
itself in the personal consciousness of the ego-role
I play; it has also to do with the incomprehensi-
ability of the infinites, the infinitely large and the
infinitely small and the way in which the one is the
other writ large and the other is the one writ small,

-22Nathan Scott explains that "problem" is that which
I can meet and reduce, but "mystery" recognizes the irre-
ducible. The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological
Horizon of Modern Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ.
of the way in which the whole of things is tucked inside of itself in endless ingressions and progressions like a play within a play within a play. 23 Heinlein seems above all else to want to get rid of this kind of complexity in the Christ story. The numinous depends in large part on recognition that the universe, even as it is contained in each personal consciousness, cannot be pinned on a page and titled, which is precisely what Heinlein tries to do. This is understandable. We have lost our myths but need them, which, as Philip Wheelwright points out, leaves men unstable, ready to grab at pseudo-myths. 24 Youth are somewhat unstable in any age, but in the 1960's many of them sensed profoundly the lack of any meaning-story in the established culture which could make some sense of their personal chaos. Stranger in a Strange Land seems to make sense, but again, the weaknesses inherent in it grow out of that very strength: if it makes "sense" in that everything seems to be explained, then it has not probed into the depths wherein lies the numinous.

One of the best examples of Heinlein's effort to explain or adapt an ancient creed to the twentieth century is his alteration of the Gloria Patri: "Self's integrity


24 Quoted in Hopper, p. 115.
was and is and ever had been." 25 "Self's integrity" is, however, not only an adaptation but is a radical reduction of an injunction to praise the numinous mystery and proclaim one's faith that the mystery is the primal source of the universe. Heinlien's "gloria" is a statement that the self is fine if it maintains its integrity. No affirmation can be made about the mysterious future; "nowing" is all that is, and Mike tries to make the Gloria mean only now (p. 136). The problem is not that Heinlein has tried to reformulate ancient mythical statements but is that he has reduced both in time and space the experience they reflect so that they no longer organize and dramatize enough of the human experience to significantly support people over long periods of time.

The new Christ in this religion is Valentine Michael Smith, who proclaims eros (Valentine-like love) instead of the more ambiguous and difficult agape of the New Testament Christ. Thus the ethics of the new religion is simple. If "the joining of bodies and merging of souls in shared ecstasy, giving, receiving, delighting in each other" is "the source . . . of all that makes this planet so rich and wonderful" (p. 397), then the object of life should be to increase the source by joining and merging with others

25 Heinlein, p. 252. The Gloria Patri is "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end."
who have this secret wisdom, or with other "insiders." People on the outside are not objects of love, but are either enemies to be destroyed or objects of a massive advertising campaign by the insiders. These insiders not only serenely know what is right for everyone else but are rich enough and knowledgeable enough to impose their "rightness" on the others. Such an ethical structure is not in itself "bad" somehow; it is instead not comprehensive enough to deal with the unceasing complexities of human life and is therefore not very useful (as Vonnegut proposes that a religion should be).

Unfortunately, Heinlein's novel is replete with such simplifications posing as explanations or clarifications of complex ethical and religious problems. One final example of oversimplification is the justification Mike offers for killing outsiders:

Mike grinned with unashamed cheerfulness. "I am God. Thou art God . . . and any jerk I remove is God, too. Jubal, it is said that God notes each sparrow that falls. And so He does. But the closest it can be said in English is that God cannot avoid noting the sparrow because the sparrow is God. And when a cat stalks a sparrow both of them are God, carrying out God's thoughts" (p. 399).

The few statements of personal responsibility in the novel are inner-directed. One of these indicates not that man is responsible for the universe, but "for the fashion in which [we] shape the universe" (p. 376). I am thus not responsible for the way my neighbor fashions the universe. Another statement is not explained, but in context only serves to emphasize the exclusiveness of the inner group: "just these few here with us, our brothers, understood me" (p. 400).
If, therefore, Mike (or anybody else) decides some "jerk" needs to be killed, he can do it without hesitation since he is God deciding to kill and the "jerk," presumably, is God deciding to be killed. This works fine if one is the cat who stalks the sparrow, but doesn't seem so fine to the sparrow. Again, this kind of shallow pantheism will, since it explains so little while seeming to illuminate much, leads to discouragement.

Mike Smith is Heinlein's most extended effort to clean up some of the inexplicable (and therefore "messy" to the scientific mentality) parts of the Jesus Christ story. Instead of the Son of God, Mike is the "Man from Mars," which seems to explain everything but in reality explains nothing, since it is an effort to reduce the divinity problem by dislocating it from our unconscious responses to the mystery of life into outer space, where some higher intelligence than humans is imagined to live. Also, instead of the carpenter who was ambiguous about his claims and as a result had trouble keeping any insiders, Mike Christ is a beautiful golden man who unambiguously gathers his brothers and sisters around him. However, although Jesus had some choice words for those who practiced religion for show, he did not (judging from the fragmentary record we have) regard those outside his group as inferior to his followers. Yet Mike calls the outsiders "jerks," or more often "marks" (people who are easy targets for swindlers). Thus, in spite of
his having many attractive qualities, Mike seems to be limited in the scope of his concern.

The most damaging characteristic of this story is that it does away with suffering and death. This would be a notable achievement if it were more than an illusion. Romantic notions are not in themselves harmful, but a story like *Stranger in a Strange Land*, offered as a new myth in unsettled times, will almost surely strengthen the belief that a radical change can come over men almost magically with little effort and no suffering by those who pioneer in creating the new age. To be sure, Mike mentions a discipline, but for those who "grok" well, like Jubal, it will not be difficult. If there is to be a sacrificial death, no one will worry because it will not really be a death at all. Mike never suffers as his body is torn apart but is simply transformed from an innocent magic worker on earth to be a member of an angelic staff somewhere in the sky.

Fred Hechinger's conclusions regarding the youth movement indicate precisely the fallacy that stories like Heinlein's almost certainly encouraged. After showing that the evils to which the movement responded were real and serious, he adds that

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the fiction must be laid to rest that there is a separate youth force that can rise phoenix-like from the ashes of adult demoralization and corruption. Societal renewal is more complex. Yet it was precisely on such a fallacy that the Youth Cult was built. It was to be America's painless salvation. . . .

To the extent that the Youth Cult was a fraud and a delusion, it left young people without an understanding of their own roots and the true relationships
between the many segments and interest groups that make up a nation— even the youth of a nation.27

That is, *Stranger in a Strange Land* can be seen as a novel of recoil from the hard realities of the early 1960's, a flight into fantasy when concrete plans and hard work were called for. It can be read both as a symptom of the times and as a reflection of the narrow story many people wanted to tell themselves. Heinlein's novel is one of several ways in which the youth of the 1960's were deluded by well-meaning elders, who should have known better, into thinking that they were the saviors of the American society— automatically. This attitude is exemplified in the following conversation William Irwin Thompson reports. He is talking with a young hippie about Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and the youth clearly identifies with the chosen few. The hippie is speaking:

"You see, *The Lord of the Rings* is the real history of this planet. The kids are really digging it because it's their story. I mean like there are a lot of karmic refugees from Atlantis around; that's what the generation gap is all about. It's not the same old gang of souls on earth any more. Anyway, Tolkien gets by the grownups as a fantasy, and even some of the kids take it in that way, but once it's inside, the unconscious takes off the fantasy wrapper and knows it's the real story. Once the Valar were here, then man attempted to attack the Lands of the Furthest West. The Valar asked the One to be released from their custodianship of the planet, Atlantis sank, and the good refugees spread all over the Earth. . . .

"Hmmm, well, if that's the past, what's the future?"

27Hechinger, p. 35.
He smiled conspiratorially and began to sing
in imitation of Mick Jagger: "We are wa-a-i-ting.
We are wa-a-i-ting for something to come out of
somewhere." 28

Waiting might often be appropriate, but to wait for "some-
thing to come out of somewhere" to the supposed chosen ones
might well be waiting for a fantasy to come true while soci-
ety collapses. The golden boy Mike, with his sexual freedom,
superior knowledge (obtained without effort), financial se-
curity, and avoidance of suffering is just the one to
concretize and thus to some extent mythologize that fantasy.
Therefore, Stranger in a Strange Land, while it has some
merit, could promote alienation between people (insiders
and outsiders), encourage self-righteousness, and suggest
that waiting for some fantastic savior to come is the appro-
priate response to the last third of the twentieth century.

Cat's Cradle is perhaps the best novel of those that
captured the imagination of the counter culture. 29 This
novel has been more popular with readers in the youth
counter culture than even the other Vonnegut novels, which,
as Leslie Fiedler noted, have "seemed more scriptures than

28 Thompson, p. 29.

29 Although it might be the best novel in this cate-
gory, most commentators agree that the plot is thin, that
the characterization is generally flat, and that the nar-
rator is vaguely conceived. See Charles Thomas Samuels,
"Age of Vonnegut," New Republic, 12 June 1971, pp. 30-32,
and Peter J. Reed, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (New York: Warner,
1972), pp. 144-45. Perhaps the most favorable treatment
of his style is by Raymond Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New
It is difficult to know why novels are popular, but it can be argued that part of the reason *Cat's Cradle* has been widely read is that it expresses in a surprisingly complete way many of the deep longings and intimations of the counter culture. It has been regarded as almost holy because it tells a story which was the story about life for many people in the movement, perhaps coming as close to a useful cosmic myth as anything many of these youth found.31

30 The Divine Stupidity of Kurt Vonnegut," Esquire, 74 (September 1970), 195. Olderman comments that Vonnegut's novels are appealing because "of the deceptively simple way he deals with the extraordinary nature of contemporary fact" (p. 191). His use of the fable and his unambiguous view of our possibilities--either go our present way and die or develop illusions and love each other--also add to the appearance of simplicity and thus to the novel's appeal to a youthful generation which is often overwhelmed with the complexity of a crowded, technological world.

31 Leslie Fiedler has written the most detailed analysis of why Vonnegut has been almost canonized by "underground" youth. The primary reasons he cites are: 1) Vonnegut's work "can, maybe should be used to subvert the world of duty and work and success," 2) in using fantasy he "has subscribed to a mythology otherwise sustained by smoking grass or dropping LSD," 3) since he was categorized by critics as a science-fiction writer, his fiction was unavailable to the "main-stream" generation, which seemed to be a sign of its relevance, and 4) he, like the youth, seems to subscribe to the New Romanticism, which is "an art which prefers sentimentality to irony, passion to reason, vulgarity to subtlety." Fiedler, pp. 195-96. Vonnegut thinks he is popular with young people "maybe . . . because I deal with sophomoric questions that full adults regard as settled. I talk about what is God like, what could he want, is there a heaven, and if there is, what would it be like?" "Playboy Interview: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.,” Playboy, 20, July 1973, 74.
Although it has faults, *Cat's Cradle* is a more appropriate expression of some of the deep-seated anxieties and hopes that possessed those in the movement than is *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Vonnegut's ability to express the sense of the times with a tone of light-hearted cynicism which expresses and promotes some detachment is more realistic than Heinlein's narrow, dreamy romanticism. Whereas Heinlein tried to simplify and rationalize the Christian myth, Vonnegut invented a new religion with its own language, and he told enough about that language that it could be used to create some sense of order in lives which had been left orderless with the demise of Christianity's believable adherents (whereas Heinlein kept the "insider's" Martian vocabulary secret, making it only an impractical wish). Heinlein's hero is an unbelievable man from Mars who thinks sexual repression is humanity's problem, whereas Vonnegut's narrator is an artist-figure disgusted with the Western adoration of science as truth and attracted by the mysterious and exotic Bokonon. Finally, Vonnegut's Bokononism is not exclusive but is an invention to aid the outcasts; although not everyone is a Bokononist, Bokononists regard all men as sacred; non-Bokononists are never "jerks" or "marks." It follows that if man is sacred, then his suffering is the great human problem, and the leader, Bokonon, suffers most of all.
These strengths do not in themselves account for the power of *Cat's Cradle*. Myths do not simply tell about significance; they also tell about insignificance and weakness, enabling the individual who identifies with the story to confront himself as no more than a fallible moment in space and time. More specifically, *Cat's Cradle* indicates weaknesses in the movement's perspective but resists the temptation to dream that these will be overcome with little effort when the new "garden" arrives. The faults are, briefly, a sense of powerlessness based on an inability to do anything useful about events which are leading inevitably to the destruction of the earth, ineptitude when confronted with beauty (physical and metaphysical), and a conviction that in the end nothing is possible except meaningless acts based on frustrated defiance of that which is. Whether the youthful reader knows the novel contains not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of his stance is not important; they are there and quite probably their presence has made the difference between an interesting fable and a myth, effective for a limited number of participants in a limited time, but a myth nevertheless.

32 "Man has . . . to be led by myth . . . to be prepared to face the mystery of death." Joseph Campbell, *The Flight of the Wild Gander* (Chicago: Gateway, 1969), p. 110. Bokonon reported his principal occupation as "being dead." Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Cat's Cradle* (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 95. Subsequent references will be in the text.

33 See Jerome Klinkowitz, "Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and the Crime of His Times," *Critique*, 12, No. 3 (1971), 46, on the nature of Bokononism as a religion.
Thus it is possible that the point of deepest identification of the movement with *Cat's Cradle* is not that its members oppose the dominant order, but that they sense their opposition to be hopelessly ineffectual. Just as the movement gathered thousands together to protest the Vietnam War as the most obvious form of blundering by a desensitized and parochial nation but achieved almost no response from those in power, so does John, the narrator of *Cat's Cradle*, object fruitlessly to the spread of ice-9. Neither John nor the movement has a base of power from which to make protests that must be heard. Perhaps even more significantly, John acts out some of the worst fears of a protester; when he is put into a position of power, he first begins to change his values to suit the office (the ridiculous capitalist Crosby begins to look attractive), then the entire world disintegrates around him. In this way, John embodies the hopelessness of the movement in its most lucid moments: either the movement leaders would sell out if they gained power, or the world would collapse. *Cat's Cradle* captures this fear of betrayal better than any other novel available at the time the movement was most prominent.

For evidence of lack of response, see Goldstücker, p. 44; Hechinger, p. 32; and Greeley, p. 44.

Vonnegut often suggests that betrayal can be avoided if nothing is expected from human endeavor. He makes this point in *The Sirens of Titan* by making the greatest human achievements appear to be messages sent to a stranded Tralfamadore traveler.
There are three basic areas that John and the counterculture agreed were misguided in Western culture: its belief in Christianity, its practice of capitalism, and its wholesale adoption of a secular scientific worldview. The first two of these are dismissed in Cat's Cradle with a fairly cursory treatment. The Crosbys as representations of capitalists are narrow, bigoted fools, and Christianity is their aid and comfort. The connection between capitalism and Christianity and their rejection is a characteristic of the movement; capitalism is the base form of greed, and Christianity is used as its cause and justification.36

The protest against science and the technocracy which supports it and uses its findings to gain power is far more basic to the structure of the novel and of the protest movement than are either capitalism or Christianity. In the novel, John notes three basic faults in science; he objects to science and the use of it in each case, but even though he believes his objections are valid, his opposition is pitifully weak and painfully ineffective.

The objections are, first, that scientists believe the only truth is objective truth; second that (therefore) scientists fail to see the implications for destruction in the research that they often whimsically pursue;37 and third,


37Vonnegut's opinion by 1973 was that "scientists have become concerned about the morality of what they're doing." "Playboy Interview," p. 72.
that they have taught non-scientists to believe that science's truth will save us. These objections are at the heart of the movement's neo-romantic mythology; useful truth is obtained instinctively, not by the scientific method. On one level this is an escape from discipline; on another it gets at the heart of Western man's paralysis before the unknown, or the void, and as a result is a valid and necessary objection. As Joseph Campbell urges:

Let us . . . recognize then, that what is intended by art, metaphysics, magical hocus-pocus, and mystical religion, is not the knowledge of anything, not truth, or goodness, or beauty, but an evocation of a sense of the absolutely unknowable. Science, on the other hand, will take care of what can be known.

Adolescents and those who have maintained certain adolescent traits (or have admired them, as the Romantics did), have typically promoted the magical, mystical, interrelatedness-of-all-things views that a more positivistic perspective would eliminate. Since ancient values were arrived at and continued as guides through an intuitive grasp of their significance, few of them can be justified objectively. Thus, if objective justification is thought to be the only justification, adolescents (already in a generally disorganized state) might be the first to notice the consequent loss of values. As a result, their objections to the use

38 Reed, pp. 134, 136.
39 Campbell, p. 188.
of scientific method for obtaining all the "truth" that can be, are valid objections.

The first objection reflected in *Cat's Cradle* is that the scientific conception of objective truth dismisses as irrelevant and even harmful the "lies" most people need in order to live. These "lies" are, of course, untrue only from the perspective of science.\(^40\) They are the intuitive truths that are part of the ancient wisdom of man, enabling him to construct his life around some story which can give him a sense of order. Vonnegut makes the point in several ways. For example, Sandra, the prostitute, and the bartender try to tell John about science's discovery of the secret of life, which is "something about protein" (p. 26). And Asa Breed argues that scientific truth can bring riches (p. 36). However, in neither instance does science touch the secret or richness of life which concerns human beings most. Miss Faust appropriately states a position any good Bokononist would affirm when she has "trouble understanding how truth, all by itself, could be enough for a person" (p. 44). She insists on believing that "God is love," a statement dealing with intimations and experiences that, to Felix Hoenikker

\(^{40}\)Olderman, writing about Vonnegut's "dark vision," says "the threat of cataclysm is made possible by certain sins men commit not because they are evil but because they are foolish and live by the wrong illusions, illusions that result in the loss of conscience" (p. 214). The scientist's illusion in *Cat's Cradle* is that truth is obtained by the scientific method alone, whereas all else is superstition and magic.
the scientist, are non-existent.

Most of those in the counter culture would have agreed instantly with Miss Faust, more because she disapproves of science's narrow definition of truth than because anyone knows what "God is love" means. They would agree more profoundly, though perhaps less consciously, with John, who observes and sometimes comments on the limitations of the scientific perspective. Yet the identification with John must be not only with his lucidity about the shortcomings of the scientific method but also with his helplessness.

In dealing with Asa Breed (representing the entire breed of scientists) he can only needle him about the possible dangers of Ice-9, then leave when Breed tells him to go (p. 41). He notes that a Bokononist would howl at Breed's idea that scientific truth brings riches (p. 36); such a reaction might be good for the Bokononist's self-respect through reducing another person to an object for ridicule, but it does little to change the situation. The over-all impression of John in Ilium is that of a man confronted with a powerfully established absurdity which he is utterly powerless to do anything about. He is driven by the senselessness of this uncontrolled practice of stupidity toward nihilism but is steered away from that at the last minute by the nihilistic destruction of his apartment and cat by Sherman Krebbs (pp. 58-59).
John's experience can be seen as a way of stating in dramatic fashion the experience of many youths in the counter culture. Their exploration of Eastern religions, of drugs, and of the exotic in almost any form indicates their search for experiences beyond those verified by the scientific mentality as "true." But at the same time the ineffective efforts of the activist wing of the movement and its eventual dispersal indicate its helplessness to effect a change in the technocracy. Nevertheless, despair never seemed to be widespread in the movement. Perhaps total despair and radical anarchistic preferences were avoided by many because of the obvious inability of destruction in itself to accomplish any of the positive goals for which the movement stood. John, as a victim of meaningless destruction, seems to dramatize this awareness and give it a form. He turns it into a sign that his life does have a direction, one that leads him away from his ineffectual posturing against the technocracy toward conversion to a new religion.

The second objection of the movement to science is that scientists fail to see the implications for destruction in their work. The destruction of John's apartment in Ilium, concluding the Ilium section of the novel, is paralleled by the destruction of the world, which concludes the San Lorenzo episode and the novel. In both instances, John is tempted to despair by the irresponsibility of scientists and technologists, but, also in both instances, he concludes that the
destruction is meant to show him what "somebody or something" meant for him to do.

Both destruction and the sense that something was intended by it beyond meaningless chaos could gain a deep response in the movement. When it was at its height around 1967-68, technologists were creating anti-personnel weapons for use in Vietnam. These weapons killed and maimed people with ever-greater efficiency, and the impression was that the people who were developing such weaponry were mindlessly improving whatever was given them to improve. To many of those in the movement, however, it seemed that such totally inhumane activities must serve somehow to turn the masses against the technocracy, or, if not that, then they present the rationale for retiring from the dominant social order where one may thumb his nose at "You Know Who" while he waits for civilization to destroy itself. However, for John it is not only his realization of irresponsible activity resulting in destruction that the movement could identify with, but also his sense of knowing too late (the ice-9 had already been divided and put into the hands of fools when John learned who had it) and of protesting ineffectually (John could only call the Hoenikkers "sons of

42Roszak, pp. 240-41; Thompson, pp. 137: "We have reached the end of what we have known as civilization and we do not need bombs to destroy it."
bitches" for carrying ice-9 and using it to buy "love" and position).

Further, the novel affirms the sense that many of those in the movement had that since effective protest is no longer possible (the destruction has, in a psychological or spiritual sense, already occurred), all that is left is to find a "neat way to die" (p. 190). In Cat's Cradle, this consists essentially of defiance of that which is, or in altruism. In effect, defiance is the option that many people in the movement chose. Although the attraction for Eastern religion, drugs, and alternate life styles has been in part due to an earnest desire to probe the potentialities of the psyche, it has almost always had an element of defiance of the dominant culture in it. It has been a way of thumbing one's nose at the civilization which might well have labored for "half a million years" (p. 190) only to produce a generation with enough clarity to thumb its nose at the viciousness and destructiveness of that civilization.

The third objection to scientists in Cat's Cradle is that they have convinced most people that science and its products will save us, while in fact they are leading us to destruction. Thus Asa Breed argues that magic and superstition (all other kinds of knowledge than scientific) should be abolished; people should serve science "even though they may not understand a word of it" (pp. 25, 34).
to Asa Breed that "the hopes and fears of all the years are here with us tonight" (p. 39). Even though the "common people" in Ilium are mystified by science and at times hate "thinking" people, they dutifully believe that science will save them, as they have been taught to believe (pp. 25, 31, 33). Cat's Cradle thus illustrates that Western man has been sold on science as his myth and corresponding religion. It has mystery, dutiful obedience, and the belief in heroes and saviors (like Felix Hoenikker). Yet in one sense the most outstanding product of science is ice-9, created as the resolution of a puzzle, not directly for a practical end, but simply to see if the puzzle could be resolved (pp. 38, 163).

Those in the counter culture could identify with this dramatization of the failures of science. Roszak suggests in The Making of a Counter Culture that rebellion against a society for whom "the scientific world view has become our most unimpeachable mythology" was a primary cause of the formation of the movement. More practically, youth discovered that the generation which raised them and controlled society was clinging "fast to the technocracy for the myopic sense of prosperous security it allows."43 Thus objections to science were not only objections to the world-view it entailed but

also to a sense in most people that it would resolve their anxieties and satisfy their desires, just as most other religions promised their adherents. Yet it has seemed clear to most of those in the movement that the products of science can destroy us and that belief in rational knowledge as the only valuable way of knowing can destroy the sense of wonder on which they believe a full life depends. Thus Vonnegut has dramatized the sense of the counter culture that if what science has is truth, then lies are preferable. Insofar as his dramatization structured their sense about what "truth" is, Vonnegut helped formulate the myth of the counter culture, enabling those who believed the myth to relate more fully and confidently to that which they perceived life to be.

However, Cat's Cradle not only formulates the protest, but in Bokononism it proposes an alternate way of knowing. This is signified by John's conversion from Christianity to Bokononism. This new religion is Vonnegut's effort to formulate his sense that people need to be able to tell themselves that life has some purpose, even when disaster seems imminent and everyone knows that nothing hopeful can be expected from humanity. The youth of the 1960's seemed especially to need some kind of story to fill the void left by the rationalization of life which resulted from the adoption of the objective method as the primary way to find valid truth. Eduard Goldstücker pointed out this need as
he described one of the crucial differences between rebel-
lious youth of the 1930's and those of the 1960's:

[The] search for alternatives has a sense of urgency
about it, a sort of horror vacui. It led the youth of
the nineteen-sixties to ideological fragmentation and
to borrowing from various ideological traditions dis-
tant in space end/or time. It led them to either
resignation or violence. Both reactions stem from a
rejection of the Establishment.

They are the natural responses of the alienated.
But since this generation of young people could no
longer rely on the principal inherited ideological
concepts, they, more then their immediate predecessors,
had to create their own philosophy of life, their own
ideological framework to give justifying meaning to
their attitudes and actions. Some, anxious to find a
way out of the blind alley into which, as they saw it,
excessive rationalism would lead them, reached back to
preindustrial philosophical religious concepts, or
even to the occult.44

Thus the most prominent pattern in the counter culture has
been the rejection of outmoded Western religious and ideo-
logical perspectives and the search for different ones.
Jacob Needleman sums up the sense in which our society's
perspective seems to have been bankrupted:

The scientific world-view, recently so full of hope,
has left men stranded in a flood of forces and events
they do not understand, far less control. Psychiatry
has lost its messianic aura, and therapists themselves
are among the most tormented by the times. In the
social sciences, there exists a brilliant gloom of
unconnected theories and shattered predictions. Bio-
logy and medicine promise revolutionary discoveries
and procedures, but meanwhile we suffer and die as
before; and our doctors are as frightened as we.45

The theme of almost total disappointment which Needleman
expresses is captured by Vonnegut in Cat's Cradle. Science

44Goldstücker, p. 45.

is thought of by all the "straight" people in the novel as the hope of mankind (Felix Hoenikker is a savior and "Papa" Monzano is convinced that science will save his island). Since John doesn't have this hope, he assumes at first that nihilism is the only alternative to a scientific definition of the world, which is to say that, although he said he was a Christian, he was actually a rationalist. When he became disgruntled with the scientific method, nihilism seemed the only alternative, not Christianity. Needleman suggests how science replaced religion: "Religion becomes 'secularized' when its main concern is more to feed than to control the animals—that is, when its concern is primarily with the external conditions of human life." In the West, science was at first the servant of Christianity, providing ways to aid fellow humans, but the promise of power and comfort that Bacon proclaimed was too tempting and the Western religion became science. The aim of theology was to be systematic, and ministers were trained at most seminaries to make their sermons examples of impeccable logic. The attractions of technological marvels and the white-collar jobs overcome for many the attractions of the poverty-stricken carpenter of Christianity.

The journey of John from Ilium through his wrecked apartment to San Lorenzo is therefore a dramatic account of

46 Ibid., p. 12.
the journey of many youth in the 1960's. Science is the religion of the times; Christianity is something believed in, if believed at all, usually for selfish reasons by people like the Crosbys or for economic reasons by people like Humana Vox. Songs that once were sung to Christ are sung to science. John's experience in Ilium leads him to abandon science as his truth; then he goes beyond nihilism to an underground religion in San Lorenzo, a practical religion developed for the purpose of relieving the internal suffering of human beings. Bokononism does not try to feed and clothe the people; instead it gives them Boku-meru and a sense of drama in their lives. Secondly, it flies directly in the face of the rational interpretation of life which Christianity has been used to support. Bokonon insists that truths arrived at by rationality are the enemy.

Again, although the protest against scientific objectivity and the progressive optimism which usually accompanies it is effective in Bokononism, the alternate proposal is not very helpful for anyone except as a tool for the guilty (like von Koeningswald, trying to atone for Auschwitz) or for the truly altruistic to use in relieving the suffering of ignorant and illiterate people. For those able to read The Books of Bokonon, no spiritual comfort is either promised or offered, and finally Bokonon himself has nothing left except a meaningless act of defiance. Bokononism could help the counter culture identify itself by formulating much of its defiance as well as its sense that man is sacred and
should be helped, but beyond that it could offer only a vague sense of destiny by a confused narrator.

This narrator, John, began to write a Christian book on *The Day the World Ended*, which implies that he expected the history of man to be moving in a certain direction and that important people had something to do with determining what that direction would be. However, when John became a Bokononist, he became a Jonah, believing he was being compelled to be at certain places at certain times to deliver a message that he, left to his own volition, would not deliver. In *Cat's Cradle* he thinks he has been appointed to climb Mt. McCabe to thumb his nose at whatever created the universe.47 Vonnegut apparently does not like Jonathans. Stanley Schatt quotes him as saying in 1969 that

Jonah is interesting because he is forced to work for God, even though he doesn't much want to. . . . [This] suggest[s] that God wants things, which I find hard to believe. Awful things, of course, are commonly perpetrated because some crook says God wants them.48

The Jonah in *Cat's Cradle* believes God wants things of him (which Vonnegut finds hard to believe). He thinks he belongs to a karass, which is a team that does "God's will

47Mt. McCabe as Vonnegut's whale contrasts in illuminating ways with Melville's whale, Moby-Dick. Both whales are signs which point to the mystery that controls life; both are majestic and fearful. However, a primary question in Moby-Dick is whether a man can get revenge on the mystery, thereby knowing and defeating it, whereas in Cat's Cradle it is clear that no one can know such final truths. Instead of trying to defeat the whale, one climbs on its back and thumbs his nose at the mystery.

without ever discovering what [it] is doing" (p. 11). But Jonah thinks he knows what his karass has been doing: it has been "working night and day for maybe half a million years to get me up that mountain," where he will thumb his nose at "You Know Who" (pp. 190-91). The paradox is typical of Bokononism: those in a karass do not know what it is doing, but Jonah knows his team is supposed to get him up a mountain so that he can thumb his nose at the God who created the team. This is consistent with the "cruel paradox" at the heart of Bokononism: "the heartbreaking necessity of lying about reality, and the heartbreaking impossibility of lying about it" (p. 189). It is necessary (whether "true" or not) for Jonah to say that his life has had some direction which extends back half a million years, that in fact history has had a direction, and that the direction is intended to bring him at last to the moment of a truthful act: heart-breaking defiance of whatever created the kind of haphazard world in which humans could, in their stupidity and freedom, destroy "mother earth." Considered in the context of the novel, Bokonon's recommendation to Jonah for his final act means he should thumb his nose at the idea man has stumbled under this half million years, that something in the universe cares for man in a special way.

Bokononism's paradoxes contrast with Western Christianity, which usually asserts a kind of logical unity in the universe based on the idea of a loving God who cares for
all his children. Perhaps Vonnegut recognizes that men need to tell themselves that their lives are somehow significant in the universe, but when they see something like the fire-bombing of Dresden, the senseless destruction of Vietnam, or the freezing of "the moist green earth" with ice-9, it is difficult to hold that their significance is based on their being loved by God.

Thus John does not write a Christian book on the day the world ended but instead writes a Bokononist history of human stupidity, which he calls Cat's Cradle. The title indicates that although the strings are thrown up to tell ourselves that our lives are contained in some kind of meaning-structure, the only existence of structure is in our imagination, or in our lies. These lies are not only necessary but useful for the great masses of ignorant, suffering people.

The problem is that those who can read know that Bokononism is founded on lies. Therefore, Bokononism taken seriously leads to despair or sainthood, and few people are

49 The meaning of "cat's cradle" as the title of the novel is different from Newt's meaning. Newt says cat's cradles represent promises of meaning which are always disappointingly false (op. 114, 115-16). John rejects this nihilistic interpretation through Krebbs: "But after I saw what Krebbs had done, in particular what he had done to my sweet cat, nihilism was not for me" (p. 59). Perhaps the cat Krebbs killed was the sweetness Newt had expected to be in his cat's cradle, but which was not. He found only the horrifying face of his father, Felix Hoenikker, in the cat's cradle (op. 17-18). Since John knows the cat is dead and doesn't expect it to be alive, the cradle can refer to useful, necessary lies.
Bokonons or Castles. Bokonon, for example, becomes a saint, but, knowing what he knows, he says "a terrible price in agony for the happiness of the people" (p. 120), and Castle, the other saint in the novel, believes everything is garbage (p. 116). Joseph Wood Krutch points out the difficulty of living on the basis of a myth which is known to be a lie. Speaking of liberalism's destruction of the conservative world view, he said "fictions served to guide and to control many rebellious generations, but they could do so only because they were not known to be fictions, and they lose their power as soon as we recognize them as such." What this kind of understanding does to one who knows that the myth is a lie is evident in Cat's Cradle. There are only a few copies of the handwritten Books of Bokonon, but a few are all that are needed since few San Lorenzen natives can read. Thus, only a limited number of people read Bokonon's

Olderman explains the failure of Bokononism when it is taken seriously. In discussing Mona, he indicates that she "is a personification of the love-and-compassion side of the cosmic cool, but she is unable to adopt the right sense of detachment. She says 'so it goes' too willingly; she dies too easily, and her death is a clue to the biggest failure of Bokonon's illusions: since all is fated anyway, no one except the narrator and a few ugly Americans find it worthwhile to resist the spread of ice-nine and the destruction of life" (p. 202). However, Olderman also believes that such illusions as those Mona lived by "make life possible," even when they do not convince one of its meaning (p. 219).

warning that all he has written is lies. Of those on the island, Julian Castle is perhaps the most knowledgeable man on Bokononism (except Bokonon), and his opinion is that everything in life is garbage, though he does suggest that one should maintain the ability to talk "in case there's ever anything really meaningful to say" (p. 116). However, beyond that, he is interested only in things that will relieve human suffering, or will work. Bokonot works, as does aspirin, but the "truth" doesn't work, not on San Lorenzo at least. There the economic and political situation is so hopeless that religion is the only possibility left. So, Castle reports, "Bokonon, cynically and playfully, invented a new religion" (p. 118). Castle believes that the basic principle on which the religion was founded was that since truth on the island is "that life was as short and brutish and mean as ever" in spite of efforts to improve it, then "truth was the enemy of the people" (pp. 118, 119).

Thus, "because the truth was so terrible... Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies" (p. 118).

Vonnegut doesn't make clear exactly what Bokonon told the natives of San Lorenzo. Two of the calypsos (which the people might have sung) are concerned with lying, but the other thirteen poems and calypsos in the novel do not mention it. Mona reports that Bokonon "always said he would never take his own advice, because he knew it was worthless" (p. 182); thus she knew it was a lie, but she was not typical of the natives. At any rate, what the people did participate in seemed real to them, not a lie: "They were all employed full time as actors in a play they understood," in which the "holy man" was pitted against the tyrant (p. 119).
The importance of Vonnegut's having Castle explain basic Bokononism is that in him we know one who says the religion works, but who also knows it is a fiction—therefore it doesn't work for him and life is meaningless. Castle's view is more a reflection of Vonnegut's than is the Bokononism practiced by the natives of San Lorenzo, or even by Bokonon, who believes at least in a "You Know Who" that one can blame for human stupidity.

Castle apparently survives on two basic impulses: one, that of humor (as, when he surveys the piles of corpses at his hospital during a plague, he tells his son Philip, "Some-day this will all be yours" [pp. 110-12]), and two, that of altruism, or the belief that human suffering should be eased however possible. This latter practice is clear from his work at the House of Hope and Mercy and from the way he died, going toward the House to do what he could for the people. Such a man knows too much to lie to himself; he uses humor to keep himself going and follows his impulse to aid people who cannot help themselves.

Castle is more like Vonnegut than is John/Jonah. On humor, Vonnegut said, "laughter is a response to frustration, just as tears are, and it solves nothing, just as tears solve nothing. Laughing or crying is what a human being does when there's nothing else he can do." On altruism, he said, "I worry about stupid, dumb people. Somebody has

53 "Playboy Interview," p. 66.
to take care of them, because they can't hack it." The same two ideas are in Bokononism, but Vonnegut does not follow Bokonon when he seems to believe his lie that some direction has been established for history and that something is to blame for the world's destruction.

Thus Castle's life and statements seem to be at the heart of the underlying myth in *Cat's Cradle*, but this is not the mythical construct that most youth identify with in the novel if Fiedler's analysis of its appeal is correct. They would identify more readily with Bokononism in its popular, verbal form than they would with the written version which Castle knows to be invented by a cynic. Castle may appeal to the youths' altruistic impulse and to their defiance of things that are sacred to the older generation, but they would not take his hopelessness as a statement of their own perspective. Fiedler suggests two aspects of *Cat's Cradle* which would be more likely to appeal to youthful readers than would Castle's cynical


55 "Maturity," Bokonon says, "is a bitter disappointment for which no remedy exists, unless laughter can be said to remedy anything" (p. 134). On altruism, when Newt comments that the Castles' style of meeting death (on their way to the House to help however they could) was "a neat way to die," Jonah notes that that is "a Bokononist thing to say" (p. 190).

56 Fiedler believes the voice of both Newt and Bokonon are "Vonnegut's, and they answer each other inconclusively throughout" (p. 203). This is partially true, but Castle is more fully Vonnegut's voice than both Newt and Bokonon.
view:

[First], the possibility of actual joy. John at any rate, is revealed as having experienced two great joys before his tale is told: one slow and long-continued, as he learns who are the other members of his karass . . . one intense and momentary, as he plays footsie with the blonde Negress, Mona, whom he, and everyone else loves. . . . Cat's Cradle is then a book about loving; but it is even more, as my own language has been teaching me, the words that suggest themselves to me as I describe it, a book about learning, which means, inevitably, about learning a new language. It is Vonnegut's great good fortune to know this, and to be able to invent such new languages: to create terms like karass and Boko-maru, which seem to survive, in the heads of his readers, his plots and even his jokes.57

These two aspects of Bokononism, joyful love and a new language, appeal to the basic romanticism of the movement. Bokononism is based on a mystical wholism, not only in its love for Mother Earth (with Mona as a sign of that unity), but also in its sense that life is patterned around Wam-peters and karasses, and that each person is meant to do the things that he does. A Bokononist believes in the pursuit of the things of the present moment instead of postponing present gratifications in order to reach future goals. Boku-maru reflects not only the wholism, or rootedness of all things in the earth, but also the mingling of awareness between two people in the present moment. Above all, abandoning social and economic reform in favor of creating a new religion would appeal to the youthful love of present experience. Thirdly, Bokononism appeals because it is

57Fiedler, p. 203.
exotic, in that it occurs in a strange place, has a living saint as its creator and sustainer, and is an underground, persecuted religion. Finally, it appeals to the movement's love of childlike qualities, and there are almost no inhibitions in Bokononism. This permits belief without the restrictions of the prohibitive parent. If there is a parental figure in the sky, he has failed to function properly (as has the established generation on earth) and can now be defied.58

Thus, there are really two Bokononisms in Cat's Cradle: Castle's version and popular Bokononism. Vonnegut himself seems to reject the "inevitable destiny" idea that Jonah makes so much of and senses instead that each person is fully responsible for whatever he decides to do. That knowledge is heartbreaking, as those who have read The Books of Bokonon seem to know.59 Vonnegut understands the

58See Richard Bodtke on values Vonnegut and the counter culture advocate: "Modern society, Vonnegut reiterates, lacks juice and joy because so much that is important to simply living is condemned as socially unproductive or technologically irrelevant, a process made especially vicious in America where Puritanism and technological efficiency join hands to banish frivolity, love, and a good glass of beer on Saturday night." "Great Sorrows, Small Joys: The World of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," Cross Currents, 20 (1970), 121.

59There are several Vonnegut statements in which he stresses human responsibility to the exclusion of destiny. Rosewater tells a science-fiction writer's convention: "You're the only ones . . . crazy enough to know that life is a space voyage . . . that'll last for billions of years. You're the only ones with guts enough to really care about the future, who really notice what machines do to us . . . what tremendous misunderstandings, mistakes, accidents and catastrophes do to us. You're the only ones zany enough to agonize . . . over the fact that we are right now determining
necessity of useful cat's cradles that people can live by and believes that fiction should help people accept the comforting cat's cradles, or lies, that everyone needs in order to live. However, Vonnegut's own position is closer to Castle's than it is to Bokonon's; Vonnegut, like Castle, assumes the absence of anything in the universe other than man that can produce spiritual comfort.

Part of a useful cradle is morality. Vonnegut assumes that morals should be involved in all human activities. When the Hoenikker children were dividing the ice-9, for example, John notes that they recalled "the old man's brain-stretchers, but there was no talk of morals," suggesting that there should have been (p. 168). A scientist with morals would be like von Koenigswald, who considers himself to be a bad scientist because he "will do anything to make a human being feel better, even if it's unscientific. No scientist worthy of the name could say such a thing" (p. 149).

Thus the central moral stance in Cat's Cradle is one taken in spite of the homelessness of improving the lot of whether the space voyage for the next billion years or so is going to be Heaven or Hell." God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (New York: Dell, 1965), p. 18. Cf. a similar statement by Vonnegut in "Speaking of Books: Science Fiction," New York Times Book Review, 5 Sept. 1965, p. 2. Most predestination references occur in pure science-fiction passages, and Vonnegut said of his use of these that "the science-fiction passages are just like the clowns in Shakespeare. . . . And trips to other planets, science fiction of an obviously kidding sort, is equivalent to bringing on the clowns every so often to lighten things up." "Playboy Interview," p. 68.

60"Playboy Interview," p. 59; Cat's Cradle, p. 156.

Olderman suggests that moral concerns are central in all of Vonnegut's novels (p. 191).
man in any final way. One does what Ambassador Minton suggested in his "strikingly Bokononist speech": we should despise "the stupidity and viciousness of all mankind," and work "consciously and tirelessly to reduce the stupidity and viciousness of ourselves and all mankind," even though success is impossible (pp. 169-70).

*Cat's Cradle* shares with the counter culture a sense that the present dominant modes of thinking and acting can lead only to disaster, that myth and religion contain some of the resources which can enable men to become more humane, and that the place where significant life is going on is in a religion or spirit-world, not in the world of scientific and economic truths. But Vonnegut does not agree with the general sense that the counter culture had that its philosophies and character will become the dominant culture. He senses instead that man will either continue in his stupidity and viciousness or that he will destroy himself. Vonnegut's posture is that in the meantime, before final destruction, those who can should spread comfort and beauty wherever possible and regardless of the cost to themselves.62

62 Cf. Olderman: "The final dark implication, which Vonnegut shares with a great many other writers, is that we too are headed for cataclysm unless we find something to live by. Vonnegut does offer two possibilities—we can learn to love each other, or we can each create our own illusion, some mythology that will help us learn to live together. Neither possibility makes life meaningful, but both do offer a way to stay alive, and maybe even have some fun (p. 191).
Most statements from the counter culture reflect neither the pessimism nor the dedication of Vonnegut. Its posture is more similar to that of Heinlein or to Vonnegut's depiction of popular Bokononism than it is to the cynical altruism of the Castles. In both *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Bokononism, the basic myth is not significantly different from that of the dominant culture. Both the counter culture and the dominant culture believe that something is in control that will save man from his seemingly hopeless situation. For the dominant culture, the savior is science and technology; the counter culture hopes for a miraculous Valentine-savior, or, if not that, then at least the assurance that things are happening as they are meant to happen; if they are, then perhaps ineffectual protest is enough.

The basic myth of the counter culture did not sustain its people in a long journey of strategies and tactics into the new "garden." As a result of this and other factors, the movement dispersed, with its participants withdrawing either into the dominant culture or into a new fantasyland where they continue to wait for the savior to come in some form in order to grant them their inheritance.
Another, more profound part of the mythical landscape in the United States consists of indecisive tales which contain elements of the ancient Grail legend. In the three examples used here, the indecisiveness appears in different parts of the legend. In *Invisible Man* (1952) the narrator vows that he will start on the quest at the conclusion of the novel, but, although he knows where he must go, he does not know what he will find. Randle McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962) makes the quest and frees a Fisher King, but the kingdom is not restored. Finally, in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Oedipa Maas finds where the Grail might be if it exists, but she cannot seem to decide whether it exists or even whether its discovery would be desirable if it were there. In each instance, the results are progressively less certain; ambiguity increases because each time the forces to be overcome on the quest are

both more powerful and less concrete. The sense that these
novels communicate is that of an old, Western, authoritarian
order making itself ever larger and more pervasive because it is built over the abyss; those who make up the order hate the limits it imposes on their lives, but they fear the freedom of life in the abyss more than they hate the limits of the order. Yet the heroes of these novels venture into the abyss where there are no supports and are punished for their journey. They venture there for reasons similar to those Joseph Campbell alludes to as he indicates that precisely this journey is required for Western man and that the artist will lead in making it:

and so we stand now, in the modern west, before an irreducible challenge. The Grail, so to say, has been shown to us, of the individual quest, the individual life adventured in the realization of one's own inborn potential, and yet, the main sense of our great Occidental heritage of mythological, theological, and philosophical orthodoxies... is of certain norms to be realized, beliefs to be held, and aims toward which to strive... the authorized mythological forms are presented in rites to which the individual is expected to respond with an experience of commitment and belief. But suppose he fails to do so? Suppose the entire inheritance of mythological, theological, and philosophical forms fails to wake in him any authentic response of this kind? How then is he to behave? The normal way is to fake it, to feel oneself to be inadequate, to pretend to believe, to strive to believe, and to live, in the imitation of others, an inauthentic life. The authentic creative way, on the other hand, which I would term the way of art as opposed to religion, is [that] the artist first has an experience of his own, which he then seeks to interpret and communicate through effective forms.4

In each of these three novels, the artist has created a hero who sets out to discover his potential, and thereby the potential of modern man (the Grail), but he is opposed by powers which are manifest in scientific objectivity and technology. Opposing the Grail knight, then, are those who have established a deadly "order," primarily because every other way of living with nothingness and death seems inadequate. Those who penetrate into the regions beyond the dominant order suffer for their audacity.

Such stories differ from those which appealed to the youth counter culture in that these stories make clear that if there is any hope for Western man, it lies in a direction that will take him "straight through hell," whereas the stories of the counter culture escape hell by introducing the fantastic when their heroes confront essentially unresolvable societal and personal problems. The heroes therefore suffer more in these quest stories than do those in novels like *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *Cat's Cradle*, primarily because their journey is through a hell that most sensitive people can experience, not through an illusory world. Further, these novels are either essentially without humor (*Invisible Man*) or the humor is ironic; it is almost never flippant, as it almost always is in the novels appealing to the counter culture. All these qualities indicate the increasing seriousness of the novels and a closer approach to that which is "grave and constant" in human affairs.
Thus, one major theme of this group of novels is that hell is where we must go if we want out of the present impasse. A second theme is that the guides for this journey will be an oppressed minority. Such groups qualify as guides because they have seen what hell is like and have lost enough useless baggage to make the fear of losing more seem superfluous. If the dominant culture is to live, it will follow the guide; if it chooses to skirt around, taking several layers of affluence with it, it will die.

_Invisible Man_ is the progenitor of the novels which conceive of the post-World War II hero as involved in some part of the Grail quest. The most obvious parallels between _Invisible Man_ and the Grail legend occur in the Prologue, in the dream which concludes the major portion of the novel, and in the Epilogue. In these passages the quester has retired, or hibernated, into a coal cellar which is like the belly of a whale, from which he intends to return to the world. Underground, then, the hero experiences a rebirth like that of many who passed through the belly of the whale in traditional myth, showing by his ability not only to pass in and out of the cellar/belly but also to illegally light the cellar that he has won a victory.

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5The importance of _Invisible Man_ as a quest novel is well-established. Tony Tanner, for example, says that it "is quite simply the most profound novel about American identity written since the war." _City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970_ (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 51.

6Ellison, pp. 9, 438-39. Subsequent references will be in the text.
over chaos and is ready to enter the quest fully. This pause, or hibernation, is similar to the five years the Grail knight wandered in a waste land after he had failed in his first effort to achieve the quest. His success after the wandering was a result of a shift in loyalties away from himself to love as the guide for his life.

Invisible Man, with the exception of the Prologue and Epilogue, consists of the first quest, in which the knight has failed to understand the instructions his grandfather gave him. This failure makes him unable to deal effectively with the disintegration of his world. As he withdraws to meditate on the failure, he understands in a dream that the kingdom he has traveled (the United States) is impotent. White society, sold on scientific objectivity, has accomplished no more than the emasculation of the Blacks and consequently also of themselves. Now that the potency is destroyed, all society is threatened by an "iron man" who


8For the shift in loyalties in the Grail legend, see Joseph Campbell, The Flight of the Wild Gander (Chicago: Gateway, 1969), pp. 219-20. Also see Juan E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), who notes that Wolfram von Eschenbach (whom Campbell also follows for the legend) places the action "on the borders of Spain" (p. 115). Ellison's invisible man notes "that I don't live in Harlem but in a border area" (p. 5). Border areas, or interfaces, between two realities are the twilight areas where new truths are discovered and new births take place in dreams and myths.
represents the non-human machinery of a society founded on scientific objectivity.\(^9\)

The invisible man must therefore understand the vital message of his grandfather before he can set out again to restore the potency of the world. In the cellar, "away from it all," he ponders that advice, which is to "agree (the white man) to death and destruction." The man in the cellar suspects that his grandfather could have meant that he should affirm the principle of equality on which the nation was founded even though "they had violated and compromised [it] to the point of absurdity," but more likely he meant that the Blacks should "take responsibility for all of it. . . . Not for the power or for vindication, but because we, with the given circumstance of our origin, could only thus find transcendence" (p. 433). Even though the dominant whites have obviously caused the suffering now at hand, they are threatened by the robot as much as the sufferers. According to Ellison, they need a guide, or perhaps a knight, to restore the potency of life. Perhaps the Black man will fill

\(^9\)See p. 381 for Jack's scientific objectivity, and pp. 430-31 for the emasculation of both Black and white and the threatening image of the iron man, which represents efforts to make people conform to plans developed from a scientific perspective, overlooking the possibilities in each person and in diversity itself. Also see Tanner on the "mechanizing attitude" of the "representatives of social power that the narrator encounters in Invisible Man (p. 53).
was it that we of all, we most of all, had to affirm the principle, the plan in whose name we had been brutalized and sacrificed—not because we would always be weak nor because we were afraid or opportunistic, but because we were older than they, in the sense of what it took to live in the world with others and because they had exhausted in us, some—not much, but some—of the human greed and smallness, yes, and the fear and superstition that had kept them running? (pp. 433-34)

The agreement the old man demanded might be, then, to agree with the principle of equality until the whites also have exhausted in themselves some greed and smallness—this is the death and destruction the grandfather had wanted.

In Ellison's vision, the masses of people are linked together against the common threat of those who would use them in their efforts to "make history," or to shape people into their "plan" for society. The Blacks, however, may be the elders in opposition and experience and thus able to be the guides who free the culture from its bondage to the iron man. The invisible man, since he has been through hell in the whale's belly, knows the territory ahead: "My world has become one of infinite possibilities.... it's a good phrase and a good view of life, and a man shouldn't accept any other; that much I've learned underground" (p. 435). For the invisible man, then, the world is one in which no patterns are automatically pre-set, but it is founded on chaos (p. 438). The threat to possibility is "putting the world in a strait jacket," in which case the
shivering before the millions of eyes who look through you unseeingly. That is the real soul-sickness, the spear in the side" (p. 434). And, further, no final victory is possible; one plays "in the face of certain defeat"; the only thing that can be won is humanity (p. 435).

Whereas Ellison’s invisible man has made the initial foray into the chaos of post-war America and is prepared for the second, wiser journey, the Grail Knight in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest makes both the first and second quest, restoring the Fisher King’s strength. However, the results are ambiguous in that although the Fisher King is restored, his kingdom is not and the King himself senses that it will never be restored.

Kesey’s deposed Fisher King is Chief Bromden, son of Tee Ah Millatona, a disinherited Indian chief. Bromden has been trying to skirt around hell by sinking into a protective fog for over twenty years until the Irish gambler, Randle P. McMurphy, pulls him out into the “full force of dangers” that await the exposed ones. In the open Chief wins some battles; for example, when he struggles for the first time out of the stupor following a shock treatment, he


Kesey, p. 130. Subsequent references will be in the text.
"knew this time [he] had them beat" (p. 241). Nevertheless, he is no more optimistic about final victory than Ellison's hero was. Speaking of McMurphy, Chief says, "the thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place" (p. 265). Thus, whatever victory is won in the restoration of the Fisher King is incomplete, even though the king is clearly restored. McMurphy makes Bromden "big" again, restoring the potency he had lost when his father lost the Indian tribal lands to the Interior Department. As his Papa lost his kingdom and his self-respect, Bromden came to "fear death by water" (as T. S. Eliot suggests of the Fisher King in "The Waste Land," I.54), and "couldn't even stand a shallow pool" (p. 147). Since Bromden was to be chief of a "tribe of fish Injuns," he is a Fisher King (p. 150). Finally McMurphy takes him over the deep waters where he catches a fish "bigger'n any fish we ever got at the falls" (p. 210), and he regains his full stature even though his land is gone and his tribe dispersed or drunk.

13 Also see Chief's analysis of Big Nurse early in the novel: "She's too big to be beaten. She covers one whole side of the room like a Jap statue. There's no moving her and no help against her. She's lost a little battle her today, but it's a minor battle in a big war that she's been winning and that she'll go on winning. . . . just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her. She don't lose on her losses, but she wins on ours. To beat her you don't have to whip her two out of three or three out of five, but every time you meet. As soon as you let down your guard, as soon as you lose once, she's won for good. And eventually we all got to lose" (p. 101).
If the Indian is King, then his values are the ones Kesey proposes are needed to oppose the dominance of the Combine. Two values seem to characterize Bromden's outlook on life: first, like Ellison's invisible man, he believes that freely choosing to be what one is, is essential to one's well-being. Second, he senses that life gains its fullness only when one has a well-developed sense of the beauty and eternality of nature. This latter sense differs from Ellison's awareness of how one comes into contact with the pulse of the world. For him, an urban man, it happens with music and a reefer, which float him into the interstices of time which become also space: "I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths." But Ellison's man wants to avoid any more

14 The Combine is that which destroys chaos and diversity by working "in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches" to make each person a "functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch [the well-adjusted man] sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they're just now digging trenches along the street to lay pipes for city water. He's happy with it" (p. 40).

15 The eternal is represented especially by the geese (pp. 86, 142). For the importance of nature, note Chief's love for the falls and his mystical rediscovery of the natural world (pp. 141-43). Also see Terry G. Sherwood's conclusion that Kesey looks to dormant Indian values, represented in potential by Bromden's size, for answers to problems of modern culture. Residual Indian pastoralism and regard for physical life, plus a yet strong sense of community, represent the possibility for life in defiance of the Combine." Critique, 13, No. 1 (1972), 102.

16 Ellison, p. 7.
experiences like that because they inhibit action, and he believes in action.  

Bromden to a significant degree represents the neo-romanticism of the 1960's, however, especially the desire to re-enter a natural paradise.

It is not unusual for novels that follow the pattern of the Grail legend to affirm the need for a reunion with the natural in some fashion. The legend is pre-Christian, designating, as Joseph Campbell has shown, "the earth not as dust (Genesis 3:19) but as the source, the living body out of which all proceed and to which they return at peace. The Grail seems to carry that meaning of the earth in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, in that Western culture has created a machinelike society based on its conception of the earth as "dust" to be used by man. However, if Chief is the Fisher King, his restoration means the earth should be recognized once more as "a living body" full of majesty in its own right and worthy of respect. The Yaqui Indian, don Juan, communicates a similar attitude to the thoroughly Westernized Carlos Castaneda:

17 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

18 On the relation of nature to paradise, see Mircea Eliade: "nostalgia for ... Nature... is, in some sort, a nostalgia for Paradise, the desire to find again a transfigured and invulnerable Nature, safe from the cataclysms brought by wars, devastation, and conquests... It is a passive revolt against the tragedy and injustice of History." Myth and Reality, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 173.

For you the world is weird because if you're not bored with it you're at odds with it. For me the world is weird because it is stupendous, awesome, mysterious, unfathomable; my interest has been to convince you that you must assume responsibility for being here, in this marvelous world, in this marvelous desert, in this marvelous time. 

This is strikingly similar to the major theme of the Grail legend, which is

the healing of [the] breach [between the spheres of nature and society, sincerity and religion, the timeless forest and the time-bound court]: a renewal of the Waste Land of the Christian social order through a miracle of uncorrupted nature, the integrity of a noble, resolute heart.

Kesey reflects the ancient legend at several other points in the novel, each of which re-enforces the image of the new kingdom as a natural one which opposes the restricting Combine. Thus in the ancient legend the knight found the Grail at a castle and his recovery of it released the kingdom from its impotency. In the 1962 version the possibility of restoration is in the cuckoo's nest, or an institution for those who cannot adjust to the impotency of "normal" society and who are therefore subjected to the emasulatory work of Big Nurse (p. 57). McMurphy's last act is the dorm party in which potency is symbolically restored when Billy Bibbit spends the night with Candy (he is temporarily healed—he does not stutter until the Big Nurse accuses him of betraying his mother), and after which McMurphy permanently exposes


Big Nurse's sexuality by tearing her clothes (pp. 263, 267-68).

In the legend, the knight failed to obtain the Grail on the first visit because he acted as he was expected to act, not according to the impulse of his nature. In a similar way, McMurphy fails at first because he operates only as a dedicated gambler. On his second visit the knight succeeds because of his pure love. McMurphy withdraws in part two of the novel in order to protect his own skin, but when he returns to the quest in parts three and four, it is as a "dedicated lover" (p. 218) who no longer believes that winning is the goal of his life (p. 227).22

Another significant likeness between the two stories is that both argue for equality of the races. In Eschenbach's version, the knight returns to the Grail Castle the second time accompanied by a Moslem half-brother "as noble as himself," and the Grail has written on it the following command:

IF ANY MEMBER OF THE GRAIL COMPANY SHOULD, BY THE GRACE OF GOD, BE GIVEN MASTERY OVER A FOREIGN FOLK, HE MUST NOT SPEAK TO THEM OF HIS RACE OR OF HIS NAME, AND MUST SEE TO IT THAT THEY GAIN THEIR RIGHTS.23

In Kesey's story, McMurphy and the Indian fight as brothers in the decisive battle in the shower (that fight indicated

22 McMurphy's retreat in part two is comparable to the invisible man's hibernation in the cellar in Ellison's novel.

"that it had started at last"; that is, that the events which would lead to McMurphy's destruction and Chief's recovery had begun). Chief's history indicates that white, having been given mastery of the "foreign folk," had not seen to it that they gained their rights, but had instead systematically taken their rights away. Those who are the Combine have thus lost the right to hold mastery, and McMurphy and his brother the Indian illustrate the injustice of their rule.

Of course, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is more than a re-telling of the Grail legend. McMurphy is not a typical Grail hero, for example, in that Grail heroes do not die in obtaining the Grail, whereas McMurphy does.24 Thus he is not only the Grail knight as American hero but he also plays a Christ role—only, however, as world redeemer and never as priest founding a new order. McMurphy redeems and Bromden founds the new order.

There are several references in the novel to McMurphy as Christ. When he arrives he seems to be "a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine" (pp. 16, 224), he takes twelve people with him on the fishing trip (pp. 203, 212), and in effect he moves mountains (Harding tells

24 According to Cirlot, "The loss of the Grail is tantamount to the loss of one's inner adhesions" (p. 116). If so, then the Grail quest would be completed if the inner adhesion were regained, as they were for Chief and to a lesser degree for the other eleven who went on the fishing trip with McMurphy.
McMurphy that he doesn't "recall anything about psychopaths being able to move mountains," referring to the control panel, but later McMurphy enables Chief to move it). Before the first shock treatment he says, "Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?" He gets one, "crown of silver thorns over the graphite at his temples" (p. 237). These obvious references make other conclusions possible: the four parts of the novel roughly parallel the New Testament pattern of Jesus' life. Part one is like the initial arrival and sense that radical action is required; part two is the withdrawal into the wilderness and announcement of mission (McMurphy withdraws from the battle against Big Nurse, then breaks the window as an announcement of his return); part three is the life and teachings ("McMurphy decided fishing was the thing" and "led the twelve of us toward the ocean" [pp. 177, 203]); and part four is the crucifixion and resurrection.25

The significance of McMurphy as both Grail hero and Christ-figure is that these images enable Kesey to designate the mode of living that he suspects will be coming

25For the resurrection, see "She tried to get her ward back in shape, but it was difficult with McMurphy's presence still stomping up and down the halls and laughing out loud in the meetings and singing in the latrines" (p. 269). Also note Chief Bromden's assumption of McMurphy's way of thinking in realizing the need of others for help (pp. 233-34), and in killing the lobotomized McMurphy (p. 270), as well as his surpassing of McMurphy in strength as he threw the control panel through the window (p. 271).
out for the next round against the Combine. The American cowboy-cartoon-hero has fought out his defiance; the inheritance passes now to the Indian. That is, for McMurphy's character, Kesey has drawn from a theme in popular American mythology which apotheosizes those who oppose the conformist pressures of the social order and has put that character in the structure of the Grail legend. Thus, the restored King is the Indian, but he is re-born into his ancient heritage through the appearance of one who embodies the most powerful anti-Combine elements in white culture (cartoon hero, cowboy, Irish brawler, dedicated gambler and lover, and the Christ). Possibly McMurphy in his death represents in part the disappearance of those elements from American life. Perhaps when "you couldn't come out anymore and somebody else had to take your place," that somebody is the Indian. This is indicated when Chief throws the control panel, a massive piece of machinery, through the window in order to free himself at last from the confines of the Combine. As the panel crashes through the window, "the glass splashed out in the moon, like a bright cold water baptizing the sleeping earth" (pp. 271-72). The earth is given a rebirth (as in the Grail Legend), a baptism and new life (as men are given in the

Christ legend) through the Indian's assumption of kingship once more ("I been away a long time").

Thus McMurphy is above all the hero who re-creates the kingship of the Indian. The dragon slain by the hero as warrior, or knight, is, as Campbell points out, "precisely the monster of the status quo"; the monster is objectified in Big Nurse. She, true to good mythological form, "is in the clown role, as a mistaker of shadow for substance; it is her destiny to be tricked." Chief has been bound by the "shadow," thinking it was a real machine; his strength is regained when the hero's is destroyed, and he, Wiglaf-like, inherits the wrecked kingdom.

In his role of hero as redeemer, McMurphy not only slays the tyrant-monster who "is the representative of the set-fast," or the Combine, but he releases "the vital energies that will feed the universe." Again, Bromden, or the American Indian, represents these vital energies for Kesey, and it is he who is released from the ban of invisibility.

27 Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 337.

28 Ibid., p. 352.

29 For an elaboration of the hope that can be seen in the Indian's perspective as well as a realistic critique of that perspective, see Thomas Berger, Little Big Man (Connecticut: Fawcett Crest, 1964). Old Lodge Skins, the embodiment of the Cheyenne, or "Human Being," viewpoint, says, "Now I understand [the Americans]. I no longer believe they are fools or crazy. I know now that they do not drive away the buffalo by mistake or accidentally set fire to the prairie with their fire-wagon or rub out Human Being's
Much of the mythic pattern of the novel is compressed into one passage which occurs as the central moment in the central event of the novel, the fishing trip. The journey is conceived of by Kesey as an adventure over the depths of the unconscious, as Martini indicates when he "ran to the edge and leaned over the side and stared down into the water in the direction of his line. 'Oh. Oh, my God,' he said, but whatever he saw was too deep down for the rest of us" (p. 208). Finally, at a moment of almost total chaos on the boat, the action pauses in a universal tableau during which all who made the fearful cruise are able at last to laugh at their weaknesses. Chief Bromden describes the

because of a misunderstanding. No, they want to do these things, and they succeed in doing them. They are a powerful people." He took something from his beaded belt at that point and, stroking it, said: "The Human Beings believe that everything is alive: not only men and animals but also water and earth and stones and also the dead things from them like this hair. The person from whom this hair came is bald on the Other Side because I now own this scalp. This is the way things are.

"But white men believe that everything is dead: stones, earth, animals, and people, even their own people. And if, in spite of that, things persist in trying to live, white men will rub them out.

"That," he concludes, "is the difference between white men and Human Beings" (pp. 227-28).

Cf. Cirlot on water as a symbol: "Whether we take water as a symbol of the collective or of the personal unconscious, or else as an element of mediation and dissolution it is obvious that this symbolism is an expression of the vital potential of the psyche, of the struggles of the psychic depths to find a way of formulating a clear message comprehensible to the consciousness" (p. 346).
moment:

I notice Harding is collapsed beside McMurphy and is laughing too. And Scanlon from the bottom of the boat. At their own selves as well as at the rest of us. And the girl. . . . And Sefelt and the doctor, and all.

It started slow and pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger. I watched, part of them, laughing with them--and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water and skating the wind with those black birds, high above myself, and I could look down and see myself and the rest of the guys, see the boat rocking there in the middle of those diving birds, see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people, and watch them, us, swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles, farther and farther, until it crashed up on beaches all over the coast, on beaches all over all coasts, in wave after wave after wave (p. 212).

McMurphy is primarily the victorious Christ figure in this scene, "surrounded by his dozen people," who are able to at last walk over the chaos of their unconscious, or, in this story, to laugh, having been taught to do so by McMurphy. At this moment they have broken free from "the set-fast," and their moment of freedom is universal, crashing, as the ocean does, eternally on all beaches.

Most significant, however, is Chief's role in the dramatic event. He is not only on the boat, but is also "skating the wind with those black birds" which are diving around McMurphy and the others. The Indian is thus associated with the regenerative spiritual power of the wind and with the blackbirds, which symbolize for the Indian the
creative powers and spiritual strength of the world. In their role as messenger the birds dive back and forth between the creative powers represented by the Indian in the wind with the birds and the victorious bursting forth of power on the boat over the water.

Thus, the story told in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is similar to that in *Invisible Man* in that it indicates a quest for that which will reunite man with his world, even when there is little hope that the Grail will give potency to more than a few. These few will oppose those who want to organize and adjust society until no freedom is left. Ellison's hero made the first attempt, then retreated from the Waste Land in preparation for the second quest. McMurphy succeeded in releasing Bromden from his impotency, but this implies that what we must hope for is a rebirth of the old style and world-view of the Indian if the hero is to continue to oppose the unbeatable set-fast. But Joseph Campbell argues that recovery cannot be wrought by turning back, or away from what has been accomplished by the modern revolution; for the problem is nothing if not that of rendering the modern world spiritually significant—or rather

31 The crow, for example, was for the Indian "the great civilizer and creator of the visible world." Cirlot, p. 68. Note also that the Indian who killed old Floyd Warner in Wright Morris's *A Life* was named Blackbird. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). As Robert Wernick suggested, Warner's death at the hands of the Indian "can stand for that of the white man's America." "Gold and Grit," *Time*, 24 Sep. 1973, p. 126.
(phrasing the same principle the other way round) nothing if not that of making it possible for men and women to come to full human maturity through the conditions of contemporary life.\textsuperscript{32}

Coming to "full human maturity through the conditions of contemporary life" could be poetically phrased as going "straight through hell," whereas depending on the youth counter culture or the Indian life-style or any other "magic" is a way of skirting around the only possible way for modern man to wed the bride of life. Ellison created an image of the urban hell that concretized Morris's desert, and the invisible man's basic accomplishment was to realize that it was precisely that desert, riot-torn and infected with racism and scientific objectivity misapplied to human lives that must be traversed; he had seen his old self dead when he burned his papers, but had not yet gathered the party to lead through the desert. Kesey's hell is in one sense suburban and exurban but more profoundly is the inner hell that results from the pressures a mass society exerts on its members to adjust themselves to meek lives with reduced goals.

As Raymond Olderman points out,

\textsuperscript{32}Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 388. Also see Victor Ferkiss, Technological Man: The Myth and the Reality (New York: Mentor, 1970), who argues that we cannot invent a livable future because we have not yet created a technological man whose goals are global and humanitarian. This man needs to replace bourgeois man, who operates for his own ends out of parochial cultural, political, and economic concepts.
Perhaps there is some big bad wolf—and then perhaps there is only us. In the past the essential shock in American fictional experience has been a character's discovery that deep down he too is capable of evil; the shock in the sixties is the character's discovery that deep down he may be a source of unrelenting insanity. Down there, perhaps, that unknowable and seemingly immense power against us comes into being and then mounts to become a world gone mad.

McMurphy hints that the enemy might be within each of the inmates and not simply in the Combine one time. He is struggling with the problem that has everyone in the hospital immobilized:

"Hell's bells, listen at you," McMurphy says. All I hear is gripe, gripe, gripe. About the nurse or the staff or the hospital. Scanlon wants to bomb the whole outfit. Sefelt blames the drugs. Fredrickson blames his family trouble. Well, you're all just passing the buck... Getting shut of the Big Nurse wouldn't be getting shut of the real deep-down hang-up that's causing the gripes" (p. 165).

Quite possibly, then, the Big Nurse and the Combine are the creation of those who fear the open world beyond the structures and schedules of the Combine. They create and sustain the Big Nurse, but as Tony Tanner points out, they also create a McMurphy to fulfill their desire for a savior who will oppose Big Nurse for them. If the "Cuckoo's Nest" can be thought of as a microcosm of civilized life, the effect is one of people both creating a mad world and hoping at the same time that it can be dismantled, if possible by

33Olderman, pp. 50-51.
34Tanner, pp. 374-75.
someone else.

Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* also expresses a profound sense of being trapped with only undesirable or impossible options available. Yet the agony for the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, is intensified by her recognition that America has accepted its straight jacket without protest, even when, or perhaps because, another set of possibilities was present which promised the abysmal truth and the numinous life. For her, the journey through hell began when she realized that she was caught between two sets of possibilities: one, that life is only a daily tedious preparation for death or, two, that life has some transcendent meaning which has been driven underground. Since the latter involves crossing through hell to obtain its truth (with no assurance that any truth is there), she cannot yet accept its promise. At the end of the novel she is waiting alone to see whether the second possibility will reveal itself as a viable option or, "at least, at the very least, waiting for the symmetry of choices to break down, to go askew," so that the options will not be either the common lie or the difficult truth.

This quest for the Grail is a journey straight over the abyss, and the companions are not McMurphys or true brothers but are shadowy figures in an underworld with whom Oedipa cannot communicate. Her solitude is increased by her having been conditioned to avoid learning what the dispossessed know. Again and again, she is confronted with a
basic dilemma: either a transcendent meaning exists and she can not communicate with it or with those who experience it, or it did not exist.35

Quite possibly the guide is ready to reveal "the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (p. 87), but those who have the Word and truly communicate it have been forced to withdraw to create their own underground world so different from that of the dominant culture that communication is almost impossible. Or perhaps her idea that they have the Word is the result of a hoax, a hallucination, or a fantasy, in which case the Word and the guides do not exist. Thus, either life in the dominant culture of the United States has shut those within it into a life of "lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty" which prevents their involvement in life which has the "secret richness and concealed density of dream" (p. 128), or no such richness exists and aridity is all that is.

From the beginning of the novel, Oedipa, an inhabitant of the dominant culture, understands her life to be a hopeless effort to fill the void. She cannot escape from that

35 Pynchon comments: "But as with Maxwell's Demon, so now. Either she could not communicate, or he Driblett did not exist." The Crying of Lot 49, p. 122. P. L. Abernathy believes the Maxwell's Demon episode is central to the novel in that it serves as a metaphor for America's mistaken notion that organizing, or "sorting out," costs nothing. Oedipa knows this activity does cost, and the novel shows that through becoming more organized we entered an "entropic slough of despond" from which we cannot escape. "Entropy in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49," Critique, 14, No. 2 (1972), 30-31. It is more likely that Pynchon dealt
because "what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all" (p. 11). The magic, however, has been conjured up by those who created life in cities like San Narciso, which from above seems patterned with a sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate, yet communication seems impossible (p. 13). San Narciso in this sense is representative of what America has created; Oedipa thinks she is acting as co-executor of the will of a friend, Pierce Inverarity. However, he was the multiplicity of people who make up America (pp. 2-3), and San Narciso has no boundaries: Oedipa "had dedicated herself . . . to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America" (p. 134).

The nature of America as San Narciso is in part revealed in the strange and bloody seventeenth century play, The Courier's Tragedy, which contains the first clues to the existence of the underground communication network with the worldview which caused the effort to organize. That was the loss of a Word which enabled man to see numinous transcendence in his world. Once that was lost, he had to build an illusion in order to avoid a stark confrontation with the abyss.

36"Inverarity" is the inverse of rarity, or it is the common man in the United States. James D. Young believes Pynchon uses many of his names ironically. For example, Oedipa Mass he takes to mean "more than Oedipus." Since Oedipa doesn't solve the riddle, the name is ironic. "The Enigma Variations of Thomas Pynchon," Critique, 10, No. 1 (1968), 72.
which Oedipa comes to call the Tristero, "as if it might
be something's secret title" (p. 28). In the play, the
good Duke of Faggio was in the habit of kissing the feet
of a statue of Saint Narcissus every Sunday at Mass. His
enemy, Angelo, poisons the feet and the Duke dies. Later,
the protection of God and Saint Narcissus is invoked for
the hero of the play, Niccolò, who rides as a Thurn and
Taxis courier37 and is killed by the Tristero. As a mysteri-
cus line appearing in only one of the many versions of the
play states, Tristero cannot be stopped by any "hallowed
skein of stars" that might be arranged by Saint Narcissus
or God (pp. 52, 117).

San Narciso is America; its feet are poisoned by nar-
cissism which leaves it powerless to destroy those who
insist on the presence of the void outside the illusions
of narcissism. There is, of course, no Saint Narcissus
but only the Greek myth of the beautiful youth who wasted
away looking at his own image. A nation of paranoids
could, however, take Narcissus as its saint; as such, he is
the patron of the "true paranoid for whom all is organized
in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of
himself" (p. 95).38 Paranoia is closely related to the

37Thurn and Taxis is the established courier system
that Tristero opposes.

38Abernathy follows McLuhan in interpreting the Nar-
cissus myth to show that Narcissus mistook his reflection
for someone else (pp. 27-28). However, the point of Pynchon's
tower imagery that occurs early in the novel. The magical power which encapsules Oedioa is paranoia, from which she can be released only if another option than the poisoned San Narciso is available:

for there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia (p. 137). 39

Yet she cannot get clear evidence that the Tristero exists as a real option. Her consideration that it may be a hoax or her hallucination are in actuality evidences for the completeness of her encapsulation in the paranoia of San Narciso. The clues she finds (or which are presented to her) on her night journey through San Francisco are decisive: "She was meant to remember" (p. 87). However, she cannot penetrate the clues to experience what lies behind them, because the depth of her void is not that her society worships at the poisoned feet of Saint Narcissus; they worship the "bishop of Jerusalem" because they have lost the direct experience of a Word that can give them life:

use is that we think all value resides in our self, which is comparable to admiring only one's own image. Anything else (like Tristero or signs of transcendence) is suspect as hoax or hallucination.

39 Also note that one object of her search for Tristero is, even for Oedioa, to bring an end to encapsulation in her tower (p. 23).
each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night (p. 87).

Oedipa senses that she is isolated from this Word, if it exists, and from those who, through their ability to truly communicate, can call the Word into being (pp. 128, 136). Her difficulty is that she is unable to decide where the insiders are and how to hear their Word. People who create worlds out of their own imagination (such as saints, clairvoyants, true paranoids, and dreamers) use the Word as a metaphor to "thrust at truth," whether by embodying truth in the metaphor or by using the Word to get at "whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from" (pp. 95-96). Thus "the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth" uses the puns as "high magic" to deal with that which is behind the Word, or metaphor. But the paranoid uses the Word to protect himself from what is "out there." To an "outsider" who is not any of the above (not a dreamer, for instance), their truth is a lie.

Oedipa, however, has been drawn, through Inverarity's will, to an interface between the underground "inside" and her "outsider" role as a true, encapsuled paranoid. Thus "Oedipa did not know where she was" (p. 95). Her deepest sense is one of isolation and longing from the time she entered San Narciso and sensed an effort to communicate there. For example, she falls asleep in a motel room
looking at a painting which reminds her of the gentle curves of San Narciso (the protective circles of paranoia), but keeps waking from a nightmare about "a possibility" in the mirror. Then she dreams about her husband, Mucho, making love to her on an unreal beach, but awakens "staring into the mirror at her own exhausted face" (p. 74). Perhaps the possibility that frightened her was the Narcissus possibility of wasting away, or become exhausted loving only herself. But the prospect of leaving San Narciso for "whatever it is the word [of paranoia, for Oedips] is there, buffering, to protect us from," is also frightening. She fears leaving the protective illusion of the tower, but fears also the possibility of confronting the void face to face.

As she moves further into the interface between her world and that of the Tristero underground, she senses her loss more acutely and images herself out a window, perhaps that of her encapsulating tower, moving up and then out over the abyss" (p. 114). Then, when she has eliminated all possibilities but four, she knows she is in the void between two worlds:

Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives. Those symmetrical four. She didn't like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was. That night she sat for hours, too numb even to drink, teaching herself to breathe in a vacuum. For this, oh God, was the void. There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world (p. 123).
Finally she is totally disoriented, in the area without markers between two worlds:

She stood between the public booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face toward the sea. But she'd lost her bearings. She turned, pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land (p. 133).

Pynchon masterfully led Oedipa out of the tower built by paranoia and into the void where the barriers are gone. Life inside the tower was like the tapestry Oedipa saw in Mexico City: those inside the tower embroider a world which spills out the windows in a hopeless effort to fill the void (p. 10). But Oedipa has been lured out and now has confronted the void without the embroidery to fill it (not because she does not want it filled, but because her tools for trying to fill it have been stripped away).

The only real possibility left to her is that there might exist another world, this one in the void. During her night in San Francisco she concludes that

here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world (p. 92).

The novel ends with Oedipa waiting to see if this separate world does exist. If it does, it is a world of possibility,
out of the tower, similar perhaps to that of Ellison's man underground.

Oedipa speculates that if the separate world exists, it is not only "a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating," but it may even be "a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie" (p. 128). The alternative is that somebody somewhere might be living by that which she has lost, "the direct ... Word." That is, her hope seems to be that the void which surrounds her tower (her paranoid self) is not real, but seems to be there because she has lost the Word that can illuminate the darkness and reveal the numinous quality for those who can see that world.

Suppose, God, there really was a Tristero then and that she had come on it by accident. If San Narciso and the estate were really no different from any other town, any other estate, then by that continuity she might have found the Tristero anywhere in her Republic, through any of a hundred lightly-concealed entrance-ways, a hundred alienations, if only she'd looked (p. 135).

40Pynchon's Scurvhamites possibly represent the San Narciso American. The Scurvhamite world was "a vast, intricate machine" in which nothing happened by accident. The Scurvhamite part of that world "ran off the will of God. ... The rest ran off some opposite Principle, something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death." The Scurvhamites tried to convert lost souls into their "Godly and purposeful sodality." The threatening Other, once conceived, however, and represented as Tristero in the Scurvhamite version of The Courier's Tragedy, was too fascinating for them and finally all abandon the sect for the Other (pp. 116-17). Thus San Narciso builds an illusion of order with which to save souls from the Other. However, a few, like Oedipa, search for the Other (p. 136).
The key for Oedipa is communication. If communication is happening instead of the lies of paranoia, then the communication itself must somehow "call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word" (p. 136). This Tristero, if it exists and if it has the Word, is waiting in its twilight, its aloofness. . . . if not for another set of possibilities to replace those that had conditioned the land to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or cry, then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew (p. 136).41

Thus The Crying of Lot 49 indicates that even though the dominant American culture has fallen for paranoia, perhaps an option exists and always has. Those who embody that option wait at least for the possibility that the only alternative to the "unnamable act, the recognition" will not be the arid, smooth curves of San Narciso. Yet it appears that such is the case. Either there is transcendent meaning, or only the earth. In music there is

either some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty . . .
or only a power spectrum. . . . Either [there is] injustice, or the absence of a wind. . . . Either an accommodation [can be] reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, or [there is] only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in

41See Abernathy's strange conclusion that "Oedipa . . . can only observe [America's] disintegration. There are too many 'alternate universes' to explore" (p. 31). Her problem is instead that there seem to be only two alternative universes, neither of which she can fully accept. She senses that Tristero desires another set of possibilities because the alternative to utter mystery is so completely a "zero."
the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero (pp. 136-37).

These three novels, then, represent the West as having at least some knights prepared to risk a journey through hell on Grail-like quests with some hope of leading the others through to meet the bride of life, if indeed she is there. Yet in each case, powerful and anonymous forces exert control over society and prevent more than a few from even conceiving that the adventure of the individual quest is possible. These forces are represented in Invisible Man by Dr. Bledsoe's hunger for power, Mr. Norton's condescending desire to protect his world, and Jack's manipulative tactics. In One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, the unbeatable Combine forces people to be rabbits and like it. Finally, The Crying of Lot 49 makes clear that the confining forces have been created because we have lost the secret of life and, having lost it, need protection from the void which surrounds us. An illusory but powerful order has been created which seems to sustain us over the abyss, but which in reality has frozen us before.

The analyses of Eliade and Wright Morris are confirmed by these novels. We have come upon our death lying before us, but most who see it fail to hear the strange music coming from the body. These go back to build a better wagon train in order to forget the body and the vision of hell which lay beyond. Western culture has therefore faltered
before nothingness and seems to have settled down without desiring to make the passage further. The alternatives, then, seem to be either an improbable underground journey straight into Pynchon's void with no assurance that the transcendent truth will be on the other side, or the certainties of the illusory tower built by almost everyone acting as the Combine.

Guides are available for those who might decide to make the difficult journey. Blacks, or Indians, or the underground seem most likely to know the way. A prime temptation is to suppose that such guides will make the journey on behalf of the rest and that society will be miraculously transformed. However, the invisible man knows that no matter who makes the quest, it will be "in the face of certain defeat," and Chief Bromden knows that the Combine never loses. Pynchon is not more hopeful but is more illuminating. Life lived with the Word is not desirable to Americans because the illusory securities of society are more comforting. Life in San Narciso permits a smooth passage from birth to death with embroidery stuffed into the windows to prevent a view of the abyss or even of one's own death. However, to avoid death is to deny that which is an awareness of the abyss and perhaps of the Word which enables one to live with the abyss and thereby in a living world. Yet, as Victor Ferkiss points out, death has replaced sex as the unmentionable. "Children are shielded from it, euphemisms are used."
Yet death is known to exist and is universal as well as troubling.\(^4\) Also, don Juan indicates Western men's construct of his world that insulates him from his death. In the following passage, don Juan speaks first and the Western man, Castaneda, replies:

"A warrior thinks of his death when things become unclear."

"That's even harder [than deciding and then no longer worrying about the decision], don Juan. For most people death is very vague and remote. We never think of it."

"Why not?"

"Why should we?"

"Very simple," he said. "Because the idea of death is the only thing that tempers our spirit."\(^4\)

Western man is conditioned to think of how he can control the world of objects, so that death, which for don Juan is as real as a companion to whom he can turn for advice is conceived of as an intangible. Vonnegut made this point when he showed that for those who rely only on objective methods for arriving at truth, the secret of life is nothing more than something about protein. But, as don Juan points out to his logical apprentice, "Has it ever occurred to you that only a few things in this world can be explained your way?"\(^4\)

\(^4\)Ferkiss, p. 183.

\(^4\)Carlos Castaneda, *A Separate Reality* (New York: Touchstone, 1971), p. 63. In a later passage, he shows how a man aware of his own death can make a journey into the most threatening territories: "A detached man, who knows he has no possibility of fencing off his death, has only one thing to back himself with: the power of his decisions. He has to be, so to speak, the master of his choices. . . . His decisions are final, simply because his death does not permit him time to cling to anything" (p. 184).

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 155.
All three of these novels point to an awareness that the Grail has been shown to man, that at least on the edge of Western man's history, he wishes to push beyond the Cartesian subject-object split to recover a relationship to his death, with nothingness, and perhaps through that more complete relationship to know the earth again as living. Yet, as Hopper points out, for most of us

the time of the world as picture persists and segregates the ego from the world of objects; hence we unwittingly become alienated from it, seek to dominate it and manipulate it, devaluing it for utilitarian ends. This also is a myth, more dangerous and destructive than [that of a two-storied world], perhaps; but subtler, and its counter-myth appears preeminently today in the so-called dramas of the Absurd. But, given the new cosmology (which the collective imagination is yet very far from grasping) and the dislocation of the projected "God above us," which the time of the world picture so conveniently housed in its heaven, it is little wonder that the self should not comprehend its collective neurosis, or the panic of its "alienation," of its being thrust back desperately upon itself.\textsuperscript{45}

The desperate thrust of the self back upon itself (which Pynchon dramatized) seems to explain the power of that anonymous magic which prevents Western man from moving across the abyss into new possibilities for knowing and being.

Hopper believes, and the three novels just analyzed support his belief, that not only has the possibility of a quest for the Grail been shown to us, but its promise is beginning to manifest itself. Hopper suggests that this

is an awkward passage for the poet caught as he is between two mythological consciousnesses, one in the course of dying, the other in the course of being born. It is, for the poet, a situation both contradictory and paradoxical: in this most unlikely time (a time, in fact, in which the mythological is most generally rejected), we are experiencing a renewal of the myth consciousness in literature; in this, the most positivistic and "scientific" time, we are consumed with an interest in the meaning and intent of dreams; in this, the most widely advertised "empirical" and "rationalistic" age, we are increasingly concerned with the imagination; and, in this era of the Nietzschean and theological "death of God," we are experiencing a rebirth of the numinous. These renewals are appearing in both strange and simple forms; but whether strange or simple, it is essential to note that they are renewals with a difference.46

The difference Hopper speaks of is that not only is the "outside" pantheon of gods, angels, and demons gone, but in the new mythology the "outside" world of objects is also gone. The new myths "function from within, like archetypes of the unconscious, and point the way to what the imagination is doing in the time of the crisis of the 'mythological consciousness.'"47 This is in one sense nothing new (thus it is a renewal), since the pantheons almost certainly developed from archetypes of the unconscious to begin with, but the difference is that the mystery is located more precisely among us and on this planet. That is, the gods are gone and so is scientific objectivity--as a god--gone. In the "mythological consciousness" today, there is, as

46Ibid., p. 119.
47Ibid., p. 123.
Oedipa discovered, "nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world" (p. 123).

These three novels dramatize the "crisis of the 'mythological consciousness'" by illuminating the agony of modern Grail questers who cannot accept the pseudomyths of the dominant culture--as Oedipa discovered, "Pierce Inverarity was really dead" (p. 133)--but who also sense that a viable myth to replace it has not yet emerged from the confusion of this transitional time. Their agony is increased, however, by tantalizing intimations that the myth is indeed emerging and could be used if one knew where to venture--or had the courage to go there.
CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IMPECCABLE SPIRIT:
SAUL BELLOW'S MR. SAMMLER

Saul Bellow is vitally concerned with the human struggle to create out of chaos an order by which men can act with decency and responsibility without ignoring the abyss. His involvement in this effort is distinguished from Vonnegut's by degree; whereas Vonnegut, by his own admission, is interested in sophomoric questions which when answered have little impact on life, Bellow is concerned profoundly with how the world can survive. Bellow's Mr. Sammler is like Oedipa Maas might be after Tristero unambiguously makes itself known, omitting, however, an explanation of what meaning its existence points to. Sammler seems, in Bellow's account of his life, to make the journey across hell, where he finds a Grail that has no messages on it, seems to restore no kingdom, and arouses only some interest in the people--but is nevertheless the Grail.

In creating Mr. Sammler, Bellow understood himself to be tapping the deep sources from which religious images traditionally have come. Insofar as he deals with experiences that are usually ignored by a rational approach, he furthers
the mythical function of novels. Bellow said,

I think that [writers] became conscious in the 19th century of the fact that they were stopping a gap, that the magic or enchantment of life—represented until then primarily by religion—was vanishing in the midst of the industrial, technical, rational revolutions. [They were] very clearly aware . . . that it was up to them to provide this sense of vanishing magic or beauty or enchantment, and to preserve some sense—which is, I think, innate in every human being—of the strangeness of life, of the odd harmonies or inconsequent beauties of existence.¹

If this innate sense is in every human being, and if Bellow successfully taps it, then he is involved not only in preserving but also in awakening basic sensibilities upon which myths are built. Rational language will not contain strangeness, odd harmonies, or inconsequent beauties, but poetic language sometimes will, and if it does so in a fashion that illuminates the relation of people to the magic and enchantment of life in a convincing way, then mythical activity has occurred.²

¹Saul Bellow, "Mystic Trade—The American Novelist Saul Bellow Talks to Jim Douglas Henry," Listener, 81 (1969), 707. Eliaide's view, with which Bellow agrees, is contained in the following statement: "It is well known that, like the other literary genres, the epic and the novel continue mythological narrative, though on a different plane and in pursuit of different ends. In both cases it is a question of telling a significant story, of relating a series of dramatic events that took place in a more or less fabulous past. . . . What we consider important is the fact that in modern societies the prose narrative, especially the novel, has taken the place of the recitation of myths in traditional and popular societies." Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 190-91.

Such fundamental mythical activity is frequently present in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*; Bellow was conscious of this, and the activity is more prominent in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* than in any of Bellow's previous novels. *Herzog*, for example, is a novel of quest, not for an answer to the problem life presents to Herzog, but instead for a story to tell himself which would enable him to live with his problem. In this sense, *Herzog* reflects a shift from Bellow's earlier "victim" novels. There, the problem the protagonists confront is overwhelming; in *Herzog* the search is not finally satisfied, but at least the possibility that the search is worth making is demonstrated. By about 1968-69, however, Bellow (through Sammler) rejected "with all his heart" the conviction of the Broadway crowds (and everyone in, for example, *Seize the Day*) that "reality was a terrible thing, and that the final truth about mankind was overwhelming and crushing" (p. 255). More positively, Bellow said in 1967 that "there may be some truths which are, after all, our friends in the universe.""
Thus Bellow understands himself to be dealing with people in pursuit of, or in terrified escape from, basic life-and-death questions, or, in religious terminology, with God-questions. His analysis of contemporary society in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is conceived in this "religious" context. The perspective is set not primarily in social terms (the effect man's environment has had on him), nor in terms of his intellectual or economic development. When Bellow deals with these aspects of life, he considers how they affect the "spirit," or that in humans which responds to the most profound sources of life and death.

Because of this concern for basic questions, Bellow asserts that good novels will have "a kind of mysticism" in them in that they deal with the non-rational.\(^7\) He thinks of himself as "a sort of medium. I'm very well aware that I receive impulses--from what sources I don't know. I think that I have a sort of shamanistic character."\(^8\) This understanding is, according to some authorities on myth, precisely what is needed today. Man is in no position to hold to unneeded and useless god concepts, nor is he in a position to do without a sense of mystery and of the demands that sensitive people have felt were made on their lives. But a rational statement of the situation is not especially

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\(^7\)Bellow, "Mystic Trade," p. 707.

\(^8\)Ibid.
helpful; what is needed are shamanistic authors, recreating inclusive constructs which can order life in contemporary forms by which people will be able to enliven their imaginations, live with their despair, and create the world. Bellow has the kind of self-sufficiency needed to tap the sources of the times and develop, without the limitations of doctrine or current accepted belief, the needed myths. James Harris does not overstate the function of Mr. Sammler's Planet when he says that "the real thrust of the novel is the revelation of God through a new pronouncement of Logos." Mr. Sammler's Planet is therefore a novel that deals seriously with the collapse and possible recreation of man's relationship to himself and his universe. Elements of the comic are in the novel, but usually to parody shallow approaches to life that are considered basic by masses of people. Mr. Sammler is perhaps a persona for Bellow, but this question makes little difference in interpretation. Bellow claims that a


10James Neil Harris, "One Critical Approach to Mr. Sammler's Planet," Twentieth Century Literature, 18 (Oct. 1972), 248. By "Logos," Harris means the identification of what people know is the divine force in the world (p. 247). This can perhaps be stated more precisely. The Logos is the statement (in attractive and compelling form) that the sense men have of the divine force in the world should determine the nature of their lives.

"character" has his own logic... This man [Sammler] seemed to me to be the sort of man to whom this would be happening: he happens to have religious feelings. I did not choose such a person for the purpose of expressing my own religious convictions. I was simply following the thread of his being. I found a clue and I was winding it up, going inwards. It brought me to religion. If it had brought me elsewhere, I'd have written something else.12

Of course, if Bellow listens to some "source" from which he believes he "receives impulses," then Mr. Sammler was developed from that source or that belief in a source. Given this understanding and Bellow's deep awareness of the spirit-struggles of man, perhaps Harris is correct in saying that the question of whether Sammler is Bellow "means absolutely nothing," since the novel is primarily written in the mythic mode, and "myth finds persona quite conducive towards its affirmation of mythic figures."13

The sense in which Mr. Sammler's Planet is mythic can be stated more precisely. The novel is mythic in that the problem Sammler deals with is how man can most adequately relate to the universe in which the ancient orders no longer hold things together. In one sense this quest is internal or psychological for Sammler, as is most mythical activity in the twentieth century.14 In a more important sense, Mr.

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13 Harris, p. 248.

14 Eliade, p. 77.
Sammler is Uncle Sam, or perhaps Western history stored up and now played out again. He was born in 1895 and his "seven decades" are possibly representative of the seven decades of spiritual struggle in the twentieth century.

Even his personal problems in the novel never remain simply personal. His concern for Shula, Elya, Wallace, Margotte, and Angela is never concern for those people alone, but they are always occasions for Sammler to brood on the nature of man in the 1960's and to question how a sensitive and concerned person can relate to that world.

Because Sammler tries to relate in a responsible way, he suffers ("self-molestation," he calls it [p. 86]), and because of his suffering, his longevity, and his efforts, he becomes, in spite of himself, a symbol (p. 86). In one sense he is simply a symbol of the times, having been raised with Victorian manners, participated in the rationalistic social reforms of the twenties and thirties, and been made the object of meaningless death during the war. He tried

15 For both "faint resonances with 'Uncle Sam' and 'storage battery,' which is Sammler in German," see "Saul Bellow: Seer with a Civil Heart," Time, 9 Feb. 1970, p. 81.

16 If so, this would be a repetition of an old technique for Bellow. Robert Schulman points out that Augie March was organized "partly around a parallel between the stages in Augie's life and that of the nation—the twenties, the Crash, the politics of the thirties, World War II, post-War prosperity and problems—such that Augie's history becomes a representative history." "The Style of Bellow's Comedy," PMLA, 83 (1968), 113.
to be indifferent to the world with its unresolvable problems during the fifties, and now finds himself caught between an attraction to his surroundings and a deep conviction that surroundings cannot alone give comfort. This roughly parallels the experience of Western people during this century.

As a symbol, he is also a "judge and a priest," though he wants to be only himself (p. 86). He doesn't know what he is a symbol of, but he points beyond himself as a judge to his sense of responsibility to "'higher values,' to 'civilization,' pressing forward and so on" (p. 86), and as priest he points to the mysteries represented by those who have died and lived in tombs. The priest aspect of Sammler is partly represented by his damaged eye, which is a sign of his having lived through death, and which now "seemed to turn in another direction [from current events], to be preoccupied separately with different matters" (p. 32). He is also deeply concerned that he deliver the word to the world and more immediately to Elya by getting spoken in brief form the qualities that are still embedded in the structures of life but are not now being said.\textsuperscript{17} Delivering the word

\textsuperscript{17}Sammler as priest differs from the priestly function of obedience to which Campbell objects in \textit{The Flight of the Wild Gander} (p. 189), in that Sammler's concern is to deliver an appropriate, life-communicating sense to Elya in order to comfort him as he dies. Campbell opposes the authoritarian function which prevents men from setting out on the adventure of their own lives. Note that Sammler knows he could communicate if he were with Elya, but the greedy, violent nature of his neighbors
is a traditional priestly function.

The effect of a comprehensive "religious" novel like Mr. Sammler's Planet might be to contribute to something like the "growing agreement among the best minds" which H. G. Wells expected could be the vehicle for more spiritual forces presently neglected by a chaotic and sensualist society "to fly forward again and recover ascendancy" (p. 53). However, Bellow knows that intellectual agreement alone is inadequate. Wells' Open Conspiracy idea, while entertained by Sammler as a possibility, is effectively rejected along with the Cosmopolis idea as being "kindhearted, ingenuous, stupid" (p. 41). That is, a "rational, scientific attitude toward life" will not adequately contain the human experience because life is more than rational. According to Sammler, all that such explanations will do is to help prepare the new version of what people tell themselves life is about. These new versions are used by people because they no longer know what life is: "Humankind, crazy for symbols, trying to utter what it doesn't know itself" (p. 23).18

prevents his arrival. This contrasts with Oedipa Maas, who senses that she not only has little to communicate, but cannot communicate with those who seem to have much to tell her.

18Vonnegut's Bokononism is one example of a "new version" which provided some symbols used by youth to tell themselves what life is about. However, even Vonnegut knew that it failed to express adequately the terrifying nature of human freedom and responsibility. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and The Crying of Lot 49 are good illustrations of how empty life is without adequate symbols and myths.
Yet Sammler is totally skeptical about the value of such versions of life, even though they might embody some reality. The Germans, he thinks, created one version, the modern Method based on rationality and calculation, and now the present version tries to balance that achievement by getting closer to nature (as in such novels as *Stranger in a Strange Land*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). But the shortcoming of such efforts to "balance" the picture of life is that they are responses only to the last "century or so," and depend on blowing away "all the old fusty stuff" (p. 21). The ancient wisdom and struggle of humanity is ignored not only in time, but such responses to brief spans of human history also tend to ignore the grave and constant aspects of life. In the same conversation in which Sammler muses on the inadequacy of explanations and arguments for forming "the next common version," he suggests that there is some "very old human knowledge," the defiance of which is extremely serious. Such ancient wisdom (such as knowing what murder is) is neither the product of the past century or so, nor is it the product of a Method such as the Germans produced during the second World War (p. 21).

The effect of the statement Sammler makes is that archetypes and the myths that are formed from them contain the wisdom by which people can live, and people can know this wisdom. He has not posited a set of unchanging dogmas, but more in the sense of Jung has indicated the presence of certain basic impulses within humans which would permit the development of common wisdom through time, always, however, through long periods of time and in those people who are sensitive to basic human problems.

The context of the novel is not only religious and chronologically expansive, it is spatially complete in that it is planetary. The title points to the basic incident hovering in the background of the novel, providing the occasion for much that is thought, the moon-launching. This event permits a reconception of the earth as a place from which man can launch out to other worlds. Sammler's question is whether man should despair of this earth, wear it out and discard it, or perhaps probe the deeps of the common, discovering its secrets, creating the justice proper to it, before he launches out. Those who do go, he notes, always take something of mystical value with them from the earth—as though conscious of not having fully derived the value from the earth they have left. Sammler's planet is

20 Note the significance of the moon launching for novelists who are concerned with the human condition: Wright Morris in A Life and Fire Sermon, Vonnegut in Breakfast of Champions, Pynchon in Gravity's Rainbow, and John Updike in Rabbit Redux.
the earth, and the time of departure from it is an appropriate time for summing up where we have been and for re-dramatizing the forms archetypal wisdom is taking in this seemingly conclusive time.

In order to do so, Bellow shows what disturbs Sammler both in the dominant, middle-class culture and in the radical youth movement, which seems to rebel against that culture. Sammler senses that the problem behind the other problems of Western man is that he has lost the power to deal effectively with the spirit, or, put differently, he can no longer tell himself stories or myths that can enable him to order his world. Thus he explains occurrences and feelings instead of being able to distinguish between them for value or usefulness. Man has lost Sammler's desire for "short views," in which much is summed up, as it is in a symbol or myth. James Niel Harris's comment on "explaining" and "distinguishing" as used by Sammler is helpful in understanding why Sammler prefers distinguishing:

"To explain" is to make something not totally intelligible plain; "to distinguish" is to discern within those things already explained some kind of distinctive quality or essence about those things. This kind of quality may then be used as a postulate for a taxonomic system, a theory of literature or a philosophy. . . . The object of distinction seems always drawn toward the quintessential element capable of ordering the matter distinguished.21

21 Harris, pp. 238-39. Heinlein, and to some extent Vonnegut, are concerned with explaining, not distinguishing.
Distinguishing, then, is the ability to see or speak that in experience which can create the order for which Sammler longs so powerfully.

In the novel, Sammler offers some observations on how Western man lost the ability to distinguish. The state in which man suffers now is one in which he is overwhelmed by too many experiences—his receptors are open too much, leaving him "in a state of nervous chaos" (p. 236). The result is that "the many impressions and experiences of life seemed no longer to occur each in its own proper space, in sequence, each with its recognizable religious or aesthetic importance" (p. 27). His inability to distinguish is a result of his loss of a myth by which he can order and evaluate the significance of the parts of his life. Recognizable religious or aesthetic importance is not a quality somehow inherent in events, but is determined by the commonly agreed upon sacred stories and artistic values in a community. Without the ability to recognize importance in some events, the person is presented with only chaos, which appears to be an acceleration of experience; such chaos and acceleration compel the person to receive too much, depriving him "because of volume, of mass, of the power to impart design" (p. 28). The result is despair, in the face

22It is an acceleration, in the sense that a multiplicity of styles becomes available when the consensus of a society disintegrates and even individual persons live several lives. Ken Kesey captured this disintegration extremely well in Big Nurse's patients.
of which society pursues gross ends.

Sammler believes that Western man lost the power to distinguish basically because he pursued ends which resulted from the Puritan revolution. He indicates that the Puritan viewpoint "had forced itself onto the material world, given all power to material processes, [and] translated and exhausted religious feeling in so doing" (p. 53). The effect of the translation is that when the world seems too small for us, too filled with experiences, and we sense our imprisonment, we turn to the same material processes that confined our senses to get us out by taking us away from the earth. But, as Sammler notes, "Distance is still finite" (p. 52). Getting to the moon would not release man from the multiplicity of experience he has created, nor would it restore the lost religious sense.

Further, Sammler thinks that even the possibility of escaping the earth accelerates the disintegration of values. Why should anything remain if we are to leave it? Now, because all seems to be coming apart, there are "people justifying idleness, silliness, shallowness, distemper, lust--turning former respectability inside out" (p. 12). This means that "The labor of Puritanism now was ending" (p. 33), not in the sense that people are turning to the

23 However, at times when chaos on earth seems especially evident, Sammler considers that a new, austere priesthood of moon people might be attractive. He later dismisses this as an escape.
religious, or the spirit, but in the sense that materialism has pushed through the discipline that the Puritans concentrated on it until now madness, lust, and other forms of disintegration are in style and the old austerity is thought to be foolish. The only discipline remaining is murderous. The result—and this is one of Sammler's central grievances—is that order has been lost, and people inevitably despair without order.

The loss of order is developed most elaborately in Sammler's meditation which concludes the first half of the novel, musings he makes to himself as he prepares to meet Dr. Lal, the Indian who thinks like a German rationalist (using the Method) (pp. 125-37). Sammler thinks of leaving the earth for the moon in "metaphysical" terms, as he says later; otherwise the trip has no interest for him. He suspects that "everything [is] being done to make it intolerable to abide" on this "glorious planet," and that such treatment is the result of a "scorched earth strategy" designed (insofar as there is any design at all) to leave nothing to death (p. 125). Thus, death, or futurelessness, is the unconquerable enemy, the total threat to man when he is deprived of a sense of order.

24 The following passages indicate the importance of this point in Mr. Sammler's Planet: "Humankind could not endure futurelessness. As of now, death was the sole visible future" (p. 71). "Madness [is] a result of the despair we feel before infinities and eternities" (p. 156). In the United States, we are "wading naked into the waters of paradise, et cetera. But always a certain despair underlying
the reconciliation of consciousness with death is a primary function of myth, which indicates that if the mythical structures have collapsed, then death is the enemy—it has regained its sting:

for man has not only to be led by myth from the infantile attitude of dependency to an adult assumption of responsibility in terms of the system of sentiments of his tribe, but also, in adulthood, to be prepared to face the mystery of death: to absorb the *mysterium tremendum* of being: for man, like no other animal, not only knows that he is killing when he kills but also knows that he too will die... Furthermore, even in the period of childhood, and certainly throughout one's adult years, the wonder of death—the awesome, dreadful transformations that immediately follow death—strike the mind with an impact not to be dismissed. The reconciliation of consciousness with the monstrous thing that is life—which lives on death, terminates in death... is a function served by all primitive and most high-culture mythologies that is of no less weight and consequence than the function of imprinting a sociology.25

Sammler believes, like Pynchon, that death, or the void, terrifies modern man because he has only flimsy illusory powers with which to ward it off. Since trying to cover it with embroidery does not permit man to deal with it and perhaps even to become reconciled to it, then he seems to intend to defile everything and flee, either to another world or into oblivion.26

underlining pleasure, death seated inside the health-capsule, steering it, and darkness winking at you from the golden utopian sun" (p. 146).


26Sammler believes he has what Elya needs in order to be able to face his death, but he is separated from Elya by the confusion of modern man. Thus, even those who sense some order in life are hampered by those who seem to defile everything.
In considering this problem Sammler recalls his experiences with death in the Zamosht Forest and in Israel, concluding with his own views on taking life. He knows it is "one of the luxuries" from his own experience of taking a life, but in the past it was reserved for the aristocracy or was disregarded at the very bottom of society. Thus revolutions were bloody (and Sammler understands the last three centuries to have been centuries of revolution) because "in a revolution you took away the privileges of an aristocracy and redistributed them" (p. 133). The middle part of society envies and worships the aristocratic power to kill; for a middle-class man, a saint is one who is able to kill and is thereby equal to, or part of, the elite. However, Sammler knows this is a perversion of the idea of the saint, if the saint is thought of as Søren Kierkegaard conceived of him, as the Knight of Faith: he is at home in the finite, having already set his relation with the infinite, and does not require the extraordinary, such as killing, to complete his life. But for the middle-class Western man, the Knight of Faith is one "capable of cutting the throat of his Isaac upon God's altar" (pp. 60, 133).

The reason, Sammler speculates, that the middle class fell for the "glamour of killers" is that it had "invested

27Angela and Feffer are two examples of people within Sammler's circle who had done so. Angela especially loves the romance of the outlaw. Even Sammler is fascinated with the pickpocket, experiencing a heightened vision when he sees the pickpocket in action.
everything in material expansion" and now as a result "faced disaster" (p. 134). Closely related is the work of reason, which has taken the spirits and demons from the external world and made them interior: "mankind had never lived without possessing demons and had to have them back!" (p. 71).

This allows madness to be the excuse for aberrant human activity instead of demonology, and madness is necessary for humans who want to create interest in a situation when they "feel themselves overwhelmed by giant forces of organized control" (p. 134). These forces of control are the result of society's putting all its energies into material expansion; as a result, killing and madness are used as excuses for arousing interest. For example, Elya Gruner tries to carry a law suit through the New York courts against an insurance company but finds the companies have tied up the lawyers and the courts in order to prevent such action against them.

Rich men, who are the heroes when society's goal is material expansion, are "winners in . . . permissible criminality" (p. 72) and would be outlaws if the goal were expansion of the psyche. The underlying implication is that the middle part of society, having no standards or spiritual life of its own, invests everything in the same material values from which the forces of organized control operate, so that no significant opposition to such abuses of power and justice are possible. All that most people can do is to try to appear mad in order to make something seem interesting, and
"even this madness is also to a considerable extent a matter of performance, of enactment" (pp. 134-35). Playing at madness is both an excuse for escaping duties and a way of providing interest. This latter, Sammler adds, is the "supreme concept of dullards" (p. 209).

Madness is also a "base form of the religious life" (p. 134). However, the madness on Broadway is perverse; it does not lead to true religions or to myths which would serve to "bring the human order into accord with the celestial," or universal. Underlying the present madness and exposing it as something other than the "thorough madness" which once possessed prophets is a sense of duty in which people maintain attachments to other people, go to work, and thereby show their respect for order. However, the religious and spiritual depth is gone from this sense of order, since those who follow it "hate the undisciplined to the point of murder. Thus the working class, disciplined, is a great reservoir of hatred," made up of those who are "glad when disorderly men are killed. All of them, killed" (p. 135). Discipline, where it exists, seems grounded in a terror of freedom instead of in a conviction that order can be a basic expression of love (p. 208).

Therefore, as Sammler put it, men had had too much faith in his ability to create from material things a utopia;

now, having abandoned his spirit life and any comprehensive way of ordering his universe, he feels despair "before infinities and eternities." He wishes to escape "the common life," because, since he has not created a utopia of it, it seems oppressive. So, having liberty and "supplied also with ideas, [they] mythologize themselves" (p. 135) But this does not mean the creation of imaginative stories which enable people to sense the unity and wonder of life, but is an effort "to get away ... from the death of their species" (p. 135). Thus they create a kind of parody of the saintly life: "signifying by a kind of madness devotion to, availability for, higher purposes" (p. 136). But the saint is one driven by something beyond himself, not one who is available for higher purposes if they happen to appear. In the latter form, mythology is only parodied, and its only point is to escape the terror of infinities and eternities by playing at madness.

Sammler concludes this meditation on the disorder of the middle part of society in the face of death with a statement as revelatory of his desires and opinions as any in the novel:

Just look (Sammler looked) at this imitative anarchy of the streets--these Chinese revolutionary tunics, these babes in unisex toylanl, these surrealist war-chiefs, Western stagecoach drivers--Ph.D.s in philosophy, some of them (Sammler had met such, talked matters over with them). They sought originality. They were obviously derivative. And of what--of Paiutes, of Fidel Castro? No, of Hollywood extras. Acting mythic. Casting themselves into chaos, hoping
to adhere to higher consciousness, to be washed upon the shores of truth. Better, thought Sammler, to accept the inevitability of imitation and then to imitate good things. The ancients had this right. Greatness without models? Inconceivable. One could not be the thing itself—Reality. One must be satisfied with the symbols. Make it the object of imitation to reach and release the high qualities. Make peace therefore with intermediacy and representation. But choose higher representations. Otherwise the individual must be the failure he now sees and knows himself to be. Mr. Sammler, sorry for all, and sore at heart (p. 137).

The key point in this passage is the difference between acting mythic and being mythic. The truly mythic man is one who has made peace with the reality that he will never be the "real." He does best by accepting the truth that one does not, through seeming to be original or through announcing his availability for higher purposes, somehow get "washed up on the shores of truth" or found by those higher purposes. All that is available to man is imitation, through which he can release the high qualities in himself. To be mythic is not to play at being an original saint but is to be "satisfied with symbols" which are the models of greatness available to all. To be giddy about originality usually means to function out of ignorance, thereby hoping to "do the thing pure" (p. 136), which is impossible. According to Sammler, the desire for originality or madness (much the same thing) is basically motivated by a fear of

29 The effort to be "real" is largely an effort to be "natural," or like nature. But nature is not an ideal model for humans to follow. Their models should be the best examples of humanity available, not examples of nature: "But make Nature your God, elevate creatureliness, and you can count on gross results" (p. 54).
the common, which reminds man of death, and both are escapes from the common. Without the current escapism, one could perhaps make peace with the "inevitability of imitation," no longer trying to create interest, but "imitating good things."

A large part of the explanation of this desire for originality and escape from the common is historical, according to Sammler, a result of the last three centuries of revolution. The revolutions have been successful, but the results tend toward disaster because of the chaos that has followed. The success is that if the ends of the revolutions were equality, liberty and the rights of men ("the increasing triumph of Enlightenment" [p. 33]), then these have been achieved, but at the cost of the disintegration of order as it was maintained by the aristocracy, the Church, and the family. Sammler observes often that the middle class has obtained the privileges and freedoms of the aristocracy but not the duties and the ability to appropriately control its freedom. Thus its members have been released to confront their own personalities and the endless chaos of a world without order, living in a kind of "crazy fervor" (p. 34). The privileges and honors of the aristocracy have been inherited through the revolutions "in a debased state"; even the intellectuals attack civilization in the name of any kind of imagined freedom and against any kind of order.
Sammler concludes:

For what it amounted to was limitless demand—in-satiability, refusal of the doomed creature (death being sure and final) to go away from this earth unsatisfied... Recognizing no scarcity of supply in any human department (p. 34).

Sammler's analysis is essential to understanding the absence of effective myth in the middle part of Western society. Western man refuses, as Eliade indicated, to pass through the initiatory trials to adulthood, and he seems to "settle down with his anxiety before Nothingness apparently without issue." This is an unheard-of situation among societies with strong mythical traditions, since they know that the initiatory experience introduces them to death in order that they may live without running from it. But now, because Westerners have been promised satisfaction in revolution after revolution, the initiation is disregarded; Samantha, the bride of life for Scanlon, is expected without taking the journey through hell. Much of the problem is contained in a conversation between Boyd (The Field of Vision), who knew about imitating good models, and young Gordon, representing in this instance the present generation:

"Kid—" said Boyd, giving a twist to the head, "how about me and you taking a walk on the water?"
"You don't walk on water," said the boy, soberly. "You swim in it."

Naturally. And if you don't swim, you stay clear of it. To eliminate the risks, you simply didn't run them. You were something. You stopped this goddam hazardous business of becoming anything. Such as a failure. Or a bad example. Or something worse. You were rich, or you were famous, you were John D. Rockefeller without the oil empire, Davy Crockett without the Indians, and the movie starlet without the suicide. You eliminated, that is, the amateur. He ran the risks, he made all the errors, he forgot his lines and got the girls in trouble, and in every instance he lacked the professional touch. The object was to be the champ, not meet him. That entailed risk.31

That is, because of the demand for personal satisfaction, masses of people expect their own experience to have the quality of myth but without the risk invariably associated with the underworld trials of the hero.32 Sammler comments on a society made up of this kind of people:

Millions of civilized people wanted oceanic, boundless, primitive, neckfree nobility. . . . Humankind had lost its old patience. It demanded accelerated exaltation, accepted no instant without pregnant meanings as in epic, tragedy, comedy, or films (p. 149).

This attitude is the result of masses of people assuming that all are equal, which means that all are the elite. But Sammler is displeased with the White Protestant America that permitted such anarchy: "Cowardly surrender. Not a strong ruling class. Eager in a secret humiliating way to come


32See Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968): "And each who has dared to harken to and follow the secret call to the adventure of the hero has known the perils of the dangerous, solitary transit" (p. 22). Campbell also shows that there are no limits to the trials the hero must endure, just as there will also be "a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies, and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land" (p. 109).
down and mingle with the minority mobs, and scream against themselves" (p. 98). Sammler thus thinks of contemporary man as free from the social and religious orders that once determined his world for him, and as being terrified by the presence of an infinity that looks disturbingly like death. These people cannot therefore make decent terms with death, and since they cannot, there are no forms, or myths, through which they can interpret their lives. Life appears as only a chaos of experiences, and man tries to survive by playing "personality louder and louder," since nothing else is left on which to play. That is, since the cosmic myths are gone with the structures of society which supported them, and since man needs to know something "remarkable" in his life in order to provide him with some sense of life, then he tries to make "sub-lunary objects remarkable" (p. 180).

This effort follows from the completion of the Puritan revolution, Sammler speculates. Now everything is invested in the material, which means that Western man expects that if the remarkable, or the mysterious, is to occur anywhere, it will be in the material world, not in the spiritual. They abandoned the ancient stories which men had created out of the grave and constant in their experience because "spiritual" came to mean "not real"; only the material was real.

Order and limits are desirable to Sammler. For example, he prefers to ocean to space, both because he is a "depth" man, wishing to probe life to the bottom instead of flying away from it as Dal does, and because the ocean has a ceiling, or limit, on it, whereas space does not.
One substitute myth which is consistent with an understanding that only the material is productive is that nature is god. "Make Nature your God, elevate creatureliness, and you can count on gross results," Sammler suggests (p. 54). These results are for the most part the "sexual madness" which he confronts almost everywhere, but particularly in Angela Gruner ("sensual womanhood without remission" [p. 31]) who appears elegant but with a coarseness inside and something of a dilapidated appearance when all is not going well for her. But what offends Sammler most about her approach is her lack of "thought and decency" (p. 68). She dresses inappropriately when Elya, her father, who has been offended by her sexual excesses, is dying, and she is shocked that Sammler would suggest that she do anything so out of date as asking her father's forgiveness as he dies. She is a prime illustration of the grossness that can follow from the elevation of nature, or creatureliness, to be one's god.

The other embodiment of the nature ideology is the pickpocket. The outward sign is his elegance—he belongs in the same category of masculine elegance as does Wharton Horricker, Angela's fiancé, and inside all three Sammler detects a coarseness. The pickpocket expects to communicate authority to Sammler by exhibiting his genitalia, which is not surprising if nature is god.

The results of conceiving of nature as god is expressed in a philosophical sense by Sammler's use of Schopenhauer
(after whom Artur Sammler is named), to provide the basic structure for his thought in the novel. According to Schopenhauer, will is the driving force of all things in the universe, including man. Man is unique only in the degree to which he has intelligence, through which he is conscious of the drive of will through him. "Natural" man is driven by his will, but the will is selfish, intent only upon surviving and devouring whatever is about. In man, it is a heartless and cowardly egoist and, therefore, is the cause of evil and sorrow. It is possible for man to negate the will, however, and be no longer bound to the world as the natural man is. The saint, for example, lives in resignation and will-lessness, fully aware of the wickedness of the world as well as of the truth that the same will drives all things, which means that all are one in essence. Therefore, wherever suffering occurs, he will feel sympathy for the pain of others as if it were his own.

Sammler recalls particularly that the will overpowers everything except ideas, and that "the organs of sex are the seat of the Will" (p. 191). Thus the presentation of the pickpocket's genitalia is, as Sammler suggests, the revelation of an "instrument of the Will ... his metaphysical warrant" (p. 191). Thus Sammler longs for and lives by the old forms that support ideas of the good, but the world has become immersed in the material, the natural, and because of that is lost in chaos and hopelessness.
That Sammler in large part follows this aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy is evident from his consistent emphasis on the necessity for order and forms (he follows the old mode of politeness, never leaves his bed unmade, smokes a certain number of cigarettes each day and no more [p. 199]) and is summed up in a conversation with Wallace, who is the paradigm of the undisciplined man, and who can finish nothing he starts, claiming such characteristics as he has are simply those of "his generation," which has no roots nor desires any. After he has broken pipes in the attic looking for money that he thinks his father has hidden, Wallace notes that he and his generation are different from Sammler in that they never had any dignity to start with which they could lose, then goes on to indicate that he, like the others, uses his madness as an excuse for his failure. Referring to the burst water pipes, Wallace and Sammler sum up the difference between themselves:

"Wallace said,] "It always turns out like this. Is that my message to the world from my unconscious self?"

"Why send such messages? Censor them. Put your unconscious mind behind bars on bread and water."

"No, it's just the mortal way I am. You can't hold it down. It must come out. I hate it too."

Lean Mr. Sammler, delicately applying the light pail to the pipe, while the rapid water splashed (p. 221).

The "flood" which results not only recalls the approaching death of Elys but also the mythical flood of Genesis, in that the flood was caused by the lack of control and consequent selfishness of the people.
Using ideas like Schopenhauer's, Sammler has told Wallace that he does not have to be a victim of the mortal way that he is, that it is possible for man to control his unconscious will, and that he can starve it out and kill it. But Wallace, typical of his generation, insists on being victimized by his unconscious, using it as an excuse for his mad bungling. Finally, Wallace's gross awkwardness is neatly contrasted with Sammler's lean, delicate stance while he works with flimsy tools to control the rapid flood of chaos which flows from the works of undisciplined people like Wallace ("You had to stop and turn and wait for them" [p. 220]).

Sammler is even more critical of the radical youth and hippies than he is of the lost middle class or of the pickpocket. He has nothing good to say of the radicals, essentially because they are only destructive with no new style or order to propose. He acknowledges the reality of the problem against which their protest is directed ("a corrupt tradition built on neurosis and falsehood" [p. 37]). He believes their revolt will not help, however. They only fool themselves into thinking they are establishing a new "wholeness" and are being "real" when in actuality they are submitting to their own undeveloped wills (arrested at the stage of toilet training). As a result, the refinements and ideals that civilization at its best has developed are dismissed. Thus the radicals, through their
passion to be real, are brutal and act without dignity (pp. 43-45). Because of a "childish notion of 'wholeness'" (which seems to mean living in response to the "natural force," or will, in oneself), they fall into an adolescent madness in which they dream that the technologically developed world will succumb to their "power." But Sammler's vision is that "An oligarchy of technicians, engineers, the men who ran the grand machines . . . would come to govern vast slums filled with bohemian adolescents, narcotized, beflowered, and 'whole'" (pp. 166-67). In their idolization of primitivism as representing the "real," or wholeness, they develop unrealistic views, such as believing that the "real purpose of civilization is to permit us all to live like primitive people and lead a neolithic life in an automated society" (p. 207).

In short, Bellow does not think we need further reminders of chaos. Both the radicals and the hippies are "levelers," rejecting (in theory at least) authority and order, both of which Sammler thinks are necessary if civilization is to continue. Humanity does not now need further reminders of its savage prehistory, but needs compelling images of good men who know their duty and who do it "daily and promptly" (p. 87). The return-to-nature theme of the hippies is an ancient mythical theme, usually representing the desire to return to Paradise—but Sammler is clear that such a return will not happen miraculously. The images of nature in Mr. Sammler's Planet are of nature
destroyed, put off limits or in a cage to be preserved, like animals in a zoo. A return to that nature is not a return to Paradise, but the nature will have to be restored first by the civilization which destroyed it. The youth are trapped by their ignorance of history. They desire the primordial experience, but knowing only their desires well, they regress to the acultural condition of a child, which has historically been known as "sin."35

The hippies and radicals are dismissed by Sammler as false experiments. They seem willing not only to take a stand in ruins, but to promote the further creation of ruins, whereas Bellow urgently desires the creation of order, which will enable men to stand intelligently and constructively in the ruins: "Perhaps the best is to have some order within oneself. Better than what many call love. Perhaps it is love" (p. 208).

Most of Bellow's characters in previous novels are involved in chaos, and Harris is correct when he argues that Bellow parodies these characters in their search for an answer to the human problem, or at least for a way to live with it.36 The search for experiences as fulfillment of

35Eliade, Myth and Reality, pp. 77, 125.

36Harris, pp. 239-41.
life is shown to lead to both personal and social chaos. The desire for the extraordinary, the primitive prince (Augie March and Henderson), or the primeval natural man as the source of answers is parodied in the pickpocket and his production of genitalia as the evidence of his power. The intellectual search (Herzog) is parodied in H. G. Wells and the Bloomsbury group. Remaining is old Mr. Sammler, still torn by the opposites of the biological life force and the rational, but affirming that every man knows what is demanded of him. Yet men expend their lives in a terrified effort to find something other than what they know is required of them. The principles have been established and are re-established in every soul; still every man seeks a way to deny the principles and has failed to construct a contemporary image of the ideal man.

Bellow's point is that man needs new images of goodness in order to release him from bondage to his will. This amounts to a suggestion that our longing for coherence and sacredness (pp. 83-88) is not fulfilled because we no longer have stories that convince and sustain us in our relations with the infinite, especially as that confronts us in death. Man senses that the overwhelming truth about life is that it is meaningless. Therefore, Bellow created in Sammler a man who had been chosen to demonstrate meaningless by dying an absurd death, but who escaped by living in a tomb and is now obstinately determined to resist the effort
to make his life demonstrate meaninglessness (p. 238).

It would be impossible to determine precisely what Bellow wanted Sammler to represent, but it would seem that if Bellow believes himself to be in contact with some force beyond himself, then Sammler is a form that the impulses received could take in 1968, given Bellow's character and the nature of life today. This form is one which accepts neither scientific rationality nor meaninglessness as final truth, but suspects that rationality or the desire for the "natural" will result in a conviction of absurdity. The only valuable truth for Sammler is the metaphysical or the mystical. Modern rationalists of the spirit such as Adorno, Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, he "found to be worthless fellows" (p. 37); thirteenth-century mystics constitute Sammler's best reading.

The occasion for Sammler's observations is primarily the demonstration of man's ability to leave his planet, which could mean that the world was about to change (p. 259). Sammler considers this among a population riding the crest of three centuries of revolution and having the freedom and wealth to pursue its desires as no masses have had before.

37 This is again a slap by Bellow at the counter culture. Theodore Roszak, for example, believes that Marcuse and Brown are "major social theorists among the disaffiliated young of Western Europe and America," and that this fact "must be taken as one of the defining features of the counter culture." The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition (New York: Anchor, 1969), p. 84.
It is, as has been shown, precisely these people who are terrified of the infinite and who feel that the truth about human life is overwhelming. They lack the ability to see order and pattern in life and, perhaps because they expected the scientific method to produce perfection, they are convinced that life is meaningless. However, in providing a way to get to the moon, some hope has been aroused. Many expect that freedom from the imperfection of human forms, or even a divorce from states of being that we know, will be possible if they can escape from this planet (pp. 52, 55, 215). Mr. Sammler's planet becomes in this view a place to ravage, then flee; it is reduced to a point of embarkation instead of being a home (pp. 124-25).

Bellow is dealing directly with the world-constructs of men. On the one hand is the popular view that whatever one wants, he should have; if the earth will not provide it, he will leave it for another place that might provide what he wants. This picture of life ignores the archetypal images that have sustained humanity, replacing them with an image of continual progress which, now that reality has intervened to show the limits of progress, makes living seem hopeless. The function of myth is to reveal sustaining models that give meaning to the world and human life so that the world is apprehended as intelligible and articulate;38

38Eliade, Myth and Reality, p. 145.
however, the myths of progress, wealth and freedom for all, and of the goodness of the "natural," have collapsed and life appears unintelligible and chaotic as a result.

These basic modern myths have all overvalued the individual person by indicating that life should provide him with whatever he desires: each one should get what he wants, and the progress provided by science and technology will provide it, or if it does not, then life in harmony with the natural will meet his desires. Joseph Campbell has shown the impossibility of maintaining any image of life which overvalues the individual:

Like most of . . . us, one may invent a false, finally unjustified, image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning because one represents the good. Such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos. The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is effected through a realization of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all.39

Thus contemporary man, convinced of his own uniqueness, expects instant cures. Like H. G. Wells before World War II, people in the United States expect to cure sin by changing "Sin to Sickness, a change of words . . . and then enlightened doctors would stamp the sickness out" (p. 160). However, as the intellectual leaders begin to realize that

the nature of man cannot be changed, they opt for another cure, that of "launching moonward" (p. 160). Dr. Lal is the clearest representation of the world-view that is determinative but fuzzy in the minds of Wallace, Angela, Shula, and others. Lal admits and is fascinated with the basic order in the biological and chemical world, but insists that the order exists only to bring humanity to a point of freedom from order. In the same way that Lal feels a need to break away from his parents, he believes man should break away from order and duty. Lal in effect agrees with the crowd on Broadway, that the truth about man is overwhelmingly bad. He thinks the brain is beyond our capacity to understand and only makes us "feel the unfitness of [our] personal human efforts" (p. 205). One should deal with this sense of unfitness, not by probing into the sources of human experience for stories of significance, but by using technology in order to escape human experience. A moon-voyage is necessary because "human beings must feel that there is a way out, and that the intellectual power and skill of their own species opens this way. The invitation to the voyage [is] the Baudelaire desire to get out ... of human circumstances" (p. 200). Earlier, Sammler had made a suitable reply to such escapist tendencies: "This is not the way to get out of spatial-temporal prison. Distant is still finite. Finite is still feeling through the veil, examining the naked inner reality with a gloved hand" (p. 52). Thus,
in the same way that Wells despaired of reforming humanity
with rational social methods, so the Dr. Lals will find
no salvation for man in technological methods. No instant
cures are to be expected. Further, in Sammler's view,
cures are not desirable.

The reason he neither expects nor desires cures for
the human condition stems from his belief in archetypal
images and consequent sense that life cannot be expected
to be rationally sound. He expects that any postures taken
will be "mocked by their opposites" (p. 110). This has
little to do with intellectual posturing, but has instead
to do with images of being. For example, Sammler's stance
of indifference and detachment is mocked by his uncontroll-
able attraction to the common life, indicated by his
attraction to the pickpocket and the revival of the life
force in him while he talks to Lel. This has to do with
mankind's being caught in a "vivid shuffle with its pangs
of higher intuition from the one side and the continual
muddy suck of the grave underfoot" (p. 238). It has also
to do with Lel's description of man's struggling to be free
from the basic orderly substances of which he is constituted.
As Sammler puts it, it is the encounter of the "disinterested
spirit with fated biological necessities ... the persis-
tent creature" (p. 109). The basic difference between
Sammler's image of this situation and that of Lel and
the others is that they hope to escape it--if they cannot,
then they sense themselves to be defeated and life to be meaningless, whereas Sammler believes that meaning is established in precisely that painful encounter. Lal, in other words, joins Wright Morris's characters, Mrs. Norton, Mr. Baumann, and Mr. Criley, in their effort to skirt around Scanlon's desert, whereas Scanlon and Sammler know that one must go directly into the desert if one wants to get out of it.

For Sammler, then, the common life holds the promise of bliss; one should not or need not try to escape it. He asks,

And what is "common" about "the common life"? What if some genius were to do with "common life" what Einstein did with "matter"? Finding its energetics, uncovering its radiance. But at the present level of crude vision, agitated spirits fled from the oppressiveness of "the common life," separating themselves from the rest of their species, from the life of their species, hoping perhaps to get away (in some peculiar sense) from the death of their species (p. 136).

That is, for the one who has the intelligence and will to see it, life contains ciphers and portents, even in its times of "yellow despair" (pp. 34-35). Life can be seen by such people as "divine entertainment," but this view requires something of a double vision, which Bellow explains in part by providing Sammler with "two different-looking eyes." He often is considering at least "two sets of problems" at the same time, and presents to the world "a slight look of rebuke as well as the look of receptivity" (p. 69). The specifics of the two sets of problems vary, but seem
basically to be on the one hand the problems of the spirit life in which one is indifferent to the "common," and on the other hand to be the attractions of the "common," in which one discovers not only bliss, but also ciphers and portents which point beyond themselves to the spirit world.

The look of rebuke and receptivity seems directed at the same time toward that common life in which "all postures are mocked by their opposites" (p. 110). Sammler, considering the world both as objective reality and as his subjective reaction to it, looks with rebuke on the masses of people struggling to gain satisfaction for their insatiable erotic passions. They represent the will straining to fulfill its desire to feed on all around it without restrictions of discipline. However, Sammler is, at the same time, receptive to and cares for Shula, Wallace, and all the other relations and friends that appear in the novel.

The most penetrating analysis of rebuke and receptivity results from Sammler's meditations on his interior life. He knows that the breast is the source of both stupid stunts and of noble purposes; it contains the blind driving force of the will, which can be destructive and chaotic in the undisciplined and unperceptive person, but which, if controlled by ideas and order, provides the power that sustains man in his passage through the world.

Sammler illustrated by his own life this dialectic of the soul. His musings in Mr. Sammler's Planet often are
a result of his discovery that he has entered the third phase of his life. He was first, in his British period, a man who gained his consolation from his accomplishments and the recognition of those accomplishments by people he admired. This period was a time of pride, and was one in which he agreed with Wells that the world could be reformed through rational methods. He was a man of the world.

In Zamosht Forest during the second World War, he died to that life, discovering the extent to which man is governed by "things . . . not subject to control" which "had to be endured. They had become a power within him which did not care whether he could bear them or not" (p. 126). Although he felt himself to be dead, he had not died; then through the agony of trying to survive he was turned into something "not entirely human." In that state he killed a man and "it was joy" (p. 129).

In the experience in Zamosht Forest "much of the earlier person had disappeared," and a new one emerged, aware of the power of the will and for the first time turning to "the external world for curious ciphers and portents" (pp. 84-86). However, at that time such symbols provoked despair; "bad news for Sammler, bad news for humankind, bad information about the very essence of being was diffused" (p. 85). The message was that he had been called into being and now must wait "painfully, heartachingly, in this yellow despair," without knowing anything
about larger designs or purposes (p. 85). At that time, and for many years afterward, Sammler had no god and resisted interest in the world (p. 130).40

Sammler's approach to life after he emerged from the tomb was the antithesis of his approach during his first period. Whereas he had been a man proud of his connections with important people and involved in plans to change the world, now he was introspective. He avoided both the spiritual and the common life; it was a period during which he had resisted . . . physical impressions. . . . For quite a long time he had felt that he was not necessarily human. He had no great use, during that time, for most creatures. Very little interest in himself. Cold even to the thought of recovery. What was there to recover? Little regard for earlier forms of himself. Disaffected. His judgment almost blank (pp. 108-109).

After ten or twelve years of such disinterestedness, he found himself once again being attracted to his surroundings,

40According to Campbell, "There are . . . two orders of mythology, that of the Village and that of the Forest of Adventure. The imposing guardians of the village rites are those cherubim of the garden gate, their Lordships Fear and Desire, with however another to support them, the Lord Duty, and a fourth, her holiness, Faith: and the aims of their fashionable cults are mainly health, abundance of progeny, long life, wealth, victories in war, and the grace of a painless death. The ways of the Forest Adventurous, on the other hand, are not entered until these guardians have been passed; and the way to pass them is to recognize their apparent power as a figment merely of the restricted field of one's own ego-centered consciousness; not confronting them as 'realities' without . . . but shifting the center of one's own horizon of concern. As Joyce's hero, tapping his brow, muses in Ulysses: 'In here it is I must kill the priest and king.'" Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art, Myths, Dreams, and Religion, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), pp. 171-72. In Mr. Sammler's Planet, Zamosht Forest is the Forest of Adventure, destroying Sammler's ego-centeredness.
"being moved almost comically by momentary and fortuitous sweetness" (p. 109). This signifies the third period of Sammler's life, the present time of the two days the novel includes in present time, and is "a second encounter of the disinterested spirit with fated biological necessities, a return match with the persistent creature" (p. 109). This period of his life is different from the first encounter with such necessities in that then he was trying to be an important man, using the world to serve his ends. Now he returns to the same world as "disinterested spirit," a man who knows the bad news about life; yet, almost against his will, he is being pulled back to encounter the good news: "Bliss from bricks, from the sky! Bliss and mystic joy!" (p. 109). He no longer, in other words, expects that the world will grant him his wishes, but he knows that there are forces not subject to his control which he must nevertheless deal with.

The significance of the three periods is that they show how much farther Bellow has carried Sammler than the other novelists in this study took their heroes. Sammler saw himself dead, under the ground, then alive in a tomb. After that he ventured across the desert for ten years, knowing that "many things inside were ruptured" (p. 130). At last he emerges from the underworld desert, having gone straight through hell, though he did not will it, and now meets the bride of life once more. From his experience
he knows that almost everyone else attempts to skirt around the desert, losing their lives by doing so. The youth put on layers of mythic roles and have "fantasies of vaulting into higher states, feeling just mad enough to qualify" (p. 87). The large middle part of society skirts around by demanding that life give them what they want. This results in impotency, in that nothing is created while demands are being made, so that the personality is played louder to cover the impotency (p. 213). The kingdom is thus struck with impotency; the king is gone.

Few choose to go through such a desert; Sammler was forced to go when he was captured during the war and the Germans attempted to exterminate him along with the rest of the Jews. Govinda Lal represents the Renaissance mentality (he writes with a Gothic hand [p. 99]) of those who count on technical abilities to save us from traversing the desert. We should, he suggests, since we can, break away from Mother Earth and go up as soon as possible (pp. 202-203). Sammler is a depth man, however; he prefers the ocean and has little interest in moon launchings since there is no metaphysical interest in them and since if it were a rational matter we would not go until justice had been established on this planet (p. 216). The point of the title of the novel is that Sammler has, in this third stage of his life, chosen this planet as the locale for bliss,
potency, and god adumbrations. Life will be found by exploring one's everyday experience, not by skirting around that experience to the moon or into fantasies in which this planet is believed to owe contentment and an interesting life to everyone.

One significance of Mr. Sammler's Planet, then, is that it is one of the first of a group of writings which have begun to indicate what the mythical Grail is like in the last one-third of the twentieth century. Bellow has proposed what might restore potency, and his proposals are in harmony with the nature of the contemporary world. For example, although he mentions god, he does not propose, even symbolically, that god is anywhere (as Heinlein does) or that god causes human action or could be blamed for anything man does (as Vonnegut implies in Cat's Cradle). He is opposed to the scientific "Method" as the only source of truth but objects more strongly to those who wish to reunite with the "natural" in opposition to the dominance of the "Method." Both are ways of skirting around the desert.

Some of these are the three books by Carlos Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge (New York: Ballantine, 1968); A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan (New York: Touchstone, 1971); and Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan (New York: Touchstone, 1972); also relevant are parts of William Irwin Thomson, Passages About Earth: An Exploration of the New Planetary Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); and novels such as Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973).
Bellow's view gains much of its strength from its simplicity and solid base in ancient wisdom made contemporary. His basic point is this: we lost the ability to live when we became convinced that the purpose of the world was to satisfy our individual desires. On the contrary, existence is not accountable to man; man has a contract to meet, he knows what it is, and saints and heroes are those who meet this contract: "A few may comprehend that it is the strength to do one's duty daily and promptly that makes saints and heroes" (p. 87). In the meantime, there is in life a mystic quality which enlivens the spirit with "God adumbrations in . . . many daily forms" (p. 216) and with the instinctual sense that "the common life" is not "common" at all, but needs only a genius to find its "energetics" and uncover its radiance. Others choose to divert themselves, trying to create interest in order to entertain themselves, whereas for the "good man" life has not only its pain and demand, but also its bliss, its ciphers and portents. Life provides "God's entertainment" for a person who is "unusually intelligent to begin with, and in addition unusually nimble and discerning" (pp. 69-70).

42 Cf. don Juan's concept of "seeing": according to Castaneda, "seeing" and "looking" were "two distinct manners of perceiving. 'Looking' referred to the ordinary way in which we are accustomed to perceive the world, while 'seeing' entailed a very complex process by virtue of which a man of knowledge allegedly perceives the 'essence' of the things of the world." A Separate Reality, pp. 16-17.

43 Bellow's elitism, a longing for a spiritual (not economic) aristocracy, disturbs some readers, but if the only
There are two primary categories in Bellow's concept of man, both of which involve the necessity of crossing the desert if life is to be found. First, being human "is not a natural gift at all" (p. 277); one has the capacity to be human, which is to say that he can find good models to follow and thereby meet the terms of his contract, or he can indulge his will, try to get only what he wants, and fail to be human. Second, he recognizes that uprightnesq, which comes from the pain of meeting one's contract (doing one's duty), is more to be desired than is the power that one requires who demands that life fulfill his wants.

Being human, the first category, involves listening to what one knows, since everyone knows "what is what" (pp. 238-39, 280). There is some "very old human knowledge" available which is being ignored in the effort to gain personal satisfaction. For example, "the best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred" (p. 21)\(^{44}\) Life is not, therefore, alternative is an equality at the middle level, then everyone is in for mediocrity. He believes strongly in the need for good models, which have not been created in this culture, and, like Ellison, he believes equality is a principle which, before it can be adequately practiced, will require the exhaustion of some "human greed and smallness" (Invisible Man, p. 11).

\(^{44}\)The use of "human beings" by Bellow is similar to the way the Cheyenne use it in Thomas Berger's novel, Little Big Man (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Crest, 1964). The Cheyenne considered themselves to be the center of the universe, the ideal form that man could take. When they were "rubbed out," the old chief, Lodge Skins, simply noted that life would be without a center until the human beings returned.
centered around one's existence. It is "not 'Me and the Universe,'" but "the human being conditioned by other human beings" (p. 125), which means affirming the human bond, saying the words of compassion, of hope and desire, that are needed by others instead of using them to provide only entertainment for "Me" (pp. 125, 238). Bellow can list some of the old human knowledge, which if followed, could identify the "humans":

Trying to live with a civil heart. With disinterested charity. With a sense of the mystic potency of human-kind. With an inclination to believe in archetypes of goodness. A desire for virtue was no accident (pp. 125-26).

Desire for virtue is no accident because one does not naturally desire it. Such a desire must be decisively cultivated and developed over against the will's basic drive for satisfaction of personal desires. Elya, for example, has a "human" look because he met the terms of his contract, in that he wanted to be a good man. This required that he do little of his own free will: "he did what he disliked," followed the model of other good men and "made something of himself" (pp. 163, 276). Knowing "the desirable self that one might be" requires a far different activity than being natural, gaining power, or trying to be an "individual." Knowing "depends in part on the will of the questioner to see merit. It depends on his talent and disinterestedness" (p. 214). Every man who has the will, talent, and disinterestedness
knows that there is something in himself "which he feels it important to continue," and that is the spirit: "The spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of existence" (p. 215).

Sammler's Schopenhauer-like argument develops his conviction that to be human one must negate his will for animal-like personal satisfaction and instead develop his will to know what his duty is toward the spirit. Here, "spirit" seems to mean the "mystic potency" in humanity which can both perceive "archetypes of goodness" and will to become like the archetypes. Beyond that, the mystic potency can enable one to see into the "energetics" of life so that one can "appreciate God's entertainment from the formation of patterns which needed time for their proper development" (p. 69). The best example of seeing such energetics is the incident in which Sammler sees some X's on the windowpanes of buildings about to be demolished. Some marks were "thick loops and open curves," and, on buildings about to be destroyed, they became for Sammler "ciphers and portents" which pointed to the knowledge man has of what is what. This knowledge, he explains in Jungian fashion, comes from capacities, impressions, visions amassed in human beings from the time of origin, perhaps since matter first glinted with grains of consciousness, and were bound up largely with vanities, negations, and revealed only in amorphous hints or ciphers smeared on the windows of condemned shops (p. 84).
Sammler, a man with his "mystic poetncy" operative, is able to see in the common "symbols everywhere, and metaphysical messages" (p. 84). He thus has no need to escape this planet or create interest. The "capacities, impressions, visions amassed in human beings from the time of origin" are the spirit whose growth is the real aim of existence (p. 215). Each man's contract, then, is to will to know what "the best and purest human beings" have amassed, to develop the finest possible models of behavior and thought, and thereby to promote the growth of the spirit.45

Second, the "uprightness" which results from the pain of doing one's duty "daily and promptly" promotes the growth of the spirit (pp. 87, 201). Sammler makes this point when he is opposing Lal's idea that, since "there is no duty in biology" and "duty is hateful," there is no reason man should remain in human circumstances. He should use whatever power and skill he can harness in order to escape the "tiresomeness and vanity of life" (pp. 200-201). But Sammler is convinced that a human being is one who has gone

45In a similar way, don Juan explains that a warrior is one who develops an "impeccable spirit." His point, like Sammler's, is that no other way of living is worthy of a human being: "To seek the perfection of the warrior's spirit is the only task worthy of our manhood." Journey to Ixtlan, p. 138. With regard to death and hardships, don Juan said, "A warrior is only a man. A humble man. He cannot change the designs of his death. But his impeccable spirit, which has stored power after stupendous hardships, can certainly hold his death for a moment, a moment long enough to let him rejoice for the last time in recalling his power. We may say that this is a gesture which death has with those who have an impeccable spirit" (p. 188). For an illustration of such a death, see Old Lodge Skins' death in Little Big Man, pp. 442-445.
beyond biological necessity to will what he knows from the best human experience to be good, then who, having tapped the ancient and interior sources, can see his planet come alive; for him it points as sign and symbol back to man's primeval experience of the eternal. Life is thus not tiresome (though it may be painful) for a human being, and he does not need to escape it. If he desires uprightness and knows that the pain of duty makes the creature upright, then although he might agree with Lal that "duty is pain," he will not agree that therefore "duty is hateful—misery, oppressive" (p. 201). "Uprightness" points to the elevation of humanity over the biological and, if pain of duty is required, he wills to accept the pain with the duty. He does not agree with Lal, who insists that "human beings must feel there is a way out, and that the power and skill of their own species opens this way" (p. 200).

On the contrary, Sammler argues that "power destroys the sanity of the powerful," making them feel that their dreams can be imposed on the real world (p. 199). The human being is one who knows he can gain no comfort from fellow creatures who promise a way out of the world. Sammler cared to read nothing except Meister Eckhart, who wrote

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Poor is he who has nothing. He who is poor in spirit is receptive to all spirit. Now God is the Spirit of spirits. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, and peace. See to it that you are stripped of all creatures, of all consolation from creatures. For certainly as long as creatures comfort and are able to comfort you, you
will never find true comfort. But if nothing can comfort you save God, truly God will console you (pp. 230-31).

Sammner suggests that he does not believe this literally, which one could assume means that he did believe that true comfort was possible only for those who found no comfort in the world and were therefore poor in spirit. As far as god's consoling one, Sammler seems not to take that literally, but to believe simply that bliss comes from one's surroundings when one no longer tries to create bliss for himself.

Being "poor in spirit" is dramatized in the incident in which Eisen smashes the pickpocket's face with his medallions. Sammler connects the event with the destruction of his eye and his own brand of megalomania thirty years before in Zamosht Forest (pp. 264, 268, 270). On both that occasion and this one in New York City, Sammler senses himself to be one who has come back to life from death, but who is also utterly alone. Now he finds that he is powerless to do anything, and "to be so powerless was death," or it is to be poor in spirit.

This experience is one in which Sammler exists in a state peculiarly like that in which Oedipa Maas found herself at the conclusion of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Both are caught between a series of either/or's. Sammler is between the human and non-human states, between content and emptiness, between full and void, meaning and not-meaning, between this world and no world. Flying, freed from gravitation, light with release and dread,
doubting his destination, fearing there was nothing to receive him (p. 264).

Oedipa could not accept this situation as permanent and was "waiting above all" for it to change, to go to one pole or the other, or at least to alter the polarity. For Sammler, however, this state is to be poor in spirit, without power, and in the state in which comfort might be received. That is, he does not wait for this situation to change, agonizing as its ambiguity is, but recognizes it as the world in which he will live. Between "full and void," for example, the mystic potency of man can be fulfilled and he need not wait for a sign that the situation will change.

The man who is poor in spirit is also Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith, who, "having set [his] relation with the infinite, was entirely at home in the finite. . . . as a result needing nothing but the finite and the usual. Whereas others sought the extraordinary in the world" (p. 60). That is, the Knight of Faith is the truly mythical man who understands that the myths promise nothing except a journey through the hell of one's own expectations of what life can give him. He is the Knight of Faith because he does not expect the Tristero or any other representative of the spirit world to reveal any secret to him in order that he can proceed on the basis of irrefutable knowledge to find the bride of life. Instead, he has only ciphers, portents, and god.

adumbrations to go on, but for the one who has begun to
tap the mystic potency in his life instead of simply living
out of the power of his will, these intimations are enough.
Sammler, thinking of his death, said,

Nor would I mind if there were nothing after death.
If it is only to be as it was before birth, why
should one care? ... I think I would miss mainly
my God adumbrations in the many daily forms. Yes,
that is what I would miss (p. 216).

Sammler, then, is a man who knows he is a creature who will
die and who is attracted to creaturely things. Yet he is
also a human being who longs for more than that. He has,
however, through his having been buried and put in a tomb,
died to the expectation that life had anything implicitly
meaningful to offer him. He finds that, on the contrary, life
is often indifferent or hostile to his existence. Yet,
having returned from the tomb and having gone through the
desert of indifference, Sammler finally comes upon a new
wisdom. This is that he no longer expects the world to
meet the desires of his will, but, through the nobility of
his soul and his wisdom, he sees in the world much more
than one sees who wishes only to manipulate the environment
through physical power in order to make it do what he wants.
Now, in his powerlessness and his humility, Sammler is
confronted with a world come alive. A simply unity with
nature is gross, but a noble, wise soul can see the
mysterious depths bursting through the common life even in
scrawls on wrecked buildings.

The creature chasing after interest in life, playing a Hollywood role, never passes into the Forest of Adventure and thus never is cleansed of the blindness which prevents the visionary that is in him from developing. For the creature, the world is there to be manipulated, and he never permits "the radical immanence of the mythological consciousness [to be] turned inward upon the archetypes of the Unconscious." However, those who have their eyes opened to the mythological dimension of life see not simply objects to be used, but "bliss" to be enjoyed as "God's entertainment."

Above all, Mr. Sammler's Planet opposes flight away from that which is not certain, from the "heartbreaking paradox" of Bokononism which Pynchon pushed to profundity with his dichotomies. Whereas Vonnegut seemed to want to wish it all away somehow, and Oedipa waited for the evidence to show that one possibility or the other was "true," Sammler pushes beyond the dilemma itself. The thrust, Bellow proposes, must be down, ocean-ward. Enough is there for any man who has developed an impeccable spirit.

CHAPTER VI

THE EMERGENCE OF COMPREHENSIVE

MYTHICAL IMAGES

This study indicates that during the last century, Western men functioned primarily on the basis of a myth in which positive suffering was excluded and his savior was rationality and technology. For the first time, almost everyone suspected that his relationship to the universe could be worked out rationally and that technical developments from scientific discoveries would save him from his ills. Now, however, this mythical savior's reputation is wearing thin, and the abyss seems to be reappearing as the problem to be dealt with.

Some post-World War II novels confirm that the myth of rationality is collapsing and that new mythical images are just beginning to emerge. Possibly a major cause of the collapse is that even though more scientists are at work now than have lived to this time, still man is anxious, troubled by vague intimations that millions of collective hours on the psychoanalysts' couches during the 1950's and 1960's could not erase. Perhaps every American was in some way an optimist at the beginning of this century; the cottonwood at Lone Tree, "stripped for action," symbolized the stance of the nation. However, in a significant sense, instead of producing a New Eden, the nation
experienced disaster in a world war, a depression, and an even more catastrophic second world war. These were followed by the anxiety of "small" wars and a growing sense that either most people were being "taken" by the leaders of industry and government, or that nobody was really in charge. This latter sense is a symptom of the heart of the problem: that the myth of continuous progress in personal affluence, comfort, and security has come to be doubted.

If optimism is no longer possible as the primary approach to life because the old gods (science, nation, and industry) seem to have betrayed their promise, and if people must have myths, then masses of people must either weave some new illusory tapestry in order to create some pretense of symmetry in life, or they must come face to face with the terrifying abyss. Some of the novels explored in this study indicate that these alternatives dominate the choices available to Western man. The painful confrontation with the nothingness is one which makes one either a madman or a saint, depending on his previous inclinations and preparation for the event. If he becomes something of a madman, as Saul Bellow suggest most people have done, he returns to his effort to create an illusion, but this time he does it by making himself into a myth through choosing some easy model to emulate. The result is an even more fragmentary myth than was the myth of rational progress.
According to the images in *The Field of Vision* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, if a person becomes a "saint" (not in the sense of being beyond other men in ability and performance of deeds, but in the sense of being a believer), he finds the mystic potency in himself awakened and does not need to borrow an illusion of significance from "Hollywood extras." That is, when he confronts the abysmal truth about life, he knows he has come upon his best self dead in the desert; his dreamed-of self and the universe which was conceived of as revolving around that self are dissipated, so that only the "worst self" is left. If he can pass into the initiation, or the confrontation with himself as part of the desert and not the center of a garden, then possibly he comes to believe in the actual potency of the world, and he is a saint, not a madman.

If he passes into the desert, he has married the bride of life. He "sees" the world in its fecundity, with its own unpredictable vigor in its mundane appearances. Possibly beyond initiation, if he makes it through, he will seek perfection of the "warrior's spirit," not for his own benefit alone, but in order that his duty can be done toward the world.

This study suggests that several novels written since the Second World War indicate that some part of the human spirit has begun to enter the initiatory period that Ihab Hassan found novelists of the 1950's anticipating but avoiding, and that some novelists, such as Wright Morris,
have been able to dramatize the nature of the initiation. Others, such as Heinlein and Vonnegut, have recognized the possibility of initiation but succeed only in creating stories of escape from it. Still others, including Ellison, Kesey, and Pynchon, have produced accounts of the terrifying nature of the initiatory quest. Finally, at least one novelist, Saul Bellow, seems to be envisioning the life of the contemporary saint who has passed through the initiation and now labors to develop an impeccable spirit for himself and others.

All of the novels analyzed seem to be products of the basic mythical impulse in humanity. This impulse drives people to tell stories that will dramatize their relationship to that which is grave and constant in human affairs and points to the primal energetics of life which seem hidden in a desert until brought to life in interaction with an impeccable spirit. Thus, one trend in contemporary fiction indicates that the innocent American Self as primary myth could well be crumbling and a new, more comprehensive and realistic myth could be replacing it.
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