

"HENRY ADAMS AND AMERICAN REALISM: THE LITERARY  
EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL IDEAS"

BY

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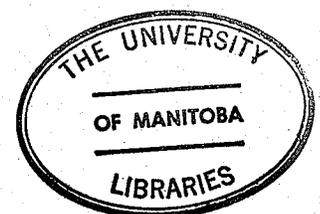
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Henry Adams and American realism:  
The literary expression of social ideas.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to establish the context and meaning of Henry Adams' <sup>1</sup> Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres.<sup>2</sup> It will show that Chartres, on the surface an atypical piece of American writing - a study of the European Middle Ages - is central to the main literary endeavour in the period following the Civil War, and to the American intellectual effort as a whole.

So far as context and meaning can be distinguished, the first three chapters are devoted to context and the fourth to meaning. With this distribution of weight it is important to define at the outset what, between the covers of Chartres and the edge of the universe, is meant by "context" in this case. First there is that of Adams' other major books - The History of the United States,<sup>3</sup> The Education of Henry Adams,<sup>4</sup> and the novel Democracy<sup>5</sup> - from which will be drawn the elements of an insight that finds full articulation in Chartres. Second there is the post-bellum literary environment - the late writing of Melville and Whitman, and the major writing of Henry James and the naturalists, some of which will be brought into relation around Chartres.

These contexts are interpenetrating. What pulls them together and relates them to Chartres is their common realism. In one sense this is obvious: the writing of James and his contemporaries is conventionally known as realist literature, and Henry Adams can be shown to have participated in this tradition of expression. However, the term will not be employed in its usual sense of "un-romantic" or "tough-minded", but in its philosophical sense, by which the existence of ideas ante res is postulated. This different view of literary realism is the core of the

thesis, and it is offered in the spirit of experiment,

There is room for such an experiment. While Henry James and William Dean Howells were developing the realist novel, a school of neo-realism was taking shape in philosophical circles at Harvard University. Charles S. Peirce, Ralph Barton Perry and many others contributed essays to The New Realism, published in 1912, but comprised of essays written throughout the period between 1870 and 1912 - the era of literary realism. It is an odd fact that these two explicit realisms, emerging out of the same time and place, have never been systematically compared.

This kind of comparison raises methodological considerations. The focus here is cross-disciplinary; Adams' effort will be viewed simultaneously from the vantage points of literary criticism and the history of ideas. The perils waiting on this approach are obvious. However, studies of Henry Adams have traditionally suffered from a hesitation to enter the region that lies between the two disciplines. Adams himself, historical poet and mythopoetic historian, was resident in that zone of complicated lights and shades; and it is the responsibility of his interpreter to observe from the relevant quarters rather than to select as significant those facets visible from the safety of one position or the other.

The chapters of the thesis move between analyses of the inception of American realism and of its literary culmination in Chartres. Realism and nominalism are the concerns of the first chapter; a working definition of realism is established, with which Adams is gradually brought into conjunction. The second consists in a discussion of Adams' unique development of realist thinking, as evidenced in his History, Democracy, and

The Education, The third consists in an attempt to map out the situation that faced American literary writing generally after the Civil War, and to locate Adams' particular position therein. The fourth is a discussion of Adams' main response to this situation, his Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres.

One thing must be made clear before proceeding: whereas The Education was the last major undertaking of Henry Adams' life, it has been found useful here to write on the assumption that the slightly earlier Chartres is a response to concerns expressed therein. To do so is not to twist the documents unduly, because the actual order of composition is not an accurate reflection of the order of experience. Rather, the order of composition reflects the generally-felt need to portray "chaos" (the advertised plan of The Education) from some standpoint not itself chaotic - as The Magic Mountain and The Waste Land each measure contemporary disorder from the standpoint of Dante. Adams created his own solid base from which to measure and express disorder: Chartres. Both books awaited the repose of old age, but only Chartres is its reflection; The Education is largely the experience of the younger Adams.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Lewis Mumford [Virginia Quarterly Review, 38, (Spring, 1962), 196] drops the "s" of the possessive in his reference to Adams, and I conform to this practice, which is followed by a majority of critics.
2. Garden City, New York; Doubleday and Co., 1959. Hereafter called Chartres.
3. The History of the United States During the Administrations of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, 9 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1889-91). Hereafter called the History.
4. New York; Modern Library Editions, 1946. Hereafter called The Education.
5. New York; Airmont Publishing Co., 1968.
6. The information given in this paragraph can be found under the headings "Realism", "New Realism", and "Peirce, Charles S." in The Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Dagobert Runes (Totowa, New Jersey; Littlefield, Adams, and Co., 1966).
7. The limitations of a strictly chronological interpretation of this phase of American cultural history is noted by Bernard Poli in the introduction to his Le Roman Américain 1865 - 1917: Mythes de la Frontière et de la Ville: "L'histoire littéraire, en insistant sur des classements chronologiques faussement objectifs, m'a paru présenter une interprétation des faits qui n'est pas toujours la plus probante.  
 "Il est évident aussi [par exemple] que l'entrée des provinciaux dans les cités de l'Est doit être considérée comme logiquement antérieure à l'exil des citadins vers l'Europe, même si, chronologiquement, ces mouvements sont parfois simultanés, et si The American précède Sister Carrie ou A Hazard of New Fortunes. L'histoire littéraire, pour rester valable dans l'explication qu'elle propose, doit tenir compte de faits historiques qui ne cadrent pas forcément avec sa propre chronologie". (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1972), p. 6.

## THE CRITICAL CONCEPT REALISM

Concepts deriving from the notion reality carry a heavy burden of accumulated meaning. It is therefore surprising that the term realism is allowed currency in literary discussion without being subjected, from time to time, to semantic query. Of the many theoreticians brought together in George Becker's Documents of Modern Literary Realism,<sup>1</sup> apart from those who labour to disclose that realists portray reality, most employ the concept with the apparent aim of reducing it to the status of pure name. This is ironic since nominalism, the ancient art of reducing concepts to names, is the traditional antithesis of realism. The loose arranging of Balzac, Flaubert, and George Eliot, Twain, Howells, and Henry James around realism displays an absence of critical anxiety such as might go along with fixing the dates of their works on a chronology. If we are to have in our possession a sign without a referent, then surely something weaker could do the same job without raising up, only to ignore, the rich full world of contention at whose centre realism sits.

Outlining the standard meanings of literary terms, M.H. Abrams suggested that by realism one understands "an accurate presentation of life as it is",<sup>2</sup> noting that this is valid but inadequate. What would be adequate he does not venture to say. Instead he goes on to de-energize the conventional understanding by observing that the unusual and the fantastic are banished from realist writing as tendentiously as the commonplace had been from romantic - involving a comparable falling short in either case of the comprehensiveness generally associated with "reality".

Alfred Kazin extends this point;

The typical product of realism represents invention and choice, as does every artistic method. No artistic work can ever be simply a copy of actuality, for the writer is dominated by an idea of what reality is before he ever chooses his examples of it; and a book represents an effort at organization that life, as life, never possesses.<sup>3</sup>

Once it has been observed that literary groups, like others, adhere to notions of significance which they like to call criteria of reality, this sort of analysis has yielded its full harvest. Realism, applied to literature, is a misnomer.

Many critics have suspected this to be the case. In his book on literary realism Damian Grant extensively documented the "chronic instability" and "unmanageable elasticity" of the concept. In recent times there has been an adverse reaction: Writers have indicated their mistrust of its behaviour by sending it out under escort (i.e. with epithets, viz. "socialist realism" or "infra-realism") or by letting it loose only when safely handcuffed by inverted commas.

Literary concepts, however, cannot be expected to endow critical efforts with scientific precision, any more than literature can be expected to distribute itself neatly into elements and relations. The most that should be expected from literary concepts is that they provide tentative hypotheses which are able to carry a reader to within sight of the debating field before they disintegrate. Realism functions to this extent, as evidenced by the body of useful criticism created within its frame.

And yet the concept is appropriate in a more specific way than that, as can be shown simply by considering what realism actually means

and then by comparing that meaning with the writing it is meant to denote. Grant suggests the invocation of philosophy as an adjunct to the exploration of realism: "If one wishes to achieve a genuine discrimination between the unruly meanings of realism as they jostle and overlap, then one must accept the necessity of going back to the philosophers".<sup>5</sup> This is true, because it is mainly in literary discussion and everyday vernacular that the "meanings" of realism jostle and overlap; in philosophy its function is definite and singular. It is not necessary, however, to pursue the concept deep into the fiery regions of philosophy proper - where questions of reality per se are confronted, where ontological status is parcelled out in infinite complexity, and so on. That is certainly the direction to be taken, but only so far as the comparatively temperate zone of the history of ideas. Realism is one of the larger Western ideas, and has left an avenue broad for following.

Either ideas are more real than things, or things are more real than ideas; the dominance-of-ideas position, whether denying or merely overriding the existence of things, constitutes what legions of scholars since Plato have understood to be realism. More specifically, it is abstract or general ideas that realism is concerned with, and the source of the issue is the ambiguous relation of these ideas to the world. For instance, it is the general idea "redness" real? If it is, did it exist ante res, that is, before any actual instances of red things had come into the world? Or does it exist merely as a name, as a linguistic abbreviation of the world based on (and hence coming after) numerous observations of individual red things? The nominalist, who sets himself in opposition to the realist, believes that general ideas are merely names - artificial devices of thought and communication unreal in themselves.

This opposition is characterized in a passage marked as noteworthy by the undergraduate Henry Adams in his copy of an 1852 Biographical History of Philosophy: "We are here led to the origin of the world-famous dispute of Realism and Nominalism.... The Realists maintain that every General Term (or abstract idea) such as Man, Virtue, etc., has a real and independent existence (apart from concrete instances). The Nominalists, on the contrary, maintain that all general terms are but the creations of human ingenuity ... merely used as marks of aggregate conceptions<sup>N, 6</sup>

From the beginnings of primitive religion to the intricacies of high Christian theology, realism was a collectively held unconscious assumption about the universe. Christian thinking from Augustine forward was realist in every respect, although room was afforded for shifting between realisms (Aquinas moved away from hard Platonic realism to the softer Aristotelian version). There were certain general ideas, such as God, and beneath that Trinity and Universal Church, and finally Man and Right, which this philosophy regarded as absolutely real. The idea Man itself was a reality, of which individual men partook; and yet Man itself did not draw its reality from the sum of individual men, but rather from other general ideas even higher above, ultimately from God.

The vision of the world implied by realism was thus one of interconnections. Nothing was irreducibly individual; all things belonged to one or another general class; and all classes were subsumed beneath the ultimate universal, God. The world was a universe, understanding the term literally. The social implication (or perhaps social base) of this is obvious: Man in general, the human community, was more real than any man in particular.

In the later Middle Ages the inherent problems of this philosophy, hidden at its heart at least since Plato and Aristotle debated the status of ideas, rushed into the foreground. A powerful school of nominalism rose up to dispute the ground with realism; Man is a mere name, created by men's experience of each other, a name that would not exist if no man or only one man existed. Virtue exists only inasmuch as there are instances of virtuous behaviour.

These supersubtle distinctions seem pedantic. However, while philosophical issues and disputes may indeed be eternal, pure, airborne, the forms they assume in human history usually have roots - ideological roots - in the ordinary world. This is bound to be the case where an issue has entered history as a large-scale obsession and confrontation; and, as John of Salisbury wrote from the University at Chartres in the twelfth century, the dispute between realism and nominalism was "a problem over which more time had been lost than the Caesars ever spent conquering the world and more money than ever filled the coffers of Croesus".<sup>7</sup> In fact, this dispute was a vehicle capable of handling ideas of obvious practical significance - ideas creating and created by radical changes in the character of Western life.

Postulating a world of multiplicity, a multiverse in which everything was to be seen as particular, nominalism nevertheless came down strongest for particularity as applied to the human sphere. "Redness" may not be an issue worth going to the gallows over, but the difference between Man and 'a man' is considerable. This difference becomes clear as one reads David Knowlton's description of Ockham's nominalism, in which "generalities of every sort are denied in favour of a world of individual things, each of which was so irreducibly individual as to be unsusceptible

of any intelligible relationship or connection with any other individual<sup>8</sup>. And since this principle "was applied with remorseless logic to every field of thought"<sup>8</sup>, the outcome of its application to mediaeval notions of Man and Community is obvious. Community was not something real, but rather a name for aggregates of individuals who happened to be gathered together in some loose sense.

Henry Adams formulated the realism-nominalism dispute in an interesting way: "The schools knew that their society hung for life on the demonstration that God, the ultimate universal, was a reality, out of which all other universal truths or realities sprang"<sup>9</sup>. The interesting point here is that Adams sees society hanging in the balance, and this of course is accurate.

The middle class, which began to emerge during the late mediaeval period, experienced as fetters many of the general ideas that the Church had envisioned (and enforced) as real. The intellectual apologists of this class attacked the status of general ideas generally, but their special commitment was to the task of releasing the enterprising individual from the restrictions of the mediaeval community, and replacing the troublesome Virtue with the more pliable ethic of personal interest. The explicit nominalism of such otherwise diverse early modern thinkers as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke comes to mind. Mature liberal-individualism reveals its nominalist centre unequivocally through one of its main spokesmen, John Stuart Mill. Of the abstract human community, Man, Mill wrote: "Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance"<sup>10</sup>. He writes similarly of abstract Virtue: "I will forego any advantage which could be derived from the idea of abstract right"<sup>11</sup>. The liberal and the nominalist are indistinguishable here;<sup>12</sup>

"group" and "right" are illusory phantoms, the individual and his conscience alone are real,

Some time before the advent of Mill, this habit of mind had crystallized into the dream of a liberal America. Miraculously coeval with the rise of individualism was the discovery of the New World, a vast region where the individual would be allowed room to nourish and contemplate his particularity. An America of owners-farmers and few cities, as envisioned by Thomas Jefferson, would escape the constriction of the traditional European community. America's values would not be lowered down from above, through Church and Community; rather they would emanate from the individual, and of course from the fresh green land itself. The related ideas of the land, Nature, and the "natural individual" as generators of value found expression in the vocabulary of European romanticism.

In Walt Whitman's early poems, where the free-floating self unfolds in blissful union with a totally particularized and lovingly catalogued Nature, the aspiration of America's youth are given classic form. The very structure of the poems reflects a nominalist world-view; and yet it is possible to find more explicit nominalism than that. In the opening paragraph of Democratic Vistas, Whitman unites his vision of a particularised Nature with a description of American Society: "As the greatest lessons of Nature ... are perhaps the lessons of variety and freedom, the same present the greatest lessons also in New World politics...." He cites Mill's On Liberty wherein "full play for human nature to expand itself in numberless and even conflicting directions" (emphasis added) is the precondition for "restoration" and "vitality",<sup>13</sup>

And yet Whitman had probably never given nominalism, as a philosophical tradition, a serious thought. The same could not be said of the

more scholarly Emerson. His general interest, preceding Whitman's, in nature, America, and the individual is well known; and in his essay, "Nominalist and Realist", nature and nominalism are brought together and fused. He writes: "Nature will not be a Buddhist; she resents generalizing, and insults the philosopher with a million of fresh particulars ... She hates abstractionists",<sup>14</sup>

The modern world, however, was not long generating its own fifth columns of opposition. About the time that the problems associated with realism and nominalism seemed laid aside forever, to the extent that realism had become effectively synonymous with its old antithesis materialism, a school of neo-realism came forth. In America, Harvard University was the seat of this school, and Charles S. Peirce its main exponent. Peirce turned his attention to what he considered to be the next of many characteristic modern confusions, the late Middle Ages. In particular, he was opposed to Descartes for his creation of "the modern form of the nominalist error", and was positively influenced by the realism of the thirteenth century philosopher Duns Scotus, the author of the ethical principle that "the limited duration of all finite things logically demands the identification of one's interests with those of an unlimited community of persons and things",<sup>15</sup> Here was realism, a general ethical principle, and a non-particularist view of the world and man.

Along with this went a new way of seeing and talking about practical human affairs. The nineteenth-century habit of viewing human history in terms of the waves moving outward from the activity of great individuals - such as Carlyle's "heroes" - gradually gave way to an attempt to view particular events within the context of general "forces",<sup>16</sup> These forces were seen to be ultimately human, of course, but with the advent of

unknown and partly-known variables like technology and population explosion, they could not be said to be individual in any ordinary sense. The idea of "synergism" that was being advanced by biologists, that in some cases the combined energy of separate agencies will be greater than their sum individually, was seen to be applicable to the human sphere. "Man in general," known now as "social force" rather than "community", was on the scene once again, and the various chroniclers of human life were not slow to pick up his vibration.

Around the turn of the century, for instance, Émile Durkheim criticized the analyses of some scholars for their facile individualistic assumptions. He believed that "society is not a mere sum of individuals, [but] rather the system formed by their association represents a specific reality that has its own characteristics".<sup>17</sup> This kind of conceptualization seemed especially à propos to the analysis of modern warfare, wherein the role of the individual (as conceived by liberalism) could be seen to be patently insignificant. In 1917, Henry Cabot Lodge wrote that "Woodrow Wilson does not mean to go to war, but I think he will be carried away by events".<sup>18</sup> In other words, Wilson is not on his own course, nor is he merely responding to anyone who is; events are carrying individuals along. In the same vein, Herbert Butterfield wrote in 1944 of war in particular and modern life in general: "There is something in the nature of historical events that twists the course of history in a direction that no man ever intended".<sup>19</sup> That "something" was given a more decisive name in an essay by T.S. Eliot: vast impersonal forces.<sup>20</sup>

With the mention of Eliot, one is reminded that it is one thing to analyse theoretically on the basis of a new look at the world, and another to incorporate that new look into a full-length, many-faceted

vision of life - such as a novel or a long poem. Literature, especially in America, had for some time portrayed the "irreducible particularity of the individual"; and in the last half of the nineteenth century novelists became interested in portraying the irreducible dimension of "connectedness" as well - perhaps even without declining the romantic legacy of personal intensity. Henry James, for instance, had an idea of what made for intensity: "The greatest intensity may so be arrived at evidently, when the sacrifice of community, of the 'related' sides of situations, has not been too rash".<sup>21</sup> Again: "Experience, as I see it, is our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures".<sup>22</sup> Eliot, strongly influenced by James, felt that "the real hero [of a James novel] is always a social entity of which men and women are constituents".<sup>23</sup> This suggests an important aspect of Eliot's literary indebtedness to James, his borrowing of James's metaphors and technical devices as aids to the delineation of social entities, and finally "vast impersonal forces", in his own writing.

A few critical inroads have been pushed into this subject. In a review of William Dean Howells for The Academy in 1890, William Sharp moved toward this generalization: "Perhaps realism in literary art may be approximately defined as the science of exact presentment of many complexities, abstract and concrete, in one truthful, because absolutely reasonable and apparently inevitable, synthesis".<sup>24</sup> It is interesting that Sharp is discussing Howells and literary realism, and using categories cited above in connection with philosophical realism. This conflation suggests that the presence of abstract entities, such as "society", in realist writing could be identified without a prior acquaintance with philosophical realism. After all, it is common and reasonable to expect

that a piece of realist writing will deal with society, with the various things that connect people rather than separate them. One would not expect to take up a novel given as "realist" and be plunged into a moody and unremitting first-person reverie. In other words, by recourse to the history of ideas we have not replaced one idea of realism with another, but rather broadened the conventional denotation. To define it as "the presentment of abstract as well as concrete complexities" is not to reject the earlier "portrayal of life as it is", but rather to render it more specific. "Life as it is" includes the social dimension.

Realism thus broadened and specified is capable of doing work. Hereafter it will serve as the master-concept in an interpretation of some of Henry Adams' writing and ideas. Adams merges smoothly with this trend toward realist thinking and description. On a superficial level, he enters the discussion inasmuch as he was intellectually related to each of Lodge, James, and Eliot - to Henry James through friendship and the mutual reading of one another's books, to Henry Cabot Lodge through friendship and as colleagues at Harvard, and to T.S. Eliot inasmuch as Eliot was significantly influenced by Adams' thinking.<sup>25</sup> The specific character of Adams' realism is the subject of the next chapter.

## NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Princeton, 1963.
2. A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1971), p. 140.
3. "The Realist Novel", Paths of American Thought, eds. White and Schlesinger (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1963), p. 250.
4. Realism (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 2.
5. Ibid., p. 3.
6. Cited in Max I. Baym, The French Education of Henry Adams (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 185.
7. "John of Salisbury and the Controversy Over Universals", in Mediaeval Philosophy, ed. Herman Shapiro (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 177.
8. "The Harvest of Nominalism", in The Evolution of Mediaeval Thought (New York: Vintage-Knopf, 1962), p. 328.
9. Chartres, p. 326.
10. Mill, A System of Logic (1843), vii, 1.
11. Cited in R.P. Wolff, The Poverty of Liberalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 5.
12. There is room for contention here. It should be noted that this was not literally true of liberal theory in every aspect of its formulation. For instance, liberal theorists tried to establish general principles of individualism and its morality throughout the eighteenth century - vide the theory of "universal natural rights". And later on, the social Darwinists believed that absolute competitive individualism would turn their society into a quasi-biological "organism".  
 But these are paradoxes within liberal thinking rather than a refutation of the characterization of liberal-individualism as nominalist. In the same vein, the particularist relies on a general theory of particularism, and the pluralist on a singular theory of pluralism. And of course the attack on "community" was carried out by individualists who were united in their aims and formed intellectual communities of their own.  
 In these and similar cases, the paradox derives from a distinction between means and end; it is nevertheless the desired end in each case that should be regarded as characteristic.

13. The Complete Prose and Selected Poetry of Walt Whitman, ed. James Miller (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1959), p. 455.
14. Essays (New York: A.L. Burt and Co., 1920).
15. Runes, op. cit., p. 277.
16. This change is discussed by E.H. Carr in What is History? (London, 1970).
17. Cited by Alasdair MacIntyre in the March, 1974 New York Review of Books.
18. Cited in Carr, op. cit., p. 51
19. The Englishman and His History (London, 1944), p. 103.
20. Cited in Carr, p. 44.
21. Cited in Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 27.
22. Ibid., p. 21.
23. Cited in Berthoff Ferment of Realism (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 83.
24. Cited in Grant, Realism, p. 61.
25. Some of the details of Eliot's debt to Henry Adams are provided by Yvor Winters in his In Defense of Reason (New York: Swallow Press, 1947), p. 497 et passim. Winters writes: "Adams, whose influence on Eliot's entire poetic theory is probably greater than has been guessed, worked out [in The Education and Chartres and in certain essays] the entire theory of modern society and its relation to the society of the Middle Ages, upon which Eliot's critical theory rests".

Specific passages in Eliot's poems have been borrowed from Adams' prose; and of course Eliot wrote an essay on Adams for The Athenaeum in 1919.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION IN DEMOCRACY AND THE EDUCATION:  
 REGULATED AND UNREGULATED SOCIAL ENERGY.

In her biographical study of Henry Adams, Elizabeth Stevenson cleared a path toward his realism:

Unlike the great individualists of his time [Adams] could not conceive of man alone, but always thought in terms of man living among his fellow men, and somehow regulating or failing to regulate the energies of society. His greatest unhappiness came from a disappointment of this conception; his most fruitful insights, from seeing this idea in various aspects.<sup>1</sup>

Three interesting distinctions are offered: the individualists of the nineteenth century, against Adams who thought of men living within social contexts and emitting social energies; the paired possibilities, within Adams' conception, of regulated or unregulated social energies; and the psychological response, happiness or unhappiness, consonant with these possibilities. It will be useful to document and connect these generalizations, with a view to validating the claim that Adams' "most fruitful insights" came from seeing the various aspects of social energy.

The distinction between individualist and realist has its earliest and most visible manifestation in Adams' historical analysis - in fact, in his decision to write history at all. Prior to Henry, men of the Adams family had been seen as embodiments of heroic individualism: making history, literally creating a new history in the new world. And now an Adams had set himself to the passive recording of history. The difference is total; history and individual have exchanged places. History is no longer moved by the individual, but rather reflected by him. "Reflected" is no loose image in this case, because in the History as well as in the

study of Albert Gallatin, Adams' historiographical standard was total objectivity (inasmuch as that is attainable by a dispassioned recording free of emotive colouring).

Within the historical works themselves, the passivity of the individual in the face of history and (what was the same thing for Adams) society, is a main theme. In a letter written during the composition of the massive History, Adams committed himself to a definition of his subject: "My own conclusion is that history is simply social development along the lines of weakest resistance, and that in most cases the line of weakest resistance is found as unconsciously by society as by water",<sup>2</sup> History and social development are one, and the implication is that the combined process operates independently of the individual. In the History itself this becomes explicit: "The scientific interest of American history centred in national character, and in the workings of a society destined to become vast, in which individuals were important chiefly as types",<sup>3</sup>

But it is one thing - as has been suggested - to write history, and another to write novels; one thing to draw principles from the flow of particulars, and another to reverse the process and deduce a world from those principles. Adams was struck by the challenge of carrying his mental exercise to a conclusion in this way. During a lull in the long composition of the History he wrote a novel, Democracy (1880), in which he attempted to incorporate his notion of "the energies of society" into a vision of ordinary life and experience.

The title of the novel is interesting, in that "democracy" refers either to a social idea or a social entity, or both, rather than to an individual or anything related strictly to any individual. And when we

arrive in Washington with Mrs. Madeleine Lightfoot Lee it becomes clear that the city itself is the novel's protagonist, its citizens incidental and passive. The novel's structure is thus tripartite: at its apex stands an airborne social idea, democracy, which is mediated through the idea's embodiment, Washington, to individual citizens. Energy moves from higher to lower.

The complex sense of society as an independent force, ironically separated from its constituent individuals, is conveyed throughout Democracy by the imagery of the machine. Mrs. Lee, dissatisfied with philosophy and with life on the periphery in general, decides to penetrate to the heart of reality. She sets herself the task of exploring the "tremendous forces of government, and the machinery of society, at work" assuming that this can be accomplished by gaining the acquaintance of political individuals. At this point Adams steps out from behind his curtain to say: "Perhaps the force of the engine was a little confused in her mind with that of the engineer, the power with the men who wield it", (p. 14) She suffers from the illusion that the energies of democratic society and the men in government are synonymous. "She wanted to know how the machinery of government worked, and what was the quality of the men who controlled it", (p. 18)

Mrs. Lee is driven to nervous exhaustion as she gradually realizes that she cannot ground the prevailing facts of Washington in the acts or ideas of individuals. Grant's Washington is an uncontrollable force in itself, sweeping individuals toward some unknown destiny. Even the politician Ratcliffe, whom Mrs. Lee had imagined as holding the "throttle" in his hand, for good or ill, is as far from the real centre of force as anyone. The passive Carrington reveals to her the facts about Ratcliffe's

earlier participation in graft, and while this signals the dispersal of Ratcliffe, it also destroys her illusion that he was ever in control of anything at all. The moral ambiguity of his offence, and the confusion of personal and social claims that was its context, render Ratcliffe not so much guilty as ineffectual. Madeleine would have married Ratcliffe because of the chaos of her own life and the ordering principle offered by his ostensible proximity to the main throttle. But with this revelation it had become clear that he was no more an agent than anyone else; like the rest of the automata he was merely installed in an opaque social medium wherein what one did and what was done to one were indistinguishable. After an initial rage, she gathers her thoughts: "She had no right to be angry with Ratcliffe. He had never deceived her. He had always openly avowed that he knew no code of morals in politics.... How could she blame him for acts which he had repeatedly defended in her presence and with her tacit assent, on principles that warranted this or any other villainy?" (p. 171)

Finding only the engine where she had hoped to meet the engineer, Mrs. Lee abandons Washington happy at least to have escaped being "dragged beneath the wheels", (p. 174) If she is to live in a world that is not human in any ordinary sense, then she must leave the modern world in general and America in particular where individualist delusions impair clear vision. "'I want to go to Egypt,' said Madeleine, still smiling faintly. 'Democracy has shaken my nerves to pieces. Oh what rest it would be to live in the Great Pyramid and look out forever at the pole star.'" (p. 188)

Elizabeth Stevenson sees as a deficiency in the novel the fact that "the characters are not sufficiently involved in the action". But perhaps this was the very effect that Adams intended. Surely the gap separating individuals and action is organic to the novel's conception, a means

of portraying the apparently independent character of social energies. This is not to say that Democracy is wholly successful. Adams himself felt that it was only a preliminary vision of a human world pervaded by a semi-inscrutable dimension of relation, because later in life he turned to the matter again.

The main difference between Democracy and The Education of Henry Adams is that Adams is no longer obliquely present, with his point of view divided between Mrs. Lee (striving naively for illumination, subject to disappointment) and Carrington (tired and complacent). Now he is his own character, speaking with a single voice. This of course leads to the famous problem of the book's autobiographical character. The sub-title "An Autobiography" was not appended by Adams; nevertheless the characterization is accurate in a sense, and in his study The Examined Self, Robert Sayre sets The Education firmly into the finest tradition of American autobiography.<sup>4</sup> However, Adams has created of his own life a persona, a character or figure deliberately refined and stylized for literary purposes. He attempted to universalize his experience, and create a figure who could stand as a culture-archetype or epic-hero. Adams suggests at the beginning that: "Only with that understanding - as a consciously assenting member in full partnership with the society of his age - had his education an interest to himself or to others". (Education, p. 4) Sayre rightly suggests the The Education, while remaining autobiography, is stretched to epic.<sup>5</sup> Adams attempted in this way to put his individual life to social use; and this outlook is embodied throughout the work.

The sense of society as a reality, as an entity with characteristics not necessarily the mere sum of the characteristics of its individuals, is a main theme running through The Education. From the outset, where the infant Adams appears as the last term in a paragraph heavy with

history and society - (Boston State House, Hancock Avenue, Beacon Street, Mount Vernon Street, the First Unitarian Church) - Adams portrays a life enmeshed within a network of active forces. His youthful experience intensifies this first impression, which by young adulthood had been extended to a general observation. After a first look at Washington and the ante-bellum South, he commented: "America and he [had begun], at the same time, to become aware of a new force under the innocent surface of party machinery". (p. 48) Returning from Europe to America and Civil War, this sense of social force pressing on the individual has become explicit and fully articulated: "He dropped back on Quincey like a lump of lead; he rebounded like a football, tossed into space by an unknown energy which played with all his generation as a cat plays with mice. The simile is none too strong. Not one man in America wanted the Civil War, or expected or intended it". (p. 98) After the war, Adams saw that the blind operation of social force would characterize more than just the period of actual strife; it would be the supreme fact of life from that point forward. Here is the preamble to his discussion of post-bellum life: "How much the character [of their native land] had changed or was changing, they could but partly feel. For what matter, the land itself knew no more than they. Society in America was always trying, almost as blindly as an earthworm, to realize and understand itself; to catch up with its own head, and to twist about in search of its tail". This idea is elaborated and seen in every light; it culminates in Adams' conception of "drift", (p. 237)

The fact and character of social force finds its embodiment and chief symbol in the Dynamo, as well as in other manifestations of technology. The machine had served as a social metaphor in Democracy, and

in The Education Adams developed the image's full symbolic potential. Here is the machine again, serving in a capacity partly metaphoric and partly literal: "Modern politics is, at bottom, a struggle not of men but of forces. The men become more and more each year creatures of force, massed about central power-houses. The conflict is no longer between the men, but between the motors that drive the men..." (pp. 421-22) It is impossible to tell whether "power-houses" here is social metaphor, or literal in the sense of industry. But it would be wrong to say that the machine's literal and figurative roles have been confused, because society is like a machine, and the machine is in fact a social product. The machine is thus symbol, in that it not only represents an idea, but also partakes directly of it. The machine is the perfect symbol of a reality created by a large group extended over vast space and time, rather than by any discernible individual. And in the same vein, the machine is an extra-human reality, in that it only gradually reveals its capacity to change the individual's world. A machine is gradually developed, which in practice asserts an independent identity, and men scramble to reorganize themselves around its energies. Both of these meanings of the machine are implicit in Dickens's description of locomotives - "trembling with secret knowledge of great powers unsuspected in them".<sup>6</sup> Adams' understanding of the social nature of technology is implicit in his epithet "the electrodynamic-social universe" (p. 413), or in his characterization of America as a "twenty million horse-power society". (p. 416) It is explicit when he writes: "One controlled no more force in 1900 than in 1850, although the amount of force controlled by society had enormously increased". (p. 389) And like other social forces, technology is experienced by Adams mainly as oppression: "Power leaped from every atom, and enough of it to supply the stellar universe showed itself

running to waste at every pore of matter. Man could no longer hold it off. Forces grasped his wrists and flung him about as though he had hold of a live wire or a runaway automobile ..." (p. 494)

Before going any deeper into The Education it will be useful to bring the ideas discussed to this point into perspective against their historical area. It is possible to view Adams as a weakling or a moaner, as many have done (such as Richard Hofstadter, who called The Education a "triumph in the art of self-pity"), with this insistence on personal powerlessness and the might of society. Yet this would be a superficial view if one recalled the dramatic changes taking place in the United States between 1850 and 1900, changes centring upon a theme of unprecedented expansion - even explosion - in the social and technological spheres. And what characterized this expansion was largely a failure on all sides to see its character and effects in any kind of broad view. In a recent book, The Search for Order, 1877 - 1920, Robert Wiebe suggests that "the essence of the nation's story" in this period was men's "failure to comprehend a society they were helping to make". He presents and documents a vista in which leaders and followers are hopelessly intertwined; in which "it became harder to untangle what an individual did and what was done to him"; and in which "attributing omnipotence to abstractions - the Trusts and Wall Street, the Political Machine and the System of Influence - had become a national habit ..."<sup>7</sup> This social world, described from the vantage of the present, is precisely the world of The Education. But since the latter is a contemporary document, its penetration is the more remarkable,

It is worth noting, however, that the world within The Education is not exactly Adams' world - not exactly the world he actually lived in.

The persona is given as an oppressed and bewildered man because Adams believed this to be the condition of the archetypal American. Adams himself functioned positively throughout his life - something deleted from The Education in the interests of portraying what was general rather than particular in the period. But even this persona is no mere reflector of force; he is capable of disambiguating complexity and consolidating insights.

There is a second theme running through The Education: alienation. Starting from the observation that "Everyone must bear his own universe" (p. 4), and persisting to the final desire to "invent a formula of one's own for the universe" (p. 472), Adams expresses the sheer weight of moral and literal solitude. Throughout the book Adams is alone, more alone than he was in life, which means that he has deliberately made of his Everyman a solitary character - an irreducible individual.

Adam's specific goal, given in the sub-title, "A Study of Twentieth Century Multiplicity", is to describe the world in which nominalism has triumphed absolutely. His own story of multiple unrelated roles - ~~dilettantism~~ - is meant to correspond to the fact of an outside "multiverse" of unrelated particulars, and specifically to the lack of community and connectedness in American society. The following idea recurs throughout The Education: "... money had all it could do to hold the machine together. No one could represent it faithfully as a whole". (P. 419) Alienation and dissolution are, of course, the netherside of the nominalist triumph, a compliment to the ecstatic song of liberation sung by Emerson, Mill, or Abelard. The ultimate psychological correspondence to the nominalist multiverse is not merely individualism, at least not an individualism which draws to a halt at the individual person, but indeed the creation of multiple irreducible individuals within the

mind: "He gathered ... that the psychologists had, in a few cases, distinguished several personalities in the same mind, each conscious and constant, individual and exclusive". (P. 433) The dissolution of community in America extends even to Harvard: " ... all these brilliant men were greedy for companionship, all were famished for want of it. The elements were there, but society cannot be made up of elements ... " (p. 307)

The main reason for society's lack of cohesion, its inability to transcend its elements, consists in the general disavowal of communally accepted moral values. Ethical nominalism had yielded, in Democracy, the predictable "twisted and tangled mass of isolated principles". (p. 25) And in later life Adams came to see that values had not only been thrown out of relation to one another - particularized - but as abstractions they had been cast off altogether. As early as Sunday-school days, Unitarian clergymen of the First Church "proclaimed as their merit that they insisted on no [abstract] doctrine", (p. 34) The Bostonian "escaped the evils of other standards by having no standards at all", (p. 40) Adams reflects on the Grant years: "The system of 1789 had broken down, and with it the eighteenth century fabric of a priori or moral, principles. Politicians had tacitly given it up. Grant's administration marked the avowal", (p. 281)

With society reduced to its elements, its individuals, Adams sought refuge from what he regarded as the terrors of multiplicity in science. Science was still grounded in the old realism, it embodied system, and bespoke a universe. The realism of science, also noted by Peirce in this period, is undeniable. At its inception, Bacon stressed (in Novum Organum) the necessary assumption of unity, relation, and amenability to generalization in the physical sphere, and the need for

a "community of scholars" in the human sphere. It may be an odd fact that Baconian and Newtonian science developed in the era of nominalist philosophy and individualist society, but as Whitehead noted in Science and the Modern World, the Middle Ages "formed one long training of the intellect of Western Europe in the sense of order", and implanted the "inexpungeable belief that every detailed [particular] occurrence can be correlated with its antecedents in a perfectly definite manner, exemplifying general principles".<sup>9</sup> This habit outlived its era, and found its way into the scientific mentality.

But even this secret vestige of mediaeval unity would fall at last, and within Adams' lifetime. Toward the end of The Education he describes vividly the dissolution of the Newtonian universe through the efforts of Poincaré, Mme Curie, and others: "The fact was admitted that the uniformitarians of one's youth had wound about their universe a tangle of contradictions meant only for temporary support to be merged in 'larger synthesis', and had waited for the larger synthesis in silence and in vain". (p. 452) Again: "Doubtless if our means of investigation should become more and more penetrating, we should discover the simple under the complex; then the complex under the simple; then anew the simple under the complex; and so on without ever being able to foresee the last term. A mathematical paradise of endless displacement promised eternal bliss to the mathematician, but turned the historian green with horror". (p. 451) Here is the full harvest of nominalism: a world without relation, whether in the social or the physical sphere, the moment of absolute multiplicity toward which The Education has been speeding.

The imagery of chaos had been vivid even before the insight into modern science. But with a multiplicity pervading the social, technological, and scientific realms it becomes moving. For instance, at the

Chicago Exposition, where all these realms of disunity conflate in a kind of nightmare, Adams sees a "Babel of loose and ill-joined, vague and ill-defined and unrelated thoughts and half thoughts and experimental outcries" such as had never before "ruffled the surface of the Lakes". (p. 340)

Generally loth to omit punctuation, here Adams has cast off his commas in order to create a run-on, chaotic sensation. (Adams' style would be an interesting discussion in itself). He triangulates the future: Of all the voyages made by man since the voyages of Dante, this new exploration along the shores of multiplicity and complexity promised to be the longest.... " (p. 449)

Three main ideas emerge from this analysis of The Education, which correspond to the three main moods of Adams' persona. First he appeared as a writer committed to social purpose, dedicating the story of his education to American society. Then he appeared as an individual oppressed by a society that seemed to hang over its individuals like a foreign entity. Finally he appeared as a victim of alienation - as a man driven to despair by the isolation of American life. These moods and ideas are only superficially at odds with one another. Over the course of his life, Adams came to understand that the social force bearing upon the individual, and the simultaneous isolation of the individual from real community, are aspects of the same thing. Rather than select one aspect or the other of this experience for emphasis and description, as is commonly done, Adams insisted on keeping it whole before him. The vision of social oppression is counterpointed, step by step through The Education, by the vision of social dissolution.

The critic Christopher Caudwell, commenting on nineteenth century literature, described the same situation one step closer to articulation than Adams actually came, relating the two terms as cause and effect:

"[The individualist] calls into being the things that he loathes because, as long as he is in the grip of the bourgeois illusion that freedom consists in the elimination of social relations, he must put himself, by loosening social ties, more powerfully in the grip of coercive social forces",<sup>10</sup> Adams saw enough, even from the dis-vantage point of the turn of the century, to know that the social dimension was a constant, and that America provided few of the advantages and many of the disadvantages of social existence.

Here was the situation Adams faced, from which his genuine contribution begins. He could choose to reject the insight that coercive social force is rampant because untempered by any sense of community, and return to classic American resistance to society per se. He could retreat into individuality and contribute to the vicious circle, or he could deal with the crucial distinction between regulated and unregulated social energy.

## NOTES

CHAPTER II

1. Henry Adams: A Biography (New York: Collier, 1955), p. 9.
2. Cited in H.D. Cater, Henry Adams and His Friends: A Collection of His Unpublished Letters (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), p. 126.
3. The History, IX, 222.
4. Princeton: University Press, 1964.
5. Ibid.
6. Dombey and Son (London, 1950), chapter 1.
7. London: MacMillan, 1967.
8. Runes, op. cit., p. 227.
9. (Cambridge: University Press, 1937), chapter 1. In the same vein, Adams notes in Chartres (p. 326) that: "Science has become too complex to affirm the existence of universal truths, but it strives for nothing else, and disputes the problem ... almost as earnestly as in the twelfth century, when the whole field of human and super-human activity was shut between these barriers of substance, universals, and particulars. Little has changed except the vocabulary and the method<sup>N</sup>.
10. Studies and Further Studies in a Dying Culture (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 98 and 114.

## III

THE LITERARY CONTEXT:  
TOWARD A SOCIAL IMAGERY.

Thus in possession of a complex understanding of American society, Henry Adams occupied a specific position vis-a-vis other post-bellum writers. That position may be identified to some purpose, since it is as a response to a general literary and intellectual struggle that his final effort, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, is most interesting.

The full entry of the social dimension into American imaginative literature took place in the era reflected by The Education, the years between the Civil War and the late Nineties. And corresponding to this, no doubt related to it, was the relative demise of romanticism. Just as Henry Adams is a figure one meets on the path to social expression, he is also present at the appanent conclusion of the earlier tradition.

In the Sixties, American romanticism gave the appearance of being mined out, as suggested by the experience and expression of some of its finest practitioners. Hawthorne, for instance, returned to America in 1860 to spend the last four years of his life struggling with four romances he could neither master nor bring to satisfactory conclusion. Whitman's fourth edition of Leaves of Grass (1967) contained only eight new poems, none up to the standard of his earlier writing, which suggests at least a partial loss of inspiration at the relatively youthful age of forty-eight. This trend, although subject to exceptions - exceptions probably owing to Whitman's strength as a poet rather than the viability of romanticism as a vision of life - had not been reversed by 1871 and the printing of the fifth edition. In the major poem of this period, "Passage to India", there is a good deal of the old vigour, but also an

uncharacteristic postponing, buried quietly in the fifth stanza, of the crucial unification of man and nature:

After the great captains and engineers have  
 accomplished their work,  
 After the noble inventors, after the scientists,  
 the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,  
 Finally shall come the poet worthy that name  
 ...

Nature and man shall be disjoin'd and diffused  
 no more ...<sup>1</sup>

Nature is an important term in romantic literature and philosophy: in Wordsworth, Cooper, and Thoreau it is the proper home of the individual, a source of strength and comfort, and an alternative to society. The hint in "Passage to India" of delay and trouble uniting man and nature is therefore ominous, and yet it is no stray misgiving. The cultural historian Perry Miller focused much of his energy on this important phase of American thought and expression, concluding his discussion of late romanticism thus:

Implicit in the treatment of nature was the metaphysic of Emersonian correspondence. The romance maintained, through Long Tom Coffin and Natty Bumppo, that there is a positive, creative, joyous union - active on both sides - between the heroic [individual] soul and sublime nature ... All the romancers, and their public, seem to have felt, in some obscure way about the middle of the century, and in America about coincident with the Civil War, that the magic link of subjective and objective which the romance had maintained became irrevocably sundered. All such epistemological assurances had strangely evaporated from the local colour landscape ... [it] became something appended and added on, something apart from the mentalities of the characters.<sup>2</sup>

Nature is no simple thing in Melville's Moby-Dick (1851), as one first suspects at the appearance of the traditional noble savage figure,

Queequeg, covered head to foot in tatoos & in art, Leo Marx rightly sees the tale an "an exploration of the nature of nature", an exploration focusing on the ambiguous character of the white whale itself.<sup>3</sup> Every image of what Melville called the "all feeling", the moments of dissolution in the warm, gentle rhythms of nature, is counterpointed by another in which nature is ambiguously related to man, often downright hostile.

This irony is embedded in key passages like the following:

At such times, under an abated sun; afloat all day upon smooth, slow-heaving swells; seated in his boat, light as a birch canoe; and so socially mixing with the soft waves themselves, that like hearthstone cats they purr against the gunwhale; these are the times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that beats and pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang.<sup>4</sup>

Although this sense of counterpoint and complexity is somewhat compromised in some of Melville's later writing, the functional ambiguities of Moby-Dick stand as his main insight, and the image of the white whale as his main contribution to the American imagination.

In a similar mood just a year later, in 1852, Hawthorne wrote The Blithedale Romance. Someone at the grave of Zenobia asks: "And will not nature shed a tear?" Coverdale (Hawthorne) replies: "Ah no! She adopts at once the calamity into her system, and is just as well pleased, for aught we can see ..."<sup>5</sup>

A few years later, in 1868, Henry Adams had a similar experience of nature; when he recorded that experience in The Education he did so in an image which appears to be a conflation of the two from Hawthorne and Melville. Like Hawthorne at the graveside, Adams at the death-bed of his

sister turns to an evaluation of nature; and like Melville he employs the "skin" or "surface" metaphor to suggest a disparity between appearance and reality. He writes:

The last lesson - the sum and term of education - began then. He had passed through thirty years of rather varied experience without having felt the shell of custom broken. He had never seen Nature - only her surface - the sugar-coating that she shows to youth. Flung suddenly in his face, with the harsh brutality of chance, the terror of the blow stayed with him henceforth for life ... Nature enjoyed it, played with it, the horror added to her charm; she liked the torture, and smothered her victim with carresses. For the first time in his life, Mont Blanc looked to him what it was - a chaos of purposeless and anarchic forces - and he needed days of repose to see it clothe itself again with the illusions of his senses. (pp. 286-87)

Nature has suddenly become Adams' Mont Blanc, Ishmael's "dumb blankness" - the tasteless, colourless "objectivity" of Kantian metaphysics, unclothed with human illusions. And for the romantic individualist this raised an important question: What was the natural individual without nature? Melville offered an answer by insisting, from time to time throughout Moby-Dick, on a "joint-stock world in all meridians". Lewis Mumford draws out the fullness of Melville's idea:

To appreciate the reality of the white whale is to see more deeply into the expedience of all our intermediate institutions, all the spiritual shelters man puts between himself and the uncertain cosmic weather. Melville, having divested himself of the meanings man had wrought, and faced the universe as a sovereign power, was confronted by a blank: he peered behind the curtain and heard the dim rattle of his own breath echoing through the abyss; nothing was there! So far can the spirit go by itself, no farther. If it returns at all, it is back to the common life.<sup>6</sup>

Here is precisely where The Education makes its appearance; and its way of realizing the fact of American society has already been discussed. But what was the next step toward an incremental, accumulative vision of the common life in America? Because although The Education occupies a seminal position in American social literature, as a social vision realized wholly in the first person, mediated wholly through the experience of an individual, it was clearly no more than a beginning.

The desire for a social novel in America would not ensure its coming into existence, because it is one thing to have an idea, and another to find the imagery by which it can be dramatized and become art. The artist must search for ways to realize experience imaginatively; he must look for the objective representation of ideas. This means that he must either precipitate images out of his own experience, or else install himself in a literary tradition and adapt the images of other writers. The latter possibility was unlikely for the American social writer, inasmuch as America had generated little in the way of a tradition of social description and imagery. Alfred Kazin makes this point: "As a form, the social novel never had an established place in America, for such a novel is always identified with a society ... that has a definite image of itself. In the America described by Emerson and Thoreau, Poe, Melville and Hawthorne, society does not intervene between man and nature..."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, unless the novelist wished to risk creating some incongruous effects by conveying American society through the social imagery of Thackeray, Dickens, or George Eliot, his only recourse was observation.

Many writers found their social imagery in post-bellum America. Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Stephen Crane found in city streets, factories, law-courts, tenement-houses, corner hotels, stock exchanges,

and grain markets penetrating images of social reality. Crane's Maggie, Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, Norris's McTeague and many others are thrown and dragged by the oppressive "wheels" and "laws" of society. These images were legitimate; there was no shortage of observable social imagery in the America that emerged swollen and mechanical from the Civil War, provided the writer wanted to dramatize social energy in its unregulated state. Such an imagery already had deep roots in collective American experience, and limited writers like Frank Norris were able to live on the sale of their books.

Henry James, on the other hand, an infinitely more talented writer, faced perennially disappointing sales; and the wealthier Adams never even bothered to put his non-academic books on the market, preferring to publish them at his own expense for distribution among a few friends. The social imagery they sought did not have deep roots in American experience (understanding American experience, as most Americans did, as distinct from the total Western experience). That imagery, of course, was the imagery of regulated social energy - an imagery capable of dramatizing Americans living within, not under, society.

Writers like Crane, Norris, and Dreiser could take any part of America for their setting, from Chicago to California or New York; awesome social "laws" were equally active throughout the land. But writers who were uninspired by the naturalists' vision of society versus the individual, and sought to integrate their individuals within a social environment, tended to adopt as their settings the old, settled cities of the East. These writers are those centred upon Henry James - Howells (and to some extent Mark Twain) on one side, and Henry Adams on the other. These men, for most critics the major energies in post-bellum letters,

in fact attempted to re-direct the traditional East-West American mythology. The original thrust of American writing toward the West, beginning with the Utopian descriptions of the earliest explorers and proceeding, with occasional breaks and reverses, through Cooper to Whitman and beyond, was understood as a movement from society and constriction to nature and individualism: from Europe to America, and then East to West within America. And of course "West" itself was a master-symbol in this mythology. But as America transformed itself from a society-fringed frontier to a frontier-pocketed society, along the lines described by Frederick Jackson Turner, spiritual Westerners felt the touch of Eastern tentacles and the most sensitive artists began to give up the idea of a Western escape and regeneration. In some cases they effectively turned the old mythology around: the journey Eastward became a principal source of imagery for the new attempt to merge the individual in society.

William Dean Howells took as his setting the society of the Eastern coast, and as his main theme the complicated entry of the Westerner into the Eastern city. Henry James also attempted to deal with Eastern society, but was never able to settle in it as comfortably as Howells had done. For James, the only place where American character and American society seemed to join in some measure of harmony was in the already over-worked world of American women. He was able to turn his drawing-room experience into social literature, especially short stories, as Henry Adams had done with the world of Washington salons in Democracy. But neither James or Adams was able to make afternoon society, tea-parties, and nieces serve as a substitute for a full social world (even though to the end this world was James's economic mainstay). After the Civil War James returned to America on two occasions with the idea of becoming

the novelist of American society, giving up the effort with sadness each time.<sup>8</sup>

When James began to write about Americans entering European society, his plan was not exactly anomalous; it was the inevitable transatlantic extension of Howells's scheme, and at the same time the final reversal of the original East-West formula. James's successes with his Americans in Europe are well known and documented. However, merely to move literature East to the centres of population, American or European, could hardly be construed as a full re-entry into the human community, when nineteenth century "society" itself was largely (and avowedly) anti-social, individualist, in character. For this reason the move Eastward was accompanied by an awakening of interest in the past.

In an essay entitled "Time and the Realists", Roger Salamon described and documented this development. He pointed out how Twain and Howells were much less hostile toward the past than Whitman had been, and also how an occasional Whitman-like diatribe against the past was often designed to turn attention from a deep ambivalence on the subject. But James's frank attraction to the past was no secret; he saw the "lack of continuity" in American life as "the most pressing national problem left unsolved". Salamon reveals the novels themselves as "opening up avenues of reconciliation" with the past.<sup>9</sup> However, although James's fictional Europe is peculiarly antiquated - his Ververs and Archers rarely meet a Protestant, let alone an anarchist - and although Henry Adams once arrived in England to find James "pretending to belong to a world which is as extinct as Queen Elizabeth", the novels never actually leave the present. His interest in the past never materialized as art. James died in 1916, leaving uncompleted a novel that he regarded as essential

to the symmetry of his oeuvre, entitled The Sense of the Past, in which he attempted to take one of his Americans into mediæval society itself. He left the pons seclorum uncrossed; but it is precisely here that one meets Henry Adams - "getting his mind into condition [to cross] the bridge of the ages, between us and our ancestors, without breaking down in the effort", (Chartres, p. 5)

James brought American realism to maturity by bringing his American characters to Europe where he could set them down amid the imagery of organized society, both that of his own observation and, in the new setting, that which could be borrowed from Thackeray, George Eliot, and so on. And yet he failed to sink his art into the past and thus bring realism to a culmination. Perhaps he died too soon, or perhaps he lacked the strong historical imagination required for the task. Henry Adams, on the other hand, was an historian by profession, who had spent a lifetime refining his ability to imagine and express the life of the past. The tendencies of American social literature toward community, toward the East, and toward the past fuse and culminate in Adams' Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (1904),

## NOTES

CHAPTER III

1. Op. cit., pp. 290-91.
2. "Romance and the Novel", Nature's Nation (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967).
3. The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 286.
4. Moby-Dick (New York: Everyman's Library, 1960).
5. The Blithedale Romance (New York: Dell Laurel, 1968).
6. The Golden Day (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 150.
7. Kazin, op. cit., p. 239.
8. Peter Buitenhuis, Twentieth Century Interpretation of "The Portrait of a Lady" (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. iv.
9. Intellectual History in America, vol. 2, ed. Cushing Strout (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 57.

## IV

## AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS

## MERGED IN A FULL SOCIAL WORLD

In his essay "The Expatriate Image", Warren Susman suggested that: "There is no study of the Chartres theme among American intellectuals - no study of American interest in the Middle Ages";<sup>1</sup> This suggestion finds a response in the following discussion of Henry Adams' Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres. It is interesting that Susman sees in "Chartres" the symbol of American intellectuals' interest in the Middle Ages; it will be useful to keep in mind the representative character of Adams' literary use of Chartres.

Before entering the world of Adams' book it is necessary to note that past and community - in other words Catholicism and community - are not a definitive equation. Philosophical or social realism does not demand any religious associations; one can recognize the supra-individual character of certain relations without passing beyond the merely human frame of reference. However, it is easy for realism to pick up religion along the way, as Bernard Rosenberg notes with regard to Dreiser's sense of society: "Émile Durkheim had suggested in Dreiser's day that when men speak of a force they are powerless to control, their subject is not God, but social organization. This is also Dreiser's theme, and so to it he brings a sense of religious awe and wonder".<sup>2</sup> Adams' interest in social energy is not exactly the same as Dreiser's, as has already been suggested, but nevertheless hints of religiosity come through in remarks such as his calling social and technological energy "what, in terms of mediaeval science, were called immediate modes of the divine substance", (Education, p. 383)

Most of the realists were interested in Catholicism; and it was in this era of social awareness that Catholic thinkers like Norris and Dreiser at last entered the mainstream of American letters. The connection is not necessarily fortuitous, and is possibly explained by the fact that modern versions of realism and community had not yet made themselves plain. Any discussion of social or collective phenomena tended to be dragged into the past for the want of a suitable conceptual apparatus - in other words, by weaknesses of vocabulary. But toward the end of the nineteenth century this was not always true. For instance, Newman's study of the mediaeval community led him to conversion and Rome, while Ruskin's led him to the quasi-socialism of Unto This Last (1860). Adams was aware of the distinction between social past and future: "... since 1450 motives for agreeing on some new assumption of unity, broader and deeper than that of the Church, had doubled in force ..." (Education, p. 430)

Socialism was on the historical stage by this time; Karl Marx had carefully outlined his plan for a post-liberal community. In numerous comments like the following he disclosed a belief that social energy may be brought under humane control:

The existing relations of production between individuals must necessarily express themselves as political and legal relations. Within the division of labour these relations are bound to assume an independent existence vis-a-vis individuals. The fact that these universals and concepts are accepted as mysterious powers is a necessary consequence of the independent existence assumed by the real relations whose expressions they are.

Once productive relations were no longer regarded as existing independently, once division of labour could be supplanted by integration of labour, it would be possible to avoid "postulating society ... as an abstraction

confronting the individual<sup>11</sup>. Instead, the individual could be seen as "an individual social being"<sup>3</sup>. Social energies seem independent, mysterious, and hence amenable to religious treatment only when, to borrow Raymond Williams' analysis, they are "alienated"<sup>4</sup> - when the individual is helping to create a whole in which he nevertheless experiences no sense of membership, for which he feels no responsibility. Within socialist society, social energies could presumably be integrated and regulated,

Adams refers several times to an inherited bias against socialism; but this may not be the only reason why his search for unity and community led him instead to the Middle Ages. For one thing, Adams never actually succumbed to religion, preferring to bear the weight of his own universe even in moments of trial. But the more likely basis of the choice is aesthetic rather than intellectual; it is implicit in the above passage from Marx, or in Unto This Last, or in any number of similar contemporary writings. These are characteristically dry and abstract speculations, devoid of imagery or even example. Such social ideas might point toward the future, but in 1900 the search for an imagery to shape and express social yearnings led back to the past.

Before he arrived in mediaeval Chartres, Adams sought his imagery of social harmony in various corners of the nineteenth-century world. During a stay in the South Pacific his imagination was fired by the primitive communal life of the Samoans and Tahitians. In Cuba he could discern "the shape beneath the wreckage - the shape of a once vital community". In Japan he noted the power of religion "as a cement to hold the social organism together". In all these wanderings he always sought the means by which evanescent impressions of community could be transformed into art. His biographer writes; "Wherever he went - to Samoa, to Greece,

to Norway - he tried, at least in letters, to put into a kind of picture the very bedrock of each civilization through which he journeyed<sup>M, 5</sup>

Finally the communal spirit of his own culture's past - the European past - occurred to him with something like the power of a visitation, an adumbration of T.S. Eliot's unexpected dropping to his knees on a visit to St. Peter's. Adams' biographer writes:

By the time he wandered into the first of the Norman cathedrals ... in 1895, he was ready for the large experience which, during that summer, he underwent. He saw his other age as centrally relevant to his own time. It was its predecessor, its ancestor. Here was an organic society which had not been exotic, narrow, or decadent, but strong and vital.<sup>6</sup>

Adams was inwardly gripped by his vision of mediaeval society; it was his main interest from then until his death in 1918, during which time he wrote Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres,

The original realism had defended its long-standing view of man and the world against the threat of nominalism in the great cathedrals and schools of the Middle Ages. It was logical that the first articulate victims of individualism should now make the long journey back to their spiritual, communal homeland - "the hills and woods, the fields and farms of Normandy, and so familiar, so homelike are they, one can almost take oath that ... [here] one knew life once and has never so fully known it since<sup>N</sup>. (Chartres, pp. 3-4)

The achievement of Chartres lies in its artistically realized merging of American character - Adams is still employing himself as American Everyman - in a full and integrated social environment. The original publisher of the book, the Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram, expressed this fact admirably in his introductory remarks: "Mr. Adams

has the power of merging himself in a long dead time, of thinking and feeling with the men and women thereof, and so breathing on the dead bones of antiquity that again they clothe themselves with flesh and vesture, call back their severed souls, and live again ..." (p. ix)

The book begins with a selection of characters, experiencers, Adams and his American "nieces", chosen since "nephews as a social class no longer read at all", (p. xv) Adams is thus still relying to some extent on the social world of American womanhood, the world of Madeleine Lee and Isabel Archer, in the absence of socially-minded members of the male world. The drawing-room, however, is to be abandoned: Adams and his ladies are ready to engross themselves in a more comprehensive social environment - not one that is merely an afternoon-world, an adjunct to the real world of individualist males. The "Preface" concludes with the party setting out on what should be seen as the obverse of the archetypal American journey: from New York to the coast of Normandy.

Once in France there is another journey to undertake, through "the church door that is the pons seclorum, the bridge of the ages, between us and our ancestors ..." (p. 5) Connections are established between the travellers and their ancestors: "Since the generation that followed William to England in 1066, we can reckon twenty-eight or thirty from father to son, and, if you care to figure up the sum, you will find that you had about two hundred and fifty million arithmetical ancestors living in the middle of the eleventh century". (p. 3) Once this larger community has been established, Adams moves on to a consideration of the symbols that gave shape and point to communal feelings. The first chapter begins: "The archangel loved heights. Standing on the summit of the tower that crowned [Mont-Saint-Michel], wings upspread, sword uplifted, the devil

crawling beneath, and the cock, symbol of eternal vigilance, perched on his mailed foot ... The Archangel stands for Church and State, and both militant". (p. 1) And because Michael is an expression of social value, "soldiers, nobles and monarchs went on pilgrimage to his shrine; so the common people followed, and still follow, like ourselves". At last it has become possible to envision a full social world, male as well as female, and it is significant that Adams brings his party of ladies immediately to this paradigm of social masculinity. However, the female will take at least equal place even in this aggressive world.

Adams has brought his nieces back to Normandy "to live again in all [their] ancestors", and promises that they will find themselves doing many surprising things: "... among the rest we should pretty certainly be ploughing most of the fields of the Cotentin and Calvados; rendering service to every lord, spiritual or temporal, in all this region; and helping to build the Abbey Church at Mont-Saint-Michel". (p. 3) The aim of the book is that these nieces "learn to feel" this world; and to do this they must relinquish selfishness: "No doubt we think first of the Church, and next of our temporal lord; only in the last instance do we think of our private affairs, and our private affairs sometimes suffer for it; but we reckon the affairs of the Church and State to be ours too, and we carry this idea very far". (p. 9) Thus it is not necessary to relinquish individuality, but rather to understand the unity of individual and group interest. Besides the duties do not all flow in one direction: "The whole morality of the Middle Ages stood in the obligation of every master to protect his dependent". (p. 292).

We proceed to Norman architecture and then to Norman literature, both "deep expressions of social feeling". Adams reads to us the Chanson

de Roland, which he relates to church architecture: "... the 'Chanson' in the refectory actually reflected, repeated, echoed, the piers and arches of the Abbey Church just rising above. The verse is built up. The qualities of the architecture reproduce themselves in song ..." (p. 35) With this one can glimpse the structural principle of Chartres as a whole. Just as the facets of mediaeval life and art are unified and interlocking, so are the sections of the book. Whereas rambling through different places and subjects in The Education culminated in multiplicity and disorder, in Chartres divagations, aimless wandering, dallying before attractive vistas, and breadth of interest culminate in unity. Architecture, literature, personality, and philosophy lie within a broad but organic unity which is a reflection of social cohesion and strength:

The whole Mount still kept the grand style; it expressed the unity of Church and State, God and Man, Peace and War, Life and Death, Good and Bad; it solved the whole problem of the universe. The priest and the soldier were both at home here ... the politician was not outside of it; the sinner was not unwelcome; the poet was made happy in his own spirit, with a sympathy, almost an affection, that suggests a habit of verse in the abbot as well as the architect. God reconciles all. The world is an evident, obvious, sacred harmony. (p. 50)

Proceeding from Normandy to the Beauce, and Chartres, the stone imagery of the great cathedral, centred now upon Mary rather than Michael, seems to welcome pilgrims. One meets an array of "long figures which line the entrance to greet you as you pass"; and "never once are you regarded as a possible rebel, or a traitor, or a stranger to be treated with suspicion, or as a child to be impressed with fear". (p. 77) At the vortex of Chartres sits Mary: "In the centre sits Mary, with her crown on her head and her son in her lap, enthroned, receiving the homage of heaven

and earth; of all time, ancient and modern; of all thought, Christian and Pagan; of all men, and all women; including, if you please, your homage and mine, which she receives without question, as her due ..."

(p. 79) The Virgin has an important social function; she is the focus in which individual differences are harmonized: "The only thing that connects [individuals] is their common relation to the Virgin, but that is emphatic, and dominates the whole". (p. 198) Again "... she typified an authority which the people wanted, and the fiefs feared; the Pax Romana; the omnipotence of God in government. In all Europe, at that time, there was no power able to enforce justice or to maintain order, and no symbol of such a power except Christ and His Mother ..." (pp. 79-80) She is, for Adams, a "social fiction", (p. 281)

The art in which the party is invited to absorb itself is entirely communal in character. Adams discusses the interior iconography: "... now and then it seems to suggest what you would call an esoteric meaning, that is to say, a meaning each of us can consider private property reserved for our own amusement and from which the public is excluded". (This is precisely Adams' opinion of Impressionism and other modern art forms). He continues: "... even symbols that seem most mysterious were clear to every old peasant-woman ..." (p. 108).

The cathedral building itself is infused and saturated with social meaning, partly owing to the fact that it was constructed communally. People from all walks of life assembled to drag stone blocks from the quarry five miles away - peasants and nobles, men as well as women "like beasts of burden ... dragged to the abode of Christ waggons loaded with wines, grains, oil, stone, wood, and all that is necessary for the wants of life or the construction of a church ..." (p. 111) Once built,

Chartres is among the largest of cathedrals, designed to contain up to fifteen thousand people on festival days. (p. 195)

Adams moves from the cathedral to a consideration of the written expressions of the mediaeval mentality, breathing even more life into the Middle Ages from this angle than from the architectural. This is related to his life-long fascination with the history of ideas. In the last three chapters of Chartres he performs the ultimate feat of intellectual historiography: by merging his American mind with the great mediaeval minds, he brings old and modern ideas into a dynamic synthesis.

Adams first established the link between this and the preceding sections of Chartres, the link between mediaeval buildings and intellect: "In 1100 the student took for granted that, with the help of Aristotle and syllogisms, they could build out the Church intellectually, as the architects, with the help of the pointed arch, were soon to enlarge it architecturally. To them words had fixed values ... like numbers, and syllogisms were hewn stones that needed only to be set in place, in order to reach any height or support any weight". (p. 325)

The discussion of the mediaeval use of "reason" - ratiocination, scholasticism, dialectic, declamatio, disputatio - focuses on the career of Abélard. The issues and arguments revolve around the problem of realism versus nominalism. Adams dramatizes the conflict and brings it to life:

In these scholastic tournaments the two champions started from opposite points: - one, from the ultimate substance, God, - the universal, the ideal, the type; - the other from the individual, Socrates, the concrete, the observed fact of experience ... The first champion - William in this instance - assumed that the universal was a real thing; and for that

reason he was called a realist. His opponent - Abélard - held that the universal was only nominally real; and on that account he was called a nominalist. Truth, virtue, humanity, exist as units and realities, said William. Truth, replied Abélard, is only the sum of all possible facts that are true, as humanity is the sum of all actual human beings. "I start from the universe", said William. "I start from the atom", said Abélard; and, once having started, they necessarily came into collision at some point between the two. (p. 329)

Adams reconstructs the details of the collision vividly - a dialectic of thrust and riposte, a quick interchange of wit, logic, erudition, and more than a little sophistry.

The problem of realism has a social implication: "If soldiers, no matter in what number, can never make an army, and worshippers, though in millions, do not make a Church, and all humanity united would not necessarily make a State", then society - along with the universe - would come apart. "Army, Church, and State, each is an organic whole, complex beyond all possible addition of units ..." (p. 337) The unity of mediaeval thought and society rests upon an assumed sense of "an energy not individual" dominating the sum of actual individuals: things, people, or ideas.

These philosophical struggles seemed interminable. Adams goes on to describe one mediaeval response to the ensuing intellectual weariness: mysticism, the rejection of human reason. Here is the procedure: "The mind that recoils from itself can only commit a sort of ecstatic suicide; it must absorb itself in God; and in the bankruptcy of twelfth century science the Western Christian seemed actually on the point of attainment; he, like Pascal, touched God behind the veil of scepticism",

(p. 361) However, with this procedure, the social base began to shift underfoot. Adams rejects mysticism, as the schools did, on the grounds of its exclusiveness: "A few gifted natures could absorb themselves in the absolute, but the rest lived for the day, and needed shelter and safety. So the Church bent again to its task ..." (p. 385)

Thomas Aquinas responded at this point, resolving the problems of faith and reason, realism and nominalism, through a new interpretation of the Trinity (although perhaps more through a talent for assertion). Adams brings to life admirably his prodigious intellectual labours, effecting in his language a fusion of the architectural and philosophical spheres:

... the Trinity was a restless weight on the Church piers, which, like the central tower, constantly tended to fall, and needed to be lightened. Thomas gave it the lightest possible form, and there fixed it. Then came his great tour de force, the vaulting of his broad nave; and, if ignorance is allowed an opinion, even a lost soul may admire the grand simplicity of Thomas's scheme. He swept away the horizontal lines altogether, leaving them bare as a part of decoration. The whole weight of his arches fell ... where the eye sees nothing to break the sheer spring of the nervures, from the rosette on the keystone a hundred feet above down to the church floor. (p. 394)

Aquinas was prepared to deal with the problem of individuals, as postulated by nominalism. He could do away with the individual altogether, because otherwise men - Man - were merely manifestations of the ultimate universal, God, and hence "God filled His own Church with His own energy". (p. 406) But individualism raised its own problems, if the individual will was to be construed as separate from the divine centre: "... the ideally free individual is responsible only to himself. This principle is the philosophical foundation of anarchism, and for any

thing that science has yet proved, may be the philosophical foundation of the universe; but it is fatal to all society and is especially hostile to the State". (p. 411) The success of Aquinas in "getting God and man under the same roof - bringing two independent energies under one control" is one of the more complex projections of the human mind. What is of interest here is Adams' artistic realization of the achievement, once again through architectural imagery:

The theology always turns into art at last, and ends in aspiration. The spire justifies the church. In St. Thomas's Church, man's [individual] free will was the aspiration to God, and he treated it as the architects of Chartres and Laon had treated their famous flèches. The square foundation - tower, the expression of God's power in act - His Creation - rose to the level of the church facade as a part of the normal unity of God's energy; and then, suddenly, without break, without logical violence, became a many-sided, voluntary, vanishing human soul, and neither Villard de Honnecourt nor Duns Scotus could distinguish where God's power ends and man's free will begins. All they saw was the soul vanishing into the skies. (p. 418)

And even this feat is envisioned as a monumental act of social, not individual, labour. Aquinas stood on numerous shoulders: "Every relation of parts, every disturbance of equilibrium, every detail of construction was treated with infinite labour, as a result of two hundred years of experiment and discussion among thousands of men whose instincts were acute ..." (p. 419)

Adams goes on to project his culminating vision of mediaeval unity, developing the same remarkable language that characterizes the final section of Chartres:

Truth, indeed, may not exist; science avers it only to be a relation; but what men took for truth stares one everywhere in the eye and begs for sympathy. The architects of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries took the Church and the universe for truths, and tried to express them in a structure that should be final. Knowing by an enormous experience precisely where the strains were to come, they enlarged their scale to the utmost point of material endurance, lightening the load and distributing the burden until the gutters and gargoyles that seem mere ornament, and the grotesques that seem mere absurdities, all do work either for the arch or for the eye; and every inch of material, up and down, from crypt to vault, from man to God, from the universe to the atom, had its task, giving support where support was needed, or weight where concentration was felt, but always with the condition of showing to the eye the great lines which led to unity and the curves which controlled divergence; so that, from the cross on the flèche and the keystone of the vault, down through the ribbed nervures, the columns, the windows, to the foundation of the flying buttresses far beyond the walls, one idea controlled every line ... (p. 421)

The language is an interwoven fabric of idea, image, and feeling. Adams has synthesized his American Everyman with a full and integrated social world, making his language its perfect reflection. The community of words is consonant with the community of men.

## NOTES

CHAPTER IV

1. Intellectual History in America, vol. 2, p. 147.
2. Cited by Irving Howe, 'Afterword' to Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 818.
3. Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, eds. Bottomore and Rubel (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 92.
4. The Country and the City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 156. Williams is discussing Dickens' ability 'to dramatise social institutions and consequences that are not accessible to ordinary physical observation. The law, the civil service, the stock exchange, the finance houses, the trading houses, come through ... as the 'impersonal forces' - the alienated human forces - that they are'.
5. Stevenson, op. cit., p. 299.
6. Ibid., p. 301.

## CONCLUSION

While Adams understood the need for "agreement on some new assumption of unity broader and deeper than that of the Church<sup>M</sup>", he failed to adapt his humane social vision to the present. This problem is not peculiar to him; it is a general literary problem, and a failure of the modern imagination as a whole. Nevertheless, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres is a significant and interesting event in early Western motions toward reactivating the idea of community.

An inability to realize modern social ideas imaginatively, to distill from them a corresponding social imagery, keeps the literature of human community effectively buried in the past - the Middle Ages and beyond. Adams, however, consciously used his mediaeval artifacts as imagery, as against prescribing a programme of reaction. This is a distinction that is often lost. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, working under many of the same pressures as Henry Adams, within and without, believed it was possible to reverse history. Pound's retreat to the old Italian city-states, via twentieth century Fascism, is the mythopoeic journey Eastward forcibly transformed into an historical reality; Eliot's Idea of a Christian Society is a literalistic Chartres.

Not every writer has found it difficult to incorporate a conception of community into a portrait of modern life. In his recent The Democratic Experience, Daniel Boorstin suggested: "Americans have invented new communal forms that have nothing in common with older notion of community",<sup>1</sup> These communities, although "invisible" and often "made up of strangers" are everywhere; fellowships of consumers united by their car models; statistical communities created by ad-men and social scientists; communities of the insured, of similar tax-brackets, and television viewers

(global villagers). Of course, Boorstin does not offer an imaginative realization; the literary counterpart to his conception is the television situation-comedy, or perhaps even the commercial.

The choice, here and elsewhere, is between adapting the conception of community to the modern imagination by enfeebling it, or having the imagination coerced into the old clothing of the mediaeval community. Not quite modern enough for the former procedure, and too sensitive to history for the latter, Adams chose to keep the idea of community itself alive, strong, and uncompromised in a consciously literary embodiment.

## NOTES

CONCLUSION

1. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 90 ff.

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