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THREE ORIGINAL SHORT STORIES
AND A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

THESIS

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By

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This thesis is composed of three original short stories and a critical analysis of them. "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories: is a comic tale of the future, set in twenty-first century America. "Cousins" is concerned with the conflicting religious views of three young adults. "A Vacation in Utah" examines the psychological and social pressures which bring the protagonist near to committing homicide. The first story is narrated in an omniscient voice, the second in an objective voice, and the last in first person.

The critical analysis examines the fictional elements in the stories, including plot, character development, theme, and narrative point of view. This analysis expresses an opinion upon the degree of success achieved in each short story in terms of style and content.

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TRICENTENNIAL SEAWEED STORIES

A conservatively attired executive youthfully pursued and boarded "The Spirit of '76" at the Bunker Hill Junction. Sunbeam thrusts of a humid June morning dappled the silver-gray clouds. The module's alloy frame merged in perspective with the metallic pall of the New England smog. At first, the perspiring businessman thought that he had discovered a vacant cabin; that is, until he noticed three Korean mail couriers sitting clannishly near the exit ramp. The executive respected their xenophobia. Once situated at the opposite end of the cabin, he structured his agenda in an inaudible voice. "#1, lunch; #2, Kuo-fan can finish the green forms; #3, There's some problems with the monument list; #4, There's some Grade 17 thing . . . agriculture, no less; #5, The whole g'damn thing's futile anyway."

"The Spirit of '76" was an Eastern Seaboard commuter line christened for America's upcoming Tricentennial. The soggy businessman was Ronald McGowan. Ron was not physically impressive; he was, however, trim-figured with good muscle tone. The topography of his facial features consisted of a series of pleasant, if not slightly effeminate, peaks and valleys. A few gray hairs had begun to encroach upon his otherwise brown scalp. McGowan viewed the gray intruders favorably, as an element befitting a bachelor of twenty-nine.

Ron had surmounted the instabilities of youth and had now resigned himself to the responsible, yet creative, lifestyle of an upper-echelon federal employee.

One conquered instability of his youth was a drug habit which Ronald had acquired during his nondirectional college years. The drug that he once used, KTC-41, was the twenty-first century descendent of marijuana; it was inhaled by almost everyone, including many of McGowan's superiors in Washington. The chemical structure of KTC was similar to that of innocuous protein, and it did produce a very enjoyable euphoria. Unfortunately, it was physically addicting. After becoming twenty-five, he had decided to relinquish the habit for a number of reasons; partly to improve his mental alertness, but primarily for the effects of a major change. His voluntary withdrawal had been hellish but, with determination and electro-Freudian therapy, he now imbibed cocaine and bourbon only on weekends.

Perhaps Ron had also transcended the need for feminine company; there had not been a woman in his life for some three years. For reasons he could not comprehend, although he tried, interacting with females always left him confused and dissatisfied. He was not a homosexual; his Hefner-Hilton membership suggested that. Inside the franchised Super-Bunny Palaces, uncomplicated, competent sex and stylized conversation were available to him from girls with whom Ron had an avuncular relationship.

Ron often doubted that he had a life-sustaining force

beyond inertia. Certainly, such a force did not originate from the love of a woman, a god, or mankind; it might well have been derived from the ego gratification that he received from his august position with the U.S. Government. The Secretary of the Interior, an old friend of McGowan's ex-Senator father, had appointed Ronald to direct the recently created Bureau of Historic Monuments.

In terms of education, Ron was qualified. The University of Chicago had granted him a Ph.D. in American History. He would have preferred a teaching post at a diminutive percent of his federal salary; however, licensed professors were as plentiful as drugs, and his contacts were in politics, not in education.

His administrative powers certainly rivaled those of any academician; he personally supervised 1,250 Orientals and some 260,000 native Americans. Initially, he had refused to make the self-confession that he enjoyed his Grade 17 status; but, as his collegiate idealism atrophied, McGowan began to cultivate the authoritarian facet of his mental makeup.

With a display of technological finesse, the "'76" module halted at the Central Washington ramp. The Koreans disembarked to their bureaucratic destinies. On their way out, they were briefly accosted by a party of reticularly-tattooed nude adolescents. The teenagers were receiving beta subwaves and smoking KTC. When they became restless, the gang cluster-copulated with the prearranged precision of a U.S. Marine drill team.

Absolute nudity and public sex were quite legal. Archaic laws against KTC did exist, but they were seldom enforced. If a policeman of the old school had caught the minors with a homemade brainwave unit, it would only have been confiscated. Legal prosecution of citizens for self-destructive or indecent behavior had long been waived by the authorities.

McGowan really did not achieve an opinion of his new fellow passengers; he did feel uncomfortable in their presence. One of the males disengaged from oral contact and sauntered over to Ron. As soon as the young man entered McGowan's audio range, he began a prerehearsed monologue. Ron then listened to what appeared to be a dishevelled robot delivering a pitch for life insurance. When the tattooed boy automatically stopped, Ronald politely explained that he was already covered under a federal policy. Actually, all Americans were insured in some way by the government. The teenager then produced a pink three-page form and requested Ron to sign it, attesting to the fact that he had attempted a sale. McGowan acquiesced. The boy radiated a vapid smile of accomplishment.

By coincidence and nepotism, a cousin of Ronald's was the Chief of the Unemployment Bureau and the author of that pink form. Under his cousin George, the National Unemployment Rate was fixed below two percent.

When the fall of Asia to International Communism was imminent, the U.S. sponsored an evacuation that dwarfed Dunkirk. Some thirty-four million Orientals were transported to the

last Free World island-bastion, the U.S.A. Protected there from the various peoples' republics by America's nuclear defense ring, the Eastern newcomers soon increased to some eighty million. They were granted all the privileges of democracy, except for the right to vote; however, the refugees were content just to participate in Western affluence.

This ever-increasing horde of partial citizens was systematically transfused into the American labor force bloodstream. As the Tricentennial year approached, Yellow North Americans represented 87% of the industrial production of the United States. They also dominated the lower ranks of the military. Although most native Americans were officially employed on computer payrolls, few whites, blacks, or browns contributed to any actual production. Their occupations were ingeniously artificial to the American GNP, often not requiring job attendance of any kind.

The United States, more than any land in man's history, was an aesthetic nation of poets, musicians, artists, and athletes. Even those Full Citizens who daily punched clocks devoted several daylight hours to private avocations. This was a byproduct of unparalleled leisure time, abundant federal grants, and the omnipresent KTC. The narcotic's effect, although not really damaging, inexplicably convinced many youths that to seek a mundane, noncreative career was pointless. So artists sold their masterworks to other artists, psychologists endlessly tested other psychologists, and American supervisors

in tennis garb delegated supervision to their Oriental subalterns who, in turn, dutifully perpetuated the system.

McGowan refused to think consistently about the strange nature of his bureau's work force. For all he knew, 255,000 of his 260,000 native American employees were nonexistent. Furthermore, his disciplined Oriental staff was invested with the creation of public testimonials to half-remembered historical figures. A prepared retort given to critics at social gatherings came to his mind: "Full employment has stabilized the economy, and preserving our national heritage in art is a sacred obligation." Ronald half-believed his rationalization, at least before he stated it aloud.

An abrupt second stop was completed at the Federal Administration Complex South where McGowan had originally intended to get off. But when the adolescents departed to solicit customers for their imaginary family plan, Ronald decided that eighty square feet of privacy in an age when there were two hundred citizens for each square mile of U.S. soil was too much to forego. He immediately recalled a restaurant in Florida where, for an exorbitant price, one could get morsels of seafood undiluted with seaweed.

Seaweed, the staple diet item of the Western World, was processed into a myriad of tastebud-tempting forms resembling the cuisines of the past. To the average American, a frankfurter from the briny deep looked, tasted, and digested just like a 100% beef hot dog. It did not to Ron. His aristocratic

family had always been able to obtain the scarcest of edibles. However, with the recent successful Communist sabotage of America's spring crops, all nonsynthetic foods would soon be absent from the First Family's menu.

Outside the module, multilevel, reflective home units streaked by surrealistically in blurred metallic patterns. Ron's artistic temperament made him appreciate the sunflair effect. His stare penetrated the glare off the glass face of his telecom-medallion. He called in to the office, "Tell the Secretary that I was detained in the field." The switchboard volleyed back that a revolutionary process for forming seaweed had been discovered by a DuPont scientist; seaweed would replace synthetic production; the process would be demonstrated at a Grade 17+ Council at three p.m.; attendance mandatory.

"Synthetic seaweed manure; Christ! maybe they're cloning algae meatloaf . . . still . . . would look unprofessional to be late."

To take his interest off his growing hunger, McGowan on the return module began to peruse a list of proposed projects. The top priority among the future historical monuments was an approved modification of Mount Rushmore.

The decreed change was to have been a memorial to a recently deceased U.S. president. The late President Julian Glenn, the great-great-grandson of the pioneer-astronaut, had been only twenty-seven when he was chosen as the Republican nominee for vice president. His youth had necessitated a

Constitutional Amendment. Glenn, with the support of the sixteen-year-old vote, obtained the amendment and the office. When President Charon was assassinated while visiting troops on the Mexican Front, Julian Glenn became the country's fifty-fifth chief executive.

At the end of his interregnum term, Julian, at a press conference, renounced his presidential incumbency to the amazement of the Grand Old Party. He joined a law partnership and departed from public view. Some fifteen years later, he did announce his candidacy for the highest office, after becoming a best-selling author.

Glenn's Republican ticket sponsored a restoration of early twentieth-century virtues and life patterns. The American public awarded his ideology a vote of confidence in the primaries and in the presidential election. President Glenn implemented his platform with an irresistible personal charisma. The Glenn Administration was to be an anachronistic Pax Americana of peace and prosperity.

Federal Restoration programs assigned Orientals to welfare, while native Americans assumed many of the responsibilities of industry. The U.S. armed forces recaptured The People's Republic of Quebec and established military enclaves in South America and Europe. In addition, successful anti-drug behavioral treatment programs were introduced at regional control centers. Perhaps the most vitalizing presidential act was the reinstatement of high school football and Boy and Girl Scouting

into society. The United States of America was gaining a positive national identity.

However, the golden age soon tarnished with human frailty. Some weeks following the repeal of the Twenty-second Amendment, and some days after Glenn's re-election to a third term, indications of his mental instability became noticeable.

President Glenn's emulation of historic American great men evolved into something approaching ancestor worship; since his childhood, Julian's personal hero had been Theodore Roosevelt. Washington tourists began to stand in line to witness glimpses of the President, fashioned in late nineteenth-century military attire, leading a not-too-believable reenactment of the San Juan Hill up the White House lawn. As if this was not bully enough, Glenn commissioned his own likeness, complete with spectacles, Rough Rider hat, and false mustache, to be affixed to Mount Rushmore. Although the public consensus was that one Teddy R. peering down upon the Dakota Black Hills was sufficient, great men have always been allowed limited idiosyncrasies, so Julian's play-acting became immortalized in stone.

Soon there were signs of not-so-harmless Presidential whims. Most native Americans were apathetic to rumors that Orientals were being consecrated as human sacrifices in patriotic rites within the White House. However, when the C.I.A. revealed to Congress that the Executive Branch had devised a surprise nuclear attack against the Communist World Order, many began to doubt Julian's ability to govern. He was impeached by the

House of Representatives. Glenn, with the demeanor of an elder statesman, denied all allegations during the Senate trial. In the due process of constitutional law, the evidence accumulated by the Senate proved to be inconclusive, and Julian Glenn returned with public support to the Oval Office.

After the impeachment articles were dismissed, several congressional leaders suspected that the President was still involved in a White House/Pentagon conspiracy to propel America's turgid century-old nuclear stockpile towards the enemy without congressional approval. Congress was unlikely to consent to a first strike, because the Communists, with their retaliatory systems, could most likely counterpunch the Western Hemisphere before falling to a darkened canvas of mutual oblivion. Fearing that Glenn intended to lead a cavalry charge, sword unsheathed, up the hill into global death, a trusted Secret Service agent, in collusion with several senators, slipped a lethal pellet into Julian's Coca-Cola at a War Bond Banquet.

It was McGowan's task not to eradicate Julian Glenn from Mount Rushmore, but to transform the landmark which served as a sad reminder of his demise into a more appropriate representation of the man whom the U.S.A. had genuinely loved.

The monument's blueprint with its numerous specifications, coupled with the solitude of the module, produced an altered state of consciousness superior in potency to KTC-41; Ronald fell asleep.

Had not a party of Japanese businessmen entered the door

at the Federal Complex South, McGowan might have slept all the way to the domed cities of radioactive Nova Scotia. Being a bit early, Ron decided to go directly to the U.S. Conference Center; his premature arrival would enhance his spartan-worker image.

Just as he stepped into the sunlight, a crowd of Grade 15 employees began to congregate around the northbound module. It had moved only a few yards from the disembarkment ramp, abruptly halting at the shaded end of the Federal Square. By the time Ronald arrived at the site of the activity, the crowd had already dispersed. The only humans in the vicinity were the same gang of nude teenagers with whom McGowan had shared the "Spirit of '76" earlier. They were doing a kind of festive jig, chanting the following mantra:

Saul, smart fellow Saul, goodluck.
Saul took a big flying fuck,
against meaninglessness a blow he struck.
Saul took a flying fuck,
my friend took a flying fuck,
all us children going a'take a flying fuck,
Saul, smart fellow Saul, goodluck.

These lines always sounded like a nursery rhyme to Ron. He gazed downward into the commuter channel. There, beside a body unrecognizably mangled, was a bloody page with McGowan's signature. The same young insurance peddler had thrown himself onto the airpath of the module's props. Ron was momentarily sick but, remembering the Grade 17+ meeting, he left the adolescents to their celebrative recitation.

The incident had caused only a small interruption in the

diurnal lives of Ronald and the other witnesses. This was because suicide was the number-one killer in America, and Americans had become accordingly callous. This statistic had been valid for two years.

Some three and a half years ago, an unemployed master-carpenter in the midwest named Saul Rothschild, one of the lesser-known descendents of the noble house, bled to death from the self-inflicted wounds made by his power nailgun. Along with his white body, a suicide note was found. It read in the following unpretentious manner:

I believe that I am alive. I don't know for a fact that I am, but it certainly looks that way. Some people that I've met seem to enjoy life. I don't. This isn't anything hasty. I've been around old planet earth for thirty-four years and I know what I see. There seems to be just one way out, suicide.

Life is just like a movie. If you like the show -- hell, see the feature twice. If you want to cut out early, leave --leave without stepping on anyone's toes.

Some people say that suicide is wrong and that you'll wish you hadn't in some afterlife. I say that the odds on an afterlife are about 50/50 which is about the best odds you can get on anything abstract like that. To those who enjoy earth I say have a good time. I've had more than enough. I'm taking a flying fuck into where and whatever beyond. Saul Rothschild.

Originally, Rothschild's death note went unnoticed, except by a small circle of family and friends, and the police. About two weeks later, the first event in a causal chain occurred. Saul's brother, James, who had always considered Saul the patriarch of the family, put a laser beam through his head. James left this abbreviated note. "I'm taking a flying fuck too."

Within the next month, Saul's wife, mother, sister-in-law, and three nephews became despondent and wrote variations on Saul's parting words before taking their lives.

A national magazine, which specialized in sick humor, discovered the kindred deaths and published a small article on the unique Rothschild clan. A malignant growth had begun. A superstar pop group happened to read the article. It inspired all twelve band members to pen a hit tune, as well as to eventually self-destruct on stage in a fiery ball. Their final release, which brought them posthumous fame, was entitled "Saul's Farewell or Brother Won't You Take a Flying Fuck."

The suicide rate increased nationally as the song climbed on the charts. The power of suggestion of the lyrics enforced by a catchy melody line infected the American listener.

The National Telecommunication Service, in its obligation to inform the public of newsworthy items, broadcast the account of Rothschild's lethal legacy; the NTS unknowingly served as a mass carrier. When the suicide count hit the quarter-million mark in the spring of 2073 alone, Washington intervened, arresting further coverage of the epidemic and distribution of the album. However, official suppression by a bewildered government only added the element of martyrdom to the populist movement; the Church had better luck containing the plague during the Middle Ages.

Somehow widespread unemployment, combined with American prosperity, had encouraged philosophical speculation among U.S.

citizens. In the previous decades, the public had masticated and spit out an unprecedented number of gurus, oracles, prophets, fundamental evangelists, and pop-messiahs of all kinds in their unfulfilled spiritual questioning. Saul Rothschild, with his direct gospel, had provided many with what was certainly a conclusive answer. Prior religious teachers had instructed their following that life was not meant to be fun, but Saul's final note was the first sacred epistle that beckoned the student to join the dropout rate.

McGowan had made a covenant with himself that he would not do himself in or, even if he did, he would take great care not to be affiliated with a fashionable trend. It seemed to him that suicide should be an act of individuality. Besides, only real people killed themselves, and Ronald doubted that he was real.

Despite the incident, Ron arrived as many of the others were entering. His cousin had saved him a chair. Sitting towards the back of the Conference Room in obscurity, George offered Ron some Louisiana cocaine. It was a weekday, but Ronald uncharacteristically accepted. After viewing a lemming-like death, he felt a need for something to help him through the clownings of the high level circus.

The meeting was called to order; after a few preliminaries, the dimensional projector was started. The scientific cartoon expounded on an astounding process by which physical matter of any size, whether in solid, liquid, or gaseous form, could

be molecularly crystallized into seaweed. McGowan's imagination soared into disjointed fantasies. A systems test that had taken place in the Rockies was shown; Ron watched the screen as an entire granite mountain became a Pike's Peak of kelp. The disjointed fantasies returned, mixing with the cocaine.

However, Ron soon noticed that the military contingent of the meeting seemed more involved in pragmatic planning than in fantasy. It came to him in less than a minute what their pragmatic intent was. The Pentagon could reap a victorious harvest by transforming the six Communist-held continents in their entirety into an American-supervised crop. McGowan became more than apprehensive. In fact, he actually began to appreciate the long-absent sensation of an emotional response; his fear was quite sincere. The next scheduled event was to have been a question-answer period with the discoverer of the scientific breakthrough. Ron's masochistic response intensified when it was announced by the FBI that the DuPont physicist had apparently absconded with the molecular device into seclusion.

It quietly occurred to both cousins that the man had defected to the other side. Rather than voicing this concern, they decided that the bisection of the remaining cocaine was an act more appropriate to the moment. George, after regaining his sangfroid with only two hits, suggested that they should try to analyze the problem at a tavern. Ronald agreed in flight.

Leaving the Conference Room in chaos, the pair sprinted

three blocks to the Elagabalus-Baby Bar. There McGowan was to break his ascetic fast from KTC; he also broke a multitude of personal drug abuse records. It did feel great. The physical motions, necessary for unrelenting drug consumption, therapeutically dominated their thoughts and actions. Ronald athletically competed with his cousin until he serenely positioned his head on the bar counter. It was his last statement as a member of the animal kingdom.

At that same moment, a constipated molecular physicist, sitting on a motel commode in nearby Baltimore, flipped a small switch on a small box-like device. He had defected to Rothschild, not to Lenin. Around five p.m. on that same muggy summer day, the third planet from the sun, along with all things glued to it by gravity, took a flying fuck into a monolithic mass of sea-green vegetation.

COUSINS

A young man in his early twenties arrived at the address of his older cousin near the campus of Princeton University. The visitor was on a sightseeing tour of the East Coast. He had visited one cousin in Virginia. After staying with his family in Princeton, he would travel to visit some friends in Boston. The first person that the young man saw after the wood door opened was his cousin's wife.

"We were beginning to worry about you. I phoned Pat, and she told us that you would be late," the woman said, smiling.

The older cousin, a balding man in his early thirties, entered the front room of the middle-income apartment. "Did you have to fight the rain?" he asked.

"It was dangerous just for a few minutes near Baltimore," the visitor replied. "The New Jersey Turnpike was safe Jim was involved in their election of Elders, and I got a late start from their church. You look prosperous, Dick."

"Prosperous meaning overweight," said the older cousin. "How's Jim and Pat?"

"They're quite the happy couple," the visitor replied. "We had a good time; we saw the Nixon pandas at the zoo."

The wife broke into the dialogue flow: "You seem to have actually lost weight."

"Oh, it's harder these days to get to my mother's home-cooking."

"Do you live by yourself?" she asked.

"I have a small apartment near the music school. You know, I eat a lot of TV dinners and junk food. I should be gaining weight."

"You'll feel right at home then," said the older cousin. "We're having frozen pizza tonight."

"Sandra's favorite food," the wife said. "Tomorrow, I will try my hand at Southern fried chicken, or something nearer a real meal."

"New York State Dutch fried chicken would do just fine. Where is the little whirlwind?" asked the visitor.

"Sandy's asleep, and don't worry about waking her," replied the older cousin. "Our family doctor gave her some cold medicine which makes her feel drugged."

"Best I remember, maybe you should continue the dosage after she gets well."

"Do you really think that she is hyperactive?" the wife asked.

"No, no, no. I'm not serious about that . . . just a healthy, active, real active girl."

"She is looking forward to having you as a playmate," the wife said. "She really likes you."

"Maybe it's because you let her win at all her games," suggested the older cousin.

"Yeah, I'd make a rotten parent."

"That's not true," the wife said emphatically.

"Sandy is my favorite little girl relative, whatever that means. I saw that photo that you sent Grandfather. She looks like Shirley Temple. You ought to give her tap-dancing lessons."

"How's your music career developing?" asked the older cousin.

"For one thing, I've been working toward my senior recital next spring."

"You were kind enough to come to Richard's graduation. I do wish that we could attend your recital," the wife said apologetically.

"That's O.K. I'll send you a tape of it."

"That would be wonderful. We have a cassette player," said the wife. "Will you have some people to back you with other instruments during the performance?"

"No, I don't think so. Just me and a Steinway, or do I mean a Steinway and just I? Anyway, since I'll have a theory minor, my committee will want to hear a few original compositions. But I'd like to work in a few Chopin standards for show. I don't know the format yet."

"A real composer!" the wife exclaimed. "You do look like a European composer."

"You certainly look the longhair type," quipped the older cousin.

"Right. You should see me in a turtleneck sweater."

The wife continued her friendly questioning. "Do you write music like Chopin?"

"Oh, no. I write some pretty weird stuff . . . I guess what you would call classical modern."

"Or modern classical," the older cousin interjected.

"Right. Are you familiar with John Cage?"

"I had a roommate that raved about all those twentieth-century people, Cage, Bartok, Stravinsky . . . I'm afraid that they are a little too abstract for me to appreciate. I am quite fond of Bach," replied the older cousin.

"Bach appeals to your mathematical mind, no doubt."

"I've heard from several different people that you are very, very talented," interjected the wife. "Your professors will have to be impressed."

"Thank you, but I really don't worry about the recital much. You don't really get a grade . . . you're either recommended for graduate school or you're not. I don't intend to apply for graduate work so why should I worry?"

"Not to overly dwell on the real world, but do you still want to teach high school band?" asked the older cousin.

"I don't think anyone really wants to teach high school anything, but it's a possibility. I haven't student-taught yet. I may wind up playing an organ in some cafeteria."

"Promise me that you won't play 'Hello Dolly'," demanded the older cousin.

"Right. I promise."

"Let's move into the kitchen. I can smell the pizza. Richard, see if you can wake up Sandra," the wife commanded.

The wife prepared the salad and arranged the table. The drowsy ten-year-old daughter entered the room holding onto her father.

"Dick, I've heard several rumors about you. With your job can you, do you want to go back into a graduate program in engineering?" asked the visiting cousin.

"Well, I was thinking about exactly that, except, this is funny"

"Funny amusing and funny strange," interjected the wife.

"Funny that you would bring up this topic so quickly." "I've decided, we've decided to dedicate our lives to Jesus Christ," the older cousin testified.

"Richard has been accepted into the Princeton Seminary," the wife explained.

"Right. You're kidding . . . the Seminary!"

"No kidding at all. We've prayed for guidance, and I'm sure I've made the right decision."

"Dick, you'll succeed at anything you attempt," the visitor said. "The Seminary . . . let's see, isn't Princeton a Presbyterian school? I thought that you were Baptists."

"Princeton was the first Presbyterian seminary in America; but they go pretty light on the Calvinism these days. Besides, my personal beliefs are more nondenominational in spirit"

"And in letter," added the wife. "You see, Alan, we are part of the Charismatic Body in Christ. The Greek word 'charisma' means gifts. You are very gifted in music. God has given me

gifts as a mother. God has given my husband the sacred gift of teaching the Word. When we were baptised in the Holy Spirit, we became part of something beyond being just religious and much greater than any one faith. There are more than four million of us. We are Protestants, Catholics, and people of all faiths. Alan, have you found Jesus?"

"Right. I'll get into that if you really want to. Could we delay that business for a little while? I think I smell burning garlic."

"Al, we haven't found the right occasion to tell my parents of my decision. It may shock them a bit. Keep this a secret for now," requested the older cousin.

"Oh sure. I'm flattered. Listen, did you just call Dick Richard?"

"Yes. We've settled on Richard," said the wife as she sliced the pizza.

"It's just that there are already so many Richards on that side of the family."

"Wasn't your great-grandfather named Richard?" asked the wife.

"I think his name was Charles."

"No, Charles was the oldest brother who raised the family like a father. Grandfather's father was named Richard. I don't know much about the man except that he died young," said the older cousin.

"How is your grandfather?" asked the wife.

"He's doing just fine. He's the only ninety-year-old man I know that can eat stuffed bell peppers."

"Bell peppers are ugly, ugly, ugly," said the ten-year-old, who was now awake.

"You awake kid?"

"Do you want to hear my poem?" asked the child.

"Recite the poem that you memorized to Alan, dear," said the mother.

"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
Tell us the place Jesus was born;
Acts, Romans and two Corinthians
Tell how to be and grow as Christians.
Gal . . . Gal . . ."

"Galatians," prompted the mother.

"Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians, too,
Tell us the good works that we must do.
Thessalonians, one and two, Timothy one and two
and Titus,
To closer love, faith, and hope invite us.
Philemon, Hebrews, James and Peter
Draw us into fellowship sweeter.
Jude, John, and Revelation . . ."

"John, Jude, and Revelation," corrected the father.

"John, Jude, and Revelation
Tell us of the riches of salvation."

"Bravo! What a memory. You're a born actress," exclaimed the visitor.

"Can you play Chinese checkers?" asked the child.

"You two can play after dinner," said the mother.

The couple, the child, and the visitor continued the conversation until eleven o'clock that night.

When the visitor awoke the next morning, he found the

couple in the kitchen eating breakfast. The child soon left to play at the apartment of a nearby friend. The older cousin suggested a morning walk to the campus. The wife and the visitor agreed.

Once on the sidewalk the older cousin began the conversation: "Has Princeton changed since the last time you were here?"

"You know, I was a kid then. There aren't as many Vietnam protest persons this time. But no, I can't see much has changed. Is that building the Seminary?"

"No. That's an old Anglican church. The Seminary is a few blocks down Nassau. It isn't part of the University. Princeton U. was founded before the Seminary, except it was called the College of New Jersey back then," the older cousin explained.

"That's interesting. I didn't know that."

"There was a reenactment of the Battle of Princeton for the Bicentennial. Some of the students and townspeople dressed like colonial farmers. Later, there was a mock battle with loud cannons. It scared Sandra out of her wits," added the wife.

"Did either of you dress like a farmer?"

"No. We just watched," replied the older cousin. "They were mostly farmers because most Princetonians during the Revolutionary War were rural volunteers. The regulars from Philadelphia had tailored European uniforms."

"This is all very collegiate; collegiate-pastoral like Oxford or Cambridge. I've seen Harvard, and it's just a couple of subway stops from downtown Boston."

"Sometimes the pastoral setting is too much. It's too removed from the realities of life," the older cousin commented.

The couple and the visitor continued their walk onto the campus. They paused at several of the historic stone buildings. They heard some music coming from a stereo inside one of the dormitories.

"How collegiate can you get? Peter, Paul, and Mary tunes right here in the late seventies."

"Over there is my freshman dorm; it's one of the oldest buildings on campus. It comes complete with moaning Hessian ghosts," the older cousin said.

"Richard, you don't believe in ghosts?" asked the wife.

"No dear, it's just a legend," replied the husband.

"There is actually a dorm room in that tower."

"Hey, that could open up new concepts in on-campus probation."

"How am I doing as a tour guide?" asked the older cousin.

"You're a real pro. Keep going."

"Well, that's the Firestone Library. That building across the yard in which I misspent many hours is the computer center," he said.

"I wish that I had saved the article on the computer

experiment that Princeton did on the year 2000 A.D. Tell Alan about the article," she said.

"Let's see. Some computer science folk fed in a wealth of projected economic and social factors that would exist in the year 2000, given certain data; natural resources, inflation, population growth . . . the projected trends of the model showed the world economy plunging downward into chaos," explained the older cousin.

"That's certainly encouraging. Did they mention anything about unemployment rates among middle-aged pianists?"

"I imagine that musicians like everyone else will be in trouble unless they read the Book of Revelation, and prepare themselves spiritually for the Second Coming of Jesus," she said.

"Now I get the connection. Do you really think that the world will end in the year 2000?"

"I know that a Jewish generation is forty years. The Bible tells us that the advent of the Millennium began with the creation of a new Israel in 1948. The Seven Years of Tribulation will begin one generation after 1948. Although the days of the Anti-Christ will not begin until 1988, surely you can already see the writing on the wall," she said.

"Right. Anne, the planet Earth could still be around in the year 2000 with a messed-up economy. It's been a sad place for a long time; it may be a sad place for eons more."

"I don't think so, Alan," she said. "The descriptions

that John gives in Revelation fit our time too well to be a coincidence. In the second chapter, he describes the churches as being filled with blasphemers and hypocrites just like in American churches today."

"At least, give me credit for not attending church."

"Oh, you are closer to God by not being a hypocrite," she agreed.

"However, as an apprentice clergyman, I can't fully condone church absenteeism," the older cousin added.

"But Alan, I'm serious. Have you ever read Revelation? What do the political symbols of a bear, a dragon, and an eagle mean to you? Come on, Armageddon is in the Middle East," she said.

"Right. I know. The eagle is America; the bear--Russia . . . signs in the sky; there's the good old whore of Babylon; you mentioned the Anti-Christ . . ."

"Then you know about the terrible times ahead?" she asked.

"Well, I've heard some of that doomsday business on the radio. Did either of you see the movie The Omen? It had several references to the Anti-Christ."

"Richard saw it. I wouldn't go. A movie like that is so demonic, so many people get killed, that it may not exactly be the work of the devil; but, its contents can't be good for your soul. I suppose if it starts people to think about their salvation, it might serve a heavenly purpose," the wife replied.

"I saw The Omen and The Exorcist in the same week. They

didn't start me thinking about religion exactly; it's just that for weeks afterwards I felt uncomfortable around precocious children."

"I don't even want to talk about The Exorcist," she insisted.

"Sure. What did you think about The Omen?"

"It was more Hollywood fantasy than biblical prophecy," replied the older cousin. "I thought that it was odd that no one, not even the father, thought it peculiar that the child's name was Daemon."

"Then you believe that Doomsday is near?"

"Yes. But when the Anti-Christ comes, I suspect that he'll be far more subtle," replied the older cousin.

"Richard, you really believe the world is coming to an end?"

"Yes. Definitely. Al, I've seen where the human race is headed and I've seen Jesus as a real life-force. If you're not trying to find Jesus, He will find you, sooner or later. His love saved my marriage. I had it all, the American dream. I was having trouble loving my wife and daughter. I went to church as routine; but the emphasis in my life-force was on material possessions. Soon after my wife had found Jesus, He spoke to me while I was in my office. He simply told me that He loved me. My first response, as soon as I could think, was 'Lord, this is too much for me to handle; this is totally mind-boggling.' And then Jesus said, 'Yes, my son. I know it's

mindboggling.' I didn't run out and tell my fellow employees about my experience; for one thing, I was still in shock"

"For another thing," interrupted the wife, "your fellow workers would have thought that you had cracked. Do you remember when I asked you at the dinner table if you had accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?"

"Yes. I certainly do."

"Do you remember the look that you gave me?"

"Yes. I thought that I had a sick wife on my hands."

"Alan, you don't give me any odd looks; but, sometimes I think that you think I'm crazy," she said.

"No . . . not crazy; just real different. I don't advocate locking up all the Christians in America in padded cells . . . not enough cells. I just have grave doubts about all the sentences in the Bible being true. I don't want to seem like the village atheist"

"You're not; you're the village musician," quipped the older cousin.

"Is that worse? What I mean is the Bible when taken as a social document just doesn't hold water. A few months ago I told myself that I was going to read the entire Bible and all of the plays of Shakespeare. Well, I read King Lear and I got as far as Deuteronomy. But, I do remember that one of Moses' laws advised trial by water to establish innocence in adultery cases. Now, God, through his agent Moses, had poor swimmers thrown into fast currents. What does that have to do with dating another man's wife?"

"First of all, I'm not an extreme fundamentalist," replied the older cousin. "Moses wasn't more than human. Human error has probably entered into the Holy Word at a few points. It's entered into everything else. I was reading this morning a scholarly article that dates the writing of the Book of Revelation at the turn of the first century. John the Apostle would have been over a hundred then. Nevertheless, whoever recorded the prophecies must have been privy to divine information."

"But Richard"

"Al, if you believe in God's love, all doctrinal matters will fall into place given time. Yes, Christians often find God's ways to be mysterious. Cousin, don't you find life a mystery without Christ? All men with our limited view will. I was trained as a scientist; but, when science and logic are taken as absolutes . . . in that way lies madness."

"But Richard"

"Sorry Al, I'll be through in just seconds. Jesus has touched my life and the lives of my family. We were very incomplete; now we rejoice in the Lord, and we know that eternal salvation is ours. My commitment to Jesus is in part mysterious. Paul in his letter to the Philippians speaks of 'the peace of God that passeth all understanding.'"

"When you believe in things you don't understand, you'll suffer 'cause superstition is your way . . .' to quote Stevie Wonder." The visitor continued. "Just because a successful Hindu marriage exists, that doesn't mean that the earth is

carried on the back of a turtle. Just because a successful Christian marriage exists, that doesn't mean that the world is coming to an end . . . Dick, Richard . . . you know the validity of all those kinds of arguments"

"You just haven't witnessed the miracle of prayer in people's lives. This miracle is beyond any theories or arguments. Alan, please come with us tomorrow night to our prayer meeting," the wife requested. "I think that you will be able to experience what we have been talking about. I sense that you are seeking Jesus."

"Listen . . . it's just"

"It's not as dreadful as it sounds," added the older cousin. "You might find something new about yourself. Besides there'll be several single ladies there."

"Listen, I have to be in Boston by tomorrow night. Sorry, but two college buddies are expecting me. I'm sure that your meeting would be interesting."

"Very well, Alan," said the wife.

The older cousin broke several seconds of silence by resuming the role of a tour guide.

"See that side street by the library? It's sealed off from traffic. If the University authorities don't make it inaccessible to the public for one week every year, it then becomes property of the city of Princeton."

"Sometimes the laws of man are mysterious, too," said the wife, smiling.

The next day, the young man ate breakfast, packed his suitcase, and loaded his car. The older cousin explained to him how to find the New England Turnpike. The family gathered together to pray before the visitor's departure. Then the couple and the child accompanied the visitor to his car.

"Maybe I'll see you three in Tennessee next year," the visitor said.

"Alan, you're a fine young man," the wife said. "Please think about the things we've said in times ahead."

"Anne, I'm afraid that I'm a poor candidate for conversion."

"I for one didn't expect a dramatic conversion from you," the older cousin said. "We are just farmers who plant seeds."

"I suppose that you will say that we've become fanatics," the wife said.

"No, I wouldn't say that. I might say something about Richard seeming more religious these days."

"We are not religious; we're Charismatics," the wife said. "Alan, we're glad that you stayed with us."

"Right. I enjoyed my stay. I hope that you can visit my side of the family soon."

"We may make it down there Christmas, depending on finances," the older cousin replied.

"Alan, you've been very diplomatic," said the wife. "Do you have any parting criticisms of us?"

"Well, just one. Maybe Sandra should hear more . . . different kinds of music . . . secular music."

"She loves all the music on Sesame Street," the wife said.

"As a matter of fact, we're going to find her a piano teacher next fall," the older cousin said.

"That sounds good. Thanks for everything. I'll send you a postcard before I get home."

A VACATION IN UTAH

Tom Brawner is the name; professional student's the game. As an English major might say, I'm the, no, I am the narrator and first-person voice of the following story. I am only a minor character. The protagonist is named Paul Stevens. The play, which begins in Dallas, Texas, is derived, more or less, from real events.

Paul and I matriculated together in the Psychology Graduate Program at Southern Methodist University. Neither of us is a Texan or a Methodist. We attended classes in Hyer Hall during the Fall '76 semester.

Many would remember Stevens from these months as a marijuana dealer. But to describe Paul simply in terms of drug deals would misrepresent him. Yet, illicit trafficking did affect his personality. When Paul was an undergrad, he had swum the Rio Grande with the contraband. However, the profession of a smuggler soon proved incongruous with a demanding graduate degree plan. He became a middleman in the trade, completing most of his business within the Metroplex. He directed the pot through a channel of confederates from the Mexican state of Michoacan to Texas. In University Park, Paul cleared a good profit by wholesaling to associates, who transported the pounds to points east.

Stevens was hardly in the superfly category of dealers.

He dressed in low-key hippie attire to retain his near anonymity. Paul wedged into a collegiate context convincingly. One could have mistaken him for one of the acceptably hip frat men on campus. At age twenty-six, he was older than most students; he was not considered stranger than most in the varied lifestyles of the Psych Department.

While at S. M. U., my friend was closer to a gentleman than a scholar. He made "B's" in every graduate course. The mediocrity of his G. P. A. did not originate from a paucity of intellect. He scored a 1200 plus on the G. R. E. Also, he was well-read in modern literature, particularly in Camus and Sartre. However, his reservoir of motivation was even murkier than mine, and he had a tendency to flow downward academically.

Studying was not his forte, and he did not work. Dealing provided him with a time-consuming avocation. He enjoyed making money from his illegal hobby, but dire poverty was not knocking at his front door. His father was well-off. Paul received a stipend from him to continue his education. He received a house rent-free from his grandmother. The capital that he invested in his marijuana machinations was family money of some kind. Stevens cherished the playing of the dope game like any gambler pursued by ennui. Along with the excitement that comes from breaking the law, he found the strange people of that trade to be entertaining. If Paul played cops and robbers as a child, I suspect that he always chose the latter role.

Stevens himself was not really what I would term a heavy

pot user; he smoked socially. I know that my classmate jogged and did homework straight. Also, he did not take psychedelic drugs. Admittedly, smoking dope before running his Rat Lab experiments was a norm with him; however, almost everyone drank, smoked, or did something thereof, before entering that malodorous cavern.

One weekend, I house-sat for Paul while he was in Nuevo Laredo on business. Inside his residence, I found several loaded guns. His dad was a retired colonel; Paul's fascination for weaponry had evolved from his Army brat days. An Astra 380 automatic handgun was sequestered under some computer printouts. A Remington 22 automatic rifle was stationed in the bedroom closet, and a fearsome 20-gauge sawed-off shotgun was under some floorboards in the den. It would be tempting to label Stevens as just another paranoid training to be a clinical psychologist; however, some of his associates had died under mysterious circumstances. Although he existed in close proximity to dangerous men, his life in crime had been remarkably nonviolent. Paul Stevens had never shot at anyone, nor had he been shot at, other than with rocksalt as a teenager.

I liked his company and conversation, but he was not an immediately likable fellow. Sometimes, he would kow-tow to faculty members; also, he would rudely avoid his peers. Sometimes, Paul involuntarily projected the aura of not being altogether on your side.

He once had a date with a woman in the department who was known for her tactless honesty. After a few drinks, his date forced a smile. She disrupted a long pause in the conversation with these words: "Paul, I'm your friend and all that, but I've had a tough day, and you're just making me more nervous. Please take me to my apartment now." Stevens reflexively chuckled at her command.

I knew Paul Stevens during a catastrophic time in his life. Fate often places pressures on those who can least bear them. In that fall semester, his psyche was jolted by two separate tragedies.

First, he was arrested at his house in possession of twenty-five pounds of marijuana, a small quantity for him. Dallas police, in conjunction with S. M. U. Security, of all people, executed the bust. The law-enforcers also discovered three sizable pot plants growing next to the driveway. Although Paul was not mentioned by name, the incident made The Dallas Times Herald. I believe the article was entitled, "Student's Garden Surprises Police." The Herald listed the "indicted horticulturist" as a Ph.D. candidate. Stevens, who had barely started on his Masters', was flattered by the inaccuracy.

A night in jail, fourteen months, and nine thousand dollars in legal fees later, my friend was meted out a probated sentence. A mutual hatred was soon spawned between Stevens and his probation officer, one Sergeant Keller. Paul recounted a fantasy to me about spiking Keller's coffee percolator with a four-way

LSD microdot. However, Paul did tolerate the situation. Since he was a full-time student, his directing officer could not harass him about getting a job. As legal retribution goes, he was dealt with mercifully. Yet he never discovered who had set him up for the arrest. This fact reinforced some already existing neuroses; his inherent introversion moved toward the sociopathic end of the spectrum.

The second tragedy to occur within six weeks was the death of Paul's girlfriend, Jane Fisher. Their lives together had been a turbulent, off-and-on relationship. Jane was the attractive daughter of an S. M. U. professor. I recall that she had a good sense of humor. Once at dinner, a fiery lover's quarrel was rekindled. The heated discussion was centered on Paul's invisible means of support. Stevens began shouting obscenities and ultimatums, and Jane left in tears on her motorcycle. A few blocks from his house, she slid under a large truck. Her funeral was a closed-casket one. Stevens considered himself responsible for her death.

Speaking metaphorically, a primary shock wave of severe depressions surfaced from Paul's emotional epicenter soon after Fisher's death. He woke up unrested every morning with the same conviction that his life was not quite worth the effort. To curb insomnia, depression, and despair, he began taking a scary combination of sedatives. He told a friend that he was seriously considering suicide. Stevens gallantly offered to introduce some of his contacts to the friend to keep the pot routes

open. Then Paul produced a syringe and a gram of heroin to prove his sincerity. At the time, I discounted the syringe as a disguised plea for help.

However, with his reinvolvement with school routine, his ability to cope steadily improved. A concerned professor gave him an experiment with federal funding. Stevens admirably ran the paper chase. He rallied on the finals to pull his usual "B's."

Paul Stevens had always considered himself to be his only true friend. With the possible exception of Jane, he really never had a confidant. However, since her death, he forced himself to be more gregarious. Social activities helped to ward off depressions. At the same time, this growing dependency on other people worried him. He felt as if his sense of self was being diminished. Paul was convinced that a regained self-confidence could only thrive in near-autonomy.

During the first days of the spring semester, an opportunity to test his autonomy and recovery occurred. A former roommate, who was a lodge bartender in Sun Valley, Idaho, offered Paul free housing near a ski lift. Sun Valley was still thriving as a resort that January, despite a record Western drought.

Stevens had hoped to return from Idaho in time for late registration. Missing opening lectures is always tricky; however, Paul sensed that he needed an altered environment. He was still annoyed by sporadic fits of depression; yet, overall, he appeared physically and mentally sound. A vacation trip

seemed like a fine idea. He reasoned that his sadness was linked to the Dallas area. Foreign locales without memories would be a balm. He had travelled throughout his life; Paul particularly enjoyed experiencing the vast distances of the American West. He intended to lose his melancholia by journeying far from his maddening appointments with Sergeant Keller.

Stevens marshalled the provisions for his one-man safari. He assembled the gear on the mattress in the back of his Ford Pinto station wagon. For comfort, he packed a catalytic heater, a mummy sleeping bag, a beer cooler, and a lid of grass. For sound, the small car was equipped with an eight-track tapedeck and speakers. For recreation, he wedged his skiing paraphernalia on top of his clothes. For safety and protection, he included snowchains, flares, and his pump sawed-off shotgun. Paul carefully hid the illegal gun and its holster under the mattress.

I drank a beer with him on the same day that he left. He departed in his brown Ford around sunset. West Texas is best seen at night. At first, the drive to the Panhandle expanded tediously. However, Paul slowly adapted to the space and rhythm of cross-country driving. He lit a joint and inserted a Joni Mitchell tape. Outside, the temperature was below freezing, and the heavens were remarkably clear. Stevens, secure in his module-home, sped through the great void of a West Texas night. The cold, alien darkness accentuated the phosphorescent detour signs.

Occasionally, a jackrabbit would dart across the two-lane

highway. Paul neither sped up nor slowed down. To him, it seemed as if the long-legged creatures in the car's illuminated path were playing a lapin game of death defiance. The rabbits were good players. They repeatedly challenged Stevens in a fierce right-angle race, and won. He did hit one bunny that was looking for edibles on the littered asphalt. He inadvertently froze it in place with his highbeams. The entranced animal never flexed an ear muscle.

There was almost no traffic on the highway. Stevens began to drive by the center stripe. The light play of the road reflectors soon softened into muted hues. A few miles before Amarillo, he pulled into a roadside park. After fitting into his sleeping bag, the fatigued traveller quickly passed out.

Around sunrise, a noisy current of trucks woke Stevens up prematurely. However, his Friday morning was cheerful enough. Near Walsenburg, the first real mountain on Interstate 25 pleasantly surprised him. Later, he transported a sleepy hitchhiker sixty miles.

A few minutes past noon, alto-stratus clouds laden with moisture appeared in the northwestern sky. By early evening, a light sleet began falling near Colorado Springs. The cold, humid atmosphere seemed to influence Paul's temperament unfavorably. He felt restless. To lessen the irritability, he drank a beer and smoked a marijuana cigarette. He then reasoned that contact with the outside world might divert his thoughts; he turned on the car's A. M. radio.

A Denver station came in clear of static. After a Sears commercial, the six o'clock news came on. The announcer-commentator reported on the preparations for the Carter Inaugural on the twentieth. The broadcaster then turned to another historic news item. The first American execution in almost a decade was scheduled for Monday. After years of litigation, Gary Gilmore, the convicted murderer of a Provo motel clerk, was to be shot.

Stevens listened attentively to the report. Because of their kinship in felonies, Paul felt an empathic bond with Gilmore. Also, he thought that he understood the condemned killer. It appeared that Gilmore was playing a twentieth-century joke on a nineteenth-century culture. Most Utahans despised Gary Mark Gilmore. State authorities had processed nearly a thousand volunteers for Gilmore's firing squad. Yet Gilmore did not hate those who condemned him. He simply wanted to die; he had attempted to take his own life twice. The situational irony seemed heavy-handed to Paul. The entire state of Utah would be an accomplice to the capital offense of suicide. The melody and lyrics of a satirical song from "Saturday Night Live" surfaced in Paul's mental stream. He began singing to himself, "Let's kill Gary Gilmore for Christmas."

Stevens abruptly turned off the radio and stuck his hand outside the window. The Colorado night air was unbearably wet and cold. Long icicles dangled from the yellow interstate shields.

Upon entering Denver's city limits, Paul rented a motel single. An hour later, in the businessmen's bar, the sensation of road motion finally left him. He drowsily sipped his Campari and soda. A barmaid in the nearly empty room attempted to engage Stevens in conversation. Besides being tired, he had not altogether adjusted from the insular microcosm of the car to the macrocosm of the Holiday Inn. Paul spoke to the thirtyish woman behind the counter in polite, but impersonal, replies.

The first conclusion that he reached after waking up the next morning was that his nerves were still on edge. Paul suspected that there was too much sugar in his bloodstream. Perhaps it was there from yesterday's quaffed beers. He knew that he had experienced a troubled sleep. Although he could not remember his night hours, the top corners of the bedsheet had been pulled from the mattress.

Stevens controlled the persistent nervous tension as he headed due north towards Wyoming. After breakfast at a diner, he was certain that he was much better.

He stopped for gas near the Interstate 80 Junction at Cheyenne. The air was colder and drier. While Paul was at the service station, a pretty girl, one that did not really resemble Jane Fisher, passed Paul on her motorcycle. He quickly and efficiently suppressed the evoked connection; yet the transient image did not help his peace of mind.

As the car trekked westward, the terrain shifted from lifeless fields to barren hillsides. A major American drought had

formed a desiccated tundra in southern Wyoming. Tall wooden fences, which had restrained walls of snow powder in other Januaries, went untested.

Stevens endured the monotony of the gales blowing about the tawny rolling hills. He wished that the sun would come out. The expanse of Wyoming had outlasted his eight-track tape collection. He pulled out a Leonard Cohen tape that he had heard twice and turned on the radio. At first, he located a weak signal from WLS in Chicago. However, the top-forty station soon dissolved into the ether. Then, there were only two Country-Western stations on the dial. Stevens reinserted the tape.

In Rock Springs, a giant Gibson's sign appeared directly off an I-80 exit. Paul entered the barnlike department store and purchased five new tapes and some shotgun shells. While inside, he had the impression that he was somehow different from his fellow shoppers. He was outwardly friendly to two clerks, a cowboy, and the cashier. Yet the stop did not positively reinforce Paul's social self. He was glad to be alone.

Once back on the open highway, Stevens was tense and restless again. Each truck that he passed seemed like a pernicious obstacle. His excessive nervous energy was ill-placed inside the small car. The new tapes helped a little.

He began to question his health. After examining the symptoms of his agitated state, he concluded that, whatever it was, it could be cured with a good night's sleep. He forced himself to change the topic inside his head. By a random progression

of thought, he recalled a jogging program, a brand of anti-freeze, and his bartender friend in Sun Valley.

Paul began to follow a systematic schedule. The traveler made himself stop somewhere every forty-five minutes. He made one such stop to expend energy by doing some pushups. To maintain a sense of time within the schedule, he began listening to segments of the news each hour. These divertissements did lessen the unpleasant necessity of driving.

When Stevens turned on the radio, much to his surprise, he found a Salt Lake City station playing Schubert's Eighth Symphony. The station news anchorman followed on the hour. The local story of Gary Gilmore was the leadoff report. The newscaster included a brief synopsis of the case; in July, the Supreme Court had reversed a 1972 decision that had declared capital punishment in violation of the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment. In various rulings that fall, the Utah Supreme Court and U. S. district courts had rejected all subsequent appeals on Gilmore's death sentence. Earlier in the week, Gilmore's defense team, against his expressed wishes, had obtained a reprieve. Gary Mark Gilmore denounced the judge who had granted the respite as "a moral coward." An eleventh-hour legal effort had been launched by the A. C. L. U. to preserve his life. However, any mitigation of the sentence was unlikely by the governor or the courts.

The news broadcast had angered Stevens. He mentally tuned out the following story on Amy Carter. His sympathy for

Gilmore was counterbalanced with a growing antipathy towards the people of Utah.

The increased volume of a commercial break directed his attention back to the radio. A slightly patronizing but kindly voice invited all people who would be in the Salt Lake City area to come and hear a performance of the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The doors would open at ten a.m. Sunday.

The proximity of the Gilmore report to the religious advertisement evoked a mental juxtaposition. Paul chuckled aloud at a whimsical scene in his head. He imagined himself entering the Tabernacle with his shotgun. Then, in the middle of a hallelujah, he opened fire on the choir. As the congregation rushed towards him, Stevens fantasized the words, "Long live Gary Gilmore."

Paul ceased to entertain the fantasy when a bulletin on local skiing conditions redirected his interest to the radio. There was no snow in the forecast for the Powder and Wasatch Mountain Recreational Areas.

He wondered if Sun Valley was using artificial snow. He then questioned whether his health would permit him to ski. Although he did not consider himself exactly sick, he did discern that he was not very alert. Stevens reiterated to himself the necessity of getting to bed early.

It was time for a break from driving. He stopped at the I-80 North-South Junction for gas. Inside the Exxon bathroom, he read some interesting graffiti. Someone had commented in

writing, "There's too many queers in Utah." A second hand had scrawled the rejoinder, "I thought that we were all queer here."

A Rat Lab report that was due in a month popped into Paul's active memory. He considered the possibility of heading home. He looked at the North-South sign at the end of the block.

Stevens tried to call his bartender friend; no one answered. As Paul approached the Junction cutoff in the car, he spontaneously turned south towards Dallas and late registration.

Around nine o'clock, Paul passed the Salt Lake County marker. Although he had once lived in Colorado, he could not remember ever experiencing the present intensity of nocturnal cold. The car's inside temperature was near freezing with the heater on high.

As Paul approached Salt Lake City, the number of suburban lights increased. Driving was becoming difficult; Stevens hardly noticed the illuminated panorama.

He exited off I-80 and followed the traffic to the outer freeway loop. A Roadway Inn sign beckoned to the weary driver.

When Stevens entered the motel lobby, two families were already waiting in line at the desk. The infant in the arms of the woman in front of him began crying. The father of the other family, who looked like a farmer, was attempting to prevent his two pre-teenage daughters from playing tag. The father's loud repeated threats further provoked the crying baby. After a short pause, the spirited game of tag continued.

The younger dirty-faced hoyden almost ran into Stevens. Suddenly, the father grabbed the girl by the arm and yanked her outside.

Paul, who was already in a jittery state, could no longer bear the lobby's sound and fury. As he walked across the parking lot, he could hear the screaming girl being whipped by the father. After slamming the door, Stevens sped back onto the loop.

He decided that he had met his daily requirement of fellow humans. He pulled onto the expressway shoulder to look at a map. Several campsites were marked near Great Salt Lake.

Highway 186 led to the comatose town of Saltair. On the south shore of the lake, Stevens found a deserted campground in the darkness. He stacked as much gear on the front seats as would possibly fit. He then crawled onto the mattress and into his sleeping bag.

Inside the padded bag, he was warm. However, he did not feel exactly comfortable and secure. The vague presence of some anxiety annoyed him. Paul was physically drained; yet he was still too tense from the drive to fall immediately asleep.

A few minutes before midnight, a secondary wave, more debilitating than any previous depressed state, attacked his mind and senses. His nervous system felt as if it were charged with electrical voltage. Stevens forced himself to lie still. The intensity of the electrified depression intrigued him. He

speculated whether this new change in metabolism was organic or psychosomatic in origin. The surges in energy reminded him of the effects of amphetamines. Paul suspected some organic aberration. He decided against smoking some weed. He wanted to experience the body phenomenon at its most potent, unmitigated with counter-chemical influences.

The night hours slowly passed. Stevens fitfully shifted positions on the mattress. His mind vacillated between a blurred consciousness and hallucinatory reveries. When he passed into semi-consciousness, his thought stream flowed through several emotions. An anxiety based on some trivial part of his graduate work developed into a wholehearted indulgence of self-pity. To inflame the pathos, he reviewed several of his most poignant misfortunes. The summary concluded with a haunting image of the Wyoming girl on her motorcycle. Without much transition, he then envisioned his probation officer tripping on acid, while trying to drive home. Paul grinned without fully coming to.

Stevens lapsed totally into his subconscious. A magic lantern show secured the creation of mental images. A swirl of impressions turned into a lucid dream. Stevens found himself a witness to a firing squad execution. The wan figure chained to the wall was Gary Gilmore. A guard blindfolded the lone shape of a man. Then the squad was given the orders to get ready and aim. Just when the gunmen were anticipating the final command, Gilmore began an inhuman transformation. Everyone stood transfixed. Reptilian scales appeared on his exposed

skin. Gilmore began to expand to several times his real dimensions. When the blindfold snapped, two pitch-dark cavities were revealed. The monster disdainfully broke its manacles and indifferently started away from the wall. A fusillade of bullets was met with an eyelidless blank gaze. Stevens made eye contact with the creature. Its face, although grotesque, did not seem malicious, just pitiless like a force of nature. The monster studied Paul's countenance, and then briefly smiled. Paul noticed that all the other witnesses had died from fright. Although he was alone with the rough beast, he did not fear it. His dream-self was only tired and numb.

Paul woke from the dream. The clarity of the surrealistic sequence remained awhile after he became fully conscious. Abandoning all attempts to achieve a satisfying sleep, he wiggled out of the bag and dressed in the confines of the car. His original intent was to find a truckstop for an early breakfast. However, the first other-worldly gleams of dawn on the lake's horizon quickly drew Stevens to the water. The advent of a new day seemed to portend apocalyptic changes.

As the lake increasingly came into daylight, he took off jogging towards the sluggish, saline tide. He now felt as if he were being powered by an unnatural dynamo. The wind's icy sting brought tears to his bloodshot eyes, but he did not object to physical pain.

Stevens ran for about one hundred yards and then stopped. At a life coordinate where his adult age intersected with the

grey sand, his existence seemed without justification. The word "meaningless" seemed to echo along the forlorn beach. A phantom radio voice from the previous day intertwined the condemned prisoner's name with the abstraction of futility.

Paul looked at the icy lacings on the sand. He then watched several puffed seagulls' sprightly dancing along the water's edge. His vision followed the birds into the overcast sky. In the distance, snow-capped mountains dissolved into cloud vapor. Paul now possessed a keenness of perception that seemed to discern the importance of each sense stimulus.

From the whole of the inputs, he assumed that this moment was the focal point of his life. He did not literally take the sunrise on the hoary landscape as a divine sign. The radio announcer in his head was not as pronounced as the voices that spoke to Saint Joan or Manson. Yet the voice did demand deeds, not thoughts and words. The mountain peaks and brine also demanded action.

Paul was cognizant that his chosen lifestyle had always been one of avoidance. However, a great moment, one that would justify his existence, seemed nigh. He would create, by a force of will, a meaningful act out of his chaos. He would strike while the cold hue of his resolve matched that of Zion's native sky. The fantasy would be given form.

Stevens sprinted to the car. He pulled the shotgun from under the mattress and strapped the holster belt around his midriff. He noticed that the decaying leather of the belt was

nearly severed at the buckle. The tear was easily mended with electrician's tape. He then draped a knee-length coat around his shoulders. The fake fur coat adequately concealed the pump shotgun.

He glanced at his appearance in the car mirror. With his unshaven face, he looked a bit like a Wild West desperado. Before leaving the lake, Paul removed the gun from its holster and shoved it under the front seat.

A light snow began falling on Paul's car as he drove back to Salt Lake City. The snow strengthened his commitment.

Stevens believed, or almost believed, that a seagull above his car was guiding him to his destination. The gull knew and approved of his intent.

Stevens envisioned that his action would help keep a vengeful wheel in motion. This wheel, which was set in motion by Joseph Smith's murder, would soon come a full turn. It would not rest there. Paul intended to direct a ritual that would revenge Gilmore's death. Gilmore's and his own sanctioned murders would give momentum to the wheel. Other misfits would be led by seagulls. These men would plague the Utah authorities with their spirit of futility. Paul was pleased with the role of a martyr.

He stayed on the loop to the Business Exit. He then followed the geometrically laid out streets to the downtown area. Several brick buildings in the windblown city appeared to date back to the turn of the century. The streets and sidewalks

were devoid of trash. There was something about the town that reminded him of a toy model set.

Stevens followed his soaring vanguard until he reached Temple Square. He parked the car on a side street within view of the tall spires of the Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints. Paul emptied his marijuana on a nearby lawn. He reasoned that if the police were later to find the lid, they might contend that he was on drugs during the crime. He wanted his intent to be unmixed with other issues. The gun was then fitted into its holster.

When Stevens walked by the grey gothic temple, he was a strange hybrid of a tourist and a determined gunman. He looked for an entrance to the fortress-like building. Finding none, he walked farther along the sidewalk. Paul happened to glance upward to the golden statue of the Angel Moroni. Stevens gave the statue an obscene gesture. The golden angel seemed to respond with a hateful stare.

He walked across the square's gardens. No plant life penetrated the Utah winter. He encountered the modern oval Tabernacle. As he walked towards the entrance, choral voices escaped from inside the glassed-in walls. He entered the vestibule.

Stevens continued into the sanctuary unnoticed. His senses seemed acutely perceptive. His peripheral vision caught the slightest movement in its field. He paid very little attention to the massive pipe organ. As he walked towards the choir

stage, he saw an overdressed old dowager out of the corner of his eye. He stopped at the end of her row and blatantly stared at the garish woman. She knew of his presence, but she only averted her eyes downward.

He soon came within fifteen feet of the stage. He tilted the holster to where his right hand could grip the gun's handle. Suddenly, the leather belt tore. Paul alertly pinned the holstered weapon between his left arm and chest before it could fall to the floor. However, holding it in such a fashion was precarious. The time for action was ripe.

Stevens focused on the bass section in the front row. He first saw the stern visage of a fortyish man. The choirman's demeanor on stage suggested an Old Testament kind of severity. His drawn face was bearded without a mustache. His eyes almost radiated fundamentalism. Paul removed the safety on the weapon.

The second countenance that Stevens studied was not so fanatical as vapid. It was a handsome, yet nondescript face. The young man was conspicuously clean-cut. No hair touched his ears. His teeth were noticeably white from fifteen feet away. Paul thought that the youth's smile was too perpetual. The thought entered Stevens' head that the young choirman resembled a cloned Brigham Young freshman. Stevens slipped his finger inside the trigger guard.

Paul then came to an ancient visage. The old man's face, although scarred by time and climate, contained much animation and joy. Something in the old pioneer's eyes made Stevens

think of one of his great-uncles. The choirman's facial expression suddenly altered as if he had sensed some impending danger. Then, without much finesse, the aged singer reached under his robe and pulled up his pants zipper. The old man smiled in relief.

Paul also smiled. The whole thing seemed not horrid, but absurd. He put the gun's safety back on. The pale case of indifference had won.

Stevens departed the stage area just before the benediction. He jogged down a side aisle to the entrance. His left arm was becoming numb.

Paul briskly walked through the vestibule to the gardens. An off-duty deputy sheriff in his Sunday best noticed an odd bulge in Stevens' coat. He alerted a security guard; Paul was soon disarmed and handcuffed. In a few minutes, he was directed to a squad car by two city policemen. His arrest was brief and efficient. There were only a few witnesses. This arrest never made the local news.

Inside the police car, Paul appeared to be content in his surroundings. He could hardly stay awake. When one of the lawmen called in the report, he suggested that a psychiatrist be present during questioning.

Paul rejoined his arresting officer at a police substation. He was taken to a brightly lit conference room. His rights were read. He acknowledged that he understood their meaning. Two plainclothes cops, a staff psychiatrist, and an assistant

district attorney joined Stevens and the deputy sheriff. They provided Paul with some coffee. The assistant district attorney asked Stevens a long series of routine questions; what was his social security number, his present occupation, his previous criminal record, etc. Paul answered the series succinctly and accurately. He was asked if he was presently under the influence of any drug. Although he was wired from the coffee, he replied that he was not. One of the detectives left to consult a computer on the given data. Paul sat silently with his captors for the next twenty minutes. His own inquiry was beginning to seem like a farcical play. He felt detached from the others.

The detective returned. After a short private conference between the psychiatrist and the assistant D.A., the obvious question was posed: "Mr. Stevens, why did you have a loaded sawed-off shotgun inside the Tabernacle?"

Paul rose from his chair and stared into space as if to commence a speech. His normal speech pattern is midwestern. However, he delivered the following words in his best Texas drawl:

Gentlemen, I'm a Texas existentialist, and best I can tell, life ain't worth its weight in birdshit. I've decided to commit suicide, which brings me to your question.

I sure do like the idea of a firing squad execution, a real he-man way of going about it. Except I don't want no blindfold, 'cause I want to stare my executioners in the face.

But here's the big problem. I don't downright hate you people. I just want the show with all the trimmings, like that Gilmore fellow's getting. Goddammit, do I really have to kill one of you Mormons first?

The assembled inquiry was not angered by his words. To them, Paul's monologue sounded like so many sweet bells jangled. Their continued silence soon caused Stevens to break his stage presence; he began to laugh aloud. Shortly afterwards, a justice of the peace placed him under psychiatric observation.

At 7:31 the next morning, Gary Mark Gilmore was taken to the old tannery of the State Prison at Point of the Mountain, Utah. He was fastened to a chair. Some twenty feet away there were five men behind a partition. Four of their hunting rifles were loaded with lethal 30-30 bullets; one had a blank. Gilmore stated his last sentence: "Let's do it." The state medical examiner placed a black corduroy hood over the face, and then pinned a target over the heart. The execution took only eighteen minutes.

Gilmore's corpse was taken to the Salt Lake City Medical Center. There, some of Gilmore's organs were removed for scientific research. Gary Gilmore had donated them while alive.

Simultaneously, Stevens was taking a shower in the psychiatric wing of the same complex. Paul was held there for two weeks until his pretrial hearing convened.

Stevens had violated a number of state and city laws by concealing in public a shotgun under eighteen and a half inches from the barrel tip to the breech. However, since he had been apprehended while walking out of the Tabernacle, homicidal intent was never alleged by the D. A.'s office.

The judge at the hearing examined all the evidence. This included an affidavit from the Chairman of the Graduate Department stating that Stevens had been on a thin line for months. Paul's father and lawyer agreed to a plea bargain arranged by the district attorney; Stevens would not be required to enter a plea on the weapon charges if he were institutionalized for further observation for a minimum of six months.

Paul Stevens was committed to a private sanatorium in Dallas. One of our former professors was the assistant director there. It was first through this learned man that I learned the thoughts, actions, and near actions of Paul's Utah vacation. Under the doctor's counselling, Stevens progressed rapidly. Within two months, he was an out-patient at Woodlawn.

I have frequently used a past tense to describe Stevens. He is alive and well. He still has his sense of humor. However, he seems like a different man these days. He has more or less quit dealing; he obtained his Masters; he married a pretty ballet major; and I think that he now works for Ohio State as a lab technician.

Several months ago, I ran across Paul in the Pub. Although he seemed reluctant to go into particulars, he did confirm the basic outline of his arrest with a kind of uneasy smile. I have not seen my former classmate since.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The chief intention of this essay is to analyze three short stories--"Tricentennial Seaweed Stories," "Cousins," and "A Vacation in Utah." The analysis in this essay will examine the fictional elements in these stories, including plot, character development, theme, and narrative point of view. Also, this analysis will attempt to determine the degree of success achieved in each short story in terms of style and content.

To begin with, there are two general categories in which short stories can be placed: escape and interpretive literature. All three short stories are interpretive because they give insight into human life. The first, "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories," creates a better understanding of today's society in perspective with possible disasters of the next century, if present trends continue. However, literature ought to entertain as well as interpret. The narrator's flippant sense of humor indicates that this short story is not intended to be read solely as a serious, anti-Utopian statement on America. The reader is willing to suspend disbelief and escape into a science-fiction world dominated by gallows humor. "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" may cause one rather to be amused than concerned for the future.

"Cousins" is a story in which conflicting religious views politely clash. This work is within the scope of interpretive

literature; it examines the interaction of three adults to interpret their inward selves through outward dialogue.

Of the three works, "A Vacation in Utah" is the most overtly interpretive of the human condition. In it, there are elements common to escape literature, such as suspense and surprise. However, these elements grow logically out of the plot and do not exist for their own sake. The introduction of several themes, most noticeably twentieth-century existentialism and capital punishment, as well as the character development of Paul Stevens, causes the story to rise above escapist fiction.

The plots of the three short stories are very divergent in content and style. The plot of "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" is structured around numerous digressions from the last day in the life of Ron McGowan. The story's title indicates to the reader that more than one near-autonomous story will be told. The funny-sad digression on President Glenn is almost isolated from the central action and character. Yet digressions of this kind are not uncommon to the science-fiction genre. Furthermore, the plot development is loose, but it is not free form. The following mental projection of Ron's daily routine from the first paragraph of the story serves to divine the path of the evolving plot into five narrative segments:

#1. Lunch; #2. Kuo-fan can finish the green forms; #3. There's some problems with the monument list; #4. There's some Grade 17 thing . . . agriculture, no less; #5. The whole g'damn thing's futile anyway.

At the story's denouement where mankind dies, the "whole g'damn thing" is indeed futile.

The major conflict written into the plot is the struggle between McGowan and his twenty-first century environment; it is never much of a contest. Early in the narrative, Ron, with his personal negativism, senses the ultimate pointless destination of mankind. Many readers may also find the short story's conclusion to be an obvious one. Thus, there is little of true suspense or surprise in "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories."

The plot in "Cousins" is more dependent on character than on action. The plot does not contain much suspense, surprise, or even physical action, but the story is full of psychological action. The high point in the prosaic drama is the cousins' exchange of quotations from Saint Paul and Stevie Wonder. The reader's interest is held by the wits and philosophical perspectives of the protagonists, not by the unravelling of an interwoven plot. However, the plot development within the objective viewpoint is definitely symmetrical. It begins with the visitor's arrival; it records the exchange of conflicting beliefs during the walk; and it concludes with a determinate ending when the visitor diplomatically rejects the pair's convictions.

In the first paragraph of "A Vacation in Utah," one is informed that Paul Stevens is the protagonist. His antagonists are varied. First, Stevens is victimized by environmental forces outside of his control; the death of his girlfriend is one example. His psyche is confronted with social forces that

are alien to his sense of justice; he is arrested; he begins to sympathize with the arrested Gilmore. Diverse facets of his own personality are in extreme conflict in the plot; Paul experiences a nervous breakdown.

These conflicts are woven into the plot design with a good degree of action and suspense. There is more dramatic action in this story than in the other two. The action and events in the latter pages of "A Vacation in Utah" develop logically from previous material. The reader is made aware of Paul's affinity with guns and is carefully apprised of his mental fluctuations. When the implausible scene in the Tabernacle is dramatized, it does not seem implausible. The realistic setting at Temple Square contributes to this fictional illusion. The suspense builds until the old choirman attends to his zipper. At this climactic point, the reader experiences a genuine surprise. This shift from suspense to comedy also marks a crucial point in Paul's character development.

The prominent characters of each of the three stories-- Ronald McGowan, Alan, and Paul Stevens-- are all intelligent loners; they tend toward being nondirectional. Both McGowan and Stevens are characterized by apathy and indifference mingled with a jaded hedonistic creed. Alan, the young musician, is indifferent to his senior recital. Both Alan of "Cousins" and Paul of "A Vacation in Utah" possess a similar collegiate lifestyle, as well as a collegiate sense of humor. There is something of the heroic in all three. Yet there are some major

differences, not only among their peculiar attributes, but also in the fictional techniques employed to create their lives.

Ronald McGowan is the only protagonist in "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories." The reader sees his cousin George only briefly. President Glenn is seen only from a mock-historic perspective. Although Ron lives in the future, he is much like a twenty-first century bureaucratic J. Alfred Prufrock. One does not need to know McGowan well to know his type. Although he suffers from a spiritual paralysis, he is well-intentioned and genteel. He has a human fondness for intoxicants and a need to escape routine. However, the reader is given only a partial view of his mental makeup because he is something of a flat character. Not many words are spent to explain the motivations behind his actions. First, he does not do very much. He catches two trains, reads a little, goes to a meeting, and stops at a bar just before the world turns into a seaweed whimper. Furthermore, the character, Ron McGowan, is just one element in a science-fiction scene composed of fearful events and clever narrative passages.

Alan, the visitor, is the protagonist in "Cousins." Although the author does not blatantly take Alan's side in the conflict of beliefs, his point of view is probably the closest to that of the majority of the readers. Also, Alan is given a special emphasis over the couple in the dialogue. When the visitor speaks, the author does not specifically identify the speaker. However, Alan is not intended as a model of behavior;

his hip skepticism seems shallow at times, and he is unable to attain the self-fulfillment that his older cousin has obtained. Alan is only a participant in an objectively detailed drama.

Although Alan, the protagonist, is at the center of most of the dialogue, Anne, the wife, is the most intriguing antagonist of the story. Her concept of human life is unquestionably dogmatic. The dialogue insinuates that her presence has caused her uxorious husband to accept new religious concepts, as well as a new first name. She almost seems to be the subject of ridicule in her last lines, where she insists that she is not religious, but charismatic. Yet Anne is far from being totally reprehensible; she does possess warmth and sincerity as a wife, mother, and conversationalist.

There are no dynamic characters in "Cousins." All three adults, including the soft-sell older cousin, remain unchanged at the story's end. Alan is still agnostic and Richard and Anne are still evangelical Christians. The couple may "plant seeds" of their faith in Alan's memory; yet one is left with the impression that Alan's mind will not be fertile soil.

It is difficult to distinguish the role of character and plot in a fictional work. Certainly, little would be left of the plot of "Cousins" if the dialogue of the characters was removed. The element of character development is no less an integral segment of the plot of "A Vacation in Utah." The

unusual plot action is made credible by the unusual personality traits of Paul Stevens. In turn, his personality is believable because of the success of the narration.

Paul is a dynamic character in the sense that he is capable of change. At times, one may feel that he is incapable of anything else. Stevens does grow in personal strength for all his erratic experiences; yet the narrator, Tom Brawner, equivocates as to Paul's final ability to cope with society and himself. Brawner concludes Paul's story on several notes of uncertainty; the story has an indeterminate ending. The narrator enigmatically states that Paul "seems like a different man" on the last page. Paul has only "more or less quit dealing." The last glimpse that the reader receives of the protagonist is one of a man with "a kind of uneasy smile." The reader does not know whether the protagonist has really changed.

Although Paul's final self is something of a mystery, he is an excellent example of a round character throughout the story. His intellect, weaknesses, sense of humor, and mercurial shifts in personality produce the most human character examined in this essay.

There are several themes developed in "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories." Various fictional elements join to present these themes. The kindred elements of plot and character help develop the theme of modern futility. Symbol and irony also

contribute to this topic. The modified Mount Rushmore serves as an ironic symbol of an America beyond hope. Saul Rothschild is an ironically funny Christ figure; he is humorous despite his gift of death, not eternal life. The Christ symbolism is established through several whimsical biblical allusions. Rothschild is a master carpenter who dies from self-inflicted wounds made by his own nailgun. His twelve disciples are a pop music band who soon kill themselves.

The story contains several parallels between twenty-first century America and the late Roman Empire. The influx of foreigners into the armed forces and industry is one parallel. Rothschild's cult is in part analogous to the early growth of Christianity. Julian Glenn is comparable to the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate. The Elagabalus-Baby Bar, where Ron turned into seaweed, is a historic reference to a previous decadent time period. These connections add levels of meaning to the thematic material on the spiritual and social fall of Western man.

Along with the fall-of-the-Western-man motif, the theme of Ron's alienation from society and self is developed. The reader is informed by the narrator that Ron's weak life force is kept alive by his half-hearted devotion to his federal job. McGowan is not even sure that he is alive. However, the themes on modern man and society, although interesting, are less

salient to the readability of "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" than the narrator's pervasive wit.

There is a certain realism in "Cousins" which derives from the thematic design. The reader has difficulty in finding a message from an analysis of the dialogue. Neither the visitor's nor the couple's side of the religious questions is complete. All three are sympathetic towards the other's beliefs and emotions. All three adults have potentially destructive flaws just below the surface. This story is an imaginary transcript of a family visit. Although it reads like a transcript, it is indirectly interpretive of the words of three unique fictional characters. These characters represent in part the beliefs and nonbeliefs of many nonfictional people. The Second Coming of Jesus, the need for belief, intuition versus reason, and social responsibility are some of the themes contained in the dialogue. However, the conversations raise many metaphysical and social questions, but few are answered in the nondidactic story-transcript.

In "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories," the plot, the recurrent symbolism, and the characters form a death-wish extravaganza. There is a kind of death-wish embodied in the couple's faith in the Second Coming in "Cousins." In "A Vacation in Utah," Paul Stevens becomes infatuated with the concept of suicide in conjunction with homicide. The protagonist wishes to be martyred for an ill-defined existential cause. Stevens has read Camus and Sartre. He reaches an existential decision

on the Salt Lake beach that is redolent of Camus' stranger. During his interrogation, Paul jokingly refers to himself as a "Texas existentialist." These references do not make up a cogent philosophical statement, but they do help the reader decipher Paul's thoughts and behavior.

The anti-capital-punishment theme based on the execution of Gary Gilmore overlaps the topic of Stevens' sense of existentialism. Throughout the story, Gilmore is an offstage protagonist who strangely parallels Paul in circumstance. The narrator informs the listener that Stevens considers the situational irony in the Gilmore case to be "heavy-handed." The bizarre legal and moral complications of his case culminate when Paul comically asks if he must kill a Mormon to be killed by one. The discrepancy between how the law enforcement officers interpret Paul's "Texas existentialist" speech and how the reader regards his sarcastic words lends dramatic irony to a key scene in the development of the thematic materials.

In Paul's dream, which is in part Yeats' "The Second Coming" paraphrased, Gary Gilmore becomes a superhuman symbol of not only the capital punishment theme, but of a new fearful age as well. When Gilmore transforms into a dream monster, only Stevens is left alive in a new age. The "rough beast" smiles approvingly at the jaded protagonist. In this new age, in which Paul considered himself a member of the vanguard, hopelessness, ennui, and indifference are the qualities needed for survival. In the

Tabernacle scene, "the pale case of indifference" unites with Paul's sense of humanity to prevent his finger from pulling the trigger.

Paul's guiding seagull serves to compress much thematic meaning into just a few lines. The seagull in Utahan legends is the divine protector of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. However, the seagull, which saved the Mormons from a plague of locust, now condones Stevens' homicidal plan; it has defected to Paul's need for action amid futility. On the drive back to Salt Lake City, Paul envisions that "other misfits" would "plague the Utah authorities with their sense of futility." This time, the symbolic seagull would not interfere with the plague.

There are several ambiguities in Paul's moral perspective. Despite his erratic and nonconformist behavior, he seems to be a moral individual. Yet there are a number of inherent barriers which make the formulation of a functioning code of human values based on indifference and futility difficult, if not impossible. However, Paul's psyche is too mercurial to support a consistent philosophy. The thematic materials on existentialism and capital punishment are just part of the fictional whole. There is not one unified message to be discerned from the vacation trip of Paul Stevens.

The plot, themes, and characters of "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" are developed by an indirect presentation from an omniscient narrator. This narrator is traditional in his

godlike view of man's history to its very end. However, the omniscient voice is a curious type of god. The narrator digresses from incident to incident, employing a refined vocabulary interspersed with slang and puns. The omniscient voice figuratively refers to a synthetic hot dog as "a frankfurter from the briney deep." In the whimsical digression on President Glenn's admiration of Teddy Roosevelt, the narrator puns on the word "bully." The storytelling voice coins the hyphenated verb "cluster-copulate." The narrator's motley diction, along with the comic tone, may detract from the serious themes in the work. But, once again, it is the comic element that makes "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" readable.

The characters and plot flow of "Cousins" are directly presented through the dialogue and brief physical descriptions. The objective narrative voice only creates fiction through outward tangibles. The reader must interpolate inner meaning from the externalities of the dialogue.

In "A Vaction in Utah," the author is twice removed from the central character. Between the author and Paul Stevens is the student-narrator, Tom Brawner. In the first paragraph, Brawner tells the reader that he is "only a minor character." One sees very little of him outside of his narrative function. Brawner freely mixes purple prose diction with slang, psychological terms, and drug culture jargon. As the narrator, he seemingly recounts Paul's story from first-hand information in a

first-person voice. Actually, Paul's story unfolds in a hybrid of narrative voices. Tom Brawner begins the short story in the first person. The information disclosed about Stevens in the first few pages is appropriate to the narrator-protagonist friendship. However, a sudden shift in the narrative voice takes place after a few pages. When Paul leaves on his trip, it is as if Brawner goes along as a phantom recorder of Stevens' constantly changing thoughts and environments. In this manner, Brawner narrates from a limited omniscient point of view until he returns in person on the last page. Brawner offers an explanation for this narrative irregularity. He tells the audience that he "learned the thoughts, actions, and near-actions of Paul's Utahian vacation" from the assistant director of the sanatorium where Paul was committed. This learned, yet unethical psychologist, would be privy to many of Stevens' memories. But the minute details that the narrator weaves into the story seem beyond what any one human would accurately know. Brawner knows everything on the trip, from external weather conditions to the exact internal processes of Paul's mind. The sweeping transition from Gilmore's corpse to Stevens in the shower reads very much like a passage from an omniscient point of view.

The question of the story's source casts doubts on the narrator. One is told that Paul's story "is derived more or less from real events." Until the shift in voice occurs, the story proceeds in an informal tone much like that of a tall tale being orally presented. In the bulk of the story, where Brawner,

the character, almost disappears and where a more formal tone picks up, the narrator is more subtle in his storytelling, but he is not necessarily more faithful to first-hand information.

There is another problem about Brawner, the narrator. When the narrator speaks, it is difficult to determine whether he is championing his own cause or Paul's. In part, the juxtaposition of first person and limited omniscient voices creates this ambiguity. Brawner supposedly is objectively recounting the vacation trip through Stevens' point of view and opinions. The narrator's use of sentimentality in his description of the Gilmore execution leads the reader to suspect that Brawner is expressing a subjective opinion clearly not Paul's. It is difficult to tell the storyteller from the story.

To select the most successful short story of the three is a perplexing task. Each story achieves an acceptable degree of artistic unity within its genre and scope. Admittedly, "Cousins" is a simpler story than the other two. Although exciting action is not mandatory for a fictional plot, "Cousins" at points seems overly prosaic. However, there are several humorous passages in the dialogue. The dialogue, with its youthful banter, clever repartee, and vibrant interruptions, reads like a nonfictional drama. The personalities of the protagonists are contradictory enough to seem human.

"Cousins" possesses a sense of place with its physical descriptions of, and reference to, Princeton, New Jersey. On one level, "A Vacation in Utah" could be read as a travelogue. In

particular, the descriptions of Salt Lake City lend a sense of place to the narration. Beyond the reality of the setting, "A Vacation in Utah" is the most complex work of the three because of the protagonist, Paul Stevens, and the successful mixing of suspense with comedy. Also, it is the only sustained narrative treated in this essay. The story, through the narrator, sustains and interweaves irony, symbolism, plot, character, theme, and humor into a complex fictional design.

The intent of "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" is to evoke, as well as to amuse. Much of the symbolism in this story is designed for comic effect. Its artistic unity of elements certainly attempts less than that of "A Vacation in Utah"; the plot of "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" is more fragmented. Admittedly, McGowan is a pale and flat character compared to Stevens. However, because of its comic science-fiction design, "Tricentennial Seaweed Stories" is the most successful work of the three within its attempted scope.