

THE CHILD IN THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY:  
A CONSIDERATION OF THE ART AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TREATMENT OF  
CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE IN A REPRESENTATIVE SELECTION OF AMERICAN  
SHORT STORIES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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A Thesis  
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The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
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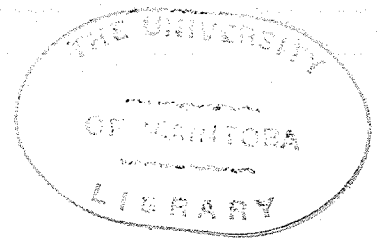
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by  
Donald M. Plummer

April 1960



ABSTRACT

of a thesis entitled

THE CHILD IN THE AMERICAN SHORT STORY:

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The study has a twofold purpose: to analyze the use of childhood and adolescent characters in American short stories and to throw light upon the motives lying behind the extensive use of such characters. Chapters are formed on the basis of thematic considerations: the child himself, the changes of adolescence and the artistic use of adolescent characteristics, and parent-child relationships. Altogether thirty-nine stories are examined, stories representing fifteen American authors of this century.

The writer finds that stories of childhood and adolescence fall into two groups: those in which the author is interested in the child himself and those in which the characteristics of childhood--especially the inexperience and innocence of adolescence--are used to explore some of the problems of existence. Stories of the first group, the writer believes, owe their existence to the child-centredness of the American culture and to the interest of contemporary psychology in childhood, an interest which authors have closely paralleled. Stories of the second group--those with other levels of meaning--often express disillusionment. On the other hand, two of the most powerful stories of adolescence give us two "resounding affirmations of the human spirit." In the final chapter the writer states his view that for many authors the adolescent character became the instrument and symbol of ambivalence--the ambivalence which resulted from the loss of American innocence.

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## CHAPTER I

### PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A twofold purpose underlies the following study. On the one hand, it will analyze the use of child and adolescent characters in a representative selection of twentieth century American short stories. On the other hand, it will attempt to throw light upon the motives which lie behind the use of child and adolescent characters in these stories. In adopting the unique approach of grouping together stories which treat childhood and adolescence, the present study will bridge a gap which has existed heretofore in short story criticism. For in spite of the fact that many of the stories to be considered in this study have appeared in a number of anthologies, and in spite of the fact that much has been written on individual stories as they relate to the total work of this or that particular author, stories of childhood and adolescence have never been examined in relation to one another, nor have they been considered for their total, cumulative significance in the stream of American literature. It is in the belief that there are important relations within this group of stories, and that there is a considerable significance to this body of literature, that the following pages have been written.

The fact that a large number of short stories of our time do

feature child and adolescent characters is one which appears to be little realized or appreciated by short story critics. It is a fact, however, which is easily confirmed by a glance at the table of contents of any one of a number of short story anthologies which have appeared in the course of the last half-century. The forty-odd stories considered in this study -- and these only a representative sample -- indicate, surely, that in purely quantitative terms, childhood and adolescence have been major concerns of American writers in the first half of the present century. Moreover, when one pauses to reflect on the truly great short story achievements of this period, immediately such titles come to mind as "The Killers", "The Red Pony", "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" and "The Bear": all of these are stories which feature child or adolescent characters. Both quantitatively and qualitatively then, it appears that childhood and adolescence are subjects which have been highly favored by American writers of the present century.

Why is this so? Why do American writers choose so often to write about child and adolescent characters? What does the existence of this considerable body of literature indicate of the twentieth century American artist's attitude toward life? What do these stories reveal of contemporary American culture? Are they symptomatic of some deep malaise? Or do they, on the contrary, indicate youthful health and vigour? These are the problems which the following study will attempt to illuminate, and these are the questions for which it will provide at least partial answers.

The stories included in the study are drawn from a wide variety of authorship -- as separated in time as Sherwood Anderson and Truman Capote, and as geographically removed as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County in the South from Steinbeck's Pastures of Heaven in California. Such diversity in authorship makes for an extremely heterogeneous body of material -- so heterogeneous, in fact, that grouping these stories together is possible only by virtue of their single unifying characteristic; that is, that all of them feature child or adolescent characters in a prominent way.

This heterogeneity makes the task of dividing our primary material into convenient discussion units an extremely difficult one. Chronological considerations are of little help in this regard, and division on the basis of authorship involves one in innumerable repetitions and cross-references. While no method of division proves completely satisfactory, a way out of the difficulty is suggested by the recurring themes in the stories themselves. It is, therefore, on the basis of thematic considerations that the following chapters are formed. Some writers choose to write about child characters purely out of fascination with child behavior. Our second chapter will consider a group of stories in which this is the case. Other writers have been interested in the physical and emotional changes of adolescence; and closely related to stories of this type, some writers have used the characteristics of the adolescent -- his ambivalent moods, his idealism -- for the expression of personal feelings and views in regard to twentieth century life.

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Adolescence and the artistic use of adolescent characteristics will concern us in our third chapter. Still other writers examine in their stories some aspect of the relationship between the world of the child and the world of the adult -- especially the relationship of child to parent. These stories will be examined in our fourth chapter. A final chapter will summarize our study and draw conclusions from the entire group of stories considered.

With these few remarks we may proceed to the examination of the stories themselves. The method followed as far as possible will be to summarize each story briefly and to let the exegetical comment grow out of these brief summaries. In this way the writer hopes to achieve a satisfactory balance between what the various authors have expressed in the stories themselves and what we must observe about these stories -- for purposes of our study. This balance will, it is hoped, enable the reader who may not be completely familiar with every story, to follow the argument of the study, and at the same time will not excessively try the patience of the reader to whom these stories are well known.

## CHAPTER II

### STORIES OF NORMAL AND ABNORMAL CHILDREN

Authors choose to write about children from a variety of motives, the examination of which will constitute an important part of this study. As will be evident in a later chapter, child or adolescent characters are often created to express an author's own feelings and attitudes in regard to some aspect of life--feelings and attitudes which could hardly be expressed at all, or at least could be expressed with much less appropriateness through adult characters.<sup>1</sup> For example, in "Two Soldiers", William Faulkner creates the child character who narrates the story, to express the feelings of shock mixed with patriotism which all Americans felt at the time of the outbreak of World War II.<sup>2</sup> Our response to these feelings is the greater for re-experiencing them through the sensitive and innocent mind of a child. Before turning to these more complex stories, however, it is appropriate to begin this study by an examination of a group of stories whose authors have no special message to convey, stories in which child characters are presented simply and purely out of fascination with childhood itself.

This interest in the child or adolescent himself is an important

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<sup>1</sup>See infra p. 24, et passim.

<sup>2</sup>William Faulkner, "Two Soldiers", Collected Stories of William Faulkner (hereinafter referred to as Collected Stories), Random House, New York, 1943, pp. 81-101.

one not only in the stories which concern us in this chapter; it is important in the creation of most of the stories included in the entire study. It is a factor in the more complex stories to be considered later --in the creation of Nick Adams of Ernest Hemingway or Jody Tifflin in John Steinbeck's "The Red Pony", to use only two of many conspicuous examples that might be chosen.<sup>3</sup> Our concern at the moment, however, is with stories in which the interest in the child himself--either normal or abnormal--is the dominant motive, almost the sole motive, in the creation of a story.

It is a matter of broad cultural significance that American writers should have devoted considerable creative energy to the portrayal of child and adolescent characters purely out of interest in childhood: Americans are universally known for their love of children. Whether this fact is the bone of American culture or one of its highest virtues is a moot question, but that it is one of the facts of American life is beyond dispute. As one recent observer of the American scene has commented,

Perhaps allied to its maternalism, perhaps stemming from the heritage of the frontier, is America's overwhelming love of children. It is a pleasant experience to walk along an American street and to find both men and women enthralled by the very presence of a child. American children must be the most violently loved on earth. 4

The most obvious evidence of this American characteristic is to be found

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<sup>3</sup> John Steinbeck, "The Red Pony", The Long Valley, World Publishing Company, New York, 1945, pp. 263-279. Also see infra pp. 53-60, 77-80.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Angoff (ed.), "The Comic Strip in American Life" American Writing Today, New York University Press, New York, 1957, p. 317.

found in its popular literature and in its mass entertainment media. Mark Twain's stories, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn--as the latter has been popularly misinterpreted and misunderstood--are early examples in a long tradition of the stereotyped boy in popular literature. Later examples are found in the Penrod series of Booth Tarkington and in the Peck's Bad Boy series of George Wilbur Peck. Still more recently, this tradition has flourished in motion picture and television shows like Leave it to Beaver and Dennis the Menace--the good little boys who have more than their share of mischievous propensities and who always triumph over the complexities of plot which are invented for them ad nauseam. The fact that such material has been consistently popular and highly saleable is indicative of the long and continuing popular interest in the sentimental and superficial aspects of childhood and adolescence.

To be sure, the stereotyped child abounds in American popular entertainment, but truly sensitive portrayals of children--such portrayals as concern us in this chapter--are much more rare. Still it is the same qualities in children--their innocence, their frankness, their occasional grotesqueries of behaviour, above all, their uninhibited enjoyment of life--which appeal alike to the writer of popular literature and to the serious artist. The perceptions of the true artist are, of course, deeper than those of his sub-literary counterpart. The stories included in this portion of our study represent a concern with the world of childhood and adolescence at a deeper level than that of the popular literature; truth rather than popularity or saleability is the motivating force in their

creation. All stories considered in this chapter feature child or adolescent characters in a prominent way, and all characters so created are successful enough in an artistic sense to demand consideration by the student of literature. To be exhaustive, more titles would have to be added, but those chosen are a representative sample and will serve well enough in our examination of the type. Such a representative sampling will also serve in the interests of brevity. The stories are divided into two groups: those which present normal children and those which portray abnormality in children.

#### I. NORMAL CHILDREN

Consider first a touching and simple story, "The Bumpers", by John Powell.<sup>5</sup> In this story the writer's sole concern was to present the endearing qualities of growing boys in a believable and interesting way. The narrator-author has picked up four boys in his automobile, has driven them a short distance and let them off at a crossroads near their homes. The story simply records the conversation of the boys; it was written out of a desire on the part of the author to share a particularly memorable experience with children.

We immediately recognize American boyhood's interest in cars in such a passage as the following:

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<sup>5</sup> John Powell, "The Bumpers", Fifty-five Short Stories from the New Yorker, (hereinafter referred to as New Yorker Collection) Simon and Schuster, New York, 1949, pp. 445-451.



"It shows up to a hundred," the older one in back said, leaning forward with his chin on my seat and pointing at the speedometer. "I never seen but a few Fords that could make a hundred."<sup>6</sup>

We recognize universal boyhood's bizarre means of expression in such a passage as the following:

"I heard about a soldier," the older boy in back said. "I think it was out on the Camp Davis road. And he got in a wreck, and one side of his nose? His brains was runnin' out the one side of his nose, and they had a glass they were ketchin' 'em in, and ever' day they wd pump 'em back in his head."<sup>7</sup>

Or again, when the conversation has turned to the subject of fires and firemen, we see boyhood's preoccupation with violent and spectacular events:

After a moment, Curtis said, "Someday the firemen ain't goin' to the fire and the whole town is gonna burn up. All across town---whoom!"<sup>8</sup>

In this way, and through many more quotable passages, the boys simply emerge--believable and delightful. Revelation of character through dialogue is the technique here, and it is perfectly suited to this presentation of growing boys. We are seldom aware of the unobtrusive author, but at the conclusion of the story he reveals himself in these words:

They were standing on the grass between the curb and the sidewalk smiling, and I saw that I had picked up the right people and had made some friends.<sup>9</sup>

It is a measure of the success of this story that its reader experiences the same sense of amusement and delight in the endearing qualities of these boys as its author has experienced.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p. 445.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 449.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 451. <sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 451.

A similar motivation, that is, the presentation of interesting child characters, marks William Saroyan's story, "The Great Leapfrog Contest".<sup>10</sup> This story is told in the more conventional third person narrative. The central character is Rosy Mahoney, a tough tomboy, who has maintained a position of hegemony in her neighborhood by virtue of her skill in combat. When Rex Folger, a Texan and a gentleman—one moreover who is accustomed to a position of leadership in his own right—when this paragon of Southern manliness moves into Rosy's sphere of influence, a battle for supremacy is inevitable. With Rosy's clever contriving it is not long in coming. When it does, Rex, in the proud tradition of the South, refuses to strike a "lady", and as an alternative, a leapfrog contest is agreed upon to decide once and for all who is to be leader.

Rosy's victory is certain from the beginning, for she is untrammelled by the gentlemanly scruples which govern Rex's conduct. This "lady", whom Rex has refused to strike, bumps his head on the gravel roadway each time she leaps over him. In this way the contest goes on, mile after weary mile. Rex bears up well until their contest brings them to a section of concrete. With this, Rosy knows that the contest is over. Summoning all her strength, she delivers the coup de grace and her adversary lies defeated and unconscious on the pavement. Assured of a permanent place in the unwritten history of her neighborhood, Rosy turns

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<sup>10</sup> William Saroyan, "The Great Leapfrog Contest", The Trouble With Tigers, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1938, pp. 119-128.

to more ladylike pursuits after this final triumph. In her "retirement", she plays to the utmost of her ability the role of undefeated champion.

Here again is a story written out of sheer fascination with child behaviour and containing no serious overtones. The effect achieved is comedy--comedy bordering on the mock-heroic. There is humor in the exaggerated role-playing of the children--Rex, the Southern gentleman; Rosy, the champion. There is humor in the seriousness with which all of the spectator children regard the contest. Whether or not the story should be regarded as serious literature is perhaps an open question, but it does illustrate the literary interest in the grotesque side of child behaviour.

Comedy reaches hilarious proportions in the story, "Children on Their Birthdays" by Truman Capote.<sup>11</sup> This story is really nothing more than an elaborate and extended character sketch of its main character, Miss Bobbitt. She is a ten-year-old girl, who has precocious if somewhat implausible mind; her outstanding quality is that she is much given to imitating what she believes to be adult modes of behaviour. When she arrives in town, her flamboyant ways completely captivate the attentions of two hitherto irresponsible boys, Preacher Starr and Billy Bob. They become rivals for her affection; they pick flowers to win her approving nod; they become her agents in a cosmetics business. They become tidy

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<sup>11</sup> Truman Capote, "Children on Their Birthdays", A Tree of Night, Random House, New York, 1949. pp. 35-64.

in their personal habits, ambitious in their working habits--all for Miss Bobbitt. Sometimes they are driven to do incredibly ridiculous things on her account, such as climbing the pecan tree or deliberately picking fights to prove themselves.

Even though she does love their attention and their meek submission to her every whim, Miss Bobbitt does not respond to their affections in any genuine way. She is, in fact, completely narcissistic. Her greatest desire is to go to Hollywood for a screen test, an ambition which she very nearly realizes. However, on the day that she is to leave, the two boys prepare her an enormous bouquet. In her grand theatrical manner, she runs across the street to receive it--and is run over by the six-o'clock bus.

The story is completely successful in what it attempts to do, that is to re-create an interesting child and to show the effect which she had on the two boys. The smallness of its subject perhaps illustrates what has been called modern American literature's concern "with minute facets of minute experience".<sup>12</sup>

It is the inner life of a child which Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings has created so successfully in "Black Secret".<sup>13</sup> This story's slender plot, the discovery by the boy that his favorite uncle, Baxter Merrill,

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic, Vol. II. Oxford University Press, New York, 1942, p. 570.

<sup>13</sup> Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, "Black Secret", New Yorker Collection, pp. 472-478.

is a reprobate, is merely instrumental to the portrayal of the mind of the child. The central character is Dickie Merrill, a seven-year-old boy. He is presented in two scenes: in the living room, playing at the feet of his mother and her guest, Mrs. Tipton, and later in the barbershop, having his hair trimmed. In each case Dickie overhears a conversation. In the first scene, to the appearance of his mother and her guest, Dickie is completely absorbed in a picture book; in reality he is straining every nerve to understand what it is the adults are discussing in such hushed tones. Both his skillful deception and the nature of the scandal surrounding his uncle are shown in the following passages:

Her voice sounded the way it sounded when she had a headache.  
 "She's not lying. I tell you, Mrs. Merrill, men are beasts."  
 His mother sat down again and Mrs. Tipton sat too.  
 Mrs. Tipton said in a low voice, "Dickie?"  
 His mother said, "Oh, my dear, he's only seven."  
 "But little pitchers have big ears."  
 His mother said, "Dickie, dear, Wouldn't you like to go out and play?"  
 He pretended not to hear.  
 "Dickie, dear."  
 He looked up from the picture book. "Mummy, do lions have long tails?"  
 His mother smiled at Mrs. Tipton. "You see."  
 They settled back.<sup>14</sup>

From the first conversation, Dickie learns that his uncle is linked in scandal with an attractive mulatto girl. In the barbershop scene, his child world is shattered when he realizes from the conversation of two gentlemen that his uncle is father of the girl. With this realis-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 474.

ation, he runs from the barbershop in tears.

By any criterion, the presentation of Dickie is superb. Its success is due to Miss Rawlings' instinctive feeling for the world of a child and to her facility in translating this into adult language. The descriptive qualities of her prose enable us to relive the keen sense impressions of a child, as for example in the following passage, in which we become aware of several senses in quick succession--sight, smell, tactile sense and sound:

The shutters were drawn in the parlor against the afternoon sun. June lay heavily on the street outside, but the room was dark and cool. Hummingbirds droned in the honeysuckle over the window. The fragrance filtered through the shutters. Dickie flattened his face against the rose-patterned Brussels carpet. It was pleasantly harsh and faintly dusty. He moved his cheek to the smoothness of his picture book. The page was smooth and slippery. He lay comfortably, imagining that the painted lion under him was alive and the lion was breathing against him. He wished that it was night, when the new gas lights would flare from their brass pipes on the wall, for their yellow flickering made the lion's eyes move and shine. He lifted his head. The double doors of the parlor were sliding open. He heard his mother speak.<sup>15</sup>

Humor born of adult exasperation is the key to a delightful story of children, Niccoli Tucci's "Evolution of Knowledge".<sup>16</sup> In this story, in contrast to the majority which are considered in this study, it is the child world which is triumphant and the adults who must do the accepting and the adjusting. It is primarily to the harassed segment of society which will acknowledge the truth of this basic premise--that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 472.

<sup>16</sup> Niccoli Tucci, "The Evolution of Knowledge", New Yorker Collection, pp. 396-405.

is, parents---that this story is directed.

The story centers around a typical urban problem. The author and his wife must provide, at one and the same time, a quiet atmosphere for the scholarly and childless Mr. Feinstein, who lives in the apartment below, and a permissive atmosphere in which their own children can grow according to the most up-to-date notions of child psychology. These two opposing philosophies are cleverly summed up in the author's words, " 'Man must sleep' (his theory), 'Children must jump' (mine)". Space does not permit a description of the various strategies which are adopted in attempting to achieve these irreconcilable ends. The children win at every turn. At the end of two years, both the author and Mr. Feinstein have reached a state of exhaustion: Mr. Feinstein from lack of rest, and the author from worrying about Mr. Feinstein's lack of rest. The story ends happily, when, after a heated argument, the two gentlemen adopt a philosophical attitude toward the children and become good friends.

Mr. Tucci tells his story in a good-humored, lightly philosophical vein that attests to long parenthood. The tongue-in-cheek retelling of the strategies which go awry, parental exasperation at the child mentality, amazement at the helpful but impractical school psychologist---these are other ingredients of this highly entertaining story.

"Bubbles", by Wilbur Daniel Steele, is another interesting study of the mind of a child.<sup>17</sup> Carol, seven years old, has lived a nomadic

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<sup>17</sup>Wilbur Daniel Steele, "Bubbles", The Best Stories of Wilbur Daniel Steele (hereinafter referred to as Best Stories) Doubleday and Company Inc., New York, 1946, pp. 208-228.

life in Europe and America, travelling with her father, her nurse, Coddie, and a succession of governesses and secretaries, who are, in reality, her father's mistresses. The complexities which surround Carol--the plot seems to owe much to Henry James--are all but lost in her egocentric view of things:

Carol was proud and jealous all in one. She wished she were dying, so that he [her father] couldn't go but must stay and be distracted about her. Yet just as fiercely she wanted him to go--out where the clustered lights were and the admiring throngs. "Do look: who is that wonderful man?"..."But don't you know? You know the girl with the red-brown curls and the green jacket and gaiters--well, that's her father!"<sup>18</sup> [Italics in the original]

Carol is unaware of the dark intrigue in her father's search for a suitable "governess". The juxtaposition of the egocentric child world and the world of the father's lust is one of the story's main interests. The story handles the inner world of the child with great cleverness. "Carol felt things a good deal more than she knew things", and in the world of Carol's feelings, Steele is at his best, as in the following passage:

How could she ask where such a thing as her nightie was, when she couldn't even ask where Coddie was? The next morning it came back with a thump, "Coddie isn't here".<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, the story is marred by an excessive emphasis on plot, suggesting a strong G. Henry influence. The introduction of the insanity of the mother, for example, is a completely extraneous note which detracts from the success of the story.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.



Here, then, is a representative group of stories which appeal to adult amusement and delight in and for normal children. The prime motive, as noted earlier, is to present children in a real and interesting way. These stories represent American love of children in its best literary expression, as opposed to the sentimentalized, stereotyped, even grotesque characters in the popular literature and mass entertainment media, which represent this characteristic of American culture at its worst. No one would hold that these stories rank with great literature, or even with great short stories; but literature, and the short story medium in particular, are enriched by their existence.

## II. ABNORMAL CHILDREN

Our concern in the preceding section was with the interest of writers in the world of normal children. In addition to stories of the foregoing kind, a number of authors have written sensitively of abnormality in children. It is to this rather specialized interest (but still within our larger context of the interest of writers in the child himself) that we now turn our attention.

The first story to be considered is Wilbur Daniel Steele's "The Body of the Crime".<sup>20</sup> The hero, Daniel Kinsman, is the victim of a traumatic experience in late infancy, an experience which he cannot remember but which has left him with a terrible fear of his father. The narrative of the story reveals the exact nature of the experience, and

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<sup>20</sup> Wilbur Daniel Steele, "The Body of the Crime", Best Stories, pp. 349-368.

its discovery by the boy is the climax of the story. The boy's fear, which neither the boy nor his father understands, is always heightened by a certain set of circumstances. The sight of his father standing in a stooped position with a bundle in his arms produces this heightened reaction, especially if this occurs in the half-light of evening. The word murder also causes the boy to turn cold with fear, as does the sight of a particular Seckel pear tree. After his mother's death, the boy's fear is augmented; so that it is with relief that he leaves home to attend a boys' camp. A chance remark of the camp doctor on the subject of memory causes the boy to search his own subconscious for the basis of his fear. This slow process of recall gradually convinces him that his father has buried something at the base of the Seckel pear tree. On a certain day, knowing that his father is away, the boy returns home and begins to dig frantically on this spot. He can now remember his mother's words on an evening long ago, "It's brutal murder". As he digs, his emotions rise to a higher and higher pitch; he is now convinced that his father has murdered someone. Finally, he comes upon the skeleton of a dog. He realizes immediately that the burial of the dog, an event which had occurred while he was a mere toddler, had become confused in his early consciousness with actual murder. This, he now sees clearly, was the cause of his fear. His father returns home at this moment, and rather melodramatically, the boy collapses into his father's arms. The boy's fear has ended: at least this is what Steel would have us believe.

The story is not without its interests, but the psychology is too

mathematically precise to suit the tastes of the modern reader. The story has a great deal of surface brilliance, but one is struck too, as Ray B. West has pointed out in regard to Steele's writings in general, "by an almost too predictable craftsmanship, utilized too much for its own sake".<sup>21</sup> As the same writer continues, "as with O. Henry and masters of this type of writing, once the trick is seen, too little remains to satisfy the demanding reader".<sup>22</sup>

Another interesting study of abnormality is Steinbeck's story of Tularecito, a severely retarded child.<sup>23</sup> Tularecito attends school in accordance with the compulsory attendance requirement but he is unable to learn. He has only one skill, an extraordinary ability to draw and model animals. His teacher is delighted to discover this peculiar ability, for it offers her some means of keeping the boy occupied. That afternoon, Tularecito entertains his classmates by filling the entire blackboard space with pictures of animals and birds. However, another side of Tularecito's simple nature is revealed the following morning. It appears that he loves the birds and animals he has created to the extent of being quite prepared to destroy anyone who meddles with them. When the teacher asks the pupils to erase some of Tularecito's

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<sup>21</sup> Ray B. West Jr., *The Short Story in America* (hereinafter referred to as *The Short Story*) Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1952; p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>23</sup> John Steinbeck, "Four", *The Pastures of Heaven*, World Publishing Company, Cleveland, Ohio, 1932, pp. 45-57.

animals so that the regular classroom work may proceed, a near riot ensues. Tularecito defends his animals with his fists and injures several children in the process.

It is this characteristic of Tularecito which very nearly results in tragedy. One day the teacher reads her pupils a story of fairies and gnomes. Tularecito is fascinated. To him they are not imaginary creatures; they are real, and he determines to find them. Imagining that he hears voices in Bert Munroe's orchard, he begins to dig to find the little people. Munroe discovers the hole the following morning, and somewhat amusedly, he begins to fill it in. He is surprised and very nearly killed by an enraged Tularecito, who at that moment was returning to his digging. As a result, the aroused community arranges for Tularecito's confinement in a mental institution.

The most notable feature of this story is Steinbeck's superb handling of the fantasy world of this retarded child, as, for example in the following passage:

It was Bert Munroe's orchard. Often, when the land was deserted and ghost-ridden, Tularecito had come here in the night to lie on the ground under the trees and pick the stars with gentle fingers.

The moment he walked into the orchard he knew he was nearing home. He could not hear them, but he knew the gnomes were near. Over and over he called to them, but they did not come.

"Perhaps they do not like the moonlight," he said.

At the foot of a large peach tree he dug his hole--three feet across and very deep. All night he worked on it, stopping to listen and then digging deeper into the cool earth. Although he heard nothing, he was positive that he was nearing them. Only when daylight came did he give up and retire into the bushes to sleep.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid. p. 55 f.

One of the most successful stories of abnormality in children is Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow".<sup>25</sup> It is the story of a twelve-year-old boy's withdrawal from reality into the blank, empty world of schizophrenia. The causes of the boy's emotional disturbance are only darkly hinted; the focus throughout the story is in his progressive retreat from reality. The most important aspect of the boy's insanity is the hallucination of falling snow--the silent, secret snow, which muffles hearing, obscures vision and progressively insulates him from the terrible reality with which he has been unable to cope. The worsening of the boy's condition is cleverly measured from day to day by the point on the street at which he first recognizes the postman's footsteps. On the first day of his hallucination--when he had risen from his bed expecting to see the streets covered with snow--he recognizes the postman's footsteps at the seventh house from his own; on the second day, at the sixth house; the third day the fifth house, and so on. As his condition worsens and the real world is blanketed by the white, swirling masses of snow, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to carry on his daily routine at home and at school. The following passage illustrates this growing duality of his life. It describes superbly the dullness of the real world as it now appears to him and his excitement at discovering the delicious and secret new world:

This had been, indeed, the only distressing feature of the new experience: the fact that it so increasingly had brought him into

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<sup>25</sup>Conrad Aiken, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow", Angus Burrell and Bennett Cerf (eds.) The Bedside Book of Famous American Stories (hereinafter referred to as The Bedside Book, Random House, New York, 1939, pp. 959-973.

a kind of mute misunderstanding, or even conflict, with his father and mother. It was as if he were trying to lead a double life. On the one hand he had to be Paul Haslamen, and keep up the appearance of being that person--dress, wash, and answer intelligently when spoken to--; on the other, he had to explore this new world which had been opened to him. Nor could there be the slightest doubt--not the slightest--that the new world was the profounder and more wonderful of the two. It was irresistible. It was miraculous. Its beauty was simply beyond anything--beyond speech as beyond thought--utterly incommunicable. But how then, between the two worlds, of which he was thus constantly aware, was he to keep a balance?<sup>26</sup> *italics not in the original*

Finally, in the bedroom scene, we see the boy's complete separation from the world of reality. Both in artistic terms and in terms of psychological insight, it is a superb climax to a very fine story:

But then a gash of horrible light fell brutally across the room from the opening door--the snow drew back hissing--something alien had come into the room--something hostile. This thing rushed at him, shock him--and he was not merely horrified, he was filled with such a loathing as he had never known. What was this, this cruel disturbance, this act of anger and hate? It was as if he had to reach up a hand toward another world for any understanding of it,--an effort of which he was only barely capable. But of that other world he still remembered just enough to know the exorcising words. They tore themselves from his other life suddenly--

"Mother! Mother! Go away! I hate you!"<sup>27</sup>

### III. SUMMARY

Here, then, is a group of stories which illustrate the interest of the American writers of our time in the child himself. Stories in the first group, as we have seen, attempt nothing more than to present

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 963.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 973.

normal children--their endearing qualities and their grotesqueries of behaviour. The second group--comprising stories of abnormality in children--illustrate one of the ways in which the artists of our time have drawn inspiration from the contemporary psychologist.

### CHAPTER III

#### ADOLESCENCE -- INITIATION --

##### BECOMING A MAN

An aspect of child and adolescent experience which has received a great deal of attention from American writers of our time, and around which it is convenient to group, for purposes of discussion, a number of particularly rich and complex stories, is the maturation process, the growth of child to man. This interest is evident in such longer works of fiction as Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel,<sup>1</sup> but it manifests itself with particular force in the short story medium. It is to this kind of story that we now turn our attention; our concern will be the artistic treatment of adolescence, that transitional state between childhood and manhood which even after a half-century and more of study by psychologists, is still the most uncharted region of the human personality.<sup>2</sup>

Within this frame of reference -- the interest of writers in maturation or the adolescent period -- several kinds of interest are discernible. These various kinds of interest will be used in the following

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1929.

<sup>2</sup>Irene M. Josselyn The Adolescent and His World, (hereinafter referred to as The Adolescent) Family Service Association of America, New York, 1952, p.4.



pages as convenient divisions of our complex material. At the simplest level, some stories take for their subject the physical and emotional changes which accompany pubescence. At a more complex level, a large number of stories deal with some facet of the adolescent's initiation into the world of reality -- his first reaction to it, his feelings of disillusionment in regard to it or his ultimate adjustment to it. In many stories of this type, the adolescent character becomes the instrument through which the various authors express personal feelings of disillusionment in regard to life in the twentieth century, the means through which commonly held values are examined, repudiated, or in a few cases, affirmed. Finally, at an even more complex level, certain stories embody elements of both the foregoing types but go even further, to examine the problem of how a young person acquires the ability to cope with life, in other words, how a child becomes a man.

#### I. PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHANGE

##### Sexual Awakening

At the simplest level, let us consider first Victoria Lincoln's "Down in the Reeds by the River"<sup>3</sup>. The story of the sexual awakening of a fifteen year-old girl, it tells of her attempted seduction by a middle-aged Italian immigrant, Mr. de Rocca. The story begins with a thoughtful

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<sup>3</sup>Victoria Lincoln "Down in the Reeds by the River", New Yorker Collection, pp. 25-35.

comment on the inability of one to receive or benefit from the experience of another. This comment, although not strictly related to our topic, seems a particularly appropriate way to begin our study of the artistic treatment of adolescence. It will serve as a reminder that to each of us, the experiences of life are always new:

Why are we never prepared, why do all the books and all the wisdom of our friends avail us nothing in the final event? How many deathbed scenes we have read, how many stories of young love, of marital infidelity, of cherished ambition fulfilled or defeated. There is nothing that can happen to us that has not happened again and again, that we have not read over a thousand times, closely, carefully, accurately recorded; before we are fully launched on life, the story of the human heart has been opened for us again and again with all the patience and skill of the human mind. But the event, when it comes, is never anything like the description; it is strange, infinitely strange and new, and we stand helpless before it and realize that the words of another convey nothing, nothing.<sup>4</sup>

The narration of the story very nearly gives the lie to this opening comment, so perfectly does Miss Lincoln describe the girl's conflicting emotions in her first sexual experience. The climax of her conflict occurs in the following passage:

I knew that I must be doing something bad, and still I could not feel that it was bad yet, not yet. And his slowness made me confident that I was free to decide if it was really bad, that he would let me go quickly the minute I thought it had begun to be bad. It still did not seem to be bad when he kissed me, or when his kissing changed and made me feel all soft and strange inside, or when his hands began to describe all the differences that the year had made in my body, and to tell me silently that they were beauties, richness, a bounty of which to be proud.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

Following the incident -- the seduction is averted by the last minute arrival of a friend -- the girl has ambivalent feelings about her experience. For a time she actually wishes that her friend, Poey, had not come. Then, shocked by the realization of what certainly would have happened, she is overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, fear and remorse. These feelings last only a short time; they are dispelled later in the story by the warmth and affection of a sympathetic aunt.

The story has an authentic ring: the girl is susceptible to the advances of an older man, for her own parents have been killed recently in an automobile accident. She feels, consequently, the lack of warm relationships with older people. In a way not untypical of adolescence, she interprets Mr. de Rocca's friendliness wrongly and is very nearly victimized as a result. The story, remarkable for its authenticity and for the sensitive and frank manner in which it treats an intimate facet of experience, is a good illustration of the artist's interest in the sexual side of adolescent development.

Two stories which describe with insight and sensitivity the initial attraction which a boy feels for a girl are Stephen Vincent Benet's "Too Early Spring"<sup>6</sup> and Sherwood Anderson's "I'm a Fool".<sup>7</sup> From the former comes the following passage, which conveys a beautiful and tender message by an effective understatement:

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Vincent Benet "Too Early Spring" in Selected Works of Stephen Vincent Benet (hereinafter referred to as Selected Works), Farrar and Rhinchart Inc., New York, 1942, pp. 261 - 272.

<sup>7</sup> Sherwood Anderson "I'm a Fool", The Bedside Book p. 712 - 721.

"All the same, I wasn't thinking of her when we bumped into each other the first day of school. It was raining and she had on a green slicker and her hair was curly under her hat. We grinned and said hello and had to run. But something happened to us, I guess."<sup>8</sup>

And in "I'm a Fool" the same emotion is expressed more vigorously:

"...and when that Miss Woodbury was looking the other way once, Lucy Wesson kinda, with her shoulder, you know, kinda touched me. You know how a woman can do. They get close, but not getting gay either. You know what they do. Gee whizz."<sup>9</sup>

The same theme occurs in the stories of William Saroyan, where it is expressed in more sensual terms. In "Seventeen", for example, the sexual awakening is a major interest.<sup>10</sup> This is the story of Sam Wolinsky, "the crazy Polak with the broken nose". He feels the powerful urging of sex, and in his cynical way, determines to satisfy his desire violently. Believing that love is purely physical and "that all the rest was imaginary, stupid, fake," he goes to Chinatown to find a prostitute. His youth and inexperience let him down, however, for in making his wishes known to a watery-eyed madam, he commits what in terms of his affected cynicism is an unpardonable sin--he smiles! The consummation of his first sexual experience is a terrible disillusionment for the boy. Far from savoring every evil moment of it, as he had planned, he is revolted and disgusted. A mere half-hour later he returns home, shocked and horrified at the cheapness of his act. Still later, as his mother stands

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<sup>8</sup> Binet, op. cit. p. 264.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, op. cit. p. 718.

<sup>10</sup> William Saroyan "Seventeen" in Waiting Young Man on the Flying Trapeze, Modern Library Inc., New York, 1941, pp. 141 - 152.

by his bedroom door, she overhears him crying.<sup>11</sup>

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Another Saroyan story, "And Man",<sup>12</sup> continues the theme of sexual awakening in slightly different form. In the following passage, in which the adolescent hero is speaking of the girl with whom he has fallen in love, we have one of the wordiest expressions of the sexual attraction of girl for boy:

But the girl, I thought .... She was of me. I had taken her name, her form, the outward one and the inward one, and I had breathed her into me, joining her meaning to my meaning, and she was of my thought, of my motion in walking over the earth, and of my sleep .... I had loved her secretly, worshipped her, worshipping the very things she touched....<sup>13</sup>

As with many of Saroyan's early writings, the story is autobiographical -- an agglomeration of his own intimate adolescent feelings.<sup>14</sup> It must be emphasized, however, that the story is an extremely effective representation of life.

An exhaustive study of stories in which sexual awakening is an element is not possible within the confines of the present study; we have here chosen some obvious examples in which it is a major interest. It is an important element -- but not the main one -- in many stories of adolescence to be considered later. It is important in the Nick Adams series of Ernest Hemingway in such a story as "The Light of the World",

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<sup>11</sup>In its violently contrasting moods this story also illustrates Saroyan's awareness of ambivalent feelings in adolescence. See also *infra* p. 31 f.

<sup>12</sup>William Saroyan, "And Man" *Daring Young Man* pp. 91 - 104.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of this aspect of Saroyan's writings the reader is referred to Ray B. West Jr., *The Short Story in America* pp. 81 ff.

where it is implicit in the boys' fascination with the two prostitutes.<sup>15</sup> We find it in another Hemingway story, "Fathers and Sons", in the description of Nick's sexual attraction to the Indian girl, Prudie.<sup>16</sup> We find the same interest in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio in which the sexual awakening of George Willard is an important aspect of that adolescent character's development.<sup>17</sup> While considerations of space preclude the possibility of considering at greater length the artist's interest in the purely sexual side of adolescent experience, it is doubtful that further examination would reveal matters of significance which have not already emerged. The significance of this kind of story lies in the frankness with which the various authors treat the subject of sex, in keeping with the general liberation of literature and society in general from the Victorian restrictions, circumlocutions and concealments which surrounded this facet of human experience. The role of Sherwood Anderson is significant in this respect.<sup>18</sup> By freeing the short story from the tricky manipulations of plot as practised by O. Henry and his followers, and by making this medium more truly represent life, Anderson brought the sexual side of human behavior within the purview of the artist.

#### Ego Development in Adolescence

At about the same time in the adolescent's development as the sexual

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Hemingway "The Light of the World" The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories (hereinafter referred to as The First Forty-Nine Stories) New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938, pp. 482-489.

<sup>16</sup> Hemingway, "Fathers and Sons" The First Forty-Nine Stories pp. 586-597.

<sup>17</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, The Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1947.

<sup>18</sup> Ray B. West Jr., The Short Story in America, p. 43 ff.

awakening is taking place, there is a corresponding growth in the ego of the maturing person.<sup>19</sup> This fact is universally known whether it is stated in terms of adolescent mulishness -- as a parent might describe it, or of uncooperativeness -- as a teacher might describe it, or of increase in ego capacity -- as the social scientist might describe it. At this time of life the adolescent suddenly feels able to cope with new situations (although at times his performance may be little better than a child's); he demands independence from parental domination (although in some of his moods he may be quite childishly dependant); he becomes introspective, more and more preoccupied with his own feelings and thoughts -- in short more egocentric.

This aspect of adolescence is central in William Saroyan's story, "And Man"<sup>20</sup>. The adolescent hero, who is the narrator of the story, rises early in the morning, "unable to sleep for thinking about the strangeness of life, feeling himself part of it for the first time definitely solidly". The past year had made great changes in his body; his parents embarrass him by teasing him about his private organs. He hates the ugliness of his face as he sees it in the mirror, "feeling that it was not my true face and that I wanted others to see the face that I inwardly saw".<sup>21</sup> The boy's vastly expanded ego becomes evident

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<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of this aspect of adolescence the reader is referred to Irene M. Jousselyn The Adolescent p. 17 ff.

<sup>20</sup>See supra p. 29.

<sup>21</sup>Body strangeness is another characteristic of adolescence which is mentioned briefly below. See infra p. 34.

as he goes for his morning walk. He feels almost omnipotent as he jumps to catch a high limb, and later as he vaults a fire hydrant several times--something he had been afraid to attempt a mere few weeks previously. To demonstrate his new self-reliance (and as an unconscious assertion of his ego) he decides to miss school that day, simply because he wanted to walk in the country, alone with his thoughts. The knowledge that he will be punished for such behavior is no deterrent; on the contrary, the punishment becomes an additional incentive to his rebellion.

The same interest in the rapidly developing ego is evident in another Saroyan story, "Seventeen";<sup>22</sup> Sam Wolinsky's mood as the story begins is a particularly fine illustration of this characteristic:

Everything was small beneath his enormity, and he was seeking something to do, some cruelty; it was godly to be cruel, to hurt, even to destroy. It was proper to mock soft feelings in man, to stand by laughing at the pettiness of man.<sup>23</sup>

Other writers have been aware of this sudden ego development in adolescence and have embodied it in their stories to a considerable degree. In Hemingway's "The Battler",<sup>24</sup> ego development is an important facet of Nick Adam's mood at the beginning of the story. We find ego development again in "Indian Camp",<sup>25</sup> where Nick, at the conclusion of

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<sup>22</sup> Saroyan "Seventeen" *Baring Young Man* pp. 91 - 104. Also see supra p. 26 f.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> Hemingway "The Battler", The First Forty-Nine Stories pp. 225-236.

<sup>25</sup> Hemingway "Indian Camp", The First Forty-Nine Stories pp. 187-194.



the story, "felt quite sure that he would never die". In "Capital of the World"<sup>26</sup> it is the increased ego (and its all too common manifestation, the temptation to experiment with dangerous things -- in this case the paraphernalia of the bullfight) which leads to the adolescent character, Peco's death. In Steinbeck's "The Leader of the People", Jody Tifflin's developing ego is aptly described by his mother's term "Big-Britches".<sup>27</sup>

The list of examples of the interest in the ego development of adolescence could be extended almost without limit, but the foregoing selection is sufficient for our purposes. These stories illustrate that American writers, sensitive to the studies of contemporary psychology, have been interested in this aspect of adolescent growth and have made it an integral part of their treatment of adolescence. William Saroyan has given this characteristic more emphasis than any other writer, but this can be attributed to the autobiographical nature of his stories, to his preoccupation with his own adolescence, rather than to any greater awareness on his part of the importance of ego development in the maturing person.

#### Lesser Characteristics

In addition to sexual awakening and ego development, the two characteristics considered in the foregoing pages, some lesser

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<sup>26</sup> Hemingway "Capital of the World" The First Forty-Nine pp. 137-149.

<sup>27</sup> John Steinbeck "The Leader of the People", The Long Valley, World Publishing Company, Cleveland Ohio, 1945, pp. 283-303.

characteristics of adolescence are also embodied in short stories. William Saroyan describes an adolescent's feeling of body strangeness in "And Man", a story which has already been discussed.<sup>28</sup> In Nancy Hale's "Between the Dark and the Daylight"<sup>29</sup> the ambivalent feelings of an adolescent girl in regard to growing up are the subject of the story, and in "Seventeen"<sup>30</sup> the ambivalent feelings of Sam Wolinsky are an important element in the story.

It is not without significance that the relative emphasis given to various physical and emotional characteristics of adolescence in the stories we have been considering (and hence the relative emphasis in these pages) is roughly proportionate to the relative emphasis given to these characteristics in a typical textbook of adolescent psychology.<sup>31</sup> This in itself is indicative of the extent to which American writers have drawn inspiration from contemporary psychology.

## II. STORIES OF INITIATION

### Initiation—the recognition of evil

In his excellent study, The Short Story in America, Ray B. West Jr. uses the term story of initiation to describe those stories which "portray the progress of a character from innocence to knowledge".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See supra p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Hale "Between the Dark and the Daylight" New Yorker Collection pp. 426 - 431.

<sup>30</sup> See supra p. 28 f.

<sup>31</sup> See for example Jesselyn The Adolescent pp. 9 - 25.

<sup>32</sup> West, The Short Story p. 96.

In theological terms that knowledge is knowledge and a recognition of evil. To adopt a more secular term we might say, however, that it represents a knowledge of the limitations of existence....<sup>33</sup>

By and large it is this broad definition of the story of initiation that is used in the following pages, but in certain stories, we will notice the use of initiation experiences, sometimes even a ritual of initiation, which will give the term story of initiation a slightly different meaning. When this occurs we will be using the term initiation in its more familiar, anthropological sense.<sup>34</sup>

Let us consider first, as almost a perfect example of the first type of story of initiation--that in which evil is confronted and recognized--Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers".<sup>35</sup> Consideration of this example will orient our further discussion of the genre.

In "The Killers", Ole Anderson, an ex-pugilist, is to be murdered by two hired thugs. Nick Adams is sent to warn Ole, but finds the latter in a despondent state, completely resigned to the fact that he is going to die. To Nick's youthful idealism, Ole's imminent death and his attitude of indifference toward it are "just too damned awful". In contrast to Nick's attitude, Sam, the Negro cook, wants only to stay out of the affair completely, while George, the proprietor of the lunch-counter in which the story is set, merely advises Nick not to think

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<sup>33</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> See infra p. 61 f. for a discussion of initiation in this sense in Faulkner's "The Bear".

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Hemingway "The Killers", The First Forty-Nine Stories pp. 377-387.

about it.

Here then, in barest outline, is an example of the first type of story of initiation. Our interest in the story, it should be noted immediately, is not in the murder at all; the circumstances surrounding Ole Anderson, his imminent death and his attitude of resignation, are merely the situation of terror, the facet of reality, which forms the background of the story. Our interest is in the effect which the knowledge of this facet of reality has on Nick Adams. His inexperience and his untutored idealism are brought into contact with the world of reality. He is forced to recognize the existence of evil, which is represented in the story by the two gangsters and their mission of murder. It is, then, the knowledge of the existence of evil that Nick finds "too damned awful". In contrast to Nick's attitude, the character, George, is already aware of the existence of evil and had made his adjustment to it. His cynical advice to Nick is, "you better not think about it".

In the stories which follow, a technique similar to that of "The Killers" is used. Youthful idealism is brought into contact with the world of reality or some segment of it. Our interest in the stories derives from the way in which the adolescent adjusts or fails to adjust to this world. In most of the stories which follow, the adolescent stands petrified by his contact with reality; in a few others he retreats from that world temporarily; in still others he learns to adjust to the new world, to fit his newly-acquired knowledge into his

experiential framework.

So much in a general way for considerations of method. There remains, however, one very large question to consider. That question is: why have American writers been so interested in this initiation experience of adolescence? Every major writer has used it, and in the case of Ernest Hemingway, it became a preoccupation. What was there about the initiation of adolescence that made it so appealing to the American artist of the twentieth century? In seeking answers to these questions we will arrive at the very crux of our present study.

In the judgment of the writer, the answers can only be found in reference to the prevailing ethos of early twentieth century American society, and in contrast to that ethos, the nature of mankind's twentieth century experience. It is plainly beyond the scope of this study to trace the development of American thought from the post-Civil War period to the nineteen-fifties, but we may in passing notice some nineteenth attitudes and at least mention some of the cataclysmic events which have resulted in a complete revision of those attitudes.

Most of the writers considered in this study reached maturity in an atmosphere still dominated by nineteenth century America's boundless optimism -- its belief in inevitable progress and manifest destiny, its faith in American goodness as opposed to Old World decadence, its transcendentalist belief that evil was merely the absence of good, and later, the belief of the pragmatist that virtue could be created by

society. If any single adjective could describe this late nineteenth century cast of mind that adjective would be the word youthful.

And what has been the nature of the American twentieth century experience? There was the closing of the frontier, there was the Darwinian revolution, there was World War I, there was "normalcy" and the scandals of that era, there was the depression, and finally there was World War II. How far removed these world-shaking and melancholy events seem from the ethos of virtue, progress and optimism which was so much a part of the American character in the late nineteenth century and which persisted into the early twentieth century. How frightening, how disillusioning, how "damned awful" these events seemed to a generation of writers which expected that the millennium had arrived with the dawn of the twentieth century. It was these feelings of shock and disillusionment at the events and problems of the terrible new age which the writers of the time tried to express. In seeking a means of expression for these personal feelings, they turned, consciously or unconsciously, to adolescent characters. Adolescence, with its awakening consciousness of the world of reality, adolescence, with its feelings of disillusionment and ambivalence, became the perfect focus for the expression of the lost generation's feelings of disillusionment in regard to twentieth century life. And further, just as every adolescent searches for values upon which he can build his life, and still further, just as every adolescent must test old values, repudiating those which he finds inapplicable to his situation, adapting those which he finds applicable, so American writers have used these aspects of adolescent

experience in their own searching for and testing of values, in a world in which all values seemed to have been either negated or called into serious question.

Considerations such as these make us aware of a deeper level of significance to such a story as "The Killers". That deeper significance lies in what it represents of Ernest Hemingway's own struggle to come to terms with reality, his realization that the idealistic beliefs of his youth -- represented by Nick Adams -- are gone forever, and that the real world -- represented by "the killers" -- has evil elements which one must recognize and with which one must come to terms. In this way, Hemingway and others used the adolescent focus as a means of exploring the world of reality and of stating their own feelings of disillusionment in regard to that world.

The same two levels of significance are discernible in the entire Nick Adams series. In "The Battler"<sup>36</sup> we again find Nick confronted by a brutal aspect of reality, represented in this story by Ad Francis, a completely broken and punch-drunk ex-fighter. At the beginning of the story, Nick is trying to swagger off a humiliating experience at the hands of a railway brakeman -- he has been thrown off a train on which he was bumming a ride. He approaches a campfire, which he sees in the distance, and there meets Ad Francis and his companion, Bugs. After friendly greetings on both sides, Nick is invited to join in their simple outdoor meal. Later, on a slight pretext, Ad begins to make insulting remarks to Nick, tries to pick a fight with him, and generally

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<sup>36</sup> Ernest Hemingway "The Battler", The First Forty-Nine pp. 225-236.

shows in his manner and conversation the half-demented behavior of a person who has suffered too many concussions. Nick is embarrassed, frightened and a little sickened by this broken man -- feelings which Hemingway reproduces with great skill. Bugs saves Nick a beating by tapping Ad a sound blow at the base of the skull. While Ad is unconscious, Bugs advises Nick to take his leave.

Another painful aspect of reality confronts Nick in "Indian Camp"<sup>37</sup>: In this story he accompanies his father, a doctor, to a remote camp where the latter performs a caesarian section on an Indian woman who has been in labor for two days. Nick finds the smell of the shanty, the screams of the woman and the whole idea of childbirth a very trying ordeal. To add to Nick's horror and to heighten Hemingway's statement that life can be painful, the men discover, when the operation is completed, that the woman's husband, who had been lying in an upper bunk all this time, has cut his throat from ear to ear.

The theme of adolescent disillusionment is taken up again in "My Old Man"<sup>38</sup>, a story which is narrated by its adolescent hero, Joe Butler. Joe has always loved his father very much. His father was a jockey, who took his son with him as he toured the racetracks of Europe. The first portion of the story develops the father's character from the

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<sup>37</sup>Ernest Hemingway "Indian Camp", The First Forty-Nine Stories, pp. 187 - 194.

<sup>38</sup>Ernest Hemingway "My Old Man", The First Forty-Nine Stories, pp. 289 - 303..



boy's point of view. There emerges the picture of a carefree, honest jockey, everything that an adolescent boy could look up to and admire in a father. Between father and son there is a free and easy relationship and mutual interests to knit them together.

A counter-theme is soon introduced, however, and it swells until it dominates the latter half of the story. The father may have been "one swell guy" to Joe, but to others -- the real world again -- he was a crook, who was involved in a long series of swindles. The death of the father, which is so painful to the boy, elicits not a word of sorrow from those who moved in his father's circle and who knew him best. The two conflicting views of the father, the boy's and that of the real world, are illustrated in the following passage, which occurs at the end of the story:

George and I went out to the gate and I was trying to stop bawling and George wiped off my face with his handkerchief and we were standing back a little ways while the crowd was going out of the gate and a couple of guys stopped near us while we were waiting for the crowd to get through the gate and one of them was counting a bunch of mutual tickets and he said, "Well, Butler got his all right".

The other guy said, "I don't give a good goddam if he did, the crook. He had it coming to him on the stuff he's pulled."

"I'll say he had", said the other guy and tore the bunch of tickets in two.

And George Gardner looked at me to see if I'd heard and I had all right and he said, "Don't you listen to what those bums said, Joe. Your old man was one swell guy."

But I don't know. Seems like when they get started they don't leave a guy nothing.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid. p. 303.

In these Hemingway stories, and in a number of his other very similar stories, the negative and defeatist note dominates. There is no catharsis, no reconciliation of the adolescent with the world of reality. The adolescent is confronted by the real world and stands in paralyzed shock before it. In this way Hemingway expressed both his own inability to come to terms with life and the loss of his own innocence.

A slightly more positive note is sounded in such a story as "Big Two-Hearted River", the story of Nick Adams's fishing trip to the Michigan woods.<sup>40</sup> In this story we see Nick as a much more mature person than he was in the stories considered earlier. His maturity is evident in the skillful manner in which he sets up his tent, cooks his meal and attends to the other trivia of camping. The story has very little plot, and consists mainly of minutely described details of the fishing trip. Such details as the catching of the trout and Nick's preparation for his meals are described with an elaborateness which gives them almost ritualistic significance. In this way Hemingway seems to be saying that although the old idealistic beliefs are gone, there is still a world of recognizable value in the simpler pleasures -- such pleasures as fishing and eating. In this story the real world is symbolized by the burned-over forest, where even the grasshoppers have turned black. Even in such a world, Hemingway shows us, it is still possible to find a very limited kind of happiness.

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<sup>40</sup> Hemingway "Big Two-Hearted River", The First Forty-Nine, pp. 305-330.

A positive note occurs also in "Fathers and Sons".<sup>41</sup> In this story, the last of the Nick Adams series, we see him as a mature man with a son of his own. As he drives along an almost deserted road on a Sunday afternoon -- his son at his side -- his thoughts return to his own childhood and adolescence. In retrospect he examines the relationship that obtained between himself and his father. Much that his father has taught him Nick has rejected in the intervening years, particularly his education in sexual matters. On the other hand he now feels grateful to his father for passing on his knowledge of hunting and fishing. He recalls certain tensions that had marred his relationship with his father and certain incidents that had infuriated Nick while he was an adolescent. He recalls these now, not in anger or bitterness, but in gratitude for the good things which his father has passed on to him. Perhaps we are not reading too much into this story to say that it reflects an important step in Hemingway's growth, the realization that the past is irrevocable and that there was much in the past that is worth preserving. This is what seems to be implied in Nick's decision to pray at his father's tomb.

Preceding Hemingway and influencing him to a considerable degree, was Sherwood Anderson, who also used the story of initiation -- in the broad sense in which we defined it earlier.<sup>42</sup> "I Want to Know Why",<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hemingway "Fathers and Sons", The First Forty-Nine Stories, p. 586-597. Also see infra p. 83f.

<sup>42</sup> See supra p. 374ff.

<sup>43</sup> Sherwood Anderson "I Want to Know Why", The Bedside Book pp. 722-729.

a story upon which Hemingway's "My Old Man" is probably modelled, is another race-track story, and it is another story which is narrated by an adolescent hero.

The boy concerned is a lover of horses: to him a horse represents everything that is beautiful in life. As he phrase it, "there isn't anything so lovely and clean and full of spunk and honest and everything as some race horses". The boy also feels a kinship for the simple men who work with the horses, and he especially admires Jerry Tillford, the trainer of a fine animal by the name of Sunstreak. In the following passage, the boy describes his feeling for the horse and for Tillford:

I looked up and then that man and I looked into each others eyes. Something happened to me. I guess I loved that man as much as I loved the horse.... Seemed to me there wasn't anything in the world but that man and the horse and me.<sup>44</sup>

After the race, in which Sunstreak has set a new record, the boy, still feeling the warm attachment evident in the foregoing passage, follows Tillford to a deserted farmhouse, where a drinking party is in progress. Through an open window, the boy sees and hears Tillford bragging about Sunstreak's victory, "bragging in a way that Sunstreak never would have bragged". Moreover, Tillford is now surrounded by "mean looking women" and he has the same "shine in his eyes" that had so elevated and moved the boy the previous afternoon. The boy's disillusionment is complete. In the following words he joins Nick Adams and Joe Butler and other disillusioned innocents of American fiction:

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<sup>44</sup>ibid. p. 726.

But things are different. At the tracks the air don't taste as good or smell as good. It's because a man like Jerry Tillford, who knows what he does, could see a horse like Sunstreak run, and kiss a woman like that on the same day. I can't make it out. Darn him, what did he want to do like that for, I keep thinking about it and it spoils looking at horses and smelling things and hearing niggers laugh and everything. Sometimes I'm so mad about it, I want to fight someone. It gives me the fantods. What did he do it for? I want to know why.<sup>45</sup>

This story, with its Swiftian conclusion that the horse is moral by instinct, whereas man, who has the possibility of choice, is immoral, leaves us, as do the Hemingway stories already considered, with a profound sense of man's limitations. In the earlier relationship between Tillford and the boy we are presented with the possibility of beauty, only to have it negated in the denouement. We are left only with a sense of man's ugliness and meanness.

Ray B. West has pointed out that most of Anderson's characters can be explained in terms of Anderson's own revolt against genteel manners.<sup>46</sup> The boy in this story has left a middle-class home in much the same way as Anderson himself left his paint factory to become a writer. Anderson's stories are full of repudiation, but no adequate or satisfactory alternatives emerge to replace the values which are repudiated. In "Brother Death"<sup>47</sup>, a farm boy must deny his love of beauty — represented in the two oak trees which must be destroyed —

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 729.

<sup>46</sup> West, The Short Story p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Sherwood Anderson "Brother Death" Walter Haringhurst (ed.) Masters of the Modern Short Story, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1945 pp. 318-337. Also see infra pp. 85-86.

in order to become a successful farmer. This, Anderson implies, is a fate worse than death. In Winesburg, Ohio, George Willard repudiates success, worldly ambition, material possessions and the like, but again no satisfactory alternatives are suggested. One suspects that Ray B. West was right, that it was Anderson's own repudiation of small town life, and following from this his exaggerated idea of his role as a reformer that lead to his sometimes solemn tone, which scarcely manages to conceal a superficiality of approach to the real problems of existence.<sup>48</sup>

A similar superficiality characterizes William Saroyan's stories of initiation, of which we may take as examples "And Man" and "Seventeen", two stories already considered.<sup>49</sup> Saroyan's writings too are full of glib pronouncements on what is wrong with American life, but one searches in vain for an underlying alternative philosophy. Both Anderson and Saroyan seem to advocate nothing more satisfactory than being "natural", which appears to mean kicking up one's heels at responsibility.

William Faulkner also used this kind of story of initiation and used it in a variety of ways. "That Evening Sun"<sup>50</sup> resembles "The Killers" in that one character is doomed to death and in that our interest is in the attitude of several spectators to this fact. Nancy, a Negro woman, who has led a promiscuous life in which whites as well as

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<sup>48</sup> West, loc. cit.

<sup>49</sup> See supra pp. 28 ff.

<sup>50</sup> William Faulkner "That Evening Sun". Collected Stories of William Faulkner, (hereinafter referred to as Collected Stories),

Random House, New York, 1943, pp. 239-309.

Negroes were involved, is left unprotected by the code of either group. Her common-law husband is going to kill her; Nancy and the other characters are quite aware of this fact. These circumstances form the situation of terror which is the background of the story.

The different adjustments of the three children, who are the spectator characters, to the fact of Nancy's doom, is an indication of their relative maturities. Jason, five years old, says repeatedly, "I ain't a nigger"; he apparently believes that being white protects him from the terror surrounding Nancy. Candace, seven years old, like Nick Adams of "The Killers", is intrigued by the nature of evil itself -- this is her initiation. Her nine year old brother, Quentin, who narrates the story, recognizes that evil is a permanent condition of life.<sup>51</sup>

Faulkner's "Uncle Willy"<sup>52</sup> is similar to "My Old Man" and "I Want to Know Why" in that an adolescent character tells of his love for a favorite adult; it differs from these stories, however, in that it is Southern society in general and Southern Calvinism in particular which suffer condemnation in the story, and the social outcast, Uncle Willy, who is vindicated.

The drug addict, Uncle Willy, is a simple, harmless man, who

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<sup>51</sup>For the foregoing analysis of this story the writer is indebted to West, The Short Story pp. 95 - 96.

<sup>52</sup>Faulkner, "Uncle Willy" Collected Works pp. 225 - 248.

merely wants to be left alone with his morphine and his little circle of friends -- teen-age boys and a few irresponsible adults like himself. A church group led by Reverend Schulz and Mrs. Merridew intervenes, in a doubtfully motivated attempt to rehabilitate Uncle Willy. He surrenders to their overwhelming methods for a time, but at the earliest opportunity escapes from their influence. In rapid succession he develops an impressive list of new vices: he turns to alcohol as a substitute for morphine, marries a prostitute, who sets the entire town in an uproar, and becomes involved in a real estate swindle to support his new mode of life. When his evangelistic "friends" arrange for his confinement in an asylum, he confounds them by escaping a second time. He finally kills himself in an unsuccessful attempt to learn to fly an aeroplane.

The significance of the story lies in its glorification of simple, irrepressible Uncle Willy. This quality of the story is illustrated in the following passage in which the adolescent hero explains his reasons for leaving home and accompanying Uncle Willy on his last, fateful fling:

I want because I wanted to, because he was the finest man I ever knew, because he had fun all his life in spite of what they tried to do to him or with him, and I hoped that maybe if I could stay with him awhile I could learn how to, so I could still have fun when I had to get old.<sup>53</sup>

Through the boy's mind, which provides an innocent focus, we are presented with this glimpse of Southern society and Southern Calvinism. The church circle is presented as a group of interfering hypocrites, in contrast to which Uncle Willy is simple and loving. In this story, as in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 259.



some of Faulkner's novels, he seems to suggest that the social and religious rigidity of the South does not allow individual self-realization.<sup>54</sup>

Here then is a representative sample of the first type of story of initiation -- these stories in which the adolescent confronts some facet of the world of reality and in which his innocent mind is used as a means of exploring that world. Time after time, in story after story, we have seen the adolescent in a state of helpless confusion, withdrawing in horror from life as he finds it. It would appear that the theme of adolescent disillusionment and failure to adjust to reality has been much more popular with American writers than stories which show the adolescent reaching a satisfactory adjustment or a satisfactory integration of personality. The reasons for the popularity of stories of this type, as stated earlier,<sup>55</sup> lie in the twentieth century artist's keen awareness of man's limited possibility of happiness. To the artists of the lost generation, the adolescent character became the perfect means through which they could express their own negative and defeatist attitudes in regard to life. Happily, as we shall see later, not all stories of adolescence express such negative and defeatist views.<sup>56</sup>

#### Initiation -- the preparation for manhood

We may now proceed to a consideration of a second group of stories of initiation, in our discussion of which we shall be using the term

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<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the theme of rigidity<sup>/in</sup> Faulkner's works the reader may wish to consult Irving Malin. William Faulkner: An Interpretation, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1957, p. 5 ff.

<sup>55</sup> See supra pp. 38 ff.

<sup>56</sup> See infra pp. 52-53.

initiation in its more restricted, anthropological sense; that is, initiation as a preparation of the adolescent for manhood.

First let us consider some stories which tell of inadequate preparation for life, or the lack of proper initiation. One such story is John Steinbeck's "Flight".<sup>57</sup> The hero of this story, Pepe, is the victim of his mother's romantic belief that "a boy becomes a man when a man is needed". With this philosophy of child-raising, it is not surprising that Pepe's mother allows him to idle away his adolescent years. He is given no responsibilities or experiences to prepare him for manhood; he simply wastes his time until "a man is needed". Pepe "becomes a man" when he is sent to the town of Monterey on a simple errand. While there, he immaturesly drinks to excess, becomes involved in a fight and kills a man. Pepe's flight to the mountains to avoid his pursuers gives further evidence both of his lack of initiation and of the inadequacy of his mother's philosophy. Pepe is unprepared for life in the real world, and a series of childish mistakes culminates in his death. He loses and forgets things which are vital to his survival -- his knife, his hat and finally his rifle. After being struck in the hand by a bullet, he stops the flow of blood by pressing cobwebs into the wound -- the result, bloodpoisoning. When his throat is parched with thirst, he puts damp clay into his mouth, and the clay, like a poultice, draws the little remaining moisture from his throat. Ironically, the only manful act of Pepe's life occurs in the moment of his

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<sup>57</sup> John Steinbeck "Flight", The Long Valley, pp. 45 - 70. Also see infra pp 71-72.

death. Cornered by his enemies and half-demented by hunger, thirst and pain, he stands boldly on the top of a rock and allows himself to be shot. When he falls, his body starts a little avalanche, which, rolling down with his body, covers up his head: a final ironic touch by which Steinbeck would remind us that Pepe has died a mere child. In such cases, one must not judge too harshly; even the earth mercifully covers his head to hide his shame.

Another adolescent hero who dies because his life is based on a false, romantic view of life is Paco, in Hemingway's "The Capital of the World"<sup>58</sup>. Paco greatly admires the bullfighters who come to dine each day at the Luarca restaurant, where he is an apprenticed waiter. He dreams of being a bullfighter himself someday and boasts that he will not be afraid when the bull charges. His friend, Enrique, somewhat older, assures Paco that everyone, even the most experienced matador, is afraid. To demonstrate, and to enable the two of them to play realistically at bullfighting, Enrique binds two meat knives to the legs of a chair. Using this device to represent the bull, he begins to charge at Paco, hoping to disabuse the latter of his brash over-confidence. After several passes, in which Paco demonstrates his prowess and courage, the game comes to a tragic end. Paco steps aside too late, and one of the knives enters his leg, cutting the femoral artery. He dies while Enrique is trying frantically to summon help. The following ironic passage, which occurs at the end of the story, applies not only to Paco,

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<sup>58</sup> Ernest Hemingway "The Capital of the World" The First Forty-Nine Stories pp. 137-149. Also see supra p. 33.

but to Pepe of "Flight" and to adolescents in general who set out in life without adequate preparation:

He died, as the Spanish phrase has it, full of illusions. He had not had time in his life to lose any of them, nor even, at the end, to complete an act of contrition.<sup>59</sup>

Another kind of unsuccessful adaptation to reality is illustrated by Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" which was considered in our study of stories of abnormal children.<sup>60</sup> This adolescent's retreat from life is a reminder that some find the real world beyond their capabilities and never succeed in coping with it. Still another kind of adjustment is illustrated in Winesburg Ohio, in George Willard's decision to leave the small Midwestern town where he had been raised: a reminder that a reaction of repudiation and flight is not always maladaptive. In George's case, he must repudiate the materialistic small town life if he is to achieve the kind of self-realization he wants. Like George, most adolescents must repudiate portions of their past if they are to become integrated adults in the present.

#### Stories of affirmation

To this point we have been considering, in both types of initiation story, adjustments of the adolescent to the real world which are unsatisfactory. Generally speaking, the adolescent has been used, as we have noticed earlier, for the expression of negative and defeatist attitudes

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid p. 149.

<sup>60</sup>See supra pp. 21-22.

which were held by a number of writers of the lost generation. Happily, not all stories lead to such pessimistic conclusions; a few stand in powerful and affirmative contrast to these general themes of adolescent defeat and failure. The two outstanding examples which will be considered here are John Steinbeck's "The Red Pony"<sup>61</sup> and William Faulkner's "The Bear".<sup>62</sup> These two stories alone, by their power, authenticity, and, we feel, moral rightness, are sufficient to confute the plethora of negative statements considered in the foregoing pages.

"The Red Pony" must be considered in relation to another Steinbeck story, "Flight", which was discussed earlier.<sup>63</sup> Pepe, we saw, was the victim of his mother's philosophy of child-raising, which was summed up in her statement, "a boy becomes a man when a man is needed." In contrast to this philosophy, the boy Jody's father, Carl Tifflin, is a stern realist and a disciplinarian. He believes that a boy needs increasing responsibilities to prepare him for life.<sup>64</sup> When he gives Jody gifts, as he does rarely, the gifts are hedged around with "conditions". For example, when Jody is given a rifle, he is told that ammunition will be allowed two years later, provided that he demonstrates a sense of responsibility in the handling and care of firearms in the meantime. Similarly when the pony is given to Jody, it is made abundantly clear to him that its care is never

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<sup>61</sup> John Steinbeck, "The Red Pony", The Long Valley, pp.203-279.

<sup>62</sup> William Faulkner, "The Bear, Malcolm Cowley (ed.), The Portable Faulkner, The Viking Press, New York, 1954, pp. 227-363.

<sup>63</sup> See supra p.50 f.

<sup>64</sup> The relationship between Jody and his parents is considered in greater detail in another context. See infra pp.77-80.

to interfere with his other assigned chores. Even as a ten-year-old boy at the beginning of the story, Jody already has the responsibility of feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs.

Jody's initiation takes place in a series of episodes. We see him first as a young boy -- alert, imaginative, curious. Steinbeck presents the rural background, as seen through Jody's eyes, with great skill and deftness, as the following passages illustrate:

Jody's tall stern father came in then and Jody knew from the noise on the floor that he was wearing boots, but he looked under the table anyway to make sure.<sup>65</sup>

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After a while the boy sauntered down the hill again. Back through the vegetable garden he went, and he paused for a moment to smash a green muskmelon with his heel, but he was not happy about it. It was a bad thing to do, he knew perfectly well. He kicked dirt over the ruined melon to conceal it.<sup>66</sup>

Jody's upbringing is according to a strict but kindly authoritarian pattern. We see Jody's response to this pattern in his training of the colt--first to lead, then to work on the long halter, and later to bear the weight of the saddle and the feel of the cinch. This training requires great patience on Jody's part, and he responds to the demands of each task in its turn. His sense of responsibility grows with his love and care of the pony. Now he arises early in the morning to attend to his chores--even before the sounding of the triangle which summons the men to breakfast. He oils the pony's hooves and curries him frequently, until his coat takes on a deep, rich shine.

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<sup>65</sup> Steinbeck, op.cit. p. 204.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 207.

The sickness and death of the pony is a severe trial for Jody. These sad events surely afforded Steinbeck as great an opportunity to express disillusionment and defeat as other writers did in stories considered earlier in this portion of our study. But Steinbeck does not stop here; his concern is to show Jody's response to the crisis and his growth as a result of it. Jody responds in accordance with his preparation for life and in accordance with the discipline and training he has received. Along with Billy Buck, the hired man, he does everything possible to save the pony's life. On the afternoon that the pony had been left out in the rain, Jody runs home from school, puts the pony in the barn, dries him thoroughly and covers him. No one has to tell him to do these things: with his background of discipline, with his love for the pony and with his growing sense of responsibility, Jody simply knows what must be done. As the pony's sickness progresses, Jody ignores his own comfort and sleeps in the barn in order to keep closer watch. On the fourth day, when the pony's throat must be opened to allow breathing, Billy Buck, to spare Jody's feelings, orders him out of the barn. Jody refuses to go, and in doing so, demonstrates that unlike some other adolescent heroes, he is not afraid to face reality. As the pony's death becomes imminent, even Carl Tifflin would spare Jody the final, agonizing hours:

"Hahn't you better come with me, I'm going over the hill".  
Jody shook his head. "You better come out of this", his  
father insisted.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 234.

But still Jody refuses. Carl has builded better than he knew; Jody faces his crisis manfully.

Only in the final moment of the pony's death does Jody act childishly. The scene is one of the most powerful in all the stories of adolescence. In its dying moments, the pony escapes from the barn and runs tiredly over the brow of a little hill a short distance from the barn. As Jody follows the weary trail in the early morning dew, he notices a flock of buzzards slowly descending. When he comes upon the dead pony, the ugly birds have already begun their work: one has just dipped its beak into the dead pony's eye. Furiously, childishly, and with a strength born of intense emotion, Jody seizes the buzzard by the wing. He lifts his knee and falls on the bird, and holding its neck on the ground, he beats its head to a pulp with a piece of quartz.

In this final scene of the first story, the buzzard becomes the perfect symbol for the reality of death, which Jody must accept. Even as he kills the bird, "the red eyes looked into his face, calm and fearless and fierce". Even in death, "the red fearless eyes still looked at him, impersonal and unafraid and detached". They seem to say to Jody that life is cruel and demanding and that he had better learn to accept life as it really is. In this scene, the reader experiences an aesthetic satisfaction and a sense of moral rightness that occurs rarely in stories of adolescence. In most of the foregoing stories, as we have noticed, the authors purposely leave us with a profound sense of man defeated. In Jody's case, however, we know both from our knowledge of



his patient and stern training and from our knowledge of his past performance that he will outlive this painful moment and that he will be a bigger, better man because of it. We are left with a sense not of man defeated, but of man triumphant. It is this catharsis in Jody Tifflin's case that raises "The Red Pony" to literary heights far above the level of the kind of stories considered earlier.

Jody learns other lessons as well as the irrevocability of death. In the second subdivision of the story, "The Great Mountains", the aged Gitano returns to his birthplace to die. Gitano's birthplace is now Carl Tifflin's ranch, but the old paisano believes, romantically, that he is entitled to free board and room at Carl's expense, simply because this had been his birthplace. This sentimental appeal has a great attraction for Jody. To him it seems right—that a man is entitled to a place to die. He would like to have Gitano stay at the ranch. Carl Tifflin, on the other hand, has little patience with the old man's views. Carl, the uncompromising realist, is cruel to the old man, and draws a comparison between Gitano and the old horse, Easter; he says to his unwelcome guest, "If ham and eggs grew on a side-hill I'd turn you out to pasture too". At the conclusion of the story, when Gitano has stolen the old horse, Easter, and returned to the mountains from whence he came, Jody is full of a "nameless sorrow". The lesson he has learned is what has been implicit in Carl's attitude all along: that life owes us nothing—a law from which not even the aged are exempt.

"The Promise", the third subdivision of the story, is perhaps the most important from the standpoint of Jody's development. In this section, we see Jody first on his way home from school--commanding imaginary armies, hunting imaginary game. When he arrives home, he learns that his father has conceived a plan to replace the red pony: that is, to breed the mare, Nellie, and to put her in Jody's care until the colt is born. To repay the five-dollar fee for Nellie's breeding, Jody is given an additional load of responsibility: now he drives the horses in haying time and milks a cow morning and night. The eleven months of Nellie's pregnancy seem an eternity to Jody; sometimes he doubts that she is going to have a colt at all. The care of the mare during these long months is another valuable experience for Jody, as well as an important lesson in patience.

When, at last, the birth of the colt is imminent, Billy Buck discovers that the foal "is the wrong way". His only hope of fulfilling his promise to Jody--to give him a good colt--is to kill the mare and to remove the living foal from her dead body. He does this swiftly and expertly, and a few moments later lays a wet, slippery bundle at Jody's feet. The end of the story, one of the finest pieces of writing in the entire literature of adolescence, contains Jody's feelings of disillusionment at the fulfillment of the promise. The lesson that Jody has learned and is not likely to forget is that life makes cruel demands for what it gives and that life and death often go hand in hand. The ending of the story is worth re-experiencing at first hand:

Billy's face and arms and chest were dripping red. His body shivered and his teeth chattered. His voice was gone; he spoke in a throaty whisper. "There's your colt. I promised. I had to do it--had to". He stopped and looked over his shoulder into the box stall. "Go get hot water and a sponge", he whispered. "Wash him and dry him the way his mother would. You'll have to feed him by hand. But there's your colt, the way I promised."

Jody stared stupidly at the wet, panting foal. It stretched out its chin and tried to raise its head. Its blank eyes were navy blue.

"God damn you," Billy shouted, "will you go now for the water, Will you go,"

Then Jody turned and trotted out of the barn into the dawn. He ached from his throat to his stomach. His legs were stiff and heavy. He tried to be glad because of the colt, but the bloody face, and the haunted, tired eyes of Billy Buck hung in the air ahead of him. <sup>68</sup>

Another story in the Jody Tifflin series, "The Leader of the People", contains a final important lesson for Jody. <sup>69</sup> His grandfather on his mother's side arrives at the ranch. His stories of "westering" (that is, of leading a migrant party across the plains) his stories of Indian attacks and the bravery that brought the party to its destination completely enthral Jody. Carl Tifflin, however, is irritated by the older man's preoccupation with the past. He is unkind to his father-in-law, and in an unguarded moment makes a particularly cutting remark which the old man overhears. For the moment, Carl has let his realism carry him too far, and he knows it. To the surprise of Jody, Mrs. Tifflin and Billy Buck, Carl Tifflin abjectly apologizes to his father-in-law. Following the incident, Jody is solicitous for the grandfather's feelings

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 279.

<sup>69</sup> John Steinbeck "The Leader of the People", The Long Valley, pp. 283-303. The story is sometimes included as a fourth part of "The Red Pony".

and offers him all the comfort that he can. Finally the old man admits that Carl is right, that "westerling is over and done with".

In this final story, Steinbeck seems to be saying that different times call for different kinds of leaders. Just as the grandfather has been a leader in his lifetime--the kind of leader that "westerling" required--so Jody will be in his--as his time and situation will require. While the past must be given its due--this is what Carl recognizes in his apology--the past must not become an obsession, as it has in the grandfather's case.

Through these episodes, Jody progresses on his way to manhood. Through Carl and Mrs. Tiffelin's stern training, through the painful experiences of the death of the pony and of the mare and through his ever-increasing load of responsibility, Jody is being prepared for effective manhood. Where other stories of adolescence were characterized by defeatist and negative visions, "The Red Pony" is affirmative not only of traditional American values--particularly those of rural America--but also of the power and ability of the human spirit to overcome the problems of existence. It is this affirmative vision that makes "The Red Pony" one of the great stories of our time.

Another noteworthy achievement in the short-story medium--certainly no other story in our present study can be compared with it for elaborateness of structure, complexity of theme or richness of meaning--is William Faulkner's "The Bear".<sup>70</sup> While the setting of this story is the

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<sup>70</sup>See supra p. 53.

South and some of its meaning of special relevance to that region, one of the story's greatest qualities, a quality, which, in the judgment of the writer, raises it to the level of great and enduring literature, is its universality, its timeless applicability to mankind's earthly situation. Read and reread, it yields level upon level of meaning, only a portion of which can concern us in this study.

At the simplest level, it is superb hunting story. The first three parts contain the details of the hunt: young Ike McCaslin's introduction to the wilderness and his first sight of Old Ben, the bear (Part One), the training of the mongrel Lion and the drawing of the first blood (Part Two) and the successful hunt in which the bear is killed by Lion and Boon (Part Three). Even at this simple level, the story ranks with the greatest stories of the chase.

At another level of meaning, it is a story of Ike's McCaslin's initiation into the state of hunter. Under Sam Fathers' tutelage, he learns the skills of the woodsman: how to handle his rifle --

"Yes" Sam said. "I want you to learn how to do when you didn't shoot. It's after the chance for the bear or deer has gone already come and gone that men and dogs get killed".<sup>71</sup>

-- how to hunt upwind and how to find his way when he is lost: so that at the beginning of the second part of the story,

There was no territory within twenty-five miles of the camp that he did not know...; he could have led anyone direct to any spot in it and brought him back.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid. p. 232.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid. p. 245.

But there are still other dimensions to Ike's development. He is not content merely to become a good woodsman or a good hunter, able to find his way and stalk and kill. The qualities which he is seeking are courage, humility and truth. It is because of his desire to acquire these qualities that he must meet the bear on its own level, as part of nature, as mere animal. While equipped with rifle, compass and watch--the mechanical accoutrements of modern man, symbols both of his mastery of nature and his helplessness--he cannot see the bear, even though the bear can and does see him. Sam Fathers, Ike's spiritual father, tells him that he will have to choose, that if he wants to meet the bear on its own level he must leave his rifle behind. Next morning, by his own choice, Ike leaves his rifle and goes once more in search of the bear. Later in the morning we see him in the wilderness, armed only with a stick for snakes, a compass and a watch. And then,

He stood for a moment--a child, alien and lost in the soaring gloom of the markless wilderness. Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of the one and the looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and entered it. <sup>73</sup>

Unaccounted man in juxtaposition to nature--it is in such cosmic proportions that this story must be considered. In this defenseless state--man without distinctions of class or race, the hunter out of time and space (the watch and the compass which are relinquished)--Ike is able, at last to see the bear:

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid. p. 243.

It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion...<sup>74</sup>

Sam Fathers, the wilderness and the bear--these are the forces which assist Ike in his quest for self-realization. As Faulkner phrases it near the beginning of the second part of the story:

If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bearran was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater.<sup>75</sup>

What Faulkner is concerned with in this story is not just the initiation of an adolescent but with the complete self-realization, or individuation, of one human being. Faulkner, like Jung, realizes that most people never become whole units; like Beon or Cass Edmons, or several other characters in "The Bear", most people are content with partial manhood.<sup>76</sup> Only a few, like Ike McCaslin and Sam Fathers, even desire complete self-realization. This is the significance of Sam's advice to Ike when he tells him he will have to leave his rifle behind if he wants to meet the bear. What Ike must choose between is the partial manhood of his cousin Cass or the complete manhood of Sam Fathers. Ike makes his choice and subsequently sights the bear. Following this, Sam baptizes Ike in the blood of his first buck--

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid. p. 245.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. p. 246.

<sup>76</sup>For a discussion of the influence of Jung on Faulkner see Irving Malin, William Faulkner: An Interpretation, pp. 90 ff.

a ritual of initiation into the state of hunter and into the complete manhood of Sam Fathers. When the bear has at last been brought to bay and killed, Sam Fathers dies. Ike has become the kind of man Sam wanted him to be; Sam's work is done.

Significantly, it is not Sam and Ike who kill the bear, although both of them had the opportunity to do so. It is Boon and Lion, the creatures of greed and power that combine to accomplish this, just as it is Southern industry--another greedy mongrel breed--that destroy the wilderness in the last section of the story. In a larger sense than mere killing, however, Ike and Sam have conquered the bear, and what is more, they have conquered it unarmed, in a state "in which all the ancient rules of hunter and hunted had been abrogated". They have achieved inner serenity by facing up to all that the bear represents: the wildness in life, which must be ordered and tamed if one is to achieve complete manhood.

Sam, the wilderness and the bear are Ike's teachers, but he learns from other sources as well. He learns the meaning of fear and courage from the various dogs that attempt--most of them half-heartedly--to bay Old Ben. He smells fear when he peers under the porch and sees the huddled dogs after the first chase. Later, when he himself sights the bear, he tastes fear in his own saliva--the faint taste of brass. He gives himself up to fear completely when he faces the bear alone and unarmed in a passage already quoted.<sup>77</sup> He has learned the lesson that Sam Fathers has taught him:

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<sup>77</sup>See supra p. 63.



"Be scared. You can't help that. But don't be afraid. Ain't nothing in the woods going to hurt you if you don't corner it or it don't smell that you are afraid. A bear or a deer has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be."<sup>78</sup>

He recognizes one kind of courage in a little female dog, which, although afraid, gets close enough to the bear to have her shoulder and ear raked. Her kind of courage is full of significance for Ike: it mirrors his own early timorous attitude:

"Just like a man", Sam said. "Just like folks. Put off as long as she could having to be brave, knowing all the time that sooner or later she should have to be brave once so she could keep on calling herself a dog, and knowing beforehand what was going to happen when she done it."<sup>79</sup>

Later, in a little fyce, Ike recognizes another kind of courage, a courage almost of foolhardiness. In the fourth section of the story, he recalls the fyce's furious attack on Old Ben and what it came to mean to him:

...and a little dog, nameless and mongrel and many-fathered, grown yet weighing less than six pounds, who couldn't be dangerous because there was nothing anywhere much smaller, not fierce because that would have been called just noise, not humble because it was already too near the ground to genuflect, and not proud because it would not have been close enough for anyone to discern what was casting that shadow, and which didn't even know it was not going to heaven since they had already decided it had no immortal soul, so that all it could be was brave, even though they would probably call that too just noise.<sup>80</sup>

The fourth part of the story, with its intricately interwoven themes of possession of the land, family and national background, slavery

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<sup>78</sup> Faulkner, *op. cit.* p. 243.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 234.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 329.

and manumission and inter-racial adjustment, tests the values that Ike has learned from the wilderness in terms of "the tamed land which was to have been his heritage". As one critic has observed, this section is "a kind of litany", in which Ike relates his reasons for relinquishing the land.<sup>61</sup> These themes need not concern us here, except to notice that in keeping with the lessons he has learned from Sam Fathers, the wilderness and the bear, and in accordance with the kind of self-realization he wants for himself, he must, and of course does, repudiate this heritage.

In this complex way, Faulkner gives us the complete individuation of one human being, and provides us at the same time with one of the greatest affirmations of the human spirit to have been achieved in the literature of our time.

### III. SUMMARY

With these comments on "The Red Pony" and "The Bear", we bring to a conclusion our consideration of stories of adolescence. We have seen that some writers have been interested in the physical and emotional changes which occur in the adolescent period. However, of vastly greater significance are those stories which use the adolescent focus as a means of exploring the world of reality, of testing old values or of searching for new values. Most stories of this type, we have found, express negative and defeatist views in regard to life in the twentieth century; the desire to express such feeling, we have seen, is the main reason for the

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<sup>61</sup> West, The Short Story, p. 103.

popularity of this kind of story with American writers. In contrast to these negative and defeatist feelings, however, two outstanding stories, "The Red Pony" and "The Bear" are powerful affirmations of man's ability to triumph over the problems of existence.

One final comment would appear to be in order in concluding this portion of our study--a comment in regard to the relationship of this complex group of stories to contemporary psychology. We have noticed repeatedly in the foregoing pages, but hardly explored adequately, the extent to which our stories parallel psychology. There is, however, one great emphasis of psychology which is conspicuously lacking in the stories we have considered. Where psychologists stress the importance of the peer group in an adolescent's development, and speak of gang pressures, fads in dress and conformity in behavior, the writers we have considered have scarcely mentioned the adolescent in relation to his peers. Is this an oversight on the part of the artists, have they simply not been interested in the effect of the group, or in what way can this interesting omission be explained?

A moment's reflection is sufficient to clear up this mystery. While the peer group--and the fads and the conformity which go with it--may be important to the psychologist, who is interested in the totality of adolescent behaviour, these characteristics are merely superficial aspects of the adolescent personality, manifestations of the insecurity and the uncertainty of status which he feels. In the real problems of existence, however--in achieving a unified and satisfying life-view and

in seeing himself in relation to the world--each adolescent in his turn must face these problems and conquer them, or be conquered by them, ~~alone~~. Like Ibsen's Macaulay in the wilderness, each adolescent becomes for a time, "a child--alien and lost." One may at least raise the question: is not the artist's interpretation of adolescence truer than the psychologist's concern with overt behaviour?

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM GENERATION INTO GENERATION

The final aspect of child and adolescent experience to concern us in this study is the relationship between the world of child and the world of the adult. Some of the following stories, drawing inspiration, one feels, from applied psychology, take for their subject the family environment in which the child is raised and the effect of this environment on the development of the child. Other stories consider the continuity of beliefs, attitudes, prejudices and the like from generation to generation: many stories of this type repudiate all or portions of the parental teaching, but a few are strongly affirmative of some values which may be bequeathed from father to son. Finally, some stories examine the adolescent in the throes of asserting his independence, of rebelling against parental rule and becoming an individual in his own right.

#### I. THE FAMILY SETTING

We begin with a story which is severely condemnatory of cruelty and indifference toward children, Mary McCarthy's "Yonder Peasant, Who Is He?"<sup>1</sup> It is an autobiographical account of her upbringing, first by grandparents and later by foster-parents, after her own parents' death in the influenza epidemic of 1918. During the period of the parents' illness and death, the children live with their grandparents, where the

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<sup>1</sup>Mary McCarthy "Yonder Peasant, Who Is He," New Yorker Collection, pp. 172 - 184.

severe authoritarian rule of the grandmother contrasts sharply to the tender nurture to which the children had become accustomed in their own home. Now instead of picnics and games, the children are commanded to stand up and sit down and "no nonsense about it". Combs are ripped through their hair, arms jerked into sleeves and medicine forced down their throats in large gulps. The children are told not that their parents have died but that they have gone to the hospital "to get better". Only after agonizing weeks of loitering at the bottom of the staircase for the parents who do not return (Miss McCarthy has facility in the selection of such emotionally loaded detail), do the children reach the conclusion that their parents are, in fact, dead. The grandfather, who is too preoccupied with his business and his rheumatism to concern himself in the children's upbringing, arranges for their transfer to a foster-home. Here the rule is even more severe and cruel; fear of punishment now pervades the children's lives--punishment for misbehavior they do not understand. Each night their lips are sealed with adhesive tape, "to prevent mouth breathing"; ironically, for such unkind treatment the children are constantly reminded that they must be grateful to their "benefactors". This severe and arbitrary authoritarianism continues through the greater part of their childhood. Eventually, however, they are rescued by the grandparents on the opposite side of the family, who had been unaware, until this time, of their deplorable situation.

On the whole, the story is a powerful and just indictment of the

cruelty and indifference of the adults in relation to the helpless and defenceless children. On the other hand, the story also illustrates, in the destructive attitude of its author, the very kind of problems which such an emotionally barren atmosphere may engender. This destructive quality of the story is illustrated by the following passage, in which the author describes the grandmother:

She had money, many grandchildren and religion to sustain her. White hair, glasses, soft skin, wrinkles, needlework--all the paraphernalia of motherliness were hers; yet it was a cold, grudging, disputatious old woman who sat all day in her sunroom making tapestries from a pattern, scanning religious periodicals, and setting her iron jaw against any infraction of her ways.<sup>2</sup>

At the opposite pole from Miss McCarthy's story of emotional deprivation, and illustrating a pattern of extreme indulgence in child-raising, we have such a story as John Steinbeck's "Flight".<sup>3</sup> The inadequacy of Pepe's preparation for life has been considered in another context, but a further examination of his relationship to his mother is mandatory here. His mother believes, "a boy becomes a man when a man is needed"; accordingly, Pepe is allowed to idle away his formative years. In a scene at the beginning of the story, Pepe is presented playing a game with his younger brother and sister. Pepe lolls on the ground with a spring-knife held nonchalantly in his hand. On a signal from one of the children, Pepe's arm flashes, the knife opens in mid-air, and sinks its blade deeply into a cedar post. Such play is Pepe's

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>3</sup>John Steinbeck "Flight", The Long Valley, pp. 45-70. Also see supra p. 50.

preparation for life, and as we have seen, its inadequacy is exposed in the denouement. He dies because he is insufficiently prepared for life in the real world. His unpreparedness, in turn, is the direct consequence of his mother's romantic philosophy.

Here, then, are two extremes in adult practice in raising children. Miss McCarthy's story illustrates arbitrary authoritarianism, while Steinbeck's illustrates complete indulgence. Between these two extremes, we have a number of stories which also illustrate practices and attitudes, or which tell of family situations, which have a detrimental effect on the child's development. John Steinbeck returns to this problem in his story of Robert Maltby in The Pastures of Heaven.<sup>4</sup> Robert is both indulged and neglected, but in his case the consequences are more humorous than tragic. His father, Junius Maltby, has moved to the Pastures of Heaven for his health. As he recuperates, he becomes terribly lazy and loses interest in returning to his former employment. He marries a widow and makes some slight efforts at becoming a farmer. When his wife dies in childbirth, leaving him a little son to raise, Junius is as unprepared for the responsibility as he is for the management of the little ranch which he has now inherited. Fences sag unrepaired, and field and orchard degenerate into weedy profusion, while Junius, his lazy hired man, Jacob, and the little boy, Robert, sit on a sycamore limb, dangling their feet in a stream, philosophizing on an endless variety of subjects. They love to read such imaginative writings as those of Robert Louis Stevenson and to discuss the famous battles of history.

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<sup>4</sup>John Steinbeck, "Six", The Pastures of Heaven, pp. 74-96.



In this way, the three of them pass their time, sinking blissfully into the most abject poverty while the busy, normal life of the farm community goes on around them.

The son, Robbie, reaches the age of six in this innocent state. His hair grows long; his clothing is covered with patches, and he has never worn shoes. However, he is completely happy and blissfully unaware of any other kind of existence. Before reaching school age, he can read well, and uses the vocabulary of a grown man. When the time comes for him to go to school, his precocious ways and his dishevelled appearance completely captivate both teacher and pupils. He becomes the leader of his group, and much to everyone's delight, Junius and Jacob join in the imaginative games that Robbie invents for his friends. Even the teacher, whose curiosity has been aroused by the neighborhood stories of the Walby's way of life, pays them a call on a Saturday morning and is so charmed by the simple, unaffected manners of Junius and Jacob that she remains all day.

Of course this idyllic state cannot last. Well-intentioned neighbors buy new clothing and shoes for Robbie and present them to him on the day of the school board's annual visit to the school. The effect on Robbie is dramatic, for until this moment he had been unaware of his poverty. He runs from the school, weeping bitterly.<sup>5</sup> The incident snaps

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<sup>5</sup>The story is also, of course, a story of initiation.

even old Junius out of his world of dreams. We see them last, father and son, boarding a bus for San Francisco, where Junius intends to find employment.

The story is a delightful one, but its basic conflict between the world of materialism and the state of innocence remains unresolved. In his sympathetic treatment of Junius and Jacob--their laziness and their poverty--Steinbeck seems to imply that all of us should be like this to a degree. As in Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, Steinbeck treats the irresponsible and simple characters very sympathetically. The latter part of the story, in which Junius accepts his responsibility to his son, is Steinbeck's admission that this kind of life is impossible in the real world. The energetic neighbors are right: boys cannot go barefoot in the winter time. But the conflict between their views and the erst-while habits of old Junius is not resolved to our complete satisfaction.

In a story which is perhaps more related to real twentieth century problems, William Saroyan examines the situation of an adolescent boy whose parents are divorced, in the story, "A Talk With Father".<sup>6</sup> The boy lives with his mother, and lunches with his father from time to time. The mother imagines that she is very kind and thoughtful, but in reality she is too selfish to reach a satisfactory relationship with the boy:

His mother was as nice as anybody could be, only it always gripped you and made you think she was being nice so she could get something out of it; it made you think it was all a trick;

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<sup>6</sup>William Saroyan, "A Talk With Father", The Trouble With Tigers, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1938, pp. 128-133.

maybe she didn't even know it was that way. She wasn't deliberately clever; she was always thoughtful, considerate, and all that stuff, but it never seemed right.<sup>7</sup>

Neither is the boy able to reach a satisfactory relationship with his father. At lunch, the two of them eat their meal "like condemned men eating for the last time". The boy would like to have a real father:

"Why can't"---the boy began to say. (Why can't you be my father, he wanted to say.) But he knew why. To be truly a father a man had to stop living his own life. He knew his father wasn't made that way.<sup>8</sup> [*Italics in the original*]

The boy is torn between his desire not to hurt his mother---even though he recognizes her hypocrisy---and his sympathy for his father---even though he recognizes his father's worthlessness. The boy is a pathetic spectacle as he walks along the street talking to himself---the object of amusement to a group of adolescent girls. Like Paul Hasleman of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow", this boy is beginning to retreat from reality.<sup>9</sup> The story is effective: it leaves its reader depressed and wondering how the vast and growing number of children in this boy's situation can ever achieve a satisfactory personality integration or adjustment to reality.

In Stephen Vincent Benet's "Too Early Spring", the adolescent narrator is the victim, neither of indifference nor of deliberate cruelty but of misunderstanding by the adult world.<sup>10</sup> In this story the narrator tells of his love for a pretty young girl, Helen, who is two or three

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 132.

<sup>9</sup>See supra p. 21 f.

<sup>10</sup>Stephen Vincent Benet, "Too Early Spring", Collected Works, pp. 261-272. Also see supra p. 27.

years his junior. He makes it quite clear that their relationship was not of the "mushy" variety: they don't walk around holding hands as some other couples do. Their relationship is more distant, and is all the more intense for being distant. Occasionally, they go alone to a deserted house for picnics, but it is made clear that their conduct on these occasions is above reproach.

The boy calls on his girl friend one night after an exciting basketball game, in which he has distinguished himself. In his mood of exhausted excitement, he simply wants her companionship. Helen's parents are away, and even though she is clad in night attire, she invites him in. They sit by the fireplace chatting, and when they become weary, they lie down. As might have been expected, they fall asleep. They are found in this compromising position by the girl's parents.

The ensuing judgments infuriate the boy; all of the adults believe that the young couple have had sexual relations. Helen's mother, whose own past has been anything but moral, refuses to believe in her daughter's innocence. The boy's parents blame Helen's mother for the incident. The teacher, a paragon of virtue and frustration, enjoys the scandal and embellishes it to suit her own purposes. Even the boy's older brother is merely "impressed". In this way, the adults condemn without knowing the facts. The story is a good reminder that much of adolescent love is purely platonic and that mature motives should not be ascribed to immature people.

Not all stories which treat parent-child relationships illustrate practises which have a detrimental effect on the child. A more positive note is sounded by Steinbeck's "The Red Pony".<sup>11</sup> Jody Tifflin is being raised according to standards which can best be described as traditional American. Carl Tifflin and his wife are hard-working farmers of Monterey County, who are determined that their son will be a useful and contributing member of the family and of society. Accordingly, Jody is given an increasing load of responsibilities to prepare him for manhood. Carl and Mrs. Tifflin hate sentimentality and weakness; Carl speaks to Jody in a tone of voice that demands instant, unqualified obedience. When Jody piles the sticks cross-wise in the wood-box, Mrs. Tifflin's correction of his errant behaviour is swift and sure. When Jody spends more time with the pony than he should, she is quick to remind him that he still must feed the chickens before dark. The authoritarian pattern of Jody's upbringing is illustrated by the following passage, in which we also see Carl's carefully concealed pride in his developing son:

Carl Tifflin and Billy Buck, the ranch hand, stood against the lower pasture fence. Each man rested one foot on the lowest bar and both elbows on the top bar. They were talking slowly and aimlessly.....

Jody sidled uneasily near. He dragged one foot to give an impression of great innocence and nonchalance. When he arrived beside the men he put one foot on the lowest fence rail, rested his elbows on the second bar and looked into the pasture too. The two men glanced sideways at him.

"I wanted to see you," Carl said in the stern tone he reserved

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<sup>11</sup> John Steinbeck, "The Red Pony", The Long Valley, pp. 203-279. Also see supra pp.

for children and animals.

"Yes, sir," said Jody guiltily.

"Billy, here, says you took good care of the pony before it died."

No punishment was in the air. Jody grew bolder. "Yes, sir, I did."

"Billy says you have a good patient hand with horses."

Jody felt a sudden warm friendliness for the ranch hand.

Billy put in, "He trained that pony as good as anybody I ever seen."

Then Carl Tifflin came gradually to the point. "If you could have another horse would you work for it?"

Jody shivered. "Yes, sir."

"Well look here, then, Billy says the best way for you to be a good hand with horses is to raise a colt."

"It's the only good way," Billy interrupted.

"Now, look here, Jody," continued Carl. "Jesse Taylor, up to the ridge ranch, has a fair stallion, but it'll cost five dollars. I'll put up the money, but you'll have to work it out all summer. Will you do that?"

Jody felt that his insides were shriveling. "Yes, sir," he said softly.

"And no complaining, and no forgetting when you're told to do something?"

"Yes, sir."<sup>12</sup>

Beneath this uncompromising exterior which Carl and Mrs. Tifflin present to their son, there is a solid core of genuine love and understanding. This is revealed only in the most critical moments of Jody's life,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 259 f.

always with considerable embarrassment on the parents' part. For example, when the pony is dying and Jody is driven to distraction with grief, Carl carries in the wood for him. The same evening, Mrs. Tifflin enters Jody's room late at night, ostensibly to ask if he is warm enough, but really to bring him a much-needed word of comfort:

"Have you enough covers on? It's coming on winter."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, get some rest tonight." She hesitated to go out, stood uncertainly. "The pony will be all right," she said.<sup>13</sup>

When the pony dies, Carl Tifflin is there to help his son through a very difficult moment:

Carl Tifflin wiped the blood from the boy's face with a red bandana. Jody was limp and quiet now. His father moved the buzzard with his toe. "Jody," he explained, "The buzzard didn't kill the pony. Don't you know that?"

"I know it," said Jody wearily.<sup>14</sup>

This, then, is the relationship between Jody and his parents. Their love for him is evident throughout the story, but it never becomes mere sentimentality; it is all the more effective as a force in his life for its restrained and infrequent expression. It is an authoritarian pattern under which Jody lives, but it is a kindly pattern. Jody knows where he stands in relation to his parents: he knows that hard work and a sense of responsibility win approval, that swift punishment follows

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<sup>13</sup> ibid. p. 230.

<sup>14</sup> ibid. p. 238.

errant behaviour. We feel, with Steinbeck, that under this consistent discipline, Jody is being prepared for effective manhood.

William Faulkner's story, "The Tall Men", is another story which speaks affirmatively of the father-son relationship, in this case, in the McCallum family of the mythical Yoknapatawpha County.<sup>15</sup> This family is united by strong bonds of love and filial devotion; three generations of huge, silent men figure in the story, men who kiss one another "without hiding and without shame". The story is presented from the point of view of a Selective Service investigator who calls on the family to serve a summons to Buddy for failing to register his two sons, Lucius and Anse. The investigator, long experienced in dealing with the irresponsible segment of Southern white society believes that the McCallums are of this familiar breed. He discovers, however, through his own observation and from the local marshall's account of the family's history, that Buddy's failure to register the boys was dictated by the highest principles--by the McCallums' towering independence and by their unswerving belief in human values. He learns that the family, out of its high sense of duty, has participated in both the Civil War and World War I: old Anse (the grandfather) had walked all the way to Virginia to fight for the state of his ancestors; Buddy had been awarded two medals for distinguished service in France. Another indication of this family's

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<sup>15</sup> William Faulkner, "The Tall Men", Collected Stories, pp. 45-61.



high ideals and spirit of independence is that it has refused a paternalistic government's payments for land removed from cotton production. Through AAA and WPA and "a dozen other three-letter reasons for a man not to work", this family has preserved its sense of duty, its integrity and its belief in the dignity of human life. This is what the investigator discovers, in this story, which, with its theme of the rediscovery of value, is almost the exact reverse of the stories of initiation considered in our preceding chapter. The final words of the marsh-all, which are spoken to the investigator (as the two of them bury Buddy's amputated leg—which has been amputated with only whiskey for anesthetic), are a powerful reminder of the dignity and worth of individual man—a reminder that is refreshing in an age which has become too accustomed to dealing with man en masse:

"Take yourself now,<sup>2</sup> he said in that same kindly tone, chatty and easy; "you mean all right. You just went and got yourself all fogged up with rules and regulations. That's our trouble. We done invented ourselves so many alphabets and rules and recipes that we can't see anything else;...Yes, sir. We done forgot about folks. Life has done got cheap, and life ain't cheap. Life's a pretty darn valuable thing. I don't mean just getting along from one WPA relief check to the next one, but honor and pride and discipline that makes a man worth preserving, make him of any value. That's what we got to learn again. Maybe it takes trouble, bad trouble, to teach it back to us; maybe it was the walking to Virginia because that's where his ma come from, and losing a war and then walking back, that taught it to old Anse. Anyway, he seems to learned it, and to learned it good enough to bequeath it to his boys. Did you notice how all Buddy had to do was to tell them boys of his it was time to go, because the Government had sent them word? And how they told him good-by? Crowned men kissing one another without hiding and without shame. Maybe that's what I'm trying to say."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid. p. 59 f.

In this representative sample of stories of the child in relation to the adult, particularly of child to parent, we are struck by the extent to which these stories parallel the pattern of the stories of initiation considered in our preceding chapter.<sup>17</sup> The majority of these stories, too, reach negative conclusions, expressing the belief, or at least the feeling, that there is something wrong with parent-child relationships in the twentieth century, that somehow the relationship is unsatisfactory. On the other hand, the same two writers, Steinbeck and Faulkner, provide us with powerful affirmations of the best in the father-son relationship, as that relationship has existed throughout American history.

## II. CONTINUITY—REPUDIATION

Closely related to stories of the foregoing type, and separable from them only because of the degree of emphasis on one or another aspect of family life, are those stories which consider the continuity of beliefs, attitudes or values from one generation to the next.

In William Saroyan's story, "War", the child characters represent their various national backgrounds.<sup>18</sup> Karl, five years old, is a Teuton, who has been trained by his grandfather to walk in a military style and to speak sparingly, after the manner of his race. Josef, six years old, is an irrepressible Slovenian, who is interested in everything, talks incessantly, and laughs and cries easily. Karl's serious manner gets on

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<sup>17</sup>See supra. p. 49.

<sup>18</sup>William Saroyan, "War", Raring Young Man, pp. 235-243.

Josef's nerves. Irving, an introspective and melancholy Jewish child, weeps bitterly when Karl and Josef fight. As Karl and Josef advance to meet each other, the author imagines that he sees two nations advancing:

I was certain that Karl and Josef were going to express their hatred for each other, the hatred that was stupid and wasteful and the result of ignorance and immaturity, by striking one another, as whole nations, through stupid hatred, seek to dominate or destroy one another.<sup>19</sup>

And regarding the Jewish boy's weeping, the author states,

I can only imagine that he cried because the existence of hatred and ugliness in the heart of man is a truth....<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the fact that the child characters in this story are thinly disguised symbols for their respective national backgrounds (and the story subject to the limitations of such a technique), its theme of the perpetuation of prejudice and attitude is certainly a valid one. Each child in the story, to the extent that he becomes real at all, acts out the pattern of belief and prejudice which his parents have handed on to him--a fact to which psychology as well as everyday observation can attest.

Ernest Hemingway develops this theme at a level of greater reality in "Fathers and Sons"<sup>21</sup> Nick Adams, now a man of thirty-eight, drives along a highway with his son at his side. His thoughts return to his own childhood and adolescence, particularly to the things his father

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 242.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 243.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Hemingway, "Fathers and Sons", The First Forty-Nine Stories, pp. 386-397. Also see supra p. 43.

(now deceased) had taught him. Much of this he finds inadequate; for example, his education in sexual matters:

His father had summed up the whole matter by stating that masturbation produced blindness, insanity, and death, while a man who went with prostitutes would contract hideous venereal diseases and that the thing to do was keep your hands off of people.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, Nick can now recall with gratitude the positive things he has learned from his father, especially his knowledge of hunting and fishing. In a flashback, Hemingway presents some of the tensions that developed between Nick and his father as the former approached maturity. At that time, Nick had ambivalent feelings toward his father, loving him and hating him in typical adolescent fashion. These ambivalent feelings are cleverly objectified in an incident centering around his father's underwear. The particular garment had shrunk, and Nick had been told to wear it. Even though Nick "had loved his father very much and for a long time, he hated the smell of him, and wearing his father's underwear made him feel sick". He deceived his father by hiding the underwear under two stones in the creek and saying that he had lost it. After being whipped for this lie, Nick sits in the woodshed nursing his wounded feelings. His loaded shotgun stands nearby. Suddenly he thinks, "I can blow him to hell. I can kill him". A moment later, "and he felt a little sick about it being the gun that his father had given him."

In this way, Hemingway "got rid of" his own feelings of ambiva-

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid. p. 589.

valence toward his father, for as Nick says--(an important clue to all of Hemingway's writing--"he had gotten rid of many things by writing them").

In "Brother Death", Sherwood Anderson examines the different attitudes of two brothers toward a family tradition of possessions and material wealth.<sup>23</sup> The boys are inheritors, on the one hand, of their mother's carefree, impractical nature (the Aspinwahls love beauty more than possessions) and on the other, of the father, John Gray's tradition of land hunger, drudgery and prosperity. Ted, the younger son, has a heart ailment which is certain to kill him at an early age. The older brother, Don, will inherit the farm and the father's tradition. Because Ted will die young, he is allowed to develop his Aspinwahl love of beauty: he does not have to be realistic and practical. In Don, however, the Aspinwahl characteristics are carefully eradicated. When the father orders the cutting down of two large, beautiful oak trees because they are shading and destroying a section of good pasture, Don and his mother object. Don even leaves home, but the father cuts down the trees anyway. In a few days, Don returns--once more the obedient son, the inheritor of the land, the hard-headed practical farmer.

To Anderson, it is Don who dies the more frightful death. Ted's expected physical death sets him free to develop his love of beauty.

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<sup>23</sup> Sherwood Anderson, "Brother Death", Walter Havighurst (ed.), Masters of the Modern Short Story, pp. 316-337. Also see supra p. 45.

Don's death, on the other hand, is a living death, for he must repudiate the Aspinwahl part of his nature. This, Anderson would have us believe, is a fate worse than death.

William Faulkner provides us with one of the most powerful stories of a boy's repudiation of his family in "Barn Burning".<sup>24</sup> This is the story of the poor-white share-cropper, Snopes, and his son's rebellion against a tradition of cruelty, stupidity and vindictiveness. Snopes moves from one landlord to the next at frequent intervals, having "an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own", and being too disagreeable and useless to remain on good terms at any one place for long. On the slightest pretext, Snopes burns his landlords' barns-- "the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being". The story opens after one of these barn burnings. We first see the boy in the courtroom scene, in which he is staunchly loyal to his father, even to the point of lying to the judge as his father has instructed him. Immediately after the trial, the boy fights with a much older boy who has whispered an insult as the Snopes family leaves the courtroom. In spite of these demonstrations of loyalty, Snopes strikes the boy a vicious blow because of his obvious uneasiness as he prepared to lie to the judge. Faulkner describes the incident in his involved but effective style:

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<sup>24</sup> William Faulkner, "Barn Burning", Collected Stories, pp. 3-25.

His father had struck him before last night but never before had he paused afterward to explain why; it was as if the blow and the following calm, outrageous voice still rang, reperculated, divulging nothing to him save the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events.<sup>25</sup>

This is the beginning of the boy's revolt against his father. From this beginning, he becomes increasingly aware of his father's true nature, and he is increasingly revolted by what he sees. Yet just as powerfully, he feels the pull of family loyalty, "the old fierce pull of blood". Faulkner's superb presentation of the boy's ambivalent feelings toward his father makes this story one of the most intense and dramatic in the entire literature of adolescence. The following passage, even out of context, conveys some of his feelings of family loyalty:

"Pap", he said. His father looked at him--the inscrutable face, the shaggy brows beneath which the gray eyes glistened coldly. Suddenly the boy went toward him, fast, stopping as suddenly. "You done the best you could!" he cried. "If he wanted hit done different why didn't he wait and tell you how? He won't git no twenty bushels! He won't git none! We'll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch...."<sup>26</sup>

To which the father replies, unmoved by this effusion of loyalty:

"Did you put the cutter back in that straight stock like I told you?...Then go do it."<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the boy's growing realization of his father's true nature is revealed in the following passage, which contains his thoughts as he stands contemplating the large and serene dwelling of Major de Spain, the Snopes' new landlord:

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>Loc. cit.

They are safe from him. People whose lives are part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch, he no more to them than a buzzing wasp: capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all; the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the suny flames he might contrive.... <sup>28</sup> [italics in the original]

In this way, as incident is piled upon incident, the boy's ambivalent feelings, "the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses", rise to a climax in Snopes' attempt to burn de Spain's barn. When commanded to fetch the can of oil, the boy obeys; but when his father has left on this final act of vindictiveness, the boy's rebellious spirit overcomes his family loyalty. Escaping from his mother and sisters, who have been left to guard him, he runs to warn de Spain. When he has succeeded in this, he continues to run--on into the night. As he runs, he hears two shots, which, he knows, have ended his father's life. Still, loyalty to family is strong in him. Even though he has just caused his father's death, he thinks aloud:

Father. My father, he thought. "He was brave!" he cried suddenly aloud but not loud, no more than a whisper: "He was! He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" <sup>29</sup> [italics in the original]

To which Faulkner adds the final twist of the knife:

...not knowing that his father had gone to war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck himself did: for booty--it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own.<sup>30</sup>

Another story of repudiation, much less violent than the one just considered, but a story, nevertheless, of fine insight, is Sherwood

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Loc. cit.



Anderson's "Departure", the last story of Winesburg, Ohio.<sup>31</sup> Its retrospective glance at George Willard's childhood and its presentation of George's feelings of apprehension as he embarks on new experiences, make it an appropriate story to conclude this portion of our study. George is packed and all prepared to leave the little town of Winesburg, where he has been raised. He rises early in the morning, unable to sleep "for thinking of the journey he was about to take and wondering what he would find at the end of his journey".. He goes for a long walk along Trunion Pike, filled with memories of earlier walks:

He had been in the midst of the great open place on winter nights when it was covered with snow and only the moon looked down at him; he had been there in the fall when bleak winds blew and on summer evenings when the air vibrated with the song of insects.<sup>32</sup>

When he returns to town to catch the early morning train, he is surprised and a little embarrassed to find that a number of his townspeople have turned out to bid him good-bye—"even Will Henderson, who was lazy and often slept until nine, had got out of bed". Gertrude Wilmot, a tall thin woman of fifty voiced what everyone felt, "'Good luck', she said sharply and then turning went on her way". When George boards the train, he self-consciously takes out his pocketbook and counts his money; he is trying very hard, as his father has advised, not to appear a "greenhorn". Out of the window, he observes the little incidents of small-town life--the life which he is leaving behind. He closes his eyes and leans back in

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<sup>31</sup> Sherwood Anderson, "Departure", Winesburg, Ohio, pp. 299-303.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 300.

his seat:

He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood.<sup>33</sup>

In this story, George Willard's situation could well exemplify <sup>that of</sup> all adolescents, who, in making their own way in the world, must turn their backs on the early portions of their lives and make of their past, "a background on which to paint the dreams of their manhood".

### III. SUMMARY

The group of stories considered in this chapter illustrate the interest of the artist in the relations between the world of the child and the world of the adult. Some stories, we have found, parallel closely the interests of contemporary psychology, examining such aspects of parent-child relationships as the effect of parental attitudes on child development, the effect of broken homes and similar problems. Other stories examine the whole problem of how a parent prepares his child for manhood. Another group of stories consider the continuity of beliefs from father to son: some of these stories reach negative conclusions—expressing, apparently, a dissatisfaction with parent-child relationships. On the other hand, a few stories—again, surprisingly, those of Steinbeck and Faulkner, reach more affirmative conclusions. Finally, other stories portray the adolescent throwing of the parental yoke and becoming an individual in his own right.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 303.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing pages we have examined in considerable detail some of the ways in which American writers of our time have used child and adolescent characters in short stories. The present chapter will summarize our study and state some conclusions which can be drawn from the entire group of stories considered.

#### I. SUMMARY

Our second chapter considered those stories which were written purely out of fascination with childhood. In this group, we found that some authors were interested in normal children--their endearing qualities and their grotesqueries of behaviour; other authors took for their subject the distorted world of the abnormal child. Such stories, we found, owe their existence about equally to the love of children which is so much a part of American culture and to the interest of contemporary psychology in childhood, an interest which American writers have closely paralleled.

Our third chapter considered the artistic treatment of adolescence. Some of these stories--again illustrating the close parallel between the contemporary artist and psychologist--dealt with the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. Other writers made use of certain characteristics

of the adolescent--his innocence, his feelings of insecurity and his ambivalence--as a means of exploring some of the problems of existence. In all but a few cases, the adolescent was used to express negative and defeatist views of life: his timorous confrontation of the real world and his search for meaning in life became the perfect means for expressing the artist's own ambivalence. In contrast to these negative and defeatist statements, however, two of the greatest stories, "The Red Pony" and "The Bear", used the growth of adolescent into manhood to give us two resounding affirmations of the human spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Our fourth chapter considered stories which examined various aspects of the relationship of child to adult, particularly of child to parent. Some of these stories considered the effect of parental philosophy on the developing child; other stories examined the effect of such factors as divorce, parental attitudes ranging from indifference to indulgence and other familiar problems of family life in the twentieth century. A final group of stories considered the continuity of beliefs and attitudes from generation to generation: some of these showed the adolescent in rebellion against the adult world; others showed him sorting out the portions of the parental teaching which were still applicable to his situation.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

In the present perspective, it appears that the stories considered

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<sup>1</sup>See supra pp. 53-60, 60-67.

in this study may be divided into two groups, or two levels of significance, on the basis of the authors' motivation in writing them. These two levels have been observed from time to time in the foregoing pages, but they emerge more forcibly when all of the stories are weighed in their total, cumulative significance. At the simpler level, many writers are interested in the child or adolescent himself: the artist may have an insight into child behaviour which he wishes to convey, an interesting experience with children or adolescents which he wishes to share, or a particularly interesting child or adolescent character which he wishes to portray. In any case, at the simpler level, the interest of the writer is in the child or adolescent himself. At the second level--a level of greater significance by far than the foregoing kind of story--are those which use the child or adolescent character--especially the adolescent character--for the expression of feelings, attitudes or views, which, for a variety of reasons, can best be expressed through such characters. A brief reconsideration of our primary material in the light of this differentiation will conclude our study.

#### The Child or Adolescent for Himself

In this group are included all of the stories considered in our second chapter, those which dealt with normal and abnormal children. Also included are those discussed in the first portion of our third chapter, those which dealt with the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. In addition, this group includes those stories examined in the first portion of our fourth chapter, those which examined the affect

on the child of certain circumstances or attitudes in the family environment.

In making this differentiation of our heterogeneous mass of material, we are immediately struck with startling confirmation of what we have so often noticed in the foregoing pages; that is, the extent to which our writers have drawn inspiration from psychology. The normal child, the abnormal child, the changes of adolescence, the effect of family environment—these all are aspects of human development in which the psychologist has been interested. Many of the stories in this study simply tell in more human terms what the psychologist has found in case history and clinical study. In thus paralleling the psychologist, the writers of our time have performed a unique and valuable service to man in understanding man as probably no other generation of writers has had the opportunity to do.

In this regard, it is unfortunate that among all the anthologies of short stories which have been published, no anthology containing only stories of childhood and adolescence has appeared. In the opinion of the writer, this is a most regrettable omission. Such an anthology would not only be extremely interesting in its own right; it would also be invaluable as supplementary reading for university courses in child and adolescent psychology. There is no doubt that such courses would be enriched by the fine insights of many of the writers considered in this study.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>In this regard, it is interesting to note the introduction to one anthology of short stories, Josephine Stroads (ed.) Social Insight Through Short Story, Harper and Bros., New York, 1946, p. 6:

"The primary purpose of this volume is to satisfy the need for supplemental material to enrich courses in sociology, social work, guidance, education and social administration."

Another fact to which stories in this group owe their existence is the child-centredness of the American culture. Other evidence of this characteristic, as noted earlier, is to be found in the popularity of motion picture and television shows which feature child or adolescent characters.<sup>3</sup> Still more evidence of this American characteristic--if more were required for an obvious fact--is supplied by the child-centredness of American education and educational thought. This feature of the American culture has guaranteed the popularity of stories about childhood and adolescence and almost certainly has been a factor in their creation.

#### The Child or Adolescent as Instrument

At a level of greater significance are those stories which use the characteristics of the child or adolescent for the expression of the various authors' views. Included in this group are those stories considered in the latter portion of our third chapter, those which showed the adolescent confronting some facet of the world of reality and those which showed the adolescent being prepared for manhood. Also included in this group are the stories considered in the latter portion of our fourth chapter, those which examined the continuity of beliefs, attitudes or values from generation to generation. While it is more difficult to generalize about the stories included in this than in the foregoing group, a few tentative conclusions are possible.

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<sup>3</sup>See supra p. 6 f.

The theme of innocence. The theme of innocent, natural man set over against the complexities of civilization has been a persistent one in American fiction and in American folklore. We find one example of this theme in Huckleberry Finn, who will have nothing to do with ordinary civilization and takes off for the territory.<sup>4</sup> The figure of Leatherstocking in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper and the "barbaric yawn" of Walt Whitman, are other manifestations of this American myth of innocence and primitivism. This myth, if it has a philosophical basis at all--it may simply be characteristic of a frontier society--probably derives from Rousseau's naturalistic view of life. In American folklore likewise, the cowboy and the frontiersman personify the American dream of innocence. Later, in the writings of Henry James, innocence was used not to glorify innocent, natural man but to point up the limitations of such a concept of manhood. As one critic has said,

Henry James was the first significant American author to see clearly that the importance of the mythological concept of innocent, natural man consisted in his usefulness as a tragic figure in the highest sense, not as a mere illustration of national virtue.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of innocence, then, came to have a degree of ambivalence in American literature: on the one hand, the glorification of innocence as an "illustration of national virtue"; on the other hand, the realization of the limitations of such a concept of manhood for life in the real world.

This ambivalence of innocence is an important factor in many of

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<sup>4</sup> West, The Short Story p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> loc. cit.



the stories considered in this study. On the one side of the coin are the expressions of disillusionment and the expressions of man defeated noted so often in the foregoing pages.<sup>6</sup> On the other side of the coin, and acting as a powerful motive in the creation of these stories, is the desire for innocence. This desire finds expression in a variety of ways. Many of the stories considered in the foregoing pages have a Huck Finn aspect: the adolescent hero leaves ordinary civilization to search for a state of innocence: Nick Adams goes to the Michigan woods; the adolescent hero of "I Want to Know Why" leaves his middle-class family and associates with the roustabouts of the racetrack; George Willard leaves Winesburg.<sup>7</sup> Another way in which innocence is glorified is in the sympathetic treatment of simple, unsophisticated characters: Junius Maltby, Uncle Willy, the character, Bugs, in "The Battler".<sup>8</sup> The desire for innocence is the prime motive, too, in the stories of initiation considered in Chapter III. In these stories innocence is glorified in the kind of world that is described before the adolescent has had the scales removed from his eyes. What many of these writers appear to desire is a world in which all men are like Joe Butler's father as he appeared to his son, or like Jerry Tillford as he is seen by Anderson's adolescent hero before the drinking party.<sup>9</sup> Even "The Bear" has been described as "the greatest paragon to

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<sup>6</sup>See supra pp. 34 ff.

<sup>7</sup>See supra pp. 45-46.

<sup>8</sup>See supra p. 39 f.

<sup>9</sup>See supra pp. 41-45.

innocence in all American fiction".<sup>10</sup> Ike McCaslin finds Nature bountiful, peaceful and moral; civilization with its greed and its machinery has destroyed it. In some writers the desire for innocence is expressed in mere sentimentality: Hemingway's enraptured description of Rick Adam's relationship with the Indian girl, Prudie, Joe Butler's idyllic relationship with his father, and William Saroyan's heroes who laugh and cry so readily.

What can we say, in concluding this study, of the writers who shared in this twentieth century dream of innocence, who indulged in these expressions of disillusionment, as we have seen, through the use of child and adolescent characters? Is there not in the foregoing stories something strongly suggestive of adolescence in the writers themselves? Hemingway's vision of the world, and Hemingway's heroes--bullfighters, prize-fighters, hunters--are these not the vision and the heroes of adolescence? At least one critic has felt that they are.<sup>11</sup> How typically adolescent seems the rambunctiousness of William Saroyan! How like an adolescent the self-conscious pose of Sherwood Anderson! In this regard, the following comment is particularly relevant:

Even our best writers appear unable to mature; after one or two inept attempts, they find a style, a subject and tone usually anchored in their adolescent experience--and these,<sup>12</sup> they repeat compulsively, like a songbird his single tune.  
[italics not in the original]

Perhaps the greatest significance of the stories considered in this

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<sup>10</sup>"Three Visions", Angoff, American Writing Today p. 208.

<sup>11</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, An End To Innocence, The Beacon Press, Boston, 1955, p. 193.

<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

study is that they represent the ne plus ultra of so many writers. So few of them were to go beyond their adolescent visions.

America's coming of age. In retrospect it would appear that the stories considered in this study are linked with the coming of age of the American nation, that they form, collectively, a little testament of the loss of American innocence. In part these stories reflect a nostalgia for an America that was passing, an America in which it was still possible to keep up at least a pretense of innocence, the America of the unlimited frontier, inevitable progress and the optimistic life view. In part these stories reflect a sense of shock in what was happening to American society and what was happening in the world. In many of the foregoing stories there appears a destructiveness approaching nihilism in regard to American society as it had become in the twentieth century. In many of the same stories, and in others the artist appears to be struggling to wrest meaning from life, trying to see himself in relation to the problems of the new age, just as America itself, in a larger sphere, was trying to understand its new role in the affairs of the world. These stories form a sort of documentary of America as it stood at the crossroads. Behind lay a century of optimism, innocence and infinite promise; ahead lay the world of crisis upon crisis, cataclysm upon cataclysm. Behind lay Eden; the world was all before them.

### III. SUMMARY

In the present perspective, there emerge three factors, seemingly unrelated, which combine to give the stories in this study a very

considerable significance. The first factor is the coming of age of the American nation and the loss of the heritage of innocence. The second factor is the perfection of the short story medium itself--the perfect medium for the expression of the fragment of truth suddenly grasped or partially realized, the pained outcry, the brief, unsustained view. The third factor is the interest in the child and adolescent himself--partly due to America's love of children, partly due to the influence of contemporary psychology. For the expression of lost innocence, for the expression of disillusionment, for the expression of America's feelings as it stood at the crossroads, the adolescent became the perfect instrument and symbol of ambivalence. For us the adolescent character becomes even more: the perfect mirror of the writers' own immaturity.

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