

REFERENTIALITY AND TRANSGRESSION: REPRESENTATIONS OF
INCEST AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE OF
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Introduction

This thesis will consider the incest theme in twentieth century American literature. Antecedents will be considered, especially the rich traditions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the main focus will be on three writers central to the American canon: F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Vladimir Nabokov. All three of these writers have produced texts in which their claim to literary fame and their appropriation of the incest theme are inextricable: namely, Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses, and Nabokov's Lolita. I will conclude with a chapter which examines how this debt to literary tradition, this canonical pride of place of the incest theme, has been transformed in its trajectory through the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the thesis, I will examine the utilisation of these 'variations on a theme' as a form of rhetoric manifesting itself in a wide variety of uses and readings. Pertinent aspects would include: symbolic appropriations with pretensions to universality; transgressive modulations manipulating reader affectivity; referential modes attempting the delineation of a particular - or their collective combination. All of these uses of the incest theme will be seen to participate in the propagation of various codes of normative behaviour, ethics, critiques, or political polemics. The incest theme will be tracked both as a form of didacticism and as a form of literary pleasure. The representation of incest will be observed in its combination with other important literary themes: courtly love, childhood, and their inversions. It will be linked to an aesthetics of transgression and to the representation of child sexual abuse. Its combination with the latter will also provide the grounds for a comparison of child sexual abuse, 'actually existing incest', and the many

other uses of the incest theme. The contexts of these uses will also be considered. If I were to attempt to reduce this thesis to a simple proposition, I would suggest that the importance of the incest theme has been due to its rhetorical versatility, its role as a signifier of the limit (of the family, of society, of civilisation, of the representable), and of its ready utilisation for literary shock, the vicarious enjoyment of the second-hand, or, in what amounts to the same thing, literary pleasure. These factors delineate the importance of the incest theme to literature in general, and to American literature in particular. The literary utilisation of the incest theme suggests that the most efficient way to say anything effective is still to make use of that which hides behind the barrier of the unsayable.

After giving a summary of the chapters of the thesis, the rest of the introduction will introduce the issues that form the background to an informed evaluation of the place of the incest theme in modern American literature. This background features three inter-related areas; the controversies around the incest taboo, the emergence of child sexual abuse, and the concept and representation of childhood.

I will suggest that the issue of child sexual abuse is key to any referential, analogical, or comparative approach to the reading of the incest theme in literature (most especially in those examples which include an adult/child or adult/infant age differential). I shall begin with some definitions of incest, and its relation (and non-relation) with child sexual abuse. 'Incest' can, of course, mean very different things in literature, in philosophical speculation, in the social sciences, or in the discourses of welfare or feminism. This difference of discourse, a difference of 'register' or 'genre', suggests that 'translations' between discourses need to be observed

carefully. A comment on the American context will be relevant to the discussion of recent American literature.

These issues are inextricable from the representations and conceptualisation of childhood that our period has inherited from the past, particularly the traditions and writing of the previous two centuries. I will attempt a brief summary of the concept of childhood, including its transformations up to the seventeenth century, its rationalisation in the legal and medical discourses of the eighteenth century, and its recent evolution. A comment will then follow on the influence of this inheritance upon the emergence of a recognisable child theme in nineteenth century literature (the origin and role of social and literary clichés). As recent theories of incest, sexuality, power, and representation play an inseparable part in any understanding of these issues, I shall complete the introduction with a 'rough' model of the workings of incest and its relationship with representation based upon these recent developments.

Chapter one will begin with a suggested typology of the incest theme in literature and my debt to a selection of critical approaches that have helped me in its formulation. This typology will suggest that particular attention be paid to the following areas. First an intertextual element that encompasses both tradition and counter-tradition, and the re-mixing of material from previous traditions. The social context of production, first reading, and initial critical reception will normally signal the type of use to which the incest theme is being put. The question of usage leads to the second category in this typology: criticism, conservation, and the role of paternity.

The critical mode will normally proceed via the father to class or society. The conservative mode attempts to police society, through class,

race, gender, and the younger generation; particularly the family, the unit of social reproduction and the hierarchies that traverse it. In this way the theme of the bad father is used in both critical *and* conservative utilisations. A crisis of incest is always a crisis of social reproduction.

My next category includes recent writing that includes child sexual abuse on the level of plot or incident and which appears to have been designed to raise sexual child abuse as an issue. This category will also include any narrative read in this manner. Here, a relation of deixis or reference is assumed; the practise of child sexual abuse is interpreted as a direct or mediated (hidden) referent. The last category is that of the intersection of aesthetics and ethics and involves the complicity of transgression and morality. This general typology will be contrasted against other critical purchases upon the incest theme in literature, most, if not all, of which have, so far, homogenised its various manifestations. I prefer to emphasise variety in context, and divergence in use and interpretation.

General literary approaches to the incest theme follow, including Otto Rank and Claude Lévi-Strauss, then more specific appraisals dealing with the representations of incest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Next come commentaries that focus upon the particularity of the incest theme in American writing. This chapter finishes with a discussion of two early twentieth century American writers who seem to signal trends to come: Allen Tate's The Fathers and, Robinson Jeffers' poems 'Tamar' and 'The Tower beyond Tragedy'.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night forms the focus of chapter two. This chapter begins with a short examination of The Beautiful and Damned to introduce the question of Fitzgerald's use of the child theme and some of the implications of the use of this theme as a key comparative

or source of metaphor. The reading of Tender is the Night which follows combines a critical reading of the themes of incest, child sexual abuse and the use of childhood as a source of tropological comparison noted in The Beautiful and Damned, with an examination of syntactic and semantic 'slips' in the text. An alternative reading is suggested to that habitually given to Tender is the Night, (a novel of immaturity and failure); the logic of a rhetoric is read as positing the metaphoric infantilisation of women as ineluctably leading to representations of child sexual abuse.

The complexities of William Faulkner's appropriation of the incest theme make up chapter three and necessitate its division into four sub-sections: 'Modernism, Transgression and Incest'; The Sound and the Fury'; Absalom, Absalom!'; and Go Down, Moses'. The first section examines general questions of Faulkner's style, the links of international to regional style, the question of the Faulknerian sentence, and the relation of these factors to a definition of Faulkner's experimental modernist style as formal or stylistic transgression. A discussion of George Bataille's theory of transgression and its implications for literature provides the transition point to a consideration of, what I would like to call, 'content transgression' in Faulkner's texts. Incest is foremost in this category and is often found in conjunction with 'miscegenation', a term of opprobrium for inter-racial sexual relations. The analysis of Absalom, Absalom! and the stories 'The Bear' and 'Delta Autumn' from Go Down, Moses will focus on this combination of incest and miscegenation: incest takes the form of father/daughter in Go Down, Moses; in Absalom, Absalom it is the brother/sister form that is featured. Both of these texts will be examined for the rhetorical importance of the incest theme in a textual politics of race, recognition, and restitution. The brother/sister incest theme is also central to Quentin's monologue in The Sound and the Fury. This section will be read as the collapse of a character infatuated

with his sister into attempted child sexual abuse and suicide. This collocation of the incest theme and child sexual abuse in the same text suggests that they share certain features on the level of a semantics of transgression.

Chapter four examines Vladimir Nabokov's ironic manipulation on the themes of incest and childhood. These themes are observed in Nabokov's writing in general and then in Lolita in particular. The various constructions that different generations of critics have made of Lolita are contrasted to the text itself and another reading suggested. The text itself can be made to do the work of maintaining both a sophisticated awareness of the many levels of allusion, irony, and parody *and* the ethical critique of recent interpretations, together with a place for Lolita's desire. Hitherto, the ironic and the ethical counter-readings both elided the third voice, that of Lolita, or Dolores (to use her proper name in opposition to the nickname given to her by her step-father). My interpretation will try neither to silence her into a passive victim, nor to demonise her sexuality, but will still maintain a critique of the responsibility of the narrator.

The final chapter will survey developments in the incest theme during the course of the later half of the twentieth century. Special attention will be given to texts where the incest is also classifiable as child sexual abuse. Two broad (and inter-related) trends will be identified: the 'referential', and the 'transgressive'. The referentialist trend will examine the rhetorical use of the incest theme as part of an on-going textual politics and will include a comparison of the writings of black authors such as Ralph Ellison, black women writers of the 'seventies such as Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Tony Morrison, and the white women poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. The biographical element in Plath, Sexton, and Angelou leads to the final group in this trend, this is made up of recent writers in whom rhetoric and referent coincide in a deliberate

polemical reference to incestuous child sexual abuse. The incest theme and child sexual abuse, which have been increasingly found in a relation of collocation during the twentieth century, have fused into a single literary motif.

The second trend will include texts where the incest theme and incidents of child sexual abuse find their rationale in transgression. Not that these texts do not themselves have a critical agenda (or lend themselves to critical readings), but that this agenda is often universalist or addressed to the geo-political question of the state of the nation. Writers commented upon will include Norman Mailer, E. L. Doctorow, and Sam Shepard. This trend will find its apotheosis in what I have chosen to call 'a postmodernism of transgression'. This term covers a range of the writing (and film) of the late 'eighties and early 'nineties which emphasises excess in the representation of the body and of sexuality (torture, dismemberment, S&M). Examples of this form of writing are Mary Gaitskill and Dennis Cooper both of whom include incest and child sexual abuse in their transgressive repertoires. Comments on these recent trends will serve as a conclusion to the thesis.

The term of 'incest' has been used of a wide range of social phenomena. This is especially true in the discourses which have been traditionally regarded as guardians of the definition of incest: history and anthropology. The range of historical epoch or type of societies involved have been so broad that exceptions can be found to any general hypothesis. If the incest taboo is said to cover certain kinds of sex within the family, then widely differing examples of what actually constitutes the family in various cultures are raised in objection. This variety in what are supposed to be common phenomena, the incest taboo and the family, also undermines any approach that attempts to equate exogamy with 'incest' -

this despite the widely differing efforts of structural and bio-social anthropologies to find a universally applicable underpinning based upon exogamy and the exchange of women.¹ In an anthropology which deals with radically differing forms of society, a concrete contextualisation within a given culture may often be required before a given explanation can be regarded as adequate.² Nevertheless, in the countries variously described as, 'the North', 'the West', liberal democracy', or 'advanced capitalism', the factors of industrial development, urbanisation, and modernisation have ensured some measure of homogeneity in the idea of incest; although, of course, specific legal arrangements vary from country to country. Providing distant comparisons are not made with differing social formations or with societies of simple technology, a working definition of incest designed for use in the societies of 'advanced capitalism' is deducible from everyday data.

According to the social anthropologist, Jean La Fontaine, three sources of the definition of incest currently exist: dictionary, law, and public opinion.³ The dictionary emphasises the ban on marriage: however, marriage restrictions and sexual restrictions do not coincide; for example, uncles and nieces are permitted sex, but are not often permitted to marry (p. 24). Legal definitions of incest usually forbid sexual intercourse between grandparent and grandchild, parent and child, and brother and sister; such rulings are often augmented by the relations of adoption. Public opinion centers on the idea of close relations, as 'sex in the family', and includes all

¹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, (London: Eyre and Spottisworde, 1969), for the pre-eminent example of the structuralist approach; and, for examples of the socio-biological approach, see Robin Fox, Biosocial Anthropology, (London: Malaby, 1975); The Red Lamp of Incest, (London: Hutchinson, 1980); and Richard Dawkins, The Selfish Gene, (Oxford: OUP, 1989). The functionalist aspect of anthropology promises to be more contextual nuanced, but usually generalises its findings into universals, see Bronislaw Malinowski, Crime and Custom in Savage Society, (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), & Sex and Repression in Savage Society, (London: Kegan Paul 1927).

² See especially David M. Schneider, 'The Meaning of Incest', Journal of the Polynesian Society, 85 (1976), pp. 149-169, for a thorough-going contextualist approach.

³ Jean La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 24-25.

sexual activities, not just the act of sexual intercourse (unless it is the sexual activity of the -usually heterosexual- parental nucleus). Sibling incest, perhaps thought of in a romanticised form, is usually considered far less serious than sexual relations between parents and children (either tragic in the case of consenting adults or exploration on the part of children). However, in brother/sister incest also, if there is a broad age disparity, then the usual disapproval of adult/infant sex appears to apply.

Present day or 'actually-existing-incest' is regarded by many commentators to be practically synonymous with child sexual abuse of which it is said to form a substantial subset.⁴ Any inference or comparison between the incest theme in literature and the concept of incest in other discourses, or with the practice of incest in the lived world, would therefore require a brief discussion of the key issues involved in the phenomenon of child sexual abuse.

There does not appear to be any consensus on the definition of sexual abuse. Whilst a broad definition such as, 'the sexual abuse of children refers primarily to the activities of adults who use children for their sexual gratification', might appear to command general assent there is disagreement over specifics (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 41). In general, the field is divided between two kinds of definition: one specifying contact and the other involving non-contact. The former includes all forms of sexual bodily contact with a child; the latter would include 'suggestive behaviour, sexual innuendo, and exhibitionism' (p. 41). Clearly figures drawn from surveys using the different definitions will produce widely differing results. My use of the term 'child sexual abuse' will be based upon the following definition:

adult or sexual activities involving bodily contact with a child
or adolescent for the gratification of the adult. 'Child sexual

⁴ See Jean S. La Fontaine, 'Child Sexual Abuse and the Incest Taboo: Practical Problems and Theoretical Issues', in Man, (N.S.) 23 (1988) , pp. 1-18.

abuse' in this definition involves two main features: it is an adult activity and it involves a child as victim. The definitions of offender and victim depend on their ages and not their relationship. (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 41)

The extent of child sexual abuse is estimated through two indices: prevalence and incidence. Prevalence give a figure to those abused from within living generations (cases up until 'now'): incidence attempts to answer this question for a shorter period, usually a year (number of current or new cases); it is the comparison of incidence rates that gives an indication of whether the problem is increasing or not (Child Sexual Abuse, pp. 46-47).⁵ Contrary to popular belief and literary cliché, neither class (membership of the urban underclass or rural equivalent), nor geographical isolation (life in the swamps, backwoods, or islands) make any significant difference to the probability of the sexual abuse of children (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 60). In legal terms, many of the victims of child sexual abuse who have been abused by a near relative are not technically involved in incest (defined by sexual intercourse only and thus also subject to the charge of unlawful sexual intercourse). In such cases the charges of indecent assault and gross indecency may apply. The term incestuous child sexual abuse may be used to indicate this relation.

In the survey used by La Fontaine, nearly half of all sexually abused children were victims of their fathers (mainly daughters), a further quarter were abused by step-fathers, the addition of foster-fathers and adoptive fathers brought 'the total percentage of father-figures to 76%' (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 129).⁶ The question of brother/sister incest is perceived by the

⁵ See also La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, pp. 48-68, for a discussion of statistics, their problems, and their applicability.

⁶ See also Elizabeth Ward, Father-Daughter Rape, (London: The Women's Press, 1984); Florence Rush, The Best Kept Secret: The Sexual Abuse of Children, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980); Diana Russell, 'The incidence and prevalence of intrafamilial and extrafamilial sexual abuse of female children', Child Abuse and Neglect, 7 (1983), pp. 133-146, for supporting figures; Bill Gillham, The Facts about Child Sexual Abuse, (London: Cassell Educational, 1991), for a cautionary approach, and Dennis Howitt, Child Abuse

public as an issue separate from that of inter-generational incest (due to the assumption of equality between brother and sister). However, the study of sibling incest reveals differences of age and dependency that more closely resemble the father/daughter model; 'sibling incest is... a more complex phenomenon which displays some of the same social features that are relevant to understanding the sexual abuse of children by adults' (Child Sexual Abuse, pp. 157-157). In literature in general, this relation has been represented very differently; as sibling rebellion, as a tragedy of misrecognition, or as the symbol for an impossible desire. The actual relation may be summarised thus:

Actual cases of incest as distinct from stereotypes of them show that the two forms of incest, paternal and sibling, have much in common. the most obvious feature that they share is the use of coercion. This may be the exercise of superior status, using the prestige of seniority, of age or generation but it also takes the form of physical force exercised or threatened by adult men and adolescents. (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 177).

Recent explanations for child sexual abuse fall into two broad schools.⁷ The first focuses upon issues of domination and control: power, conferred either by cultural norms or physical size, allows the potential for exploitation for sexual and other purposes (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 100). The second highlights the question of gender: the socialisation of men is held responsible, especially the lack of involvement in the nurturing aspects of family life (Child Sexual Abuse, p. 105).⁸ The role of the family

Errors: When Good Intentions Go Wrong, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), for a dissenting view.

⁷ Other views include, individual psychological abnormalities, a specific condition called paedophilia, low intelligence, alcoholism, strong sex drives, lack of adequate repression, fixation or regression to an earlier stage of libidinal development (La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, p. 99).

⁸ The nurture argument is based upon the fact that whilst men and women are both found to be equally responsible for physical child abuse ('baby-battering'), the overwhelming majority of those responsible for child sexual abuse appear to be male; however why this should only be applicable to one kind of child abuse is not clear (La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, p. 105).

or household recasts the question of power and gender as generation and gender:

The division between the generations gives parents authority over children and the distinction between genders gives males superiority over females. Both pairs of categories link social roles with 'natural' differences: of maturity in one case and sexual difference in the other. (p. 187)

However, La Fontaine concludes: 'In fact, the salient distinction on which family roles are based appears to be that of generation and not gender' (p. 187).⁹ The greater degree of 'natural' difference (size and dependency) would seem to equate the question of generation with that of force suggesting that it is the questioning of the nature of power that might be the most (but not exclusively) apposite approach to this problem. The question of power is also of relevance to that of representation; control, access, and ability (training, expertise) are important factors in the production and dissemination of myths and stereotypes.

Incestuous child sexual abuse (including the smaller set of such cases which are legally defined as incest) makes up a considerable proportion of the set of practices called child sexual abuse. Conversely, cases of child sexual abuse make up the overwhelming proportion of the known cases of incest.¹⁰ The role of the family, or household, as a the main site for abusive activities also indicates the interrelation of incest with child sexual abuse.¹¹ In general, then, the evidence available indicates that it

⁹ The author adds, 'Although parents usually treat their daughters differently from their sons, male children do not have either the authority or the actual powers of men.' Also, on the confluence of generation and gender, 'Where father and daughter are concerned these two factors increase the inequality in their relationship and make the daughter doubly vulnerable; it is not really surprising that this is the most common form of incest' (p. 190).

¹⁰ See La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse p. 190; Vikki Bell, Interrogating Incest, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 136; Karin Meiselman, Incest, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), pp. 28-50; Rush, p. 138-139.

¹¹ See also La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, p. 203, pp. 131-132. 'Space is fundamental in any exercise of power', notes Michel Foucault, 'Space, Knowledge, and Power', in The Foucault Reader, (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 239-256 (p. 252). This raises the question of 'residence' as a possible 'unit of domination', whether house or flat (home), or institution (welfare, children's homes). Also relevant is the access of non-biological parents and friends of the family. An important factor in this appears to be the question of sight and its

should be possible to treat the practice of incest as a subset of child sexual abuse, and that this relation is sufficiently shown to make the comparison of actually existing incest to literary (and to theoretical forms) of incest representation worthwhile.¹²

The American experience of child sexual abuse is important as a background to the reception and rewriting of the American incest theme in literature.¹³ Ian Hacking, in 'The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse', notes that the term 'child abuse' first appears in 1962 and that at this time the first significant governmental action on child welfare is taken since the turn of the century (p. 259).¹⁴ The terms 'incest' and 'sexual assault on children' were put together with 'child abuse' for the

relation, or disjunction, to communication. A case was related to me of an entire family having being abused with none telling the other; here silence (lack of communication) supports a regime of sight (separate rooms). On the relation of regimes of sight and word, see Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality: Volume One: An Introduction, (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 27-28; and Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 47-69.

¹² For recent accounts of other kinds of child sexual abuse: See Richie J. McMullen, Male Rape: Breaking the Silence on the Last Taboo, (London: Gay Men's Press, 1990), who notes that 64% of young male prostitutes had been victims of 'homosexual seduction' at an age that averaged out at 9 years old; the author also notes that he prefers the term 'paedophilia' or 'child sexual abuse' to 'homosexual seduction' as the latter might be used to infer that gay men molest children whereas the figures would indicate that child sexual abuse is of predominantly male heterosexual origin (p. 46). Michele Elliott, Female Sexual Abuse of Children: The Ultimate Taboo, (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1993), indicates that there are many more persons who have been abused by women than previously reported. The other major kind of the sexual abuse of children is institutional, either in children's homes, or in welfare, educational and religious institutions.

¹³ The British experience of the question of incest and child sexual abuse constitutes a part of the 'horizon of expectations' of any reading originating on this side of the Atlantic. Although the sexual abuse of children had been causing concern since the beginning of the 1980s, this issue first came to public attention in the United Kingdom as a response to the setting up of Child Line in 1986; the physical abuse of children had been a public issue since the late 'sixties. With the Cleveland Affair of 1987, where children from 44 families were removed by the Social Services on suspicion of sexual abuse, the issue achieved notoriety. The Butler-Sloss report of the following year (which in large measure exonerated the local Social Services department of most of the excesses attributed to it) ensured that the controversy continued in the public domain.

¹⁴ Ian Hacking, 'The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse', Critical Inquiry, 17. 2 (Winter 1991), pp. 253-289. For details of a previous 'discovery' of child sexual abuse see Jean Renvoize, Incest: A Family Pattern, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), where the reason given for Kinsey's silence over the incest/child sexual abuse figures in his survey (1948) are explained as due to the exigencies of reform at the time (pp. 37-38). Reformers (pro-divorce, contraception, and sex education) felt the need to keep quiet over the figures for child sexual abuse because the possibility of an increase in child molestation was one of the claims of the anti-reform movement.

first time in 1975 (p. 275). In 1977 it became a public issue. There was no Cleveland in the USA (p. 256): however, two big trials, Jordan, Minnesota, and the McMartin preschool, in Manhattan Beach, California (1990) brought the issue to public attention (p. 255). In an interesting difference of public response, in the USA outrage is usually directed against the accused, not against the social workers as it tends to be in the UK (p. 256). This emergence will gather in relevance as we move into the writing and criticism of the later twentieth century.

The varieties of historical childhood are described by Philippe Ariès, in Centuries of Childhood, who comments upon the birth of the 'concept' of 'childhood', its signs (dress, manners, treatment), and its evolution from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries.¹⁵ In 1556 the division in the French language of the ages of man were three: childhood, youth, and old age (p. 25).¹⁶ However, 'until the eighteenth century adolescence was confused with childhood' and youth 'signifies the prime of life' (p. 26).¹⁷

¹⁵ Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962). Archard (1993), notes that the translation of *sentiment* as 'concept' can be questioned and continues to make a general criticism of Ariès, which suggests the historical and cultural existence of different kinds of 'childhood' (p. 17). John Boswell, The Kindness of Strangers, (London: Penguin, 1989), argues of the medieval period and the widespread abandonment of children that abandonment was not necessarily an index of cruelty, simply of economic choice. This provides a link to the question of foundlings and myth (as observed in the work of Otto Rank) and thence to the question of foundlings and the threat of incest (p. 3-4). He also notes that the structure of concealment of the scale of abandonment is similar to the concealment of the scale of child abuse (p. 12). On Ariès, Boswell argues against the thesis that there was no concept of 'childhood' in 'pre-modern' Europe: it was different, certainly, but present in the role of parental affectivity for children and in the important role of parenthood in Christianity.

¹⁶ This was not the case in Classical Latin, where there were seven ages, possibly due to a greater degree of social differentiation in classical Roman Civilisation; this difference and its implications for pre-late medieval definitions of 'childhood' is not discussed by Ariès.

¹⁷ Ariès notes a reference to a 'child' of eighteen (p. 26). Of dress until the thirteenth century as example of age conception Ariès observes: 'As soon as the child abandoned his swaddling-band - the band of cloth that was wound tightly around his body in babyhood - he was dressed like other men and women of his class.' And, 'Nothing in medieval dress distinguished the child from the adult.' By contrast, 'In the seventeenth century, however, the child, or at least the child of quality, whether noble or middle-class, ceased to be dressed like the grown-up. This is the essential point: henceforth he has an outfit reserved for his age-group, which set him apart from the adults. This can be seen from the first glance at any of the numerous child portraits painted at the beginning of the seventeenth

These 'stages' and the behaviours regarded apposite to them (and before them) were then progressively subdivided.

Anticipating modern sensibilities, Ariès suggests that we should not take too judgemental a view of the 'fondling' prevalent at this time - a pattern of behaviour which today would be classified as child abuse. He argues that: 'gestures and physical contacts were freely and publicly allowed which were forbidden as soon as the child reached the age of puberty' because 'the child under the age of puberty was believed to be unaware or indifferent to sex' (p. 106).¹⁸ The difference between past and present in the permitted conjunctions of children and, what we would now describe as, sexual interference demonstrates the historically contingent nature of 'childhood' and what is considered as proper sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, with historical hindsight, it may be possible to question the actual efficacy of the forbidding of these 'gestures and physical contacts'; also, Ariès' concept of 'physical contact' appears to stop at the fondling of genitals; finally, it is no longer acceptable to state that the pre-pubescent child was indeed 'unaware or indifferent to sex' as Ariès states of the period.¹⁹

Ariès suggests a general historical transition of 'immodesty to innocence'. Yet for the 'child under the age of puberty' to be regarded as 'unaware' would indicate the presupposition of a state of innocence, whilst the interest in masturbation evinced in the period following 1700

century' (p. 50). Note also the relation of the above to gender and class: 'If we confine our attention to the evidence afforded by dress, we must conclude that the particularisation of children was limited for a long time to boys. What is certain is that it occurred solely in middle class or aristocratic families' (p. 61).

¹⁸ Ariès cites a commentator of the period: 'The respect due to children was then [in the sixteenth century] completely unknown. Everything was permitted in their presence: coarse language, scabrous actions and situations; they had heard everything and seen everything.' (the parenthesis is Ariès') (p. 103).

¹⁹ See, for example, Thore Langfeldt, 'Sexual Development in Children', in Adult Sexual Interest in Children, (eds.) M. Cook & K. Howells, (London: Academic Press, 1981) pp. 99-120, which describes the varieties of infant orgasm and their vagaries through the supposed 'latency period' to adolescence (p. 102).

would indicate a presumption of guilt on the child's part; an assumption of 'immodesty'. Is Ariès confusing the pre- and post-pubescent phases of 'childhood' in this period? In which case no transition has occurred; only an increase in the forbidding of the 'gestures and physical contacts' at the onset of puberty. Or is a re-definition of the terms 'innocence' and 'immodesty' required? In Ariès' own terms, the historical ordering would appear to be inverted from 'innocence' to 'immodesty'; from natural innocence, in no need of shielding from adult sexuality, to natural immodesty, which must be curbed and guided away from any possible (corrupting) sexual influence. However, Ariès' ordering may be maintained if the transition is described as moving from natural invulnerability ('immodesty') to natural vulnerability ('innocence'). If Ariès is suggesting that the seventeenth century had a different concept of 'innocence' to that of the nineteenth century, then his concept of 'immodesty' is unnecessary ('immodest' behaviour exhibited before the child being permissible due to its lack of impressionability, its 'innocence'). A succession of differing concepts of innocence, each with a differing combination of elements, would be more precise. These kinds of 'innocence', as well as the imputation of innocence itself, would influence the literature of the period in the form of the stereotypes of 'childhood' employed. The term 'natural' as applied to children can also be seen to mutate in meaning; from 'natural' as knowing (but uncorruptible), to 'natural' as unknowing' - as 'innocent' (but corruptible). Ariès is suggesting that there was an enlightenment presumption of rationality in the child prior to the 'romantic' period. If the seventeenth century saw the rise of the combinatory, innocence + rationality (innocence as compatible with culture); then, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the elements of the new combinatory had changed to innocence + irrationality (innocence as incompatible with culture, as nature). The child had become

as innocent as only an animal can be - uncorrupted by civilisation.²⁰ We can see this latter conception reflected in the dichotomy (even apparent contradiction) between the cult of the innocent girl child and the parallel suspicion of childhood sexuality, and their representation in literary and scientific discourses respectively.

If children, in the course of the eighteenth century, came to be thought of as innocent, but easily corruptible, then they were in need of careful observation. These regimes of supervision, and the bodies of theory that they produced (legal, medical, psychiatric, and pedagogical), have been described by Michel Foucault, in The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, as the discursive construction of the 'masturbating child'.²¹ The concept of childhood was re-defined by its relation to sex and turned into an object of knowledge with its own problematic sexuality which had to be closely observed and controlled (p. 38; 98; 153). Strict observation may cease on the attainment of maturity, usually defined by the commencement of a normative sexuality (Freud), or the onset of the practice of abstract thought (Piaget).²² The modern concept of childhood is that of a developmental stage on the path to adulthood.

Commentators agree on the emergence of a childhood theme in literature that was indebted to the sentiment of 'innocence' in the late

²⁰ Ariès, writing of the seventeenth century, suggests that: 'The idea of childish innocence resulted in two kinds of attitude and behaviour towards childhood: firstly, safeguarding it against pollution by life, and particularly by the sexuality tolerated if not approved of among adults; and secondly strengthening it by developing character and reason. We may see a contradiction here, for on the one hand childhood is preserved and on the other hand it is made older than its years; but the contradiction exists only for us of the twentieth century. The association of childhood with primitivism and irrationalism or prelogicism characterises our contemporary concept of childhood. This concept made its appearance in Rousseau, but belongs to twentieth century history.' Again, 'the ideas of innocence and reason were not opposed to one another.' Rationality, the ability to learn the difference between right and wrong, but not subjecthood, was imputed to the child on the verge of the Age of Enlightenment (p. 119).

²¹ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1. An Introduction, (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 27-30; 42; 46; 104.

²² See David Archard, Children: Rights and Childhood, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 32-33.

eighteenth century. The various modern manifestations of childhood described by Ariès, particularly the 'romantic' variants, appear as a set of constructs ready made for use in the expanding literatures of the period. If 'innocence' was to provide one avenue of literary exploitation, then the scientific discourses of the potential corruptibility of children, of childhood sexuality, also had a literary impact. Although not as evident as that of 'innocence', the literary connection of childhood and sex (always represented as damaging to the child) also drew upon a prior set of constructions, and came to be a theme endlessly re-worked in a set of variations running well into our own century. This darker side of the childhood theme should be a reminder that the late eighteenth century was also the period of the maximal use of the incest theme in literature in Europe, and, slightly later, in America (around 1800).²³ 'Innocence' provoked a dual corruption; an assault upon its purity from without (the father/daughter seduction plot): and an insidious decay from within (brother/sister incest). In twentieth century American literature, the child theme and its inversions (for example in the short stories of Stephen Crane) will be combined with the incest theme in the texts of Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and, most problematically, Vladimir Nabokov.

The child-figure in literature is an aspect of Romanticism, part of the reaction to industrialisation, rationalism, scientism; becoming part of the ideological reaction to economic dislocation as the appearance of the child-figure in literature grew exponentially in the course of the nineteenth century. Peter Coveney, in The Image of Childhood, suggests that this emergence was an original one: whilst Pattison, in The Child Figure in English Literature, highlights the elements of continuity with previous literary uses of childhood; this would begin with the Gawain-poet's 'Pearl'

²³ See James B. Twitchell, Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, (New York: Columbia, 1987).

in the fourteenth century and continue as a primarily Christian form of didacticism with reference to The Fall and Original Sin - the role of the child as Innocent or Redemptive is not a new one.²⁴ In Pattison's reading, the nineteenth century takes and reuses this theme. It appears that Coveney may have repeated the same type of synecdoche as has Ariès and mistaken a type (albeit a quantitatively significant one compared to previous kinds) of literary childhood for all kinds of (English) literary uses of the child. Pattison, in this respect, acts as a corrective, although it may appear that his account is somewhat homogenised (the difference of period and genre might allow for a wider range of readings than he allows).

After indicating the lines of influence upon the emergence of a literary childhood theme in the late eighteenth century I want to return to the development of the concept of childhood and its recent implications. Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers, in Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern, chart the construction of the concept of the child in 'developmentalism'; a blend of psychology and physiology which has at its heart a nature and nurture mix that the authors call the 'alembic myth', (pp. 41-42).²⁵ This process of definition leads to three major current discourses on childhood and their differing conceptions of its problems: first, that of traditional values; a pre-modern viewpoint which maintains that social work agencies invented child abuse. Second, the discourse of state welfare agencies; the modern, enlightenment, or progressive viewpoint, which suggest that always and everywhere there has been child abuse, but that it has been recently discovered and is now being combated.

²⁴ Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature, (London: Penguin, 1967). Robert Pattison, The Child Figure in English Literature, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978).

²⁵ Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers, Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

Third, the voice of the child and its sexuality (but not the assumption of a compulsory sexuality) and a recognition of degrees of damage by abuse (not always and everywhere the same).²⁶ However, this latter viewpoint also maintains the potential to become yet another discourse of 'emancipation' (expressing a naive view of power as either a single negative or as transparent and therefore irrelevant), where the voice of the child is simply seen as repressed: whilst this makes a useful criticism of other (paternalistic) positions it should be noted that what we hear is rarely the unmediated voice of the child as such (Stainton Rogers, p. 83).²⁷ This putative 'third voice' and its relationship to the differing kinds of child stereotype will become important to the question of the representation of the child (or those nominated as 'children') and the role of criticism, especially of the child as victim (see examples of the criticism of Lolita in chapter 4).

In an approach combining the work of Michel Foucault with feminist concerns Vikki Bell, in Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law, notes three areas where a Foucauldian approach may cast new light on the question of incest: the Foucauldian conception of discourse, with its

²⁶ The authors note that the combination of sex and childhood is a taboo which acts through embarrassment or other kinds of emotive reaction as a distorting influence on matters where these two areas intersect (p. 77). To highlight this they contrast cases where sex is said to be involved and others where it is not and note the immediate lack of flexibility and amount of pre-judging involved in those cases involving any hint of sexuality (pp. 180-181.)

²⁷ On the vexed issue of children, sexuality, and the age of consent, discussed through contract theory, see Raymond Belliotti, 'A Philosophical Analysis of Sexual Ethics', Journal of Social Philosophy, 10 (1979), pp. 8-11. Belliotti notes that the use of contract theory in an appraisal of incestuous child sexual abuse results in a critique of the adult on the grounds that the child is not yet capable of entering a contractual relationship which would demand that they understood the 'ramifications of sexual interactions with their parents' (p. 10). Further, that the same contract-based argument allows incest between those who are considered capable of entering into relationships with contractual implications. For more on children and sex (including the relation to adults, rights, and education), see also David Finkelhor, 'What's Wrong with Sex between Adults and Children: Ethics and the Problem of Sexual Abuse', American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 49. 4 (October 1979), pp. 692-697); and Judith Ennew, The Sexual Exploitation of Children, (Cambridge: Polity, 1986). For the best recent discussion of this area, see Archard.

related observations on the nature of power; the question of whether the emphasis on sex as a means of familial and social role definition can act as an 'incitement to incest'; and the problematic relationship of Foucault's own remarks on the legal deregulation of children and sex and his theory of power.²⁸

The two major uses of Michel Foucault's theories are to highlight the relation of knowledge to power (knowledge as the product of existing -institutional- power relations) and to show that knowledge, in turn, produces power (of definition and exclusion as modalities of control). On the subject of the construction of sexuality such an approach provides a critique of the 'repressive hypothesis' (that 'sexuality' was especially repressed in the nineteenth century); the theoretical gain from the loss of the language of 'liberation' is the affirmation of power as productive of differing forms of sexuality, or, discursively, of differing forms of life *as* redefined by sexuality.²⁹

In The History Of Sexuality: Volume One, Foucault argues that the movement from (or grafting onto) the 'deployment of alliance' to a deployment of 'sexuality' (p. 108), may incite a sexual response, a 'incitement to incest', (p. 108; 129). We may discern two issues here depending upon whether we read this as an incitement to actual or discursive incest (the practice of incest or the incest theme): first, that the sexualisation of family roles may lead to actual incest and that, more generally, law and discourse become a challenge to the transgression of the same. Or, second, that the incitement is to a further expansion of the

²⁸ See also Michèle Barrett, The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault, (Cambridge: Polity, 1991) and Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body, (London: Routledge, 1991) for other feminist appraisals of the Foucauldian paradigm.

²⁹ In a analysis methodologically similar to that of Foucault, Ian Hacking, 'The Making and Moulding of Child Abuse', notes the 'medicalisation' of child sexual abuse this time around (in the USA). When it previously appeared as 'child sex', '(indecent) assault' or 'incest' it was subject to different discourses and different agencies (church, law, children's agencies, NSPCC, Barnardo's), (p. 265; 286).

interest in incest in discourse (literature, social science, psychoanalysis). Could this be read as the suggestion that it is the 'deployment of sexuality' that is responsible for the origin of actual incest and of incestuous child sexual abuse? Probably not: 'incest', like 'childhood', has long history during which it has often changed its meaning and its referent, the 'deployment of sexuality' signalled such a change. The sexual use of children by their parents and others appears to have a longer history; although the movement to a more introverted nuclear family may have exacerbated the factor of opportunity (power and space).³⁰ Perhaps the 'incitement to incest' has resulted in the augmentation of such practices? On present evidence I think this question to be unanswerable. However, as an 'incitement to incest' *in* discourse there may be a case to answer, as literature from just before 1800 on makes frequent use of the incest theme in the context of issues concerning the family and adultery.

Foucault's own comments suggesting the liberalisation of the law on sexual relations between adults and children as a form of enablement for the child (the child can give consent) is criticised by Bell as only providing further enablement for adults (pp. 151-160). Legally, the onus of proof in court would become, as in the case of rape, a matter for the child to prove, under questioning. More importantly, if there is no legal protection (age of consent) then the 'default position' of actually existing power structures, of size, of generation, of gender roles, of economic advantage, come into play; the child would not be entering onto a 'level playing field'.³¹ Sometimes it is necessary to remember that outside of the law does not mean outside of power relations. Perhaps the critique of law, the enlightenment, and the 'civilising process' goes too far: if (as Foucault

³⁰ See Lloyd de Mause (ed.), The History of Childhood, (London: Bellew, 1991), pp. 43-50

³¹ Bell cites Foucault as describing an example of 'child sexual abuse' as 'these inconsequential bucolic pleasures' as another example of his apparent blindspot in this area (p. 6, originally in Foucault, History of Sexuality: Volume One, p. 33).

maintains) this process constructs rather than represses then at the very least its effects could be judged as double-edged (or a matter of perspective); discourses as such may not be essentially repressive - otherwise put, the 'outside' of discourses may not turn out to be a utopian space.

W. Arens, writing in The Original Sin: Incest and Its Meaning, adds yet another twist in the tangled braid of the binary opposition of nature and culture in their relation to the incest taboo and to incest itself.³² Arens chooses to begin his enquiry by examining incest as a documented historical practice rather than as a taboo; he notes the proclivity of most previous commentators to ignore the act and concentrate on the taboo.³³ Avoiding the worst excesses of socio-biology, Arens nevertheless finds for a 'weak' version of the Westermarck 'natural aversion' hypothesis, where it is culture that allows for both the possibility of incest as a practice (by weakening or replacing biological programming) and for the many forms of the 'incest taboo' (either as a result of cultural preference or as a cultural

³² W. Arens, The Original Sin: Incest and Its Meaning, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For Arens' thesis see pp. 88-99. Arens notes Robin Fox's own views of the link between Westermarck and Freud, prior to his adoption of socio-biology (p. 83). See Robin Fox, 'Sibling Incest', British Journal of Anthropology, 13 (1962), (pp. 128-158), where he argues against the use of the 'incest taboo' as a meta-theoretical tool and in favour of the study of actual 'incest behaviour' (p. 128). The article notes that exogamy pertains to marriage and not to actual sexual practice (p. 129), thus allowing the possibility of relationships defined as 'incestuous' by local tradition to pre-date or accompany marriage. Fox's use of Westermarckian aversion is thoroughly cultural, being located in the relations of siblings and co-reared infants to one another; the degree of 'frustration' occasioned by infantile sex play is seen as turning into 'aversion' at the outset of puberty. Fox notes that it is in societies where siblings are not co-reared that the strongest punishments exist for sibling incest (p. 131; 134; 139).

³³ 'The literature suggests quite clearly that as a rule intellectuals have either ignored or unintentionally denied the existence of incest in propounding their theories about the universality of the proposition. The incest taboo, which has commanded most of the attention, and incest may be the opposite sides of the same coin. However they are obviously not the same thing' (p. vii). See also Twitchell, where the author suggests that during the 'time of the Romantic poets', also a peak for the Gothic, or novelistic use of the incest theme, 'never once does a theologian or naturalist attempt to determine the incidence of human incest. Never once in the entire century, for instance, does the Lancet or the Journal of the Statistical Society of London report evidence of the darker side of family life.' Such an investigation would commence only in the 1880s in the course of the attempt to 'reform working and living conditions' (p. 137).

expression of the attenuated aversion instinct).³⁴ Arens notes that the animal world, (especially the higher mammals) contrary to nineteenth century belief, does in fact outbreed, as do apparently all 'primitive' societies, and that it is therefore the incidence of actual incest and the incest taboo in 'civilised' societies that must be accounted for (pp. 89-93). He suggests that a residual form of 'natural aversion' may be seen to work in the following examples: human societies where siblings who have been brought up together often have weak or minimal incest taboos (lack of punishment); on the other hand, societies where siblings are brought up apart are often subject to intense taboos on incest (including punishment by death). The taboo appears to be mobilised to replace aversion: if culture allows, culture must (if it wishes to) therefore be responsible for the separation (p. 99). Recent evidence from kibutzim and certain Taiwanese marriage practices (Sim-pua) also appear to support this claim. That it is culture that, contrary to Lévi-Strauss, actually allows for the occurrence of incest may explain why royal families and elites of many societies put a premium on incest as a signifier of caste superiority.³⁵ This use, even foregrounding of culture, deliberately transgressing the 'nature' of the incest taboo apparently observed by all others, signals that the perpetrators

³⁴ 'Natural aversion' as noted above refers to joint upbringing and the nurturing process, not to a biological blood relation: therefore it would discourage mother/son and brother/sister forms of incest, but not provide protection from father/daughter incest, especially if the father was not involved in child-rearing (p. xi, p. 96, Arens cites Parker 1985:1, and Finkelhor; step-fathers and father offenders had often not been involved in infant nurture, therefore as experiencing less aversion and open to the tendency to treat children as available sex objects). Although the 'incest taboo' usually includes these cases as core, but usually includes many more, such variation means that the 'incest prohibition' can not be regarded as universal, as 'the very concept is culture bound', (pp. 5-6). See also pp. 94-98. See also Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage: Vol. I* (1891), (London: MacMillan, 1925), p. 124; 255; 433-439; 453-454.

³⁵ 'Well known cases of condoned incest include the royalty of ancient Egypt, Thailand, Hawaii, and the Incan state of Peru. Examples from sub-Saharan Africa have also been haphazardly included in this category (p. 9, Arens cites van den Burghe and Mesher, 1980). In addition, there was the peculiar, but well documented, occurrence of incestuous marriages among a significant portion of the Egyptian middle class during the Roman era, which extended from the first to the fourth centuries A. D. (Arens cites Middleton, 1962, and Hopkins, 1980).

are above 'nature', are 'super nature' or allied to supernatural powers.³⁶ However, other factors to be taken into account are economics (keeping land in the family), centralisation (keeping government in the family), maintenance of elite status and inbreeding (minimising marriages with lower castes or classes), and last, but by no means least, the combinations of gender, generation, sex and power that were discussed in the section on child sexual abuse and incest above. This cultural exception (pun intended) of incestuous transgression for ruling classes and families has been used directly in literature (Vladimir Nabokov's Ada), however, it is, more usually, inverted into a critique of elites.

Is it necessary to maintain a link to biology to employ some version of the Westermarck hypothesis? Certainly no link to genetics can be shown. A 'culturalist' version might simply wish to employ the empirical evidence and refrain from positing a genetic or biological deep structure. If a subdivision of cultural factors is required then a division along the lines of earlier and later types of interaction or influence might be of analytical use (with the earlier stages of life - infancy, etc.- casting a disproportionate, but not always irreversible, influence on later experiences, or later attempts at socialisation). Thus aversion, as a cultural factor of upbringing, tempered by degree of taboo, and attendant power structures, would be sufficient to explain both the incidence of actually existing incest as well as the infinite variety of the incest taboo as it has existed historically and geographically.

³⁶ Those who break the given form of 'incest taboo' without belonging to the apposite class are regarded as 'below' nature, profane rather than sacred, and punished accordingly. Thus, as with the terms 'mana' and the general concept of 'taboo' a typology begins to appear in which we have a middle term of 'normal' and terms above and below this for a taboo break which is either elevating or debasing according to social status; beyond normal law as either 'above' it; or 'beneath' it; as 'super human' or 'animal'; this division should be multiplied to give minority viewpoints their own versions; 'others' will usually be 'below'; thus it is peasants, slum dwellers and uncivilised races who, for the middle class of much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, constituted the site of incest when perhaps it was its own system of nannying and schooling with its concomitant parent/child and sibling separation that may have added to the prevalence of incest among these (the most 'cultured') strata.

It may be useful to further sub-divide culture, upbringing and 'taboo' into private and public: privately; custom and affect would produce an internal barrier or 'taboo': publicly; custom and Law would provide the external dissuasion, thus highlighting the importance of space and access for (incestuous) child sexual abuse in a secularised society where the 'taboo' was largely 'external'. We may therefore choose to read both the incest taboo and the practice of incest as effects of culture as in a purely 'culturalist' reading (subdividing 'culture' in terms of priority to achieve a more nuanced model) or we may invite a return of the natural, of the physiological, the biological, the body, in some form of the Westermarck effect of a weak 'natural aversion'; demonstrable in animals and higher mammals, but overridden by humanity's open-ended and creative cultural forms, which would then take on the responsibility of policing incest as required. Representation, in either model, would no longer be simply an 'expression' of a 'strong' Westermarck or biological 'aversion' effect, nor a 'reaction' to the force of a chaotic natural desire, but a creative response to the exigencies of local circumstances employing the means at hand for a variety of (possibly contradictory) purposes.

Conclusion

In her recent book, Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law, Vikki Bell combines Westermarck (and Arens) and an anti-Freudian stance on lack of pro-incest drive with a Foucauldian constructivist approach which includes Catherine MacKinnon on transgression as a side-effect produced by Law (the incitement of discourse).³⁷ If this is added to the foregoing, the result is a three part, or three stage, model.

³⁷ On p. 122, Bell cites MacKinnon's article, 'Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory', Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 7. 3 (1982), pp. 515-544. See also Catherine A. MacKinnon, Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), where, writing of pornography and deregulation, the

Nature, or that which is described as 'natural', may be read as neutral, that is, easily overwhelmed by factors ascribed to culture, or 'weak', as in the example of the weak or background Westermarck effect where there is no desire for incest due to aversion. The latter would allow for 'natural' factors without granting them priority.

Alternatively, culture is regarded as determining or dominant. The Westermarck effect is caused by purely cultural factors; aversion is a product of rearing or early upbringing (therefore the less-likely incidence of mother/son and brother/sister incest). However, this aversion is overcomable by positive (overt and covert) cultural stricture or conditions (royal incest and child sexual abuse).

This leads to the positing of a second stage where the broader cultural context becomes the major determinant and is creative for, or against, incest, and capable of surpassing any residual biological (natural) or early developmental (cultural) forms of aversion. This would imply the impossibility of any general taboo; 'it' would be different in differing cultures. Further sub-divisions might include: differences of law, of custom, and of the degree of affect involved in custom where custom-plus-affect would result in a taboo-type internalised aversion, as opposed to custom as social pressure only (this division into private and public results in the possibility of incest as privacy allows). Local cultural factors of function, cohesion, control, power conditions at the origin and maintenance of institutions and discursive practices would all play their role.

author notes that, 'The old private rules have become the new public rules. Women were sex and still are sex. Greater efforts of brutality have become necessary to eroticise the taboo-each taboo being a hierarchy in disguise-since the frontier of the taboo keeps vanishing as one crosses it' (p. 200). Contrast these comments to the following, from George Bataille, *Eroticism*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), 'often the transgression of a taboo is no less subject to rules than the taboo itself', 'the transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it', and 'the taboo would forbid the transgression but fascination compels it' (p. 65; 63; 68).

A third stage may then occur. Culture reacts upon itself; limits set by cultural factors are the cause of other cultural products that cross these limits (the *other side* of the limit is also a cultural creation). The existence of (positive or negative) interdictions (as above) would suggest, or stimulate, the transgression of the same (Foucault and incitement, Bataille and transgression, MacKinnon and provocation). The theoretical possibility that limits may be exceeded offers two possibilities of concrete expression: (i) in representation, in art and literature; (ii) in practice, in the performance of acts pre-defined as incestuous and subject to taboo.

Such a three stage model would seem to cover most of the necessary options.

Factors to be considered in the examination of the literary incest theme would therefore include: 'incest' is made differently in differing cultural contexts, there is no universal taboo; however there is also no 'natural' incitement to incest. Only culture incites: directly (discursively, legally, or by custom), or indirectly by the coincidence and implications of power and privacy (child sex abuse cases), or as transgression of interdiction (via elitism, power, the illegal as the new).

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Chapter 1. Writing in Incest: typologies, criticisms, and literary pretexts of the incest theme.

I will begin this chapter by presenting a methodological approach to the interpretation of the incest theme in literature. This approach will incorporate elements of continuity, critique, referentiality, and transgression into an interpretative strategy which will be used to discuss an assortment of critical approaches to the incest theme and will orient the analyses of later chapters. I will continue with the contributions of Otto Rank and Claude Lévi-Strauss, representatives of two major twentieth century intellectual currents, psychoanalysis and structuralism, which account for incest with reference to culture and representation.¹ Turning from the inclusive approaches of myth and the unconscious, I will next examine various literary approaches to the incest theme, these will include de Rougement and the courtly love tradition, the tradition that incest is a gift from the gods, the Platonic idea of incest as a return to lost unity (taken up by psychoanalytic readings as narcissism), and various critics dealing with the specific eighteenth and nineteenth century manifestations of the incest theme.² Then come commentaries that focus upon the specificity of the incest theme in American writing, Anne Dalke discusses the influence of the early American novel, Leslie Fiedler and James Twitchell trace passages of transformation from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.³ This chapter will finish with a discussion of two

¹ Otto Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and other Writings, (New York: Random House, 1959), & The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Artistic Creation, (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1992). Claude Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning, (London: Routledge, 1978).

² Denis de Rougemont, Passion and Society, (London: Faber, 1956). D. Barton Johnson, 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada* ', Comparative Literature, 38. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 224-255.

³ Anne Dalke, 'Original Vice: The Political Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel', Early American Literature, 23. 2 (1988), pp. 188-208. Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, Revised Edition. (New York: Stein & Day, 1966). James B. Twitchell, Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, (New York: Columbia, 1987).

early twentieth century texts which seem to signal the shape of things to come.

Most, if not all, of the approaches to the incest theme discussed in this chapter tend to homogenise its manifestations in literature (in particular) and culture (in general). Literature and film of the twentieth century constitute no exception. This homogenisation occurs either directly, or is implicit in the extrapolation of the concepts that critics have used upon other periods. In their attempts to make a key generalisation about this or other historical periodisations and in order to identify key differences between these periods, the critics have been prepared to lose local nuances in favour of a single overarching theory. If we follow the distinctions of high/low (or art/popular) and of genre we will find certain continuities in the use of the incest theme: however all depends upon which oppositions are used, what elements foregrounded. A list of typical oppositions (conjunctive or disjunctive) might well include: intertext/ genealogy, integrative/ disintegrative, transgression/ conservation, experimentation/ repetition, excess/ didactic, critique/ titillation, and critique/ rebellion.⁴

Alternatively, if we examine the *use* that the incest theme is put to, for example, in the context of writing and first reading/reader, or in current strategies of interpretation, then all exegesis breaks down into issues of

⁴ De Rougement, Passion and Society, and Fiedler, Love and Death, use historical thematics in an example of an intertextual approach. Dalke, 'Original Vice', other feminist readings, and readings concerned with race, would provide examples of sites of contested power (genealogy) as determinants in interpretation (true of present as of past interpretation). Johnson, 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*', and other critics of the nineteenth century emphasise the conflicting impulses of integration and disintegration, of critique and rebellion, and of excess and didacticism. Fiedler and Dalke, also feature the dialectic of transgression and conservation, as does Twitchell. Reading with an eye to experimentation and repetition would be a product of formal readings grounded in recent post-structuralist and postmodernist thought, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). The critics of eighteenth century literature note the combination of critique, titillation, and conservation, see W. Daniel Wilson, 'Science, Natural Law, and Unwitting Sibling Incest in Eighteenth-Century Literature', Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture, 1984, Vol. 13, pp. 249-270; T. G. A. Nelson, 'Incest in the Early Novel and Related Genres', Eighteenth Century Life, 16.1 (February 1992), pp.127-162.).

historical and social specificity. A case in point would be the conjunction of the incest and seduction themes in the early novel and their relation to the role of the family and the rise of the middle class in the period of industrialisation and rapid social change.

My reading of the incest theme suggests that particular attention be paid to the following areas. First, the category of continuity, an intertextual element that encompasses both tradition and counter-tradition, and the re-mixing of material from previous traditions.⁵ The social context of the text's production and circulation, its writing, first reading, and initial critical reception, will normally signal the type of use to which the incest theme is being put.⁶ The question of usage leads to the second category in this typology: that of critique.

The category of critique suggests that the force of the incest theme will normally proceed via the father to class or society. The conservative mode of critique attempts to police society and maintain tradition through its depiction of class, race, gender, generation, and, always, the family, the unit of social reproduction and the hierarchies that traverse it. The reformist mode of critique uses similar subject matter to question tradition. Readings may be interchangeable: the context of production may indicate a conservative first reading; later interpretations may find elements of critique. In this way the theme of paternity is used in both critical *and* conservative utilisations. A crisis of incest is always a crisis of social reproduction.⁷

⁵ My readings of Michael Worton & Judith Still (eds.), Intertextuality: Theories and Practices, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Judith Still & Michael Worton (eds.), Textuality and sexuality: Reading theories and practices, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic approach to literature and Art, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); and Roland Barthes, S/Z, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), have influenced this category.

⁶ See also Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982); Roland Barthes, Mythologies, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972); & The Pleasure of the Text, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

⁷ Influences here include: Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka; Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), "Race",

Category three might be called the 'referentialist' category as it includes recent writing which takes child sexual abuse as its theme, references which may be read as opening sexual child abuse as an issue, or any other textual references or narratives read in this manner. Some of these narratives (abuse as theme, biography, auto-biography, escape-narratives) may appear as a species of 'realism': however, as this latter has a specific history as a proper name or a historical genre, I suggest we use the term 'referentialism' for this kind of concerned writing.⁸ The other aspect of this category is an engaged reading which deploys referentialist comparisons in order that narratives can be read as analogies or figures of child sexual abuse. A relation of deixis or reference is assumed and the practice of child sexual abuse is interpreted as a direct or mediated (hidden) referent. In this way the incest theme will be read as a form of historically contingent rhetoric; but contingent also upon the reader. Four uses of reference will be distinguished: first, reference as the 'as if' of narrative; second, this level of reference as opposed to rhetoric, a rhetorical use of a term will clash with its referential use; third, reference as deictic, as pointing outside of the host text to other texts (this intertextual loop returns to category one or continuity) or to historical events (which may of course be encoded in texts or artefacts); with recent events the continuity may be regarded as synchronic (a comparison is being made with the present rather than the past). Combined readings may often be possible.⁹

Writing, and Difference, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and other general feminist, post-modern and anti-foundationalist approaches.

⁸ In this way any 'realist' or 'readerly' text can be transformed (read) as an experimental text simply by the application of different (or dissenting) modes of reading (use of repetition, variation, series, metaphor) and, contrarily, any experimental, modernist or 'writerly' text can be converted into a deictic or referentialist text (although not quite a 'realist' text) by reading with social or historical parallels in mind. The two kinds of reading need not be mutually exclusive.

⁹ See also Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading, (London: Yale, 1979); The Rhetoric of Romanticism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); The Resistance to Theory, (University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and Brian Vickers, In Defence of Rhetoric, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), on rhetoric and reading. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference,

The last category might be called the category of excess as it crosses aesthetics and ethics and produces the complicity of transgression and morality. This category is therefore a veritable fifth column for any reading that attempts to adopt a moral stance.¹⁰ If it is the representation of the transgressive that carries the pleasure of the text; indeed, that also carries the normative charge, the text's moral 'message' (an excess carried far enough eventually brings out a sense of guilt and disgust in most readers), then is not an uncomfortable complicity established? We accept this position in relation to representation in general: why is it then that we can not accept that this same formula applies to the most transgressive imaginable? It is therefore necessary to suggest that some/ many readers will enjoy any/ specific transgressions in their own right: as, for example, in texts where child sexual abuse as implied in a cult of youth, in relationships where the woman is the younger, the smaller, and may result in the infantilisation of woman - and the concomitant sexualisation of children of both sexes. Finally, it will be necessary to try and show (in a temporary or strategic closure) how certain texts encourage pleasure (play with the reader's sense of limit) more than others; that is, use morality as an excuse to show excess (although of course this 'also' may be a reading

(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Of Grammatology (London: John Hopkins, 1976), and writing on deconstructive criticism in general. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction (London: Methuen, 1983); and Seymour Chatman, Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (London: Cornell, 1978), on narrative entities, the implied author, and irony.

¹⁰ The influence of the following has been invaluable: George Bataille, Eroticism (London: Marion Boyars, 1987); Literature & Evil (New York: Marion Boyars, 1990); 'The Notion of Expenditure', in Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) pp. 116-129; The Accursed Share: Volume One (New York: Zone, 1988); Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', in A Susan Sontag Reader (London: Penguin, 1982) pp. 205-233; Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977); & 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in The Foucault Reader (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) pp. 76-100; and Jean-François Lyotard, 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of their Experimentation: Contribution to the Idea of Postmodernity', in The Lyotard Reader (London: Blackwell, 1989) pp. 181-195.

strategy), rather than the opposite - as, for example, in Nabokov's play of ironies.

If Freud found the common ground of anthropology and psychoanalysis to lie in the realm of myth, then the writings of Otto Rank chart a passage from myth to literature in a theory of human creativity indebted to psychoanalysis. As Freud found incest to be the founding problematic of psychoanalysis and anthropology, so Rank utilised psychoanalysis to show that the incest theme was a key element in the narrative repertory of mythology and literature alike. However, before pursuing Rank's theory of the incest theme in literature, I would first like to contrast his views on myth with those of another theoretician of incest: Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structuralist theoretician who dealt with incest as an anthropological entity. These comments will follow the insights of psychoanalysis and structuralism on myth and the place of incest within myth.

In The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology, (1914), Otto Rank analyses the link of the incest theme in mythology and parallel narrative elements in the origin or exploits of mythic heroes.¹¹ Dismissing theories of universal cosmology as second order phenomena he suggests that:

It is evident that human beings, even in the earliest times, and with a most naive imagination, never saw incest and parricide in the firmament on high, but rather it is far more probable that these ideas are derived from another source, presumably human. (p. 11)

¹¹ Otto Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero. Rank began as devoted pupil of Freud's; but later moved to formulate the theory of the birth trauma in 1924. Despite the apparently opposite direction of birth trauma theory to Jung's hypothesis of neurosis as anxiety for the present and future expressed in universal symbols (collective unconscious) Rank later moved towards Jungian models. The theories of myth, literature, incest, and creativity expressed here are from his early (pre-birth trauma) period.

However, the movement away from the heavens also elides the human as the social, particularly the function of the narrative dominance of the hero or his lineage, when all is subsumed into matters of individual psychology:

Myths are therefore created by adults, by means of retrograde childhood fantasies, the hero being credited with the myth-maker's personal infantile history.... the myth therefore contains also the excuse of the individual for his revolt against the father. (pp. 84-85)

Indeed myths whose social function often appear to be the justification of the rule of elite families (descendants of the 'founder' of whatever social unit) are turned, in Rank's psychoanalytic interpretation, into a product of (infantile) rebellion.¹²

If Rank views myth as the product of a kind of 'dreamwork' functioning at the behest of a deep structural Oedipal causality, then Claude Lévi-Strauss in Myth and Meaning, opposes the structure of a '*total* understanding' in his own research into the meaning of myth (p. 17). The role of myth is to provide 'man' with 'the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe' (p. 17). The role of incest in myth-making is double: to justify interdicted relations which facilitate the exchange of women, providing ordered definition (semantic and functional hierarchy) inside the social unit; and to forge links to other social units (in this way meaning and exchange are combined). However, whilst this explanation may provide the basis for the form of mythic incest which relates to the hero and his life, this particular form of mythic incest is not explained by Lévi-Strauss' hypothesis. The question of excess and transgression remains: this question is best answered with reference to

¹² See Claude Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning, for examples of myth-making as justification (p. 38).

social stratification and the utilisation of incest to posit a position 'above' the law of exchange (both legal and economic).¹³

In both theorists a single 'centre' suffices to explain all related phenomena, one social-semiotic, one psychological; function (intended or unintended) and use (to elites or other social sub-divisions) and the mutability of meaning over time and space are relegated to matters of secondary concern. The context of reading or writing, the rhetorical use to deal with a problem issue, and the possible reference to actual events are all lost in a flight to universality that suggests the mythic approach to the incest theme as both too broad and too limited.

Otto Rank is also responsible for the single most important of the non-literary analyses of the incest theme, that of psychoanalysis.¹⁴ Rank begins by suggesting that:

We must assign great importance to the way these first and most persistent erotic fantasies of early childhood and puberty take as the goal of their gratification parents and siblings - those persons most loved by the child but forbidden by the culture as sexual objects.¹⁵

And he continues to observe that, of the relation of mental illness to these fantasies:

Freud and his school have shown more and more convincingly that the incest fantasy is not simply the "incest complex of

¹³ Both Lévi-Strauss and Rank deal with the unusual question of twins in myth. Rank notes, 'one of the brothers is usually considered to be of divine origin, of heroic character, and immortal, while the other is assumed to be of human origin, weak and mortal' (The Incest Theme, p. 374). Rank regards the 'most important source of the theme of the twin brothers', and its manifestations in myth, to be the 'second order' incestuous desire of siblings, an echo of an echo, a reflection of a deflection. See also Rank (1959), pp. 44-7; 49; 90. For Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning, it is the binary nature of language that explains the key epistemological function of mythological twins; they act as a guide to what is good/bad, allowed or forbidden (hence the link to incest prohibition) (pp. 25-33).

¹⁴ Rank, The Incest Theme, in his Introductory Essay Peter L. Rudnytsky notes that, 'In On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Freud wrote that, "among the strictly scientific applications of analysis to literature Rank's exhaustive work on the theme of incest easily takes first place" (1914, 37)' (p. xx).

¹⁵ Rank, The Incest Theme, p. 11. This is a translation of the first edition of 1912, not of the second edition of 1926.

neuroses" and... of several psychoses(...). Instead these investigations have shown that it also dominates the unconscious psychic life of normals, determining their social and erotic orientation in life. (p. 12)

Relating this to his literary project Rank informs us that:

Our investigation will lead us to recognise that the incest fantasy is of primary importance to the psychic life of the author. This work has its deeper justification in that it is precisely based upon the incest theme that the "fundamentals of a psychology of literary creation" can be developed; in connection with the incest theme, we shall attempt to demonstrate paradigmatically how the process of literary production characteristically resembles and differs from normal dreaming and from neurosis. (pp. 12-13)

This would lead to the rejection of a 'intertextual' approach to literature in favour of a universalist and essentialist reduction of all literary (indeed, of all cultural) phenomena to variations on the incest theme:

It is by no means necessary to attribute these typical recurring forms and motives in literature to conscious borrowing or imitation, or to literary influences, as was previously supposed. Indeed, it seems that they can be attributed mainly to a common psychic configuration shared by the various authors and resulting in a certain uniformity in their output, external influences merely serving to intensify this result. (pp. 12-13)

The various literary manifestations of the incest theme (both undisguised and occluded) will be shown to parallel the psychic life of the incest fantasy in its synchronic varieties and in its developmental stages:

We will try to demonstrate that certain patterns in literature arise from shared psychic complexes, evinced with special intensity in all authors but shared in a weaker form by the literarily unproductive (as shown by their strong response to literature). Afterall, these complexes are a component of the basically uniform development of all human beings. (p. 13-14)¹⁶

¹⁶ An example of the parallelism of psychic development and the varieties of literature and myth can be found where Rank compares Greek mythology to 'the first stage of repression of the childhood Oedipus complex', and Schiller's Don Carlos to 'the next stage of repression' (p. 132).

In a Chapter entitled 'The Relationship between Father and Daughter in Myth, Folktales, Legends, Literature, Life, and Neurosis', Rank observes that:

Like the erotic attraction of the son to the mother, the loving interactions of father and daughter are among the typical human impulses that, in the process of cultural development, have been subjected to the same process of repression, leading to the development of similar substitutes in mythological, literary, and neurotic fantasies. (p. 300)

But that:

The fantasy substitutes created by the father-daughter complex are not presented from the perspective of the young child, the daughter, as one would expect from analogy [with the mother/son complex where it is the son's viewpoint that is said to predominate] but are instead dealt with mainly from the standpoint of the father. (p. 300) [my parentheses]

This question: of just who is seeing, viewing, fantasising, will recur with reference to authors and readers (implied and otherwise), and their relation to narrative voice and character, throughout the chapters that follow.¹⁷ 'The fantasy substitutes... are dealt with mainly from the standpoint of the father'; Rank implies, with respect to the 'father-daughter complex', that the privileged fantasy is to be the paternal one. If textuality is also fantasy then the implications of this delimitation of vision are carried over into the analysis of literature; the lifting of the limitation should allow the possibility of other visions, other fantasies.

Referring to sibling incest Rank observes that:

It is only through the primary parent complex that the significance of the sibling complex can correctly be appreciated and understood. This is because one's relationship with siblings

¹⁷ Furthermore Rank notes that: 'Even in the few mythological passages in which the loving passion seems to be presented from the viewpoint of the daughter, one has the impression that this is only a justification of the father's shocking desires; an attempt is made to shift the blame for the seduction onto her' (p. 300). Rank continues: 'Just as man is the active partner in wooing and in procreation, so too the development of myths and religions, as well as artistic activity, is intended to gratify and justify male sexual fantasies' (p. 300). Comments that, if taken in descriptive or symptomatic mode, would indicate a (possibly reductive) but nonetheless provocative imperative for the re-reading for certain texts by Nabokov, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner.

is revealed by psychoanalytical research to be a "second edition", less intense but unchanged in content, of the etiologically earlier relationship with one's parents. (p. 363)

And that:

Since the original Oedipus complex quickly falls victim to repression, the impulses associated with the parent but rejected by the individual are then easily associated with the siblings, automatically present as substitutes. In the context of the siblings, these impulses are able to develop in a less impeded and more lasting manner. (p. 363)

As with the 'primary parent complex', but perhaps in a manner 'less impeded' this 'second edition' is also a relationship to art: 'in the normal individual these impulses and experiences sink into the unconscious, whereas in the playwright they continue to fill and dominate his fantasy life, even in his later years' (p. 364).¹⁸

The central paradox of Rank's thesis lies in the literature of today (early Modernism for Rank) and its relation to repression and consciousness.¹⁹ How to explain the appearance of incest 'in its fully conscious manifestations' in 'contrast to the progress of repression in the totality of human psychic life'? (p. 548). Rank's answer suggests that the Oedipus complex is copied into literature in a collective cultural self-analysis, a collective bringing into language and consciousness (in Freud's words 'where there was Id there shall Ego be') which explains why 'modern

¹⁸ On the relation of literature to neurosis: 'the individual must possess the appropriate intellectual ability. This can be considered a necessary precondition for his experiencing the incest complex through literary fantasy. But also know from psychoanalysis that such precocious talent, already evinced evinced by most authors in early childhood, is paralleled by precocious sexual development. In turn, this sexual development is only the expression of sexual drives originally stronger in these individuals than in others. Through their precocious tendency to activation, though, these drives effect, on the one hand, the intense fixation on parents and siblings characteristic of the incest complex and, on the other hand, a corresponding excess of fantasy activity, necessary for the author in his production' (p. 397). The artist sublimates (or goes mad with Oedipal guilt.. a romantic cliché): the neurotic can only struggle with this burden of guilt.

¹⁹ Rank's discussion of European Modernist literature (1900-1916) is almost entirely German and mainly, though not entirely, features the brother/sister incest dyad.

literature tends so noticeably, and so much more than in other times, to sexual themes and their free portrayal' (p. 549). In this way:

The originally repressed impulses become more and more subject to conscious control. Control of the repressed (incestuous) impulses, which earlier was still possible via unconscious projection and the corresponding reaction in the work of art, is now possible, given the increasing pressure from the tendency for repression, through conscious contemplation and action. In the main, the development of the presentation of the incest theme shows the realisation of this practical-psychoanalytical principle. (p. 549)

In this way, Rank's theory of the appearance of the sexual and the incestuous in literature may also function as a defence of the transgressive in art as catharsis or 'working through':

Incestuous impulses are by no means to be interpreted in a sexual-pathological manner, but that they belong, rather, to the most primitive expressions of human drives and emotional life. (p. 569)

But what of the theory that lies at the heart of this kind of interpretation? As the translator notes:

Despite his psychoanalytic attention to fantasy, Rank does not shrink from the realities of sexual abuse and rape, pointing out that, 'incest between fathers and daughters (often step-daughters), especially that of rape of the daughter, is among the most frequent sexual crimes' (p. 301). (p. xxix)

Rank's interest in the theoretical question of the incest taboo and its psychoanalytic resolution does not prevent him from being aware of the realities of incest and rape, of incestuous sexual abuse, and hence of child sexual abuse. In the interpretation of literature too, this collocation, or intersection, of the incest theme with the sexual abuse of children requires further explication.²⁰ However, before the implications of this linkage can

²⁰ Rank also notes, concerning the relationship of fathers to daughters, that, 'the father has an authoritative influence over his daughter, a *patriae potestas*, lending more force to whatever impulses and wishes he may have than is possible in the son's subordinate relationship with the mother' (p. 301). A comment which both shows the importance of

be explored, it will be necessary to examine the incest theme itself and the other literary thematics to which it has a relation of origin, or dependence.

Perhaps the most important literary account of the incest theme is that which reads it as an aspect of the courtly love theme; of the history of 'passion'. In his influential book, Passion and Society, Denis de Rougemont traces the evolution of 'passion' in life and literature. He finds the origin of this process in the fusion of Manicheism from Persia with Islamic poetic form under the auspices of Catharism in twelfth century France. The subsequent development of the courtly love tradition is said to be the paramount influence on the representation of love and passion in the history of European literature and, indeed, of the development of forms of passion in the West. De Rougemont suggests that the Tristan Myth should be taken as the Ur text for this process; both as model and origin (pp. 16-17).²¹ What the Tristan myth shows us is death as the true end of 'passion', '*a myth is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked with death*' (p. 21). This unhappy conjunction of passion and death is a product of impossibility

inter-generational power relations and reveals his assumption of male initiative. Rank also gives a list of father/daughter rapes taken from the press of his time (pp. 332-335).

For another passage from myth to literature (and one that features another kind of libidinal economy), we must turn to the work of George Bataille and René Girard. Both deal with the problematics of the transition of from sacred to secular. See Bataille, Eroticism, where the focus is upon sacrifice and excess in consumption and representation (intimacy and transgression); and René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, (London: John Hopkins, 1977), where the concept of sacrificial crisis is used to discuss the absence of legitimation left in the wake of the secularising process and its implications for violence in cultural representation.

²¹ de Rougemont, Passion and Society, comments on the Tristan myth and its long term effects as model for passion: 'The myth operates wherever passion is dreamed of as an ideal instead of being feared like a malignant fever; where ever its fatal character is welcomed, invoked, or imagined as a magnificent or desirable disaster instead of simply a disaster. It lives upon the lives of people who think that love is their fate (and as unavoidable as the effect of the love-potion is in the Romance); that it swoops upon powerless and ravished men and women in order to consume them in a pure flame; or that it is stronger and more real than happiness, science, or morality. It lives upon the very life of the romanticism within us; it is the great mystery of that religion of which the poets of the nineteenth century made themselves the priests and prophets' (p. 24).

(the intervention of an 'obstacle') and denial (the passage from adulterous desire to abstinent love).²²

There are two links to be made to the representation of incest in literature. First, as a type of doomed love, whether by 'obstacle' (taboo) or denial (renunciation). This would include incest as a possible analogue for the ideal as unattainable and therefore imaged through metaphors of the impossible obstacle, or of (incestuous) denial itself as productive of the ideal. In this way brother/sister mutual love (or the variants formed by the step-relation or misrecognition) form both analogue and product of the courtly myth in its development; that is, as 'unhappy mutual love'. However this first link of the incest theme to courtly love would not apply to child/parent forms of the incest relation. For this we must turn to the second connection between incest and courtly love.

To make the second link to the incest theme we must first note the connection of Catharism and *amour courtois* that de Rougemont makes to modern culture :

the passionate love which the myth celebrates actually became in the twelfth century... a religion in the full sense of the word, and in particular a Christian heresy historically determined.' (p. 137)

And:

That the passion which novels and films have now popularised is nothing else than *a lawless invasion and flowing back* into our lives of a spiritual heresy the key to which we have lost. (p. 137)

Therefore:

Considered chronologically, the great body of European *literature* expresses nothing other than an increasing secularisation of the myth or - as I would rather say - successive 'profanations' of its content and form. (p. 137)

²² 'Passion' therefore is a continuation and intensification of desire by denial; it is a construction of a *kind* of desire, and not a form of death as de Rougemont somewhat fancifully maintains.

We may read the incest theme, existing as type of 'profanation', as a major example of this degraded form in Western literature.²³ There will be an application, in chapter four of the thesis, of these ideas to a reading of perversion as product of the decadence of 'passion' in Nabokov's *Lolita*. We may also look forward to a further mutation of 'passion' in the work of Dennis Cooper, as the relation of desire to dismemberment in chapter five.

Such a literary tradition would also be a textual history of the increasingly transgressive appropriation of the courtly love theme. The relation of desire to impossibility at the heart of amour courtois already holds the possibility of such a development: indeed the two halves of 'Romance of the Rose' already express the division into sacred and profane appropriations.²⁴

Two useful studies of the incest theme in English writing of the eighteenth century show something of the tradition that will lead into the early American novel. The first, T. G. A. Nelson's, 'Incest in the Early Novel and Related Genres', gives the English background to the American use of incest.²⁵ Nelson notes the predominance of the brother/sister incest theme in eighteenth century English literature: especially in drama and the novel, in Defoe, Fielding, and previously in Milton and the drama of

²³ 'When myths lose their esoteric character and their sacred purpose they take literary form. The courtly myth was peculiarly fitted to do this, since the only way of stating it had been in terms of human love, which were given a mystical sense. Once this mystical sense had vanished, there remained a rhetoric which would express our natural instincts, but not without distorting them imperceptibly in the direction of another world; and this other world, in growing more and more mysterious, answered the need of idealisation which the human mind has acquired from a mystical understanding first condemned, then lost. This was the opportunity of European literature, and this alone will account for the sway which literature has exercised from that moment all the way down to our own time, first over the upper classes alone, later over the masses as well - a sway unique in the history of civilisation' (p. 239).

²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Complete Works*, (Oxford: OUP, 1968).

²⁵ Nelson, 'Incest in the Early Novel and Related Genres'.

the Restoration period.²⁶ This predominance may be noted in the first phase of both literatures: in England from '1680 onward' (p. 127) and then in American literature from 1780 onwards. Is it that the role of the seduction theme and incest (first in drama then in the novel) was to play the same function in English writing as in the American literature a hundred years later? In terms of intertextual tradition the Americans may simply have been copying a literary formula that had been successfully deployed in the course of the previous century. However, it appears likely that broadly similar factors could have been responsible for both, with the latter American development inheriting a ready made model. Parallel factors may include a long process of post-revolutionary upheaval, the resulting social paranoia and fear for social stability, and the opening up of a distinctively middle class space in terms of geography, manners, and mores: this will be discussed in more detail in the section on early American literature below. However, the continuing connection of adultery to incest may be noted: "Adultery," observes Malevole in Marston's The Malcontent (1603), "is often the mother of incest..." (p. 150).²⁷ The incest theme expresses fears over the structure of the family;

²⁶ Prior to the eighteenth century two classical tales of father/daughter incest form the basis for most early English manifestations of the incest theme. The first is that of Cinyras and Myrrha in Ovid's Metamorphosis, which is retold in Chaucer's 'Troilus and Cresida', in John Lydgate's Fall of Princes: Volume I, and Reason & Sensualyte, and in John Dryden, The Beauties of Dryden. The other influential classical incest tale is that of Antiochus and his daughter (part of the Appolonius of Tyre story) which appears in 'The Man at Law's Tale,' part of Chaucer's 'The Canterbury Tales', and John Gower's Confessio Amantis, which also contains an incestuous sibling marriage and a long list of incestuous rapes perpetrated by fathers and brothers from mythology and biblical sources. The Antiochus story appears again in Shakespeare's Pericles: Prince of Tyre. The classic example of renaissance sibling incest is John Ford, Tis Pity She's a Whore. Lloyd de Mauser, in 'The Evolution of Childhood', from The History of Childhood, (London: Bellew, 1991), writing of the adult use of children for sexual purposes in this period, notes the existence of a 'rising tide of moralists who warned against it' (p. 48). Between 1642 and 1640 many plays included an incest relation of some sort, a phenomenon discussed in detail in R. A. McCabe, Incest, Drama, and Nature's Law: 1550-1700, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993).

²⁷ This comment on the causal relation between adultery and incest sets the scene for the representation of incest in literature for the next two hundred years. See also Tony Tanner, Adultery in the Novel, (London: John Hopkins, 1979), where he notes a shift of emphasis in literature from marriage and adultery to the family and adultery; broadly, the change

and the possible incestuous effect of 'the bringing up of children outside their biological families', (p. 150). Here it is adultery that leads to incest as in William Faulkner it will be miscegenation (often adulterous) that will ineluctably lead to the breaking of the incest taboo.

Moving from the intertextual to the referential aspect of literature, Nelson notes: 'The last problem we shall need to consider is the relation of incest plots to social reality' (p. 159). Referring to Elizabeth Ward, Father/Daughter Rape, (1984) and Jean Renvoize, Incest: a Family Pattern, (1982) for evidence on present day incest, he comments:

Most incest plots in early novels bear the stamp of romance, not reality.... In literature, too, the most threatening manifestation of incest is between mother and son, while the commonest is between brother and sister; whereas in life the most threatening as well as the most common is father-daughter incest.

The 'too' probably refers to myth; ('in life' refers, of course, only to recent evidence, in this sense Nelson's remarks are strictly anachronistic; yet any reference to the historical reality of the period must -particularly in an issue as hidden away as actual incest or child sexual abuse- be premised upon a retroactive extension of current trends). The particular eighteenth century use of the incest theme would therefore primarily be a matter of literary tradition. Nelson does suggest a potential referentialist interpretation when he refers to several examples of attempted father/daughter incest rape in the writings of female novelists of the period; however, this may also be read as a part of the general interest in incest in eighteenth century literature.²⁸

from the breaking of a contract to a disruption of function (p. 368). This shift of emphasis onto the family reintroduces incest as a (privileged) form of limiting definition of the family (members of families may commit adultery; but they may never commit incest). Incest thus suggests itself in a dual qualitative and quantitative relation to adultery: qualitatively as the internal danger (or form of revolt), paralleling adultery's external threat; quantitatively as an intensification of the charge of adultery as a force disruptive of the family.

²⁸ Luciano P. R. Santiago, The Children of Oedipus, Brother-Sister Incest in Psychiatry, Literature, History, and Mythology, (Roslyn House, New York: Libra Publishers, 1973),

The second article deals with the idea of incest in the eighteenth century and its possible influence on literature. Although Daniel W. Wilson, in 'Science, Natural Law, and Unwitting Sibling Incest in Eighteenth-Century Literature', displays too much unquestioning faith in socio-biological theories of incest, he does provide a good account of the relation of the thought of the time to the fiction of the same period; his article covers the range of eighteenth century philosophical interests (and others) in the question of incest and the taking up of these ideas in the literature of the period.²⁹ Of especial interest is the evolution and use of a pre-scientific version of what we now know as the (genetic) theories of in-breeding and a proto- Westermarian theory of aversion. Both theories are found in the fiction and thought of the eighteenth century and can be seen to be carried over into American writing in the literary tradition that incestuous desire only springs forth in siblings (full or half) who have been brought up separately, or in the step-relation (in the passion of a step-son and young step-mother).

However, until recently, accounts of the representation of incest in the eighteenth century were rare: most commentators preferred to focus upon the literature of the following century. Thus, there exist a number of attempts to deal with the nineteenth century literary incest theme on the level of typology. D. Barton Johnson, in his article 'The Labyrinth of Incest

notes the cleaning up of literary incest in eighteenth century as a topic deemed 'unworthy of study'; this revision included the rewriting of Oedipus, and the lack of a eighteenth century development of an 'original literary plot of incest' (p. 179). This shows a lack of knowledge of the literature of the eighteenth century, and of the mechanics of poetry and drama as 'high' art forms contrasted against fiction as 'low' or 'popular'.

²⁹ Wilson, 'Science, Natural Law, and Unwitting Sibling Incest in Eighteenth-Century Literature', notes the use of 'scientific' theory in literary interpretation; especially the use of Robin Fox and his synthesis of Freud, Westermarian, and socio-biology. Fox's approach is compared to the eighteenth century approach to incest (discussed in Nelson and Wilson) and has therefore become a key part of the incest debate (for its pertinence to literature and mass culture see the discussion on the work of Twitchell below). Note also the lack of comment in Wilson on child sexual abuse in its (majority) incestuous manifestation of father/daughter rape (noted in Nelson); other socio-biologists also seem to have a blind spot in this respect, for example see Fox, The Red Lamp of Incest.

in Nabokov's *Ada* ', emphasises two traditions, both owing their genesis to ancient and classical civilisations (p. 244).³⁰ The first, taken from Greek and Egyptian myth, explicates incest as an 'attribute of gods', and in this way the property (and definitive) of a ruling elite (we may find the continuation of this use in the twentieth century as 'membership' in Nabokov's *Ada* or as criticism in Mailer). This theme also includes the idea of Promethean rebellion, as taking, illicitly, the power of the gods, and is often called Sophoclean incest implying that the real reason for the punishment of Oedipus was for daring to behave as a god (a twentieth century equivalent might be found in Doctorow's *Loon Lake*).

The second tradition is seen as originating in Plato's *Symposium*, 'all human kind are originally single-bodied twins who, having become separated, eternally seek their other halves, that is the reintegration of the self' (Johnstone, p. 224). This latter point (especially in the words of the final clause) has been given a new lease of life as the 'narcissistic' theory of incest, after Freud and Rank, where sibling incest is seen as an attempt to regain a pre-lapsarian state of wholeness, a sense of unity that transcends the self, or a return to pre-Oedipal bliss.

These two traditions provide an archive which we may observe later traditions using, augmenting, and inverting. Changes of valency, from an exemplary positive to a critical negative, may occur as part of an exhaustion of form (genre), or the demands of the epoch (political context). For example: sibling incest is used as a negative in the criticism of society in the eighteenth century; this shock value is intensified in the Gothic tradition (where it is also used as a critique of elites). The sibling incest theme then mutates into a positive as a sign of rebellion in Romanticism; further maintaining this valency as a mark of the integrative (the desire for unity) in European Modernism (according to

³⁰ Johnson, 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada* '.

Johnson, p. 245). There then follows a return to the transgressive and critical negative in American Modernism (Neo-Gothic); and finally a revival of all prior uses in (American) postmodern writing. The role of shock has become increasingly paramount: here, however, the sibling form is less used than previously, the preference being for more intensified forms in other kinds of incest: those connected with child sexual abuse for example.

If critical doxa once suggested that incest was more typical of (generally) nineteenth century Romanticism (even if only in American writing); then the description of the sentimental/seduction novel as an eighteenth century genre must invert this view. There are many more examples of the incest theme in the eighteenth century and its continuing traditions; it is a question of the differences between period, style and genre. Therefore the peak of the use of the incest theme, if it does occur in around 1800, is then, a phenomena of eighteenth century origin, and one which will have to wait until the early twentieth century for a new and more expansive airing.

Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., in his article, 'Incest as Romantic Symbol', classifies the incest theme into parallel historical stages: from shock to rebellion; from fate to choice; from Gothic to Romantic.³¹ Thorslev's incest typology consists of three types. First, parent/child incest, where the parent is the aggressor (p. 47). The classic nineteenth century example of father/daughter rape, Shelley's Cenci, belongs to this type. This form is relatively rare, always Gothic, always condemned; it usually functions as a criticism of establishment tyranny. Later American examples of this type would include Faulkner, Mailer, and Doctorow.

³¹ Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., 'Incest as Romantic Symbol', Comparative Literature Studies, 2 (1965), pp. 41-58. This set of distinctions is useful, but too homogeneous. It ignores, as do most commentaries on the nineteenth century, the distinctive and influential eighteenth century use of the incest theme.

Second, the relation of step-son/step-mother where the incest is the result of a 'mutual attraction between a natural son and a young step-mother' (p. 47). This is a mixed type lying somewhere between the parent/child exploitation theme (type one) and the doomed brother/sister rebellious romance theme (type three); as a result the incestuous relation is treated with more sympathy. Examples of this second type would include: Schiller's Don Carlos and Byron's Parisina. This type is also similar to the use of the step-relation theme in the eighteenth century sentimental novel with which it shares the features of opposition to the adulterous father, and a tragic consequence. However, there exists no rebellion as such, critique is implied in the tragic end, not in the volition or conscious actions of the participants of the story.

Third, and by far the most important, is brother/sister, or sibling, incest (p. 49). This is the classic form featured in Chateaubriand's, René, Byron, and Shelley. It has become the symbol of the essence of (impossible therefore heroic) romantic rebellion. All these Romantic types of the incest theme have rebellion either in their narrative or featured as part of their critical implication (father/daughter rape). To this Thorslev adds the more (philosophically and historically) general idea of solipsism, narcissism, and incest as the symbol of the desire to return to pre-lapsarian asexual wholeness -the author cites Plato's Symposium where beings that are originally hermaphrodite each split into two separate sexes (p. 54).

Thorslev claims that incest was introduced into English language fiction by Walpole in England (The Mysterious Mother) as an aspect of the Gothic tradition (p. 43). As we have seen, it was already an aspect of the sentimental novel and it was in this form that it entered America as a member of the genre of sentiment or seduction. In America, it is only later that incest appears in the High Gothic mode, and then it is as part of American Romanticism. It appears that the incest theme is more often

used in the seduction type novel in American fiction then anywhere else. The American Gothic heritage in the novel continues to use the seduction form of the incest theme rather than the romantic rebellion theme which prefers to feature the sibling incest motif. In other words it may be the intensified conjunction of the incest theme with the seduction theme that will become the key in the analysis of incest in canonical American literature.

Anne Dalke, in her article, 'Original Vice: The Political Implications of Incest in the Early American Novel', suggests that there are only two types of incest plot in the early American novel:

The early American novelists deal with accidental incest of two varieties. In the first version, a well-to-do young gentleman, acting on republican sentiments, proposes marriage to a poor young girl. The threat of incest intercedes to prevent their union. In the second plot, the lascivious career of an older man is halted when he seduces a poor young woman who proves to be his cast-off daughter. (p. 189)³²

She concludes that:

These cautionary tales of parental excess express a decided attitude about the social order: at the same time that they charge fathers with failure of benevolence, they charge the social structure with a failure to maintain the hierarchy of established distinctions between classes, a distinction that demands of the well-to-do a similar benevolent protectionism. These authors approved established patterns of familial and social deference and responsibility. They did so by inversion, in their display of the dreadful consequences of neglecting such obligations. (p. 200)

³² Dalke, 'Original Vice', notes that: 'The anonymous novel The History of Albert and Eliza (1812), William Hill Brown's first and second novels, The Power of Sympathy (1789) and Ira and Isabella (1807), Susanna Rowson's posthumous Charlotte's Daughter (1828), and Sarah Sayward Wood's Julia and the Illuminated Baron (1800) all tell the first story; The anonymous Margaretta (1807) and two of Rowson's earlier works, Mentoria (1794) and The Trials of the Human Heart (1795), tell the second' (p. 189). The reference to accidental incest does not signify an exclusion of literature utilising non-accidental forms, consciousness -of a potentially incestuous relation- lead immediately to disgust and separation; however as Dalke notes later in her article (p. 200) Rowson's Trials of the Human Heart does contain a deliberate attempt at father/daughter rape.

The worst consequence of which was incest. A consequence which is to be found at the origin of American literature.

The first American novel, William Hill Brown's The Power of Sympathy (1789), includes a typical literary variety of brother/sister incest as well as allusions to other forms.³³ The novel's introduction champions the claim of The Power of Sympathy to the title of the first American novel, but strangely classifies it as Romantic: yet in style, the use of the epistolary form, and in topic, the seduction theme, the Jacobin theme, the pattern of fall and redemption, it represents a clear transplanting of form and content from the eighteenth century English novel (p. xxii). As I have observed, the use of the incest theme is not a discovery of the nineteenth century, nor of Romanticism. Nor alone can it be said to signify the Gothic. Despite the romantic nature of the novel's central brother/sister relationship it is the seduction theme that is at the centre of this narrative. As Dalke observes, the novel consists of a sequence of 'four seductions, culminating in brother/sister incest', and further, that 'the focus of suffering is on the fathers' (p. 190). It is this type of plot that suggested to Leslie Fiedler that incest in American literature was 'the offence against the father'.³⁴ However, Dalke observes, referring to the act of incest, that 'in these early American novels it is a further consequence of the father's original vice' (p. 199). The critical focus is upon the role of the father, whether as transgressing, transgressed upon, or both. Another important feature of this novel is the inclusion of the Jacobin theme of a poor person (here also a woman) enlightening (republicanising) a rich aristocrat: however the result in this novel is near incest. As Dalke notes, 'put into practice in this fiction, republican sentiments lead to disaster' (p. 193).

³³ William Hill Brown, The Power of Sympathy, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1969).

³⁴ Fiedler, Love and Death, p. 129.

Thus far we may read the early American incest novel as a product of the moderate enlightenment - utilising the European Jacobin tradition- with its use of Seduction and 'Gothic' modes- but eschewing its extremes; that is, we are dealing with the middle class novel, expressing middle class concerns. Written against the abuse of power by the old (aristocratic/patriarchal) order, but equally against any levelling out or more thoroughgoing egalitarian trends this literature can be conceived as clearing out a space for itself between, and against, high and low social strata and cultural forms.

We should now be in a better position to evaluate the influence of the early American novel on the writing of the incest theme in the two succeeding centuries. If incest (especially father/ daughter and brother/ sister) in American fiction was, from the late eighteenth century linked to the question of family and class, then from the end of the nineteenth or early twentieth century (Faulkner) to the last quarter of the twentieth century (black women's fiction) it was more closely twinned to that of family and race. When Anne Dalke notes that, 'the sins of the father are visited upon the daughters with a vengeance, as the fathers seek to possess them sexually', she is observing the birth of a pattern in American literature where father/daughter incest is used as a metaphorical (and not so metaphorical) arena for the problems of racial and sexual difference, as well as of social and economic difference, or matters of class.³⁵ Incest will be utilised as a key element of propaganda in the contentious issues of adultery and the family (pro and contra) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It will be used with race in Faulkner and Ellison, and be combined with feminist issues and exposure of child sexual abuse in black women writers (in a polemic of gender rather than of generation, here again incest is the 'trying ground' or tool of critique). It will also appear in

³⁵ Anne Dalke, 'Original Vice', p. 199.

the relations of class, economy, and elite in Mailer. Most recently it will feature as an issue in its own right, representing incestuous sexual abuse and child sexual abuse, an issue of generation as well as of gender, sexual, and other forms of difference.

Leslie Fiedler, in Love and Death in the American Novel, notes, concerning the brother/sister and father/daughter incest motifs in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that enlightenment rationalist favour for brother/sister incest turns into the romantic revolutionary use of the brother/sister incest theme (pp. 111-112). He also notes that the French eighteenth century author (Abbé) Prévost, the source of much incest theme copying in England, preferred to dwell upon father/daughter incest and 'likes to identify father and seducer' (p. 112). The enlightenment and revolutionary uses of incest as critique eventually fuse with the gothic, and later the romantic, use of incest as key transgressive emblem. Thus the trajectory of the incest-motive passed through the sentimental-domestic genre into the gothic; again it is not a question of quantitative expansion in use but rather a qualitative change in intensity.

The three key examples of nineteenth century (defined as Romantic) American literary incest are, unlike the examples of the eighteenth century (or eighteenth to early nineteenth century) novel of sentiment and seduction discussed above, canonical and well-known. All are variations on the brother/ sister incest theme.

In Herman Melville's Pierre, or The Ambiguities (1852), an attempted restitution for a father's philandering results in brother/sister incest (the adultery/seduction version of the incest theme).³⁶ Other references to the incest theme include: classical gods in an incest dream, the 'Mount of

³⁶ Herman Melville, Pierre, or The Ambiguities, (New York; Russel & Russel, 1963).

Titans' (p. 307); and the play The Cenci, in which a father rapes his daughter (re-written by Shelley and -more recently- by Artaud). It is the rebellion of Melville's hero against society that gives Pierre its 'romantic' flavour; otherwise this form of brother/sister incest would be typical of the eighteenth century sentimental tradition with its moralising use of the themes of seduction and incest.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story 'Alice Doane's Appeal' features brother/sister incest, witchcraft, and murder.³⁷ Clearly transgressions are being accumulated: following C. B. Brown, American Gothic swerves into the supernatural (itself a transgressive mode or genre). This latter element is best exemplified in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, of which his story 'Fall of House of Usher' is a classic example with its symbolic utilisation of brother/sister incest.³⁸ Poe's work is also most suited for many of the incest interpretations that feature narcissism, solipsism, and psychoanalysis. Nabokov will use him as an important reference in Lolita.

In his overview, 'Incest in Romantic American Fiction', James D. Wilson concludes that the general use of the incest theme is to exemplify and explore the dark night of the human soul; an exploration of self as dangerous and leading to the characterisation of American writers as 'dark romantics' who find against Emerson and Rousseau and their emphasis on the natural self as innocent (p. 50).³⁹ This aspect will reoccur in much twentieth century literature; but Faulkner and Fitzgerald will appear to use incest more specifically as a symptom of degeneration (where self-knowledge itself will become a symptom of degeneration; another aspect of narcissism). Wilson also raises the theme of solipsism which he

³⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Alice Doane's Appeal', Violation of Taboo, pp. 87-99.

³⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, Complete Stories and Poems, (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

³⁹ James D. Wilson, 'Incest in Romantic American Fiction', Studies in the Literary Imagination, 7 (1974), pp. 31-50. Donald Webster Cory & R. E. L. Masters (eds.), Violation of Taboo: Incest in the Great Literature of the Past and Present, (New York: The Julian Press, 1963), also find the incest theme to be an exemplum of the mysteries of the human condition.

perceives as forming a tradition running from C. B. Brown, Hawthorn, Poe, and Melville, to Faulkner (broadly, the Gothic line).⁴⁰ He finds solipsism to be a function of the conflicting demands of individualism and the social order, of freedom and civic responsibility (p. 31).

The role of responsibility, or rather, its evasion, in American fiction, is an integral part of the criticism of Leslie Fiedler. In Love and Death in the American Novel, he traces a passage from the courtly love tradition to the 'denial' of mature (married, heterosexual) love in nineteenth and twentieth century American fiction. This tradition, leading from the romance and the medieval, and through their revival in Anglo-european Gothic, ends in an apotheosis of the Gothic as the definitive American prose form.⁴¹ In this way, Fiedler gives prominence to the transgressive themes of homo-eroticism (homo-social relations), necrophilia (Poe, lost object writing), and brother/sister incest (p. 12). Other forms of incest are ignored, or seen as versions of this manifestation, itself the product of a displaced Oedipus complex, unresolved, and therefore producing infantility and denial in sexual relations.

The failure of the American fictionist to deal with adult heterosexual love and his consequent obsession with death, incest and innocent homosexuality are not merely matters of historical interest or historical relevance. (p. 12)

⁴⁰ Again, we find the homogenisation of William Hill Brown with Romantic writers; again I can only suggest that Hill Brown typifies eighteenth century form (epistolary) and content (seduction), especially in the context of the other novels of seduction and sentiment of the period (p. 32).

⁴¹ The American Novel as heir to gothic tradition is therefore heir to a transgressive genre par excellence (defamiliarisation and shock) and to the avant-garde of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There is also the role of the gothic as a democratic force, with its origins in the anti-feudal and Jacoban traditions; a (buried) part of the middle class imaginary. In this way, the Gothic survives as *both* high and low literature simultaneously. See also Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, (New York: Gordian Press, 1978), for an account which stresses 'the significance of the fact that since the earliest days the American Novel, in its most original and characteristic form, has worked out its destiny and defined itself by incorporating an element of romance' (p. viii). The common factor shared with Fiedler's Gothic is anti-realism.

We may read this in two ways: with Fiedler (and after Freud), where the suggestion is that post-Oedipal maturity has not yet been attained in the American Gothic (another manifestation of the cliché of the old and new worlds) and therefore the expectation of reversion, infantilism, (childish stories) and a lack of literary progress. Or, against Fiedler (with Bataille), reading the choice of these themes (death, incest, homosexuality) in the literary process as part of a succession of transgressive moments; each apparently desiring only to go further, to create a new excess of desire, always testing out the limits (of writing, of the human, of the inscription of the vestigial sacred in the secular social text).

A productive criticism of Fiedler would stress that he looses the historically contingent category of transgression to the temptation of a Freudian 'answer'. In this way the need is shown for a sensitive and updated 'transgression' theory open to historical nuances and aware of the implications of a plural readership. The dangers of over-generalisation can be seen in the following remark: 'In each individual there is a fundamental conflict of two principles, called variously earth and heaven, nature and spirit, id and super-ego.... In Western civilisation these principles are typically identified with the mother and father, and any attempt to allegorise them produces, on the literal level, a story of incest' (p. 423). It would appear that, on a symbolic level, there is very little which may not be read as coloured by the incest theme.

Beyond a certain stage it becomes impossible to talk about the effects (or affects) of texts without falling into a formalist ahistoricity; specificity is required. Two alternatives suggest themselves: either a reconstruction (after Hans Robert Jauss) of the transgressive affect generated by a text at its first reception within a given 'horizon of expectations' (whilst remaining wary of homogenising this reception): or the recognition of a debt to the intuited present or recent tradition, in which the critic is reliant upon

(comes after) a range of current responses to a given textual excess (of which some, or one particular response, may be foregrounded to become canonical), this process is itself unfinished and resistant to closure.⁴² The latter may be read as containing the former position which is, in practice, continuously reconstructed in the eternal present.

Referring to the work of C. B. Brown, Fiedler comments on the importance of the place of brother/sister incest in American literature:

Geschwisterinzest is everywhere in our literature... associated with death; only Brockden Brown, however, is willing to portray it as naked aggression. The tender alliance of brother and sister, so beloved of the Romantics, becomes in his works a brutal conflict; his brothers rob, cheat, and harry their sisters. (p. 150)

Whilst the sexual component of incest, as Fiedler uses the term here, is present only in symbolic form in Brown's novel, Edgar Huntly (1831), the intimation of something unusual in the relation of brother and sister is found in collocation with a reference that suggests the legend of Oedipus and its incestuous climax:

How mysterious was the connection between the fate of Wiatte and his sister! By such circuitous and yet infallible means were the prediction of Mrs. Lorimer and the vengeance of her brother accomplished! In how many cases may it be said, as in this, that the prediction was the cause of its own fulfilment...' (p. 79)⁴³

Another novel by C. B. Brown, Wieland (1798), suggests that other Brown of early American fiction, William Hill Brown, is not alone in his claim to temporal priority.⁴⁴ Whilst both Browns have been described as the fathers of the American novel, the claim to paternity has its ironies when applied to C. B. Brown as the latter was known to hold pro-feminist

⁴² See Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, for the concept of a 'horizon of expectations' (pp. 20-36).

⁴³ C. B. Brown, Edgar Huntly, (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831).

⁴⁴ C. B. Brown, Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist, (London: Penguin, 1991).

views and wrote a tract on the condition of women. However, debates about the relative priority of the two Browns can only be superficial as both inherit and continue differing literary traditions. William Hill Brown takes up the eighteenth century seduction plot, a theme nearing the end of its tradition which will shortly turn into the sentimental domestic novel of the nineteenth century. C. B. Brown, on the other hand, introduces the (psychological aspects of the) Gothic genre into American writing, a tradition which flowered in American Romanticism and, according to the American critic Leslie Fiedler, was to provide the basis for a genuinely American literary form.

By contrast, D. Barton Johnson, in 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*', restricting his remarks to sibling incest and utilising his two categories of rebellion and Platonic re-unification, sees the turn of the century as the point of change from nineteenth century rebellion to twentieth century (re)integration (and exclusivity) as in the example of *Ada* (pp. 245-247).⁴⁵ However, we should note the early twentieth century continuation of Romantic themes, even if often only by 'other' that is 'formal' or modernist means. These would include rebellion, the gothic element of shock, and the lasting popularity of sibling incest in the early half of the twentieth century, giving way in the latter half to father/daughter incest and hence to child sexual abuse (which to some extent subsumes the former) in the last third of the century.

There are two problems with Johnson's comments on the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century: they posit a process altogether too homogeneous; and when applied to early twentieth century American literature in particular, his thesis is open to question. It seems more accurate to identify the usual gothic or disintegrative use of the incest theme as typical of this period (Faulkner, Jeffers); this combines

⁴⁵ Johnson, 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*'.

with a function critical of social elites (which often feature father/daughter incest) which will, in turn, become a tradition in American writing (Mailer, Doctorow).

For the most ambitious attempt to date to deal with the incest theme in literature in particular and culture in general, one which takes into account the (increasing) division of written nineteenth century culture into 'high' and 'popular' forms and their development in the twentieth century, we must turn to J. B. Twitchell's book, Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture.⁴⁶ This book has, as its underlying idea, the bio-sociological proposition that the incest theme is the cultural 'expression' of a Westermarckian 'natural aversion' in nature. For Twitchell, the general historical process is one where the incest theme in the popular culture of the nineteenth century is a product of the transmission of the incest taboo or incest warning from a primarily oral tradition (the fairy tale) into print (circa, 1800) and later into film (as the visual medium replaced the written text as key player in the popular culture of the late twentieth century).⁴⁷ The role of horror in all kinds of culture is seen to be crucial in this respect; the representation of the 'natural aversion' warning becomes the partial explanation for the genres of the uncanny. The division into popular and high forms of culture gives continuation in the popular via the genres of the gothic and the sentimental where the incest warning is seen as being hidden in symbolism. In the high, or Romantic art genres, rebellion against society becomes rebellion against the incest taboo itself (Shelley and brother/sister

⁴⁶ Twitchell.

⁴⁷ See also Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment, (New York, Knopf, 1976), for the English ballad tradition and the incest theme. Judith Lewis Herman, Father-Daughter Incest, (London: Harvard University Press, 1981), notes the prevalence of the father/daughter incest fantasy (the daughter is usually aged around 13) of 'The Seductive Daughter' stereotype, in 'men's magazines', *Chic, Hustler, Playboy, Penthouse*). The repetition of this stereotype (somewhat toned down) in the films of the (later) 1970's is discussed in Twitchell, (*Blame it on Rio* , etc. see pp. xii-xiii. p. 55).

incest); with the exception of father/daughter incest, which, as usual, is reserved for the critique of an order which is perceived as fallen.

Twitchell's typology focuses upon incest as rebellion, or sibling incest. The explanation for this delimitation probably lies as much in the conflation of bio-social readings of the incest taboo with theories of 'aversion', which results in the elision of the factor of nurture to parenting, as with the identification of the nineteenth century incest theme with rebellion. Twitchell's typology consists of four parts: (1) consummated brother/sister incest that inspires horror; (2) unconsummated brother/sister incest that ends in pathos; (3) apparent brother/sister incest, which, being disproved, leads to marriage; (4) consummated brother/sister incest without horror (p. 156).

An application of Twitchell's typology to American examples from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would produce the following list (including the first appearance of each type of incest, usually in the genres of sentiment or seduction and its subsequent variation in nineteenth century Romantic art literature). In the first category, that of consummation with horror, there are none until the nineteenth century, the first being Hawthorne's 'Alice Doane's Appeal' (1837), (this relation is present only as symbolism in Poe). In the second category, where unconsummated incest nevertheless leads to pathos (or tragedy), are the first and last exemplars of the American novel of sentiment or seduction; William Hill Brown's first novel, The Power of Sympathy (1789) and Melville's Pierre (1852). In the third category is that of incest threatened, but disproved, is also mainly a product of the sentimental/seduction tradition; Hill Brown's second novel, Ira and Isabella (1807). The fourth and final category, where incest is consummated without horror, is not found until the twentieth century, where it is the central feature of Nabokov's Ada (1969). Possible exceptions to the absence of type four may

be found in the genres of erotica and pornography.⁴⁸ Twitchell notes, of the connection of pornography and erotica to incest, that these three are stylistically close to the Gothic with its emphasis on the role of transgressive shock; and which (in a European context) could and did feature consummation (pp. 175-183). Perhaps the replacement of an 'almost consummated' category for 'consummated' in type one would work better in eighteenth and nineteenth century sentimental American fiction where there seems to have been some reticence in the inclusion of consummated incest and the *frisson* of 'almost' seems to have taken its place.

On the specifically historical role of the incest theme in nineteenth century American culture, whether in the genres of the sentimental and the gothic or in the Romantic classics (Hawthorn, Poe, Melville) Twitchell finds that it is the end of the post revolutionary experiment and its effects (real or imagined) on the family in society which are responsible for the particular type (brother/sister) of incest motif manifested (p. 195; 219). This ties in with his general theory of the incest theme in Anglo-American culture where he suggests the existence of two incest peaks (each affecting both high and low culture): respectively, in and around 1800, and in the

⁴⁸ On the relation of pornography, erotica, and incest see Henry Miles, Forbidden Fruit, which deals with the incest fantasy as a pornographic /erotic genre. Miles notes that incest is third in statistical order of frequency -although I would not care to comment on the reliability of his sample (p. 6). Interestingly he includes a typology of the incest theme in the pornographic genre: (1) as a one-off, or set piece; (2) to show that 'anything goes' (p. 7), to signify that the limit has been reached, or breached... ; (3) as a symbol of general anarchy, of anti-bourgeois norms (*épater le bourgeois*, etc.), of fake revolution or parodic subversion of Victorian household; 'turned [morally] upside-down'. On the vexed topic of the difference between erotica and pornography the author suggests that there has been a loss of (presumably subtle) erotica to a (cruder) porn in the course of the 1960s. Is this difference due to elitism/snobbery or to quantifiable formal features? An approach based upon class difference or reception might suggest that whereas high art nearly always equals erotica, low art usually implies pornography. The elitism of this approach may perhaps be modified with a further subdivision of erotica into high/ low on class lines (based upon implied audience/reader) and a further set of subdivisions based upon personal identity (particularism) and context of consumption. A formal approach might highlight: use of language, structure (plot for erotica: versus repetition for pornography), degree of context, preparation, mediation, etc. Reference to context of consumption and type of readership would also be important.

1970s and beyond - the latter presumably signalling a new crisis for the role and structure of the family (p. 12).⁴⁹ I find this too simple; for example, what of the use of the incest theme in modernism in the literature of the early part of this century (some of which will be discussed below and in the chapters on Fitzgerald and Faulkner) - or is it that this only occurred in the high-art forms of the period?⁵⁰ Twitchell's survey (still the most thorough to date) has several other problems. First, whilst apparently identifying high and low art forms (basically Romantic poetry opposed to sentimental and gothic prose), it misses the distinction between 'art' and 'popular' *prose*. Insofar as his thesis maintains that it is the popular cultural forms which are the bearers of the 'aversion' message and that, in contradistinction, the 'art' or Romantic forms use elite exceptionality as a combination of rebellion and symbolic self-assertion (Shelley, Melville), then the high/low difference in prose may also be of significance. For example, Melville's sentimental novel Pierre was, arguably, not written for, nor did it reach, a mass audience - and the form of brother/sister incest employed does fit the rebellion category. Despite these sub-divisions, generalisations for the whole are still granted priority; this leads to the second problem: the question of Twitchell's theoretical underpinning.

Twitchell suggests passages of incest taboo transmission into cultural forms without relying on any one theory of incest as such. At times he appears uncomfortably poised between the explanations of the biosociological (Westermarck and Fox; which would seem to underlie his

⁴⁹ Note also the flourishing of an 'almost incest' genre in mid-century low fiction (p. 212). In this emphasis on the role of the family and anxiety about its maintenance Twitchell, echoes Dalke, 'Original Vice'. Renvoize, Incest, also notes an, 'outburst of novels and films with incest in background or even foreground' (p. 2). A speculative causality might include: (i) provocation by the opening up of issues of child (sexual) abuse and incest, (ii) a late wave of 'permissiveness' and pro-incest paedophile influence, and (iii) the incest literature of black women writers (the early 'seventies).

⁵⁰ See Santiago, The Children of Oedipus, for another example of the theory of the renaissance of incest (and of the Oedipus myth) in the nineteenth century. Whilst Twitchell also has the 'peak' at the turn of century, 1800, he does note that this is not only as a feature of Romantic (high) culture.

idea of culture as transmitter of taboo, presumably from some sort of bio-memory) and the constructivist theories of (Anglo-American) feminism (Judith Herman) and French structuralism (Lévi-Strauss) which highlight the cultural and contingent aspects of gender, generation, and power (p. 18). Can we speak of a commensurability of models? I think not: only with a 'weak', or culturalist version, of the 'aversion' theory, such as we have seen in the work of Arens and Schneider, can a model that accommodates power relations be constructed.

Despite reference to the work of Judith Herman, Twitchell's ultimate reliance on an unmediated form of the 'aversion' theory implies a homogenisation of causality which contradicts the places where he allows for varied uses of the incest theme in different genres, periods, and by different social groups. Twitchell must regard such variety as secondary to the central model and task of 'aversion'; whereas an examination of the incest theme in its intertextual relations would show it as a staple of literary and folk traditions, which, when put to a closer genealogical examination, was put to differing uses or interpretations by differing interests in differing contexts. A combination of thematic and contextualising approaches would render superfluous any explanation based upon a universalising, 'deep structure'.

Two literary examples will set the scene for the chapters to follow: a short comment on a novel by Allen Tate will introduce the combination of incest and miscegenation; two poems by Robinson Jeffers will introduce the role of an aesthetic of transgression where incest will collocate with child sexual abuse.

Allen Tate's novel, The Fathers (1938), is told as a passage through a sequence of ill-lit rooms and dark nights which serve to accentuate the text's claustrophobic feel and signal to the reader its place in the Southern

Gothic tradition. The novel climaxes with the revelation of the threat of incest (brother/sister) and miscegenation in combination. The role of incest in this narrative appears primarily to be to add the spice of transgression to the novel's climax. It also points up a moral: the fact that the fruit of miscegenation may sow the seeds of future incest becomes a critique of miscegenation in its *ante-bellum* form of the sexual use of slaves by their owners. The novel clearly indicates that the form of the incest, brother/sister, if it had happened, would have been non-consensual. Yet, as we have seen, the role played by the brother/sister incest theme in, not least, the gothic literary tradition, usually implies consent, especially where the relationship consists of a step-relation. A consensual brother/sister incest, which was also 'miscegenation', would have been an interesting variation on this theme: but it would appear that the 'power of sympathy' does not cross the race divide - the racism of the time of writing would have fore-closed on a consensual incest across race boundaries where the brother was 'black'. If for William Faulkner the use of incest as part of a transgressive rhetoric is sutured inseparably into his literary thematics and enacted performatively in the very form and style of his writings, then for Tate it remains on the level of an adjunct which facilitates a plot sequence, acquiring for the text an extra frisson, whilst never attaining the status of the indispensable. Nevertheless, Tate's text begins a twentieth century tradition in which matters of race and sex are combined with the incest theme as part of a polemical engagement in given social problems (the inheritance of a difficult past and its relation to current struggles as represented in the work of Faulkner, Ellison, Walker, and Morrison).

The use of the incest theme in its transgressive aspect, mined for every drop of potential shock value, is exemplified in the poetry of Robinson

Jeffers. 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy' and 'Tamar' (1925) both depend upon a systematic exploitation of the incest theme to achieve their dramatic effects. A transgressive aesthetic shocks its readership whilst simultaneously entertaining it with a spectacle from the safe distance of representation. Jeffers' conservative use of form (a pre-modernist continuation of the lyric and narrative) paradoxically allows his poetry to be driven to the peak of Gothic horror and Romantic pessimism.

'The Tower Beyond Tragedy', from the volume Tamar and other Poems, utilises three heterosexual forms of the incest relation (I suspect that the usage of homosexual forms, same sex parent/child and sibling/sibling relations, in this period, would have simply been *too* transgressive).⁵¹ The father/daughter variant appears when we learn that Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover, is the son of his father's daughter (p. 48). The mother/son combination only appears in metaphorical form: when Orestes says, 'Dip my wand into my fountain', he is speaking of stabbing his mother, the intransitive form figures self-reference as incestuous and transgressive (p. 67). The murder of the mother is represented as incestuous, the penetration of her body (*his* fountain, the source of his life) by a weapon is likened to sexual penetration. Finally, the brother/sister incest relation is referred to when Electra suggests that she and Orestes should jointly govern, as 'royalty and incest' (p. 78).⁵² Incest, allied to death and dismemberment, constitutes the field of metaphor of this poem. We might note that, as with Tate, there is an evil (or irrational;

⁵¹ Robinson Jeffers, 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy', in Tamar and other Poems, (New York : Random House, 1953), pp. 23-83. The absent representation of homosexual forms of incest raises the question of whether literary and other representational or cultural forms of transgression exist on an unstable and historically contingent border between the sayable and the unsayable; the unsayable as *said*.

⁵² See also Eugene O' Neill, Mourning Becomes Electra, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), first published in 1932, for an up-dated version of the Orestia. Incest is used as an allusion rather than a theme and its melancholic effect may be contrasted with the hysteric tone which results from Jeffers' use of incest. The incest theme is also utilised in another O'Neill play: 'Desire under the Elms' (1925), in Nine Plays, (New York: Random House, 1952); another example of the 'step-relation' (the continuation of a key Romantic theme) and incest.

that is, mad) woman at the centre, Clytemnestra, understudied by her daughter who herself becomes fascinated by the combination of power and the breaking of the incest taboo. Women, for male writers of this place and period, appear only to have a sanctified place in a transgressive textual economy if they are passive; the temptation to activity renders them evil or mad.

'Tamar', collected in Tamar and other Poems, doubles brother/sister incest and then adds on the father/daughter variant for good measure (p. 108-180). Tamar and her brother embark upon an incestuous affair; the reader then learns that their father and *his* sister had also been involved in an incestuous relationship. The family history appears bound by repetition. The text's ambiguities hint at the possibility that this sister may also have been Tamar's mother; this would intensify the fate as repetition theme and suggest the additional theme of the genetically corrupt blood-line (p. 123). Tamar proceeds to seduce her neighbour and her father (p. 160). At the poem's climax Tamar is pleased to announce that she will have 'my three lovers under one roof', when her neighbour and suitor, has arrived to join her father and her brother (p. 166). As in the 'The Tower beyond Tragedy', all the incest options available (homosexual variants apart) are utilised.

The references to the original brother/sister incest, a 'youth botched with incest', of David (Tamar's father) with his sister the long dead Helen, contains several ambiguities (p. 123). Is she really dead? As Aunt Stella speaks with her voice, might she not be Helen - gone mad? (the names share a phonic resemblance). Stella's appeal to David during the play's tragic climax appears to be a confession of her true identity:

Meanwhile the Helen
That spoke out of the lungs and ran in the nerves
Of old Aunt Stella caught the old man David Cauldwell
By the loose flapping sleeve and the lean arm,
Saying in a clotted amorous voice, 'Come, David,

My brother, my lover....
 ...beautiful as when we dared
 Desperate pleasure, naked, ages ago,
 In the room and by the sea.' (p.176)

The ambiguities continue when Aunt Jinney has a symbolic, clairvoyant, and self-fulfilling vision of the coming conflagration in which a young girl dances for an old man, both being naked and surrounded by fire, perhaps a moral vision depicting the incestuous in hell (p. 178). This purgative vision may also include the return of a repressed memory which hints that she may have been sexually abused by her father as a young girl or child. The phrase 'naked under the armpits', could connote lack of age and the lines, 'and thinking "Father"/ She dropped herself into the arms of the fire... and felt a nuptial joy', could connote an ecstatic re-enactment of the incestuous consummation or a purified reunion (p. 178). There is also a faint possibility that she might be Tamar's mother, and thus perhaps even Helen herself. Another possibility is that Helen haunts the text's other female characters (as textual repetition or variation): Tamar becomes Helen; the others either speak like her or re-live aspects of her life. The possibility that Aunt Jinney was involved in an incestuous relation with her father would create a parallel with the incest of Tamar and her father, the one shadowing the other in the same way that the relation of David and his sister shadows that of Tamar and her brother. In this way the current tragedy becomes a repetition whose recurrence can only be stopped by the destruction of the entire family. The pattern of double repetition would suggest that the family was, in the current social work classification, an 'inter-generational abuse family', where the older generation initiate the younger in perpetuity. However, in 'Tamar' it is the younger generation that initiates the cycle in a kind of unconscious re-enactment of the

behaviour of the previous generation. In particular it is Tamar who is the source of the current cycle of repetition.

Tamar's active role in the unfolding of the story's transgressions raises the question of the relationship of sexual difference to a textual ethical economy. This can also be seen in the texts of Tate and Jeffers in the relationship of woman and evil (the role of Clytemnestra in 'The Tower Beyond Tragedy', and Susan as source of tragedy in The Fathers). Two options open up: the first would read the active female as the source of (textual) evil, echoing the temptation of Eve by the serpent, and her temptation, in turn, of Adam; listening to evil leads to Ev(e's) ill. The second option would read the female and her sexuality, as represented in these texts, as naturally active, with the choice of object refusing the limits of traditional boundaries, or being corrupted by the environment into perverse configurations. In the negative form, Tamar would be the equivalent of the phallic woman of modernist writing: in a positive appropriation she would become a version of the female as active and sexually inclusive; that such a manifestation should appear as terrifying would fit the view that such an inversion would cause consternation to a libidinal economy constituted upon sexual difference as a hierarchy where the female takes the negative tag.⁵³ Both Tate and Jeffers follow the early twentieth century aesthetic tendency which finds that the combination of the feminine and power may only produce monsters.

The story reaches resolution when Tamar provokes a fight in which all, herself, her entire family, and her lover, die in the ensuing fire. Tamar thus acts as the angel of justice, as the cleanser of sin and transgression as well as the origin of pollution. In this way she is doubly active, as the

⁵³ See also Jacqueline Rose, The Haunting of Sylvia Plath, (London: Virago, 1991), p. 151, where the repression of the active in the feminine, its resultant demonification, and its return (in fantasy, poetry, and culture) as a source of terror is discussed with relation to Robert Graves' The White Goddess, (London: Faber, 1961).

demonic source of transgression, and as the executioner of the Law. Tamar provides us with yet another example of that, only apparently, contradictory form of complicity: it may be the most fervent transgressor who most believes in (whose desire is most in debt to) the munificence of the Law. On a less referential, more immediate textual level, the same element (Tamar) takes both valencies (the opposing roles of criminal and judge) in the text's ethical economy producing an effect of unity and closure (a just ending).

Jeffers augments further the transgressive power of his text by including an undisguised child-abuse reference (p. 170). As there is no intrinsic need for this episode to further the development of the plot: we may conceive of this episode either as a form of repetition or a *mise en abyme*, that is, in a metaphorical relation to the text as a whole. A symbolic comparison has been made the grounds of which appear to be a tabooed form of sexuality (child abuse), an act of revenge, and a purifying immolation. A visitor to a nearby household gets drunk and is supposed to (this is not made clear) have 'abused /Nine year old Mary' (p. 170). He is then castrated and his body burnt. The relation of *mise en abyme* to the main plot is reinforced by the purifying use of fire; all sexual transgression is punishable by immolation. Tamar rides by, sees the burning and, hearing the child cry, she takes her away with her (the child's fate remains unknown) (p. 171). The linkage of child sexual abuse to incest is made in three ways: by the repetition of a sexual transgression and its punishment (metaphor); by mention within the same text (synecdoche); and by linking Tamar to the event by her physical proximity to corpse and child, the two actants of the supposed abuse (metonymy). These latter two metonymies in turn twin incest and child sexual abuse together into a further metonymy (as elements of the same set) or hints at their similarity (through shared elements, a metaphoric relation). The simplest form of these relations

would posit the pairing of two transgressive intensities, each heightening the effect of the other. However, the very possibility of comparison would suggest a potential for fusion, in other words, if incest and child sexual abuse do not overlap in this text, the use of this metaphorical comparison suggests a realm of greater, thus unmentionable, transgression elsewhere (incestuous child sexual abuse). For this particular turn of the transgressive screw we must read through Fitzgerald and Faulkner, to Mailer and Baldwin, and beyond, to the literature of the late twentieth century. Robinson Jeffers may not use incestuous child sexual abuse as part of his image repertoire; but his textual rhetoric already points in this direction.

Chapter 2: Fitzgerald's Metaphors of Desire: The Figure of Childhood

Young enough. Beautiful child.

(The Beautiful and Damned, p. 44)

When a child can disturb a middle-aged
gent - things get difficult.

(Tender is the Night, p. 106)

'Look at all the millions of dollars that are
being spent by old bags trying to make
themselves look young - why should I feel
like a pervert for going for someone who is
really young.'

(Child sexual abuser cited in,
Interrogating Incest, p. 78)

Two novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald use images of childhood as an integral part of their textual rhetoric. The Beautiful and Damned uses metaphorical childhood as an index of desirability whilst observing the proprieties of the taboos on incest and paedophilia - taboos which the comparison breaks by implication. Tender is the Night, I will argue, follows the logic of this rhetoric to its limit and employs the breaking of both taboos.

This is not to say, however, that this reading will limit itself to what is immanent 'in' the text; both context of writing (conditions of production and first reception) and pretext (intertextual inheritance), whether literary, social, or historical, suggest that a larger frame of reference would make connections between the textual economies employed in these particular texts and cultural factors in general.¹ Historically, the early twentieth

¹ A similar move, but from author to social and ideological context (rather than text to extra-discursive context), is made in Still & Worton, Textuality and sexuality: 'The

century inherited a tradition which counterposed extensive child prostitution with the cult of the little girl as emblem of natural purity and which combined campaigns against children's sexuality (masturbation) with the ideal of childhood innocence. The child was defined as immature and 'natural' (a figure also applied to women, non-whites, and the those of the lower social strata) yet was regarded as possessing a passive propensity for corruption. It is these factors and their influence or continuation into the culture of the later twentieth century that leads to what many feminist commentators have called a 'paedophile culture'.² It is in the present context of these prior contexts and cultural pretexts that this rereading of the texts of F. Scott Fitzgerald will take place.

The Beautiful and Damned; the rhetoric of comparison.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's second novel, The Beautiful and Damned (1922), tells the story of a young couple who meet, marry, and make merry, whilst sliding towards moral, emotional and financial disaster. An unlikely twist redeems them economically if not ethically. It was not well-received by the critics.

The Beautiful and Damned employs childhood as a source of rhetorical comparison - foreshadowing the use of this technique in Tender is the

importance of the aural, indeed the sensual (and therefore the subjective), in the writing/creative process cannot be ignored. Yet we must remember that every subjectivity is grounded in and founded by some form of subscription to, and engagement with, a prevailing collectivity and a contingent ideology' (p. 3). The authors note that the extra-discursive becomes treated as 'text' in the process of 'textuality', or the work of realising or interpreting a given text. I would add that it is the 'work' (or choice) of the reader that creates the 'author'; in the first instance from the text (the implied author), in the second from historical or biographical material (the 'actual author').

² In this context Bell, Interrogating Incest, cites the work of Rush, MacKinnon, and Driver (p. 78). Whilst La Fontaine, Child Sexual Abuse, cites Rosalind Coward and J. Ennew, (p. 202). Examples of this 'culture' might include elements of 1970's film, as exemplified by Joseph Losey, 'Secret Ceremony' (1968), and discussed in detail in Twitchell, Forbidden Partners.

Night.³ Unlike the later novel, in which the tropological use of childhood has spread itself over nearly all of the text's characters and is implicated in the rest of the text by metonymy, The Beautiful and Damned concentrates this figure on the character of Gloria Gilbert, the novel's heroine.⁴ Here, as in the examples that follow, 'Gloria' is ascribed predicates in a process of comparison which relies upon the twin series of age and desirability being placed together so that maximum desirability and minimum age will coincide. In The Beautiful and Damned, this machine for generating metaphors refuses to make certain comparisons: there tends to be an elision of the age groups covered by the taboo that forbids sexual practice with those below a given age of consent, a certain level of maturity (mental age), and the pre-pubescent. The metaphor (the more childlike = the more desirable) is allowed but only if it is used to refer to adult relations. It is this elision that, I hope to show, is no longer maintained in Tender is the Night.⁵

Here are three examples of this kind of comparison from The Beautiful and Damned: "'She seemed - well, somehow the youngest person there.'" She was," "Young enough. Beautiful child" And, "She was tremendously

³ Other examples of the use of childhood in Fitzgerald, whether on the level of theme, or privileged comparative include: 'Babylon Revisited' and 'The Baby Party', in The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London Penguin, 1986), pp. 205-223; 413-423.

⁴ The context of this first comparison is suggestive: Gloria is described by Maury (behind whom may be discerned the sequence, narrator, implied author, actual author), to Anthony, (Gloria's prospective husband), the description is handed from man to man, from text to (implied male) reader in the circulation (or gift) of a female that will pre-figure much of the relation between genders in the texts under discussion. For the issues involved in the use of the terms 'implied author' and 'implied reader', and the distinction of these from the actual author and reader see Chatman, Story and Discourse, pp. 147-151. For my purposes the difference between 'implied' and 'actual' is taken to be that between a 'competent' or 'ideal' reader as one who responds to cues in the text as inscribed by an 'implied' author'. All of which is subject to change by a shift in the frame of reference by the actual reader, the motivation of which might include a knowledge of the conditions of writing and first reception of the text, including the cultural and historical background of the actual author. A matching of textual detail to historical (biographical) fact would permit the move from the implied to a reconstructed 'actual author'.

⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Beautiful and Damned, (London: Penguin, 1966). Gloria has already been described, but not focalised, in the words of the title of Part Two, Book One as 'a Siren', and as having 'a very young soul', a binarisation which parallels that of Whore/Madonna and guilt/innocence, in its contrast of temptress and child (p. 37).

alive. She was eating gum-drops." (p. 44). The bathetic ending of the final example almost reads as a parody of the trope employed. A little later the reader is informed that 'her hands... were small as a child's hands should be' (p. 55). This is followed by the first example where the desire that motivates the comparison is shown to be explicitly sexual: 'Anthony put his arm around the girl, drew her over to him, and kissed her damp, childish mouth' (p. 87).

The first meeting of Anthony and Gloria, narrated from Anthony's viewpoint, describes Gloria thus: 'She talked always about herself as a very charming child might talk' (p. 53). If a comparison is textually persistent, then the reader is permitted to read with suspicion previously 'innocent' terms like 'young' and 'girl'. The latter, for example, is used in contexts where 'young woman' would be more semantically accurate; there is no parallel use of 'boy', instead the chronologically precise 'young man' is employed. Let us take the sentence that I have quoted from as a whole: 'She talked always about herself as a very charming child might talk, and her comments on her tastes and distastes were unaffected and spontaneous.' In a word: natural. Her responses are 'unaffected and spontaneous' as compared to the adult world of civilised affectation and mediation. The child is opposed to the adult as authentic nature is opposed to artificial culture.

The metaphor also slides metonymically into the character's environment; the name of the restaurant Anthony retreats to to sit in after his argument with Gloria is CHILD'S, spelt backwards in the text indicating Anthony's vision from within (p. 100). We may infer that the genitive force carried in the name of the restaurant applies, either as a denotative or as an interrogative, to Anthony himself: does he or does he not belong to the (Gloria) child? The synecdoche is refigured in terms of hierarchy: who is the whole and who is the part? Perhaps it is as a

response to this emasculating question that Anthony feels the need to assert 'himself as her master' (p. 164).

Gloria is shown to be like a child whether she is active or passive: her insistence is depicted as a tantrum; her pacification places her in a subordinate position. She goes from being childish as a part of being 'selfish', a product of irrational behaviour, to being child-like as a result of being mastered, of behaving obediently (after assault and threat of violence); thus, she is twice, inevitably, a child. She has previously been described as one who requires someone, 'to baby her whims and indulge her unreason' (p. 100). In this way the irrational is connected to the childish and the childish to the selfish. When Anthony is shown to think, 'that Gloria was being selfish, that she was always being selfish and would continue to be unless here and now he asserted himself as her master' (p. 164), the oppositions unselfish/selfish, rational/irrational, mature /immature (or, simply adult/child), and male/female line up together to justify his actions. Defined as child, whether as object of desire (sex object), as active (tantrum, selfishness), or passive (obedient), Gloria is in a no-win situation. The definition, or position, of child as inferior, appears to have *a priori* status. The trope, apparently, is prior to predicate or causality. The ground for comparison is originary, and thus prior to interrogation. Such an arrangement points towards an (irrecoverable) 'origin'; that is, it could be argued to express a viewpoint outside of the text (trace of the culture of origin).

This negative use of the 'child' metaphor complements and completes the tropological mapping of the text's field of reference begun by the positive use of 'childlike' as an attribute of Gloria. In this way a modernist manifestation of the nineteenth century child cult is reversed in order to continue the mapping out of the semantic and ethical field of the text into an economy of means where 'childhood' provides both positive and

negative terms. Indeed, 'childhood' has become the privileged means of comparison used even in passing to provide similes for other attributes such as those of mood; Gloria is described as being as 'lonesome as a forgotten child' (p. 293).

The questions, 'who speaks, 'who sees', and therefore who motivates the text's tropological economy may begin to be answered by noting the relation of focalisation to narration, of character to implied author and hence to implied or ideal reader. The following example is focalised by Anthony, however, as the third person centre of consciousness, his (implied) thoughts are attributable to the narrator, also the voice of the implied author:

Her face was as untroubled as a little girl's, and the bundle that she pressed lightly to her bosom was a child's doll, a profound and infinitely healing balm to her disturbed and childish heart. (p. 187)

All terms of comparison, including those for a metonymic possession (the doll) draw upon one source and indicate one viewpoint.

An example of focalisation of children from Gloria's viewpoint also utilises another of the text's tropological terms of reference 'Italian'. Gloria is 'excited by the extraordinary beauty of some Italian children' (p. 334). The use of the word 'excited' is notable: read as attributed to a female subject it appears innocent, maternal, asexual; yet if the subject were sexed as male some doubt might arise as to the precise connotations involved. If this focalisation seems like an exception, rather than an addition, to this list of examples, we must remember that the real author is male and that the implied author has been very close to focalising from Anthony's viewpoint, that this reflects upon the context of the other childhood references, and that lastly we have an adult commenting upon an Italian *child* (the asexuality of the female gaze is taken for granted). This

particular rhetorical combination of ethnicity and age will gather connotations as we examine Fitzgerald's later work which will in turn find resonance within other literary texts.

Matters 'Italian' reappear on page 359. This time it is the country itself that is the subject of fantasy, becoming for Anthony the place of utopian escape - the place of the other : 'dark women and ragged beggars'. In this short phrase are found many of the excluded or lower terms of traditional hierarchies: 'non-whites', women and the vagrant poor. Children, irrational inferiors as compared to reasoning adults, or (in another form of condescending fantasy) natural innocents to knowing adult civilisation, are mentioned elsewhere. This paragraph finishes on repeated references to Italian women, to youth, to money and to sex (a full, 'hung heavy', purse is linked to fulfilled sexual pleasure).⁶ 'Italian' has become non-white (non-Wasp) as compared to 'American' (Wasp) in the terms of the text's assumptions about the presuppositions of its implied reader. Catholic Italy plays the role of a hot, lazy, and erotic South to the Protestant North's cold and thrifty rationality. The American version of this long-standing trope replaces the European 'Italian' with the term 'black' (also used of American Latins) in its racial aspect, and with the American South in its geographical aspect. A similar binary distribution of attributes applies; it is their supposed proximity to 'nature' that renders all those of the (geographically and ethically) lower term of this binary opposition as childlike. The rhetorical uses of 'Italian' will be referred to again later in this chapter.

⁶ The elided ground of the comparison may be read as phallic or more generally genital. See Still & Worton, *Textuality and sexuality*, for an account that suggests 'testicular' as an alternative to 'phallic' modes of masculine self-identification (p. 43). The metaphor is Anthony's and it reveals the role of economic plenitude as a prerequisite to sexual plenitude and of the latter in turn to youth of his own psychic economy (which, I would suggest is also that of the text).

There have been no studies of Fitzgerald's use of the child metaphor in his works as a whole, nor in The Beautiful and Damned in particular.⁷ General, usually older approaches stress immaturity, whilst more recent approaches influenced by feminist criticism suggest that the comparison of childhood and desirability may be part of a traditional, or, to be more historically specific, modernist, misogyny or the desire for subordinate women, this latter being read as both critique (of women) and as (masculinist) desire. Criticism dating from the time of publication to the late 'sixties usually argues that the themes of The Beautiful and Damned are those of wasted youth, immaturity, and the meaninglessness of life (the underside of the roaring 'twenties). Richard D. Lehan, in F. Scott Fitzgerald: and the Craft of Fiction, may speak for the older generation of critics when he maintains that, 'The Beautiful and Damned is a story about wasted youth.'⁸ Sergio Perosa states that, 'the theme of The Beautiful and Damned ... is the dissipation and deterioration of the inner self,' disagreeing with Edmund Wilson's existentialist appraisal, 'a distressing tragedy which should be, also, one hundred percent meaningless.'⁹ Wilson himself quotes Mencken's existentially motivated remark, 'the meaninglessness of life,' to show the influence of the First World War and the years that followed, on the writing of the book, and suggests that this negative tone be read as a critique of the period and its institutions.¹⁰ Criticism that focuses upon maturity, or its lack, will be dealt with after the discussion of Tender is the Night that follows as I feel

⁷ Milton R. Stern, The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 'the analogy with a spoiled baby must be noted' and 'Anthony caters to his babywife' (p. 140; 141). This may be taken as a comment on maturity rather than objectification.

⁸ Richard D. Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald: and the Craft of Fiction, (London: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 89.

⁹ Sergio Perosa, The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965 (p. 48; 57).

¹⁰ Edmund Wilson, 'F. Scott Fitzgerald', in F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays, (ed.) Arthur Mizener, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 80-85 (p. 83).

that the contrast between this particular reading and my own will be brought out more forcefully in that context.

More recently Sarah Beebe Fryer has given Fitzgerald a feminist reading which not only brings out the position of woman as victim of masculinist prejudice but also, in a twist that inverts the modernist stereotype of the upstart, or castrating, woman, gives Fitzgerald's women a positive interpretation that allows them a self-enabling role. It is in this way that Fryer's reading of The Beautiful and Damned not only points out the limited role (the subordinate position) available to Gloria, but the fact that she does in fact turn out to be the stronger character:

Ironically, at the close of Fitzgerald's first novel about marriage, the wife - who has long struggled with the culturally-induced belief that she needs to be taken care of by a man - winds up as a kind of nursemaid to her very seriously unbalanced husband.¹¹

However, another reading might find that she nevertheless ends up playing the traditional maternal role by looking after an invalid; in other words it is in the loss of masculinity that the irony resides.

Here, also, no mention is made of the usage of childhood. Only in her chapter on Tender is the Night, does Fryer comment on this topic. It is to this novel, then, where this metaphor, the comparison of childhood and desirability, is carried to its logical conclusion, that we must now turn.

Tender is the Night; the blind-spot of a metaphor.

Tender is the Night also tells the story of a couple; unlike The Beautiful and Damned, however, the novel's time occupies the duration of their relationship. They meet in a private mental clinic in Switzerland: he is a

¹¹ Sarah Beebe Fryer, Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change, (London: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 41.

rising star in the psychiatric firmament, an American studying in Europe; she a patient, daughter of a rich Chicago businessman. They marry and move to the French Riviera, later buying into the clinic where she was once a patient. Nicole's cure coincides with Dick's slide into alcoholism and infidelity. He ends up a small town doctor in America. She marries a mercenary.

As with The Beautiful and Damned the 'romance' form (the modern genre of sentiment) suggests that gender relations are to be a key topic: the madness theme and the collapse of the central relationship suggests that it is the darker side of human relations that may be of central concern. Again, a feminist reading would also appear apposite, as this novel's treatment of the feminine would appear to parallel much in American, or generally, modernist, literature of the period where assertive, independent, or 'phallic' females are diagnosed as both a cause of the decline of civilisation and masculinity, and its most prominent symptom. This use of the feminine as the key metaphor for decadence is succinctly expressed in Ezra Pound's famous line from Hugh Selwyn Mauberly: 'an old bitch gone in the teeth/A botched civilisation'. I will show how the textual tropes employed for the purposes of comparison, which are also used to give textual coherence, will also result in a reading of Tender is the Night in which the issue of child sexual abuse plays a key interpretative role.

I will begin by discussing the approach of the critics who have dealt with the 'incest theme' in F. Scott Fitzgerald and particularly with Tender is the Night.

M. J. Bruccoli's Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, has a chapter dealing with the original reception of the novel

which records no mention of child sexual abuse or related themes.¹² However the role of the incest theme has been noted. D. S. Savage comments that, 'the incest motive is in fact central to all of Fitzgerald's novels,' whilst Maxwell Geismar notes that, 'Fitzgerald's work, like Poe's, is coloured by the images of incest.'¹³ Nowhere is there any connection made between incest and child sexual abuse and the incidence of such practices in society; nor indeed is Nicole's experience related to anything other than the larger theme of immature love or (much the same thing) to the role of fantasy as self-delusion.¹⁴ This is the traditional way of dealing with this subject matter and does not deviate from what has perhaps become *the* canonical reading of the novel; that of a parable of immature emotional relations resulting from inadequate personalities.¹⁵ Insofar as any social element is allowed mention, it is that of Dick's decline as a metaphor for the decline or decadence of the 'twenties, of America as such, or of the American male in particular.¹⁶ In The Illusions

¹² M. J. Bruccoli, Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981) pp. 367-375.

¹³ M. J. Bruccoli, '*Tender is the Night* - Reception and Reputation', in Profile of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (ed.) Matthew J. Bruccoli, (Columbia, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 100.

¹⁴ John F. Callahan, The Illusions of a Nation: Myth and History in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London: University of Illinois Press, 1972), suggests that, 'Dick's fantasies of sexuality utterly protect and prevent him from any sensuous contact. His intelligence feeds only on his own shrinking carcass' (p. 196).

¹⁵ Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, 'Sensuality as Key to Characterization in *Tender is the Night*', English Studies in Canada, 9. 4 (December 1983), pp. 452-467, begins her article: 'Lionel Trilling has remarked that Fitzgerald's description of love in the Jazz Age is "innocent of mere 'sex'," charged as it is with much sentiment. Much to the contrary, sex, eroticism, and sensuality are found everywhere in the novel' (p. 452). Yet her focus on sexuality and character works by ignoring the connection of sexuality to the use of the childhood metaphor in the novel. Incest, the abuse of Nicole and the murdered Italian child, are mentioned only in passing to support the theme of Dick's personal inadequacy which will lead to his mental collapse.

¹⁶ For a more recent version of such a reading see Robert Wexelblatt, 'F. Scott Fitzgerald and D. H. Lawrence: Bicycles and Incest', American Literature, 59. 3 (October 1987), pp. 378-388. This article begins: 'Either the incest is rather casually discussed as a central, though by no means essential, symbol of the general corruption, or it is attacked as absurd and arbitrary, since parent-child incest has, up until recently, been presumed by psychologists to be a rare phenomenon' (p. 383). It continues: 'to cap the matter, there are the just barely sketched relations between Dick and his own children. These relations are characterized by a questionableness which Fitzgerald suggests very delicately' (p. 384). The article adds examples, such as the one where 'Dick jokes with Lanier about a fanciful French law that

of a Nation, John F. Callahan notes that of Fitzgerald's heros: 'neither individual can unite his erotic-imaginative impulses to the painful, practical realities of a material and temporal framework' (p. 23). Of Tender is the Night he remarks:

Here again, now in Diver's round complexity, stands Fitzgerald's theme: the failure of the American idealist either to integrate himself with or change the course of American history. (p. 24)

Robert Stanton's article ' "Daddy's Girl" Symbol & Theme', discusses the 'incest theme' and the many references to childhood in the text.¹⁷ However his interpretation is finally the traditional one mentioned above:

The incest motifs may be fully accounted for by Tender is the Night itself. Most of them grow logically out of Dick's relationships to Nicole.... Ironically, although Dick's fascination with immaturity gives him an opportunity to be both lover and father, it also reveals his own fundamental immaturity. (p. 159)

The extension of the critique of immaturity, as well as the use of the comparison with childhood, to social themes can be seen in Fitzgerald's

allows a parent to "divorce" a child' (p. 385); but does not develop this line of investigation, preferring instead to draw parallels between Fitzgerald and D. H. Lawrence and emphasising the modernist theme of gender inversion, of passive men and active women, of the lack of ambition and creativity of modern man in thrall to the feminine.

In another recent reading, Richard Godden, 'Money makes Manners make Man make Woman: *Tender is the Night*, A Familiar Romance?', Literature and History, 12. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 16-37, maintains a virtuoso linkage between subjectivity, sex, the social and the economic, in what is ultimately an economistic reading reducing incest to a symptom of the changes in the American capitalism of the 'twenties from accumulation to reproduction. Godden suggests that, 'incest embodies accumulation; read as a projection having a different economic emphasis, Warren's act and Dick's complicity become expressions of accumulations new problematic, the problematic of self-transgression - whereby energy (in this case sexual) needs to try untried combinations and to multiply selves as a multiplication of markets' (p. 31). Yet again incest can only be interpreted if it is to be a metaphor for something else. Finally this article too reverts to the traditional theme of Dick's decline: 'Dick's dive derives from a major shift within the history of capital - a shift that generated Fitzgerald's pivotal preoccupation with incest as a narrative source' (p. 34).

¹⁷ Robert Stanton, ' "Daddy's Girl" Symbol & Theme', in Tender is the Night : Essays in Criticism, (ed.) Marvin J. La Hood, (London: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 156-165.

own comments on the Jazz Age as 'a children's party taken over by their elders' (p. 161).

Much more indicative of the role of a horizon in limiting interpretation is John B. Chambers' recently published book, The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1989), which, written several years after the re-emergence of incest as a public problem, can mention father/daughter relations as a model for many of the human relations in the text, has thirteen references to Freud, and which nevertheless contains not one single mention of child sexual abuse.¹⁸

Freud would have been an important part of the intellectual horizon of Fitzgerald's time and the author would certainly have read and discussed the nature of Freud's discoveries.¹⁹ In his linking together of Nicole's rape and her illness Fitzgerald appears to show that he prefers the Freud of the 'seduction theory' to that of the later theory of the 'Oedipus Complex'.²⁰ Whilst it is not my intention to reveal what Fitzgerald 'really thought' and to practise a certain kind of reductive autobiographical criticism, or retro-active clairvoyance, it is interesting to note that two facts would appear to support the argument that Fitzgerald may have had

¹⁸ John B. Chambers, The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald. (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 172.

¹⁹ T. Buttite, The Lost Summer: A Personal Memoir of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London: Robson Books, 1987), indicates that Fitzgerald knew Freud's ideas well (p. 125). Yet neither here nor elsewhere do critics appear to have made any reference to Freud's 'seduction theory', which poses the seduction of a child by an adult as the cause of hysteria - no-one seems to have found it pertinent to look for the connection. Buttite also makes the following strange and enigmatic remark: 'He would speak of his duty to Zelda and his daughter.... If he felt the sudden urge for sex, he often found *them* ready to oblige' (p. 132, my emphasis.)

²⁰ Fryer, suggests that the biographical element here may not be Fitzgerald's, but that of his wife, Zelda (p. 72). That Fitzgerald may have drawn not only on his wife's mental illness for material for his novel but also upon her possible abuse as a child: '...given the nature of the incest taboo, the cloak of secrecy that generally surrounds cases of incest, the fact that incest memories are often repressed, and the widespread tendency - even among mental health care professionals - to dismiss reports of incestuous abuse as "fantasies," it seems somewhat naive for so educated a group of biographers to suggest - with apparent conviction - that any woman, particularly a woman with a deeply troubled psyche like Zelda Fitzgerald's - could not possibly have been an incest victim.' Fryer also suggests that Nicole's mental illness in many ways 'reads like a case study of a hysteric (not a schizophrenic) whose illness was precipitated by incest.' For contrast, see Zelda Fitzgerald, Save me the Waltz, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968).

a *semi-conscious* or intuitive suspicion of the phenomena with which his text seems so obsessed.²¹ This is not to suggest that the author consciously knew of the incidence of child sexual abuse; but that the combination of the rise of Freudianism in the intellectual public sphere and private introspection on the nature of sexuality and human relationships together with the habitual cultural and linguistic use of the child image and child metaphor could have caused him to stumble towards an unconscious, or semi-conscious, literary, posing of what we, in retrospect, would identify as a pressing social problem (p. 63-64).²² If the posing of the question in terms of child sexual abuse was, at this time, *unthinkable*, then the question, or at least something resembling it, could have only surfaced as a form of *literary sublimation*; aestheticisation as the condition of enunciation would not be anything new in the history of literature - the history of transgression in literature, not least that of the use of the incest theme testify to this. Such uses have also been distinguished by their didacticism: Fitzgerald states that: 'I am... a moralist at heart and really want to preach at people in some acceptable form rather than entertain them.'²³

The other factor that might be seen as supporting such a contention is Fitzgerald's attempt at producing a revised edition of the novel (Brucoli states that the reason given for the 1936 revision was that of 'clarification').²⁴ This edition has come to be known as the 'Cowley

²¹ For an example of this kind of criticism, in which the novels are reduced to an oblique reflection of the author's life see, Sheila Graham, The Real F. Scott Fitzgerald: 35 Years later. (London: W. H. Allen, 1976).

²² See also Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), Amory, in a low moment decides that, "'To hold a man a woman has to appeal to the worst in him'" (p. 263). Moral decline will become a theme in the later Fitzgerald, whose heroes often appear to be (slightly parodic) spokesmen for the implied author, and thus possibly for Fitzgerald himself. Quite what 'the worst' might be is one of the issues posed by this reading of Tender is the Night.

²³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (ed.) Andrew Turnbull, (London: Bodley Head, 1964) p. 63. Fitzgerald to his daughter, 4th November, 1939.

²⁴ Brucoli, Some Sort of Epic Grandeur, p. 372.

Edition' after its editor Malcolm Cowley and was published in 1951. This revision reconstructs the book in chronological order by placing the 'flashback' chapters (Book II, I to X) at the beginning of the book. Cowley argued that:

One fault of the earlier version was its uncertainty of focus. We weren't quite sure in reading it whether the author had intended to write about a whole group of Americans on the Riviera - that is, to make the book a social study with a collective hero - or whether he had intended to write a psychological novel about the glory and decline of Richard Diver as a person.²⁵

However this version has recently fallen into critical disrepute because Cowley's alterations cannot all be authenticated as being those of Fitzgerald.²⁶ The key point about the revised edition is that Nicole's sexual abuse is placed at the beginning of the book (instead of just under half-way through); this move brings this incident to the reader's attention from the beginning and means that the reader experiences the frequent allusions to father/daughter relations and to childhood with this connection in mind (rather than retrospectively). The result of the revised edition is that the child sexual abuse theme is foregrounded more strongly.

This chapter is *not* about whether or not Dick the character may be read as a closet child molester: although this could be argued as against those who would *accept* the themes of incest and the questionable references to childhood only to suggest that they are pointers to the *spiritual* decline of Dick Diver - his early interest in Nicole suggests otherwise. It may be

²⁵ Bruccoli, '*Tender is the Night* - Reception and Reputation', p. 99.

²⁶ Matthew J. Bruccoli, *The Composition of Tender is the Night : A Study of the Manuscripts*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), p. 206. Bruccoli notes that 'allowing himself considerable editorial license, Cowley made some 800 emendations in his edition of the novel; however, many of the changes strike me as arbitrary.' The same page notes an omission from any extant version of the final chapter of the novel; that of Dick's affair with a 'grocery clerk' in Lockport, who is described as 'an eighteen year old girl'; the age was increased from 16 in an earlier version (p. 157). Thus the novel's finale, or coda, was also to contain a reference to desire and disproportionate differences of age (and class).

possible to read Dick as we read Gatsby, as someone wreathed in self-delusion whom the reader learns gradually to see afresh despite the closeness of the narrator to him as the text's main focaliser. As Dick's self-presentations slip away, we are left with something not altogether edifying to behold.

The focus is upon the identification of significance in the fabric of the text and its interpretation. The suggestion is that the *entire fabric* of the text is re-woven, even *re-written*, by any particular re-reading. The relation of this *back* into the social context will either have been pre-decided by the very horizon that made a particular reading possible; or by the reader's other pre-suppositions, not least of which would be the type of explicit (or implicit) world-outlook that they would bring to the text.

This reading will move from more to less obvious features in the text as one unravelling leads to another, and simultaneously, one re-stitching leads on to another, a double process where the initial identification of key features will reorder (or exclude) all remaining textual information. The feature that will provoke such an operation is the less age/more desire trope. This comparison of desirability and childhood, discussed with reference to The Beautiful and Damned, is utilised without the elision of child sexual abuse and gives Tender is the Night a coherence which can only be maintained and accounted for by an interpretation which foregrounds the problematics raised by the use of this metaphor.²⁷

²⁷ Indeed an analysis of the title (from Keat's 'Ode to a Nightingale') might note the connotations of youth, weakness, and woundedness of 'tender' and those of darkness, hiddenness, and hence possible illicitness, of 'night'. A combination that would fit well with the reading suggested here and be at (diametrical) variance with the title's only apparently romantic ambience (dusk, the song bird as voice of nature, the aural as intimate presence).

Tender is the Night contains a number of textual cues that would suggest the suitability of this text for a re-reading based upon a sensitivity to the tropological use of childhood; upon a new horizon of expectation which would look critically at any conjunction of femininity, masculinity and childhood. Some of these cues directly denote either incest or child sexual abuse (or both). Many will take the form of another kind of trope; *obviousness*, and will require either the application of the new horizon or the context of examples which clearly make use of the conjunction of desirability with childhood to be identified as such. Such a reading will show that in this text the comparative conjunction of desirability with childhood will be taken to its transgressive yet logical end. It is to textual cues that we must now turn.

Book Two, Chapter Three (p. 140-145) contains the episode where Nicole's father confesses to raping his daughter.²⁸ Warren is described as 'a strikingly handsome man' who is 'a fine American type in every way' and is 'nervous and obviously moved by his errand' (p. 141). The irony of his typological classification and his nervous condition rapidly becomes apparent. Warren tells Doctor Dohmler that, 'my daughter isn't right in the head' (p. 141). Then explains that:

"Her sister was the first one to say anything to me about it—because Nicole was always the same to me," he added rather hastily, as if someone had accused him of being to blame, "—the same loving little girl. The first thing was about the valet." (p. 142)

The implicit denial that Nicole had been anything other than 'the same to me' is unsolicited, and the text notes, perhaps focalised by Dohmler, that this appears as a denial of guilt. Warren is not the only character in the text to produce unsolicited denials; we may wish to detach these

28 F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender is the Night, (London: Penguin, 1986). All references to Tender is the Night are to the original 1934 version in the Penguin edition of 1986. I will refer to the issues suggested by the revised version later.

denials from character and suggest them to be a feature of the text itself.

Warren continues:

"I had a valet - been with me for years - Swiss, by the way." He looked up for Doctor Dohmler's patriotic approval. "And she got some crazy idea about him. She thought that he was making up to her - of course, at the time I believed her and I let him go, but I now know that it was all nonsense."(p. 142)

A grim humour accompanies Warren's story. He points to the valet's nationality, thus linking him with the doctor *before* he exonerates him of sexual abuse. Again we have a denial 'it was all nonsense' negating the event, even though it refers to another person. The movement from the abusive valet to the fantasizing child may be read as an echo of Freud's movement from the Seduction Theory to the Oedipus Complex, where childhood sexual interference is replaced by childhood fantasy as the cause of mental illness. Fitzgerald, however, returns us to the Seduction Theory when Warren is finally persuaded to part with the truth:

"People used to say what a wonderful father and daughter we were - they used to wipe their eyes. We were just like lovers - and then all at once we were lovers - and ten minutes after it happened I could have shot myself - except I guess I'm such a God-damned degenerate I didn't have the nerve to do it."(p. 144)

Warren's confession is hedged with mitigating circumstances (the loss of his wife, Nicole's beauty and physical proximity) and his reference to himself above as a 'degenerate' carries more of a tone of self-pity than of contrition. Indeed if we look again at Warren's reference to the healthy state of his finances ('money is no object', p. 143), in the light of his subsequent attempt to leave Europe, then it appears that he was attempting to bribe the clinic to take her off his hands. Once safely immured in a mental institution, no one would give credence to any bizarre tales that she might have to tell about her unusual father.

Fitzgerald appears to wish us to read Nicole's incestuous experience as the cause of her breakdown. It may be taken as ironic therefore that when Nicole shows signs of recovery, it is Freud that she is given to read to aid her self knowledge, the text omits to add whether it is the Studies on Hysteria, or a later work (p. 146).²⁹

Interestingly, Nicole's illness, when discussed by Doctor Franz Gregorovious and Dick is attributed to two effects of her abuse: firstly her shock at discovering what she felt was her own complicity; secondly the disturbance that resulted when she attempted to deny this feeling of guilt (p. 146). At no time is another, more theoretical, explanation brought to bear upon Nicole's problems; her trauma is given priority. Also the centrality of guilt and the problems that arise from having to deal with it as a major contributory factor to the victim's illness bear signs of verisimilitude that lead one to suspect that Fitzgerald had access to clinical reports or case histories. That he was familiar with Freud we shall see presently. This is the episode, then, that has resulted in Nicole's mental condition. If we compare Fitzgerald's account with a typical example of familial child sexual abuse, we find that Nicole's experience, in occurring once and not being repeated, is atypical.³⁰ This referential atypicality suggests that the incident be read rhetorically: the atypical single occurrence makes it more 'romantic' (the momentary sexual lapse of a loving father) and less sordid or exploitative (the repeated sexual use of a dependant).

²⁹ This early work advanced the Seduction Theory (1895) which Freud was to withdraw for his Oedipal theory a few years later (1897). The attempted use of a psychologist to cover over sexual misdemeanours and insure, if not complaisance, then silence, suggests parallels with Freud's role in the Dora case. See Charles Bernheimer & Claire Kahane (eds.), In Dora's Case, (London: Virago, 1985).

³⁰ Ward, Father-Daughter Rape, p. 136. Referential typicality and atypicality are of interest in interpretation if we wish to imply significance from the following, or not following, of a pattern. It seems apposite that a fictional account of child sexual abuse, which is also incestuous, should be compared to what is known of such practices in reality.

However, as it is not Nicole who is 'disclosing' but her father, we might wish to read his confession as an attempt to minimize his involvement; his lack of reliability may be judged from the fact that he has already attempted to shift the blame metonymically onto a 'valet', and even to deny that there had been any crime at all.³¹ Fitzgerald himself would not have had any access to a typology of child sexual abuse, so it is also probable that he featured a 'minimal abuse' in order to avoid outraging his audience.³²

Metonymic evasion is also employed in the reaction of Dr. Dohmler to Mr. Warren's confession: 'As the story concluded Dohmler sat back in the focal armchair of the middle class and said to himself sharply, "Peasant!" ' (p. 145). Here again, as in the consigning of incest to 'low' sectors of the population in nineteenth century medical discourse, the one word, 'Peasant!' absolves the whole, of which he is a part, from any possible implication in the acts of the guilty part; alternatively, the word 'Peasant' may also be being used as an incantation to avert the contamination of his own 'part', the middle class, by one of its infected members. This process (or prejudice) may, also on grounds of class or socio-economic difference, be used to distance Dick, the implied author, the actual author and, in parallel, the implied and actual reader from any such contagious taint. This distancing simultaneously plays the role of caste marker, differentiating an 'us' from a 'them'.

Nicole herself only refers to her experience once, and then it is a sign of her recovery when she urges Dick to continue to play a song that refers to

³¹ Part for another part of a larger whole: another member of the household for the father, or, from dominant to subordinate: from master to servant, or, a relation of synonymy between household and father allowing a metonymic movement from these jointly dominant terms (co-hypernyms) to the subordinate.

³² Persistent incestuous child sexual abuse would probably have appeared to the readership of the time to have been a Gothic monstrosity far in excess of expectation and certainly too heavy handed for Fitzgerald's style with its reliance upon light touches of irony.

parents: "'Am I going through the rest of life flinching at the word 'father'?"'(p. 311). Her ability to sing this song without registering any adverse effects is not the only sign of her recovery in this episode; it is she who makes the choice to continue, and not Dick, who wishes to 'turn the page'. Nicole is shown to be capable of taking control of her own life. The only other two references to her illness and its causality occur in Book Two, Part Four, which contains the discussion between the doctors about Nicole's condition alluded to above (pp. 145-147). This discussion occurs again when Dick's feelings for her become known, and when the doctors conclude that Dick 'must be most kind, and yet eliminate himself' (p. 157). Here already we have a parallel between the proper behaviour of a father and a doctor, for these roles caring and sexuality must remain in separate compartments. We are given a hint that Dick's relationship to Nicole may have parallels with incestuous transgression.

Indeed, Sarah Beebe Fryer in her book Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change, suggests that:

In Tender is the Night Nicole is betrayed and driven mad by a man who in theory at least ought to be her protector. Her ordeal at home is compounded by her psychiatrist's inept attempt to treat her "illness" - an illness which he evidently neither comprehends or respects. (p. 15)

And quotes D. S. Savage who maintains that:

It is Dick's culpable folly in agreeing to marry his own patient which is the initial fault that sets in motion the entire process of involvement and degeneration; and it is interesting to note that... he is shown in the outcome as powerless to resist, not the inducements of Nicole's bank-balance but the sheer overwhelming vital force of her sexual attraction. (p. 73)

Fryer then suggests that it is,

Dick's almost voyeuristic curiosity about Nicole's incest history is one of the earliest clues that he, like Devereux Warren, may

be capable of indulging his own fantasies and impulses through objectification of her. (p. 77)

She then describes the situation of the abused child and goes on to bring out the parallels between child and patient:

The same vulnerability exists in the patient as in the child: the loving, trusting belief that the parent (or parent-figure) is also loving and caring and would not hurt. There is the same feeling of powerlessness on the part of the child-patient: the fear that one cannot exist without the parent's or the therapist's protection and love. (p. 77)

Fryer then notes that:

Nicole's fears are at least somewhat justified: men whom she has every right to expect to be trustworthy do indeed see her first and foremost as a sexual object. The fact that her father used her sexually is titillating to her doctor, and ultimately contributes to her revictimisation. In both her family and her therapy her self is violated by men who usurp her autonomy and view her as a sex object. (p. 77)

Or put more succinctly: "Incest victims... appear to be particularly at risk of revictimisation by male therapists and psychiatrists"(p. 77). Fryer is suggesting that, 'Nicole Warren Diver is victimised by overt sexual exploitation perpetuated both by her father and by her psychiatrist-husband' (p. 71). I will have more to say on the possible parallels between Nicole's husband and her father below, but now it is necessary to go to areas of the text untouched by Fryer's analysis and to make correspondences which she does not make.

I will begin with the text's only other mention of child-rape. Apart from the references to Nicole's abuse by her father mentioned above (which are, after all, to be expected in the medical and personal context), the only other *direct* reference to the sexual abuse of children occurs at the end of Book 2 of Tender is the Night when Dick is arrested for striking an Italian policeman:

They came into the court-room. A shabby Italian lawyer from the Consulate spoke at great length to the judge while Dick and Collis waited aside. Someone who knew English turned from the window that gave on the yard and explained the sound that had accompanied their passage through. A native of Frascati had raped and slain a five-year-old child and was to be brought in that morning - the crowd had assumed it was Dick. (p. 255)

And further:

"I want to make a speech," Dick cried. "I want to explain to these people how I raped a five-year-old girl. Maybe I did____" (p. 256)

But of course he did not: Dick is simply trying to be as offensive as possible as a reaction to the man-handling he has received. We may interpret this directly as a revelation of character (of conscious or unconscious origin) or, indirectly, as a textual matter (a sign triggering a chain of connotations to interact with other such chains). Dick may (consciously or unconsciously) be making a metaphoric comparison between Nicole and Rosemary, and the little girl; between 'rape' and the power relations between himself and the women in his life. Or, taken with the general use of the child metaphor in the text, this may even be read as an admission of paedophile desire, which itself may be read as the motivating force behind his relations with women. In this sense Dick is making the metaphorical connection between the murderer and himself: he is saying, 'I too am *like* this'.³³

Yet, rather than a reading of character, it is in terms of its relation to other textual cues that this incident is far more interesting. When taken together with Nicole's experience at her father's hands, it points the reader to other cues that may be linked together to form a *subtext* or

³³ See also Sigmund Freud, 'Negation', in On Metapsychology: Vol 11 of the Pelican Freud Library, (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 437-442, for a discussion of negation as affirmation.

alternative meaning to the traditional or canonical reading. This meaning in turn would suggest the re-reading of previously inconspicuous details; including the challenge to read *literally* that which we are in the habit of reading *as a trope*, making the overtly visible, visibly overt. Dick's confession can be treated in such a way, although, as we have seen, it then requires a metaphoric step to be taken (the comparison of his statement to its interpretation). However we may ground the attempt to re-read literally from here where I have interpreted Dick's confession rather more *literally* than usual reading practice would allow.

The figure of 'literality' might be analysed in the following way. Paul de Man, in The Rhetoric of Romanticism, has observed that there may be two origins of a tropological reading: the typical and overt use of figures that signal a transport, or doubling, of meaning (an 'iconic metaphor'), for example, 'she sat, a queen on her throne' where the terms of comparison are juxtaposed; and a more covert linguistic form that depends upon syntactic ambiguity (a 'phonic metaphor'), for example, 'it is too hot to eat', which may refer either to the food, the weather, or the condition of the speaker.³⁴ My reading of Tender is the Night will make use of both of these. However, I would like to suggest a third level to the two levels described above: that of the socio-linguistic (we might term this the level of pragmatic metaphor) which would be based upon the use of the everyday language of the time of writing within the text (either marked by speech marks as direct discourse or present in some other manner, for example as free indirect discourse). This new level would include exploring the figurative possibilities of the pragmatics of language; of colloquial, or other differences in linguistic register, which

³⁴ Paul de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', in The Rhetoric of Romanticism, (NY: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 115.

are usually read as given, as a neutral background, but which may be now interrogated in such a way that previously invisible or everyday metaphors become problematic and open to interpretation. An example would be the use of the vocative 'hey, baby!' of a young woman in the context of a generalised infantilisation of women. Although based upon accepted, everyday, or habituated figures of exchange and therefore bearing some resemblance to de Man's first level of 'iconic metaphor', this third level does not consist of overt figures manipulated in a literary fashion, but of non-literary or buried figures of colloquial origin, the dead metaphors which constitute everyday speech and form the basis for further 'literary' re-figuration.³⁵ Once re-identified as of tropic origin these figures can be sorted into those which may be decoded by reference to their literal meaning. This re-affirmation of the literal meaning against the everyday dead metaphor which denies it, I would like to call *extra-literality*.

³⁵ On the first level (iconic), the shared -semantic- element is hidden but signaled by the context; on the second level (phonic) it is the common factor that is exposed and which provides the opportunity for the doubling of meaning; on the third level (pragmatic) we appear to return to the 'iconic', but here the 'hidden meaning' is the product of everyday or colloquial usage and it is this everyday register of use that the context indicates rather than the trope as a product of that particular text (hence 'pragmatic'). In the case of reading a term literally (the vehicle as the tenor), against the prior convention of an iconic metaphor become invisible by common usage, this re-reading or de-metaphorisation would be signalled by a context of larger structures of meaning; either as part of a reading 'against the grain' or as part of an exposition (or deconstruction) of the text's rhetoric. To summarise: there are two factors involved in the third level and its figurative possibilities: (i) its origin in pragmatics, that is as a metaphor of socio-linguistic or colloquial origin, not primarily identifiable as a (con)textual disparity (figure) but as an a congealed everyday meaning - descriptive lexis will usually list this meaning alongside the others for a given word, often tagging it as 'colloquial'; and (ii) the possibility that the resultant 'dead' or invisible metaphor may then be read against the process of normalisation (its becoming 'unmarked') so that the vehicle is read as tenor - the obvious returns as that which was hidden if we choose to read at another level of figure.

Here is another example from Fitzgerald, in The Notebooks of F. Scott Fitzgerald, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), the conversation explicates the trope: "'This here nigger's my boy Hugo."

"Your son!" The girl stared from one to the other in wild fascination.

"No, he's my body-servant. I guess you'd call it. We call a nigger a boy down yonder" ' (p. 22). A reading that foregrounded 'miscegenation' might (if the black man were young enough or the white man old enough) wish to join the girl in her extra-literal 'wild fascination'.

Here are some of the references in the text that begin to take on extra significance when we re-examine them in the light of their *extra-literal* sense in a general textual economy of metaphor based upon childhood. Firstly there is the film 'Daddy's Girl' which Rosemary, the girl with whom Dick will eventually have an affair, stars in. References to this film occur throughout the novel; a mention of Rosemary soon elicits a mention of 'Daddy's Girl' - the two words may almost be said to have developed a collocational relation.³⁶ Then there is the record playing on a bar 'phonograph' entitled, 'The Wedding of the Painted Doll' (p. 272).³⁷ Again we have the proximity of the semantic fields of 'sexual union' and 'childhood'. In another example, Dick, speaking of his daughter, says, 'What do I care if Topsy 'adores' me or not? I'm not bringing her up to be my wife' (p. 278). Some denials refer our attention back to themselves by the nature of their *unsolicited* unsuitability. Nicole, we must remember, has been a child-wife to her father and, by virtue of her psychiatric condition and medical relation to Dr. Diver a child-wife to her husband and therapist. A few pages later Nicole notes, disturbed by Dick's behaviour, his 'almost unnatural interest in the children'(p. 288). 'Unnatural' clearly signals a potential transgressive relation, together with the following reference it may be read as signalling that Dick, the text, or the implied author, has difficulty separating childhood and adolescence and perhaps the feelings proper to the paternal from the sexual. When thinking of Rosemary, Dick compares her to his daughter, 'She was young and magnetic, but so was Topsy' (p. 227). Another unusual comparison, particularly when the use of the word 'young' here denotes two very different age-groups: Rosemary is a young woman in

³⁶ *Tender is the Night*, p. 21; 32; 79-80; 124; 183 (p. 80, includes mock baby talk, that is, an adolescent playing a child).

³⁷ See also F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), contains the following comparison, 'She was Beautiful Doll,' made when Monroe Stahr evaluates Kathleen (p. 114).

her early twenties; Topsy is still a child in her first decade.³⁸ In yet another incident Nicole catches Dick making eyes at a fifteen year old - however the text denies this: yet as the incident is focalised through Dick, the analyst and husband, of Nicole (her narrator, her keeper and the interpreter of her words), is able to dismiss Nicole's observation as that of a hysteric (p. 208).³⁹

The two major relationships featured in Tender is the Night are those of Dick and Nicole and Dick and Rosemary. Indeed the book begins with the entry of Rosemary into the Divers' life and continues with the two relationships in parallel until they both dissolve in the course of Nicole's cure and Dick's dissolution. In each case Dick is, at least initially, the 'father-figure' to an immature (either through reasons of age or of sanity) young woman. In Nicole's case this hierarchical relation is heightened by her dependency upon Dick as her therapist. The elevating of Dick to this position is achieved by using descriptions of the young women which rely upon their comparison to children or child-like behaviour.⁴⁰

³⁸ We might decompose the differing meanings in this way: child versus young woman, that is, in the latter case, not old, or perhaps, as the phrase is spoken by Dick, at the age of sexual availability. Either way the two meanings are only synonymous for those who would have some interest in confusing the two distinct categories.

³⁹ Nicole has previously been diagnosed as a schizophrenic and Fryer, notes that, 'In *The Talking Cure*, Jeffrey Berman points out the questionable nature of "Fitzgerald's implication that the incest directly precipitated Nicole's schizophrenia" and observes that Nicole "hardly appears schizophrenic at all." He goes on to note that, "The few symptoms [Nicole] manifests suggest hysteria and obsession compulsion".... current psychological research has revealed that incest victims with "disguised presentations" - those who manifest confusion and other symptoms but who do not talk openly about their incestuous encounters (like Nicole) - are frequently misdiagnosed. One of the most common misdiagnoses of such patients is schizophrenia' (p. 82-83). Whilst not wishing to play the game of psychoanalysing textual characters, it is nevertheless interesting to note that Fryer feels it necessary to add that: 'Further evidence that Nicole's illness can be assessed more accurately as hysteria than as schizophrenia is found in *Psychotherapeutic Interventions in Hysterical Disorders* (1986)' (p. 85). Fitzgerald's first novel, This Side of Paradise, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), contains his first creative female character, Eleanor, trapped by her gender role, who is also Fitzgerald's first mad-woman, and is characterised as 'evil' (p. 238).

⁴⁰ See Fitzgerald, The Last Tycoon, for a similar technique; the hero of this novel, Monroe Stahr, is made large by the focalisation and admiration of a schoolgirl (much of the story is narrated in the first person by Celia Brady, young daughter of one of Stahr's producers).

Here are four examples, each taken from a different quarter of the text. Page 33 has Rosemary referring to her dependency upon her mother: "'She decides business matters. I couldn't do without her'", and her prospective director remarks that he would rather make a picture with her, 'than any girl since Connie Talmadge was a kid.' Page 98 observes, again of Rosemary, that, 'too insouciant... she had assumed the privileges of a child'. Page 150 describes Nicole's smile as, 'a moving childish smile that was like all the lost youth in the world'. And finally, three years on, the twenty-two year old Rosemary was walking with Dick, where 'she cavorted childishly for him until he smiled' (p. 231).⁴¹ Whilst the last three of these citations can not be attributed as the direct speech of any of the text's characters, they can be read as focalised from Dick's position, (and, indeed, narrated from his viewpoint - using his language - as, it could be argued, are all references to the child metaphor in connection with Nicole and Rosemary) in which case the choice of lexis is to be read as a reflection of his desire.

However it is the descriptions of Nicole and Rosemary from *Dick's viewpoint*, textually marked as his direct speech or clearly signalled as his indirect speech (or thought processes), that are the most telling. Referring to Rosemary he makes the following remarks: "'Such a lovely child," he said gravely' (p. 74). "'Good night child.'" (p. 77). In the context of their imminent affair Dick remarks to Rosemary: "'When a child can disturb a middle-aged gent - things get difficult'" (p. 106). Later when Nicole and Dick discuss Rosemary, Nicole seems suspicious and Dick attempts to fend

⁴¹ If we choose to read this example as manipulation on Rosemary's part, assigning intention to a character, rather than as an element of description revealing Dick's or the text's interested focalisation (narrator/implicit author), then her role as an active player in the sexual game is brought to the fore. In which case a role not of her own choosing would be used by her as a mask. Most interesting, perhaps, is the decision to read it as an undecidable, in which case we can read the 'childish' action as both adroit man-management on Rosemary's part *and* an expression of desire by Dick and the text. We might also note that here again the semantic fields of childhood and sexuality are made to overlap.

her off by understating Rosemary's age, the inference being that her youth must foreclose any sexual interest on his part: "'She's an infant,'" and more strongly, "'there's a persistent aroma of the nursery'" (p. 184). The double irony of this defence is that it is precisely these things that attract him and yet he can also use them as a shield against Nicole's suspicions; his words thus simultaneously signal both denial and desire. Textually the child metaphor is being used as a ground for all values; a single trope underlies all opposites. A similar observation may be made of the following : "'Rosemary didn't grow up," he answered. "It's probably better that way"'(p. 321): is this an evaluation... or a wish? The double irony in this instance consists of the affirmation (her metaphoric 'age' and its justification) which is also a critique (negative evaluation) and a reflection on Dick's sexuality (desire masquerading as denial).

This denial is given an extra twist if we consider Rosemary's active role in their affair; Dick's denial of Rosemary's adult status is designed to reconfirm his own masculinity. Referring to Nicole, Dick again links sexuality and childhood when he remembers, 'that nothing had ever felt so young as her lips'(p. 172). 'Young', usually an adjective employed for purposes of chronological classification, becomes an adverbial intensifier which, functioning as part of the adverb phrase, 'so young', tropologically signals as its ground the positive intensity of sexual arousal. Again, when he finds that 'she looked at him... with a child's searching wonder,' the ground for the comparison is that of childhood; there is also a suggestion here that only a child would see him in this light (p. 186).

The text furnishes us with two other examples of the intersection of Dick's sexual desire and that of childlike or helpless women. The first finds him admitting that he desires a female patient 'almost sexually',

helplessness here being the metaphoric co-efficient for child-like (p. 204).⁴² In the following chapter Dick is accused by a patient, who has since left the clinic, of seducing her young daughter; the text informs us that there *had* been some physical contact:

Dick read the letter again. Couched in clear and concise English he yet recognised it as the letter of a manic. Upon a single occasion he had let the girl, a flirtatious little brunette, ride into Zurich with him, upon her request, and in the evening had brought her back to the clinic. In an idle, almost indulgent way, he kissed her. Later, she tried to carry the affair further, but he was not interested, and subsequently, probably consequently, the girl had come to dislike him, and taken her mother away. (p. 205)

Despite the clarity of the letter he 'yet' recognises it as 'the letter of a manic': 'yet' we learn that there had been at least the beginnings of an 'affair'. Could it be that the 'manic' character of his ex-patient has the same diagnostic significance as Nicole's later hysteria?⁴³ Is it that the conjunction 'yet' plays the same role of negating the semantic content of the previous clause as the psychiatric terms 'manic' and 'hysteric' play with respect to the truth content of the accusations of Dick's patients (the girl's mother and Nicole)? The text protests that Dick stopped the relationship after 'he kissed her'. 'Yet' if this portion of the text is focalised by Dick himself, are his observations that it was after all the girl herself who was culpable ('flirtatious') to be taken at face value any more than his diagnosis? Indeed the opposition between the certainty expressed in the description of his involvement as 'idle, almost indulgent', and the 'probably' used to surmise the consequent actions of the girl suggests

⁴² 'Yet in the awful majesty of her pain he went out to her unreservedly, almost sexually. He wanted to gather her up in his arms, as he so often had Nicole, and cherish even her mistakes, so deeply were they part of her' (p. 204). In isolation the tendency of the reader might be to take this citation as an example of an unusually honest empathic humanitarianism. As part of the cumulative (ab)use of childhood as key tropic source of this text's figures, this apparently altruistic emotion takes on altogether more sinister connotations.

⁴³ Fryer, makes the connection between Fitzgerald's heroines and the Dora case (p. 14).

strongly that it is from Dick's point of view that this episode is described. Noting this the attentive reader may become sceptical and draw other conclusions, perhaps finding parallels between this event and the abuse of Nicole by her father and by Dick, seeing this incident as either echo/variation or prequel/preparation (depending upon which edition of the novel is read) to the prior/consequent act.

Before examining references to children/childhood as they occur generally as part of the background or 'everyday' in the novel, it is necessary to mention two other specifically foregrounded instances. The first instance is that of childhood as a source of metaphor other than that already mentioned; the deliberate authorial use of childhood to make comparisons, to create similes, as a source of 'poetic' image in the text. The second foregrounded instance is a specific example of reference to child-like behaviour that will give us our cue for re-reading less prominent references, in this example a character in the text is involved in actual mimicry of a feature deemed to be 'childish'.

Here are three examples of metaphoric childhood; childhood as a source of comparison. The Diver's guests are represented 'like the faces of poor children at a Christmas tree.' (p. 44). Abe North finds that, 'Often a man can play the helpless child in front of a woman, but he can almost never bring it off when he feels most like a helpless child.' (p 93). Lastly, Dick thinks, 'first the old selfish child's thought that comes with the death of the parent' (p. 222).⁴⁴ All of these comparisons have Dick as their source; as chief 'third person narrator' and 'focaliser' (descriptions are

⁴⁴ Three more examples of reference to the semantic field of infancy are: 'first I'll fix this baby', Dick's utterance as he attacks a policeman (p. 246); 'grotesque in swaddling capes', of the carabinieri (p. 247); of Baby's 'clean-sweeping irrational temper that had broken the moral back of a race and made a nursery out of a continent' (presumably rendering its inhabitants incontinent) (p. 253). Finally, Richard Godden, 'there is nothing casual about Dick's recalling Fatty Arbuckle as he relieves Rosemary of her stained Parisian bed linen - Arbuckle's career was cut short by accusations of his murderous sexual attention to a child beneath the age of consent' (p. 24).

made from his 'point of view') it could be argued that it is he who makes use of the persistent trope of childhood as a means to description and understanding. Yet, as I have noted, this trope is also employed in a general textual economy; this would indicate that the 'text' and 'Dick' are at times nearly synonymous. Here an author-centred criticism would take the autobiographical step from 'Dick'/text to the 'implied author' to 'Fitzgerald'.⁴⁵

This unity of general textual economy and particular character would not, however, be true of the last quarter of the book, where Nicole increasingly takes the position of focaliser, a clear stylistic indicator of her return to health. Does Nicole then take over the focalisation of the text's economy of comparison from Dick? The question is not clear cut: there is one indisputable example ('she had seen him') of Nicole focalising and *observing* Dick's attitude towards his children; however this is not a comparison but a description (p. 304). Whilst possibly escaping the role of operator of the tropological economy Nicole does not escape its role of privileged comparative; her new lover describes her as 'all new like a baby' (p. 317). It could be argued that Nicole remains *within* the tropological economy but does not *use* it.

Nicole's progress into mental health coincides, as index and effect, with her increased demands for autonomy in her personal life and especially with respect to her sexuality. Fryer notes that:

Due to his own conflicting need to be worshipped... Dick has little tolerance for Nicole's occasional cautious quest for a greater degree of autonomy. His counter-transference, which derives from their initial therapeutic relationship, shapes their life together. (p. 81)

⁴⁵ We may note the echo of the union between text and leading male character as focaliser, and thus as narrator/implied author/author, in the pun inherent in the suture of 'Dick' and 'text'; text and phallic function coincide. The pun may be read as uniting the male (heterosexual) viewpoint with the control of the language of the text.

And consequently that:

Throughout the novel, Nicole - like many of Fitzgerald's heroines - gradually addresses her sense that something important is missing in her life. Despite her tangible assets - money marriage, beauty, and children - she lacks the meaningful activity and commitment that would give her life substance and foster her self-esteem. (p. 16)

The quest for meaningful activity and self-esteem extends to expectations in the sexual sphere leading to sexual independence:

What is most remarkable about the sexuality expressed by Fitzgerald's women characters is their proclivity to assert themselves unequivocally in matters related to sex.... Women in Fitzgerald's last three novels deliberately participate in or even actively initiate sexual liaisons with men other than their husbands. (p. 11)

Fryer's point is that, whilst Fitzgerald's oeuvre can be read in terms of the reaction of a traditional male sexuality threatened by emergent women's rights, it may also be read as documenting the reactions of women to their restrictive lives and thus charting the development of a degree of sexual liberation in the 1920s.⁴⁶ As Fryer remarks of Tender is the Night, 'Sexuality in this novel ultimately carries metaphorical implications'; whether that of Dick or Nicole, sexuality carries connotations of domination and escape (p. 15). Childhood too, as we have seen and as we shall see further, also carries a metaphoric burden, indeed nowhere more so than when the interdiction that separates their two fields is transgressed. My point, however, is to indicate how the text is

⁴⁶ For an expression of Fitzgerald's views on women see Fryer: 'In a 1922 *New York Evening World* interview conducted by Marguerite Mooers Marshall, Fitzgerald boldly proclaimed: "Our American women are leeches. They're an utterly useless fourth generation trading on the accomplishments of their pioneer great-grandmothers. They simply dominate the American man"' (pp. 6-7). An expression of the attitude that has bequeathed to us the term 'Momism'. He then adds, in a somewhat contradictory fashion that, "'just being in love - doing it well, you know - is work enough for a woman.'"

reliant upon the semantic field 'childhood' and the adult/child opposition to generate coherence in its fabric, and to suggest that this operation should warn us to read even the most 'innocent' references in this particular semantic field with an attentive ear.⁴⁷

In the second instance of childhood as a source of textual variation, that of child-like behaviour, Nicole mimics 'baby-talk':

"Please be happy, Dick," Nicole urged him. "Why don't you meet some of these ickle durls and dance with them in the afternoon?"

"What would I say to them?"

Her low almost harsh voice rose a few notes, simulating a plaintive coquetry: "Say: 'Ickle durl, oo is de pwettiest sing.' What do you think you say?"

"I don't like ickle durls. They smell of castile soap and peppermint. When I dance with them, I feel as if I'm pushing a baby carriage."

It was a dangerous subject- he was careful, to the point of self-consciousness, to stare far over the heads of young maidens.

(p. 190)

A 'dangerous subject' indeed. The immediate context of the above cited passage also contains the words "'nursery slope'", 'children', and 'Baby', the name of Nicole's sister. A typical or canonical reading would suggest that Nicole is ironically referring to women younger than herself, the irony would be produced by the trope (metaphor) signalled through the use of the 'baby-talk' and the reference to 'ickle durls'. Dick would then be read as, predictably, contradicting her, and dictating his actions accordingly. From the vantage point of our new horizon we might wish to argue that Nicole is either teasing Dick with what she perceives to be his real tastes, or with the co-relative of his relationships so far (herself and Rosemary), and that Dick's disavowal is promptly negated by his 'self-consciousness'. Indeed, were we to comment upon the Doctor's name,

⁴⁷ Beyond the references mentioned so far children occur in all of the beach scenes, and the Diver's children are mentioned frequently. See also Robert Stanton, "'Daddy's Girl' Symbol & Theme", who suggests that the use of 'incest motifs', consisting for the most part of 'a mature man's love for an immature girl', may 'contribute to the thematic unity of the novel (p. 156).

Diver would be apposite for a psychologist, explorer of the unknown; whilst the colloquial connotations of his first name would allow us to read Nicole's polite imperative, which opens the quotation above, as a literal instruction to his libido (perhaps via a part for whole, or expression/means, metonymy).⁴⁸ The requirement to take the *vehicle* 'ickle durl' as the *tenor* (tidied of its age dialect) 'little girl' echos the injunction to read *literally* that I suggested be employed in the earlier, also spoken, example when Dick declares his guilt regarding rape and murder. It is important to note again that we are not dealing with *literal truth at the level of the story and the characters*, could such a thing be said to exist (indeed there is no Dick or Nicole, only 'Dick' and 'Nicole', in this sense nothing but the text), but with a reading, a field of meaning. There is no 'event' (Dick did not murder or not murder the girl), only a choice of reading according to a number of tropological possibilities. The trope I am suggesting, 'extra-literality', where *the vehicle=the tenor, regardless of the co-text's signals to the contrary* (in this instance to search *elsewhere* for the tenor) is of crucial importance in reading a text with so many references to children and childhood where the 'intentional' use of the childhood metaphor becomes inextricable from the 'background' use of children - the difference between 'feature' and accident' disappears. If the immediate context is seen to be ignored, it is only to facilitate a larger context; a reframing of the metaphoric detail in the light of the wider movements of meaning in the text. This technique appears to expose those portions of a text which are both saying and *not* saying at the same time, perhaps offering different or conflicting meanings between the local or referential and a rhetorical or general cycle of meaning; a favourite

⁴⁸ We may also note that 'to dive' is to actively penetrate a passive yielding substance. Thus, if we pursue the parallels with psychology as a domain of scientific knowledge, the pursuit of knowledge yet again appears (as presented in this text) as synonymous with phallic sexuality.

trick of literature in the unity of its literary-pleasurable (transgressive) and didactic functions.

Having travelled from the most proximate to the most distant (or least obvious) areas in the course of our interpretative process, I would like to continue with an example that suggests itself as a possible model for the occlusion of an unacceptable meaning. Here the reader's experience is akin to that of receiving an offering, a revelation, indeed, a gift, only to find it being (partially) retracted or re-concealed. Immediately after the court-room scene where Dick 'confesses' to the rape and murder of the Italian infant, we find the following sentence (Dick has just left the court-room and Nicole's sister, Baby, is 'waiting with a doctor in a taxi-cab.') 'Dick did not want to look at her and he disliked the doctor, whose stern manner revealed him as one of that least palpable of European types, the Latin moralist'(p. 256). Dick has misbehaved and perhaps Baby and the 'stern' doctor stand before him as parental figures that condemn his misdemeanour. But has this reaction, his 'dislike', gone further than that of the 'character' 'Dick' and infected the text as such in a path that leads from the extra-diegetic narrator, or implied author, to the actual author (if the slippage is read as Fitzgerald's) and his cultural context? The result is a phonetic slippage that covers the extent of the moral disgust which can only be that of, not Dick's alcoholic brawling, but the crime to which he has 'confessed'. The focus of this concealment is the word 'palpable' meaning 'substantial' or 'obvious'; the meaning in context being that Latin moralists are few and far between... or perhaps that Dick wishes they were! Indeed, before such a moral condemnation (judgement) there must be moral perception (in this case dislike and its cause), Dick fends of what he feels to be an implied lowering of his moral status by casting the other into the rhetorical position of 'low other' (the doctor is *Italian*). Logically then, the word used should not be 'palpable' but '*palatable*', the presence

of a moralising doctor (figure of morality) is unpalatable to Dick.⁴⁹ A phonetic metaphor has occurred in which aural similarity is used to elide the stage of personal dislike, brought on by guilt, and replace it with a negative cultural stereotypology. The visual (judgement on ethnic grounds) elides the sensible (the affective judgement of distaste). The unbearable (least palatable) is replaced by the invisible ('least palpable'). The *literal* of Dick's confession ('I did it', which may be read as the metaphorical *tenor*) may now be allied to the *occluded* of his reaction to the doctor; the relation of the two tropological *sub-texts* to one-another might be more colloquially described as an attempted cover-up after a risky gamble. The denigration of the 'moralist' deprives judgement of its charge; a disclaimer is added to divert attention - but like all disclaimers it acts as a form of repetition augmenting that which it would seek to diminish.

A reading which took *literality/obviousness* as a trope (the 'extra-literal') would find the common and everyday uses of the words, 'children', 'boy', and 'girl' as immediately accorded a visibility and a connotative depth which they would otherwise be lacking. Simply, these words are so often used in contexts where the referents are adults that we must take this confusion to its logical conclusion and suggest that, not only could we suppose this to be the rule, but that this confusing of generations be a sign for the real confusing of adults and children that results in the latter being treated 'as if' they were the former. This is the elided, previously tabooed, end of the comparison of childhood and desirability (the younger the more desirable), which has now 'returned' textually and which invites further comparison with events in the realm

⁴⁹ Another candidate for the 'original' word of this parapraxis is 'plausible'; in both meaning and sound it would fit the slot left by 'palpable'. Yet 'palatable' is phonetically closer and carries greater affective resonance. Either way, and on whoever's part, the displacement signifies.

of the social. Indeed the partial failure of the taboo to protect actual children may be said to find its expression in the exposed logic of a well-worn metaphor. In this way *all* such references in the text lose their innocence and become *ambiguous*. A crude, but frequently occurring, example of this would be Dick's watching of 'girls'; yet the text does not indicate age, thus the reader's assumption of everyday tropological use (girls=young women) may simply be false, instead of indicating 'young women' the text may in fact be indicating 'girls' (pubescent or pre-pubescent females): and even where it does hint at a tropological use (by suggesting an older age) some other textual detail may maintain the telling slide between the ages of licit and illicit sexual possibility.

I will briefly discuss two such references from the text.

However, one's eyes moved on quickly to her daughter, who had magic in her pink palms and her cheeks lit to a lovely flame, like the thrilling flush of children after their cold baths in the evening. (pp. 11-12).

The comparison seeks the support of the younger to gild the (only slightly) older (it is Rosemary who is the subject of this comparison, unfocalised by any specific character, and occurring at the very beginning of the book); but the phrase to attract our attention is the one containing the subjectless present participle 'thrilling'. *Who* is being 'thrilled'? *To whom* is this 'flush' 'thrilling'? The 'flush' can not be 'thrilled'; it is inanimate. Certainly not the 'children', the core of the object noun phrase consisting of two noun phrases ('thrilling flush' and 'children') joined in a genitive apposition; they only *possess* the 'flush'. It is the focaliser/narrator (seer/speaker), the sentence's subject noun phrase, in whom the present participle linguistically excites its affective equivalent, the 'one's eyes' of the beginning of the sentence, the elided external (or implied) narrator of the text itself... a 'subject position' assumed to be

taken by every reader as the implied reader joins the implied author in an act of voyeurism (grammatically 'one' includes both 'you' and 'me' whilst eliding them on the level of expression).

Here is the second example:

...that it was only the closeness of Rosemary's exciting youth that prompted the impending effort - she had seen him draw the same inspiration from the new bodies of her children and she wondered coldly if he would make a spectacle of himself. (p. 304).

The context is an attempted water-skiing trick that fails. Dick is attempting to impress Rosemary. Nicole is present and it is her focalisation of the incident that I have quoted. Yet when we consider the nature of Dick's relationship to Rosemary, the words 'new bodies' takes on a more ambiguous meaning. Like is not being compared with like: the urge to impress is the common factor; however it is the source of the stimulus which is questionable. Dick's relationship with Rosemary is, or has been, of a sexual nature: that with his children is not. Whilst it is logical that Dick is stimulated by Rosemary's physical presence, it should not be the 'new bodies' of his children that urge him to perform but the desire to amuse their minds. A slippage has occurred between mind and body that parallels the slippage from adult body to children, but which should be familiar to us as a facet of the trope which reiterates the comparison of childhood and desirability. The fact that it is focalised by Nicole initially gives the appearance that her words describe this scene. Actually, as in a similar example from The Beautiful and Damned (when it is Gloria who focalises children, rather than being focalised *as* one), the same trope has been continued from the viewpoint of another character (in both of these cases the one who has been the vehicle to the metaphoric tenor: childhood). The final viewpoint, then, the final 'origin' of these words, and thus of this slippage, would be that of the implied narrator, or,

indeed, the narrator as such; the narrator as the text's invention, or the reader's anthropomorphism, as that subject-position that is required to operate the text's metaphors.

Both of these examples offer some cue (syntax, collocation), which in the context of a new horizon of literary expectations, or in the awareness of the reader of the use of the trope of childhood, suggests a possibility of reading in a different way from that which the text might at first seem to encourage. In this I have accepted the tradition that interpretation find some discrepancy 'in' the text on which to hang its creation of additional or tropological meaning. I have already suggested that, from the point of view of consistency, any reference to an already re-interpreted semantic area could, in theory, bear the possibility of maintaining this re-reading. However, one may only do without this textual prop when a reading is so consensual as to be 'transparent'; that is, no longer requiring textual exegesis. Thus it could be argued that two kinds of 'invisibility' are involved: the 'invisibility' of the dominant or canonical reading, so obvious that it pre-empts discussion. This would be the position of the established horizon of expectation, of dead metaphors that have become part of everyday linguistic use, of the 'blind spot' of unquestioned preconceptions. There is also the 'invisibility' of a new or excluded reading, a marginal or contentious reading which can never be proved enough, which has yet to accede to the status of the blindingly obvious. This would be the position of the new horizon of expectation, one whose very existence depends upon rendering itself 'palpable' and contending for ground with the established horizon to whom it must appear 'unpalatable'.

In my reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night I have passed from commenting upon those factors in the text most obviously

conducive to interpretation from a new horizon and, passing on through examples ever more distant, have arrived... at the *obvious*. A strange 'return' indeed: having expected 'the repressed' to reappear in literary representation as 'sublimation', and as 'hidden behind' a tropological formulation (the metaphors and metonymies at play between our key oppositions of adult/child and father/daughter and other features of the text) we find, as with Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', that the invisible is hidden in the blatant and awaiting only the gentle touch of the interrogative.

Chapter 3: Faulkner, Modernism, & Transgression

3:1 Modernism, Transgression, & Incest

William Faulkner has been described as, in part, a regional phenomenon, as a writer of the South and of its problems. I will suggest that it is the discussion of these problems, even their exacerbation, the twisting of them to their utmost limit, that provides the aesthetic pleasure of the Faulknerian oeuvre. Yet if we may describe the content of Faulkner's work as 'regional', when we turn to the question of his manipulation of form we are very much in the domain of 'the international style'. Faulkner's experimentation, nowhere more disorientating than in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!, clearly marks him out as a member of the Modernist 'International'; a classic figure in the pantheon of High Modernism. This chapter will examine the qualities of the apparently opposing poles of form and content: this examination will involve the aggravation of a morbidly sensitive content through the limit of a taboo and the provocation of form to the limits of comprehension. Their interrelation will be seen to take place on that strange plane where the bigoted perversity of the taboo on miscegenation maps, like the occlusion of the moon in the shadow of a total eclipse, onto the troubling zone of incest.

In this chapter I would first like to discuss the role of experimentation in modernist art with an emphasis on form. This will naturally lead me into an analysis of Faulkner's style and will attempt to answer the question: Is there such a thing as the Faulknerian sentence? A discussion of several examples will follow utilising the insights of text linguistics and

focusing upon the arrangement of information in these sentences. As Faulkner's 'sentence' may often appear in the form of a paragraph, a technique which has been designed to deal with texts on a level above that the sentence should come into its own. In the step from formal analysis into a problematic content, from the broken laws of syntax and logic to the semantic representation of a broken law, a zone of taboo and regulation, we enter the strange world of George Bataille and the theory of transgression.¹ Working on both literary and sociological levels, Bataille's suggests that transgression provides the charge of much ritual and that literature too makes use of this ritualised transgression in order to provide the reader with a taste of forbidden pleasure. The history of 'adultery in the novel' should provide one example of this.² Faulkner seems to me to be a perfect example of another.

In so far as the Modernist tradition is synonymous with the practice of formal experimentation, then it must also be synonymous with the reader's experience of formal or stylistic transgression.³ We may provisionally define this as the breaking of some 'unmarked' or habitually employed model in a way which is difficult to recoup into everyday meaning on the basis of accepted practice.⁴ The everyday reading of

¹ See Bataille, Eroticism, and Literature & Evil. Bataille's theory consists of two essential strands: (i) the relation of the sacred to secular and a general theory of expenditure (*dépense*); (ii) literature as transgression and its relation to the unrepresentable (the *informe*). The metaphor of economy, is derived from the former; the theory of transgression from the latter.

² See especially, Tanner, Adultery in the Novel, pp. 3-18.

³ However if we include writers like W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, and F. Scott Fitzgerald in our canon of modernist writers then the defining role of formal experimentation is no longer quite so clear. My opening sentence is, therefore, only true for experimental modernism.

⁴ See, Jan A. van Ek & Nico J. Robat, The Student's Grammar of English, (London: Blackwell, 1984), for a summary of the role of 'marked' and 'unmarked' in communication (p. 403). Like other proponents of 'descriptive linguistics' (for example, the COBUILD corpus) Ek and Robart prefer modern spoken English to the dependence of the traditional grammarian upon prescriptive models based upon latinate models of grammar. In this context, 'marked' and 'unmarked' refers to a wide range of usage (including collocation and colloquialism) and its deliberate subversion to create new meaning (trope, irony, or parody).

metaphor (or any identification of figure) works in the same way; before the de-coding, the search for tenor and ground, an anomaly must signal the presence of a vehicle; a trace of transgression that leads the reader elsewhere.

So to begin with 'difficulty'; why is Faulkner difficult? Or better: Why is Faulkner *at his best* also Faulkner at his *most difficult*? Formally this problem is at its most acute in the presentation of information; in the length of certain sentences and the ordering of their semantic units, their information structure.⁵ This often takes the form of difficult presentation of difficult material; and it is this, one might say, 'content side' of the problem, that will be taken up later with the discussion and application of George Bataille's concept of transgression.

Hugh Kenner, a distinguished commentator on the modernist canon, has noted the tendency of Faulkner's style, 'not to symbolise (a condensing device) but to expand, expand', so that it, 'prolongs what it can not find a way to state with concision, prolongs it until, ringed and riddled with nuance, it is virtually riddled with patterns of circumstance.'⁶ Walter J. Slatoff, in the article, 'The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric', notes Faulkner's use of long sentences, 'whose structure and

Language, of course, is a open system with many continually evolving registers and dialects, degrees of 'markedness' and 'unmarkedness' will vary with context.

⁵ See also George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', from On Difficulty, (Oxford: OUP, 1978) pp. 18-47, for a discussion on the different types of difficulty in writing. Steiner finds that the form of difficulty he calls (after Heidegger) 'ontological', to consist of an undecidability of interpretation of the text as a whole, where language struggles to express the inexpressible and performs the difficulty of the speaking of Being (p. 41). For Faulkner such a difficulty would be performative of a personal dislocation and as expressing the difficulties of a particular mode of being: the South. Two other forms of difficulty are worth mentioning as they too apply to Faulkner's writing: 'modal' difficulty, where the reader must work in order to simulate empathy with another (unfamiliar) form of life; and 'tactical' difficulty where syntactic and semantic experimentation create new forms of linguistic expression refreshing the reader's aesthetic palate (p. 40).

⁶ Hugh Kenner, A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers, (New York: Knopf, 1975), quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, Faulkner: The House Divided, (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 14.

syntax are often perplexing and obscure', and suggests that, 'in many ways and on many levels Faulkner seems very anxious to keep pieces from fitting together, and that this is a crucial aspect of his work' (p. 162; 115).⁷ Slatoff focuses on the lack of closure provoked by Faulkner's technique, and the teasing lack of coherence that he regards as a key feature of his aesthetic. This effect is achieved by 'his presentation of opposed or contradictory suggestions', and particularly by the effect of oxymorons on the construction of meaning: 'Any oxymoron to some degree defies our customary intellectual desire for logical resolution' (p. 156; 158).

As we shall see the difficulty in reading Faulkner lies not so much in his convolution of syntax on the level of the phrase (word order), although this does occur, but on the level of the sentence as an entity constructed out of multiple clauses in varying relations of hypotaxis and parataxis.⁸ When we add the element of willful semantic confusion caused by the use of contradictories, as noted by Slatoff, then the reader may be forgiven for asking whether Faulkner wishes to be understood and whether the formal syntactic and semantic transgressions that he practices are not a way of concealing either an absence of meaning (or a denial of meaning, not the same thing) or a meaning so transgressive that it must be concealed.⁹ Or, better, that it must be advertised as transgressive by virtue of the very fact of its self-concealment. The formal techniques of concealment now begin to look as if they are simultaneously a means of self-advertisement. But I am in danger of sounding like Faulkner himself in propounding such an

⁷ Walter J. Slatoff, 'The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric', in William Faulkner, Four Decades of Criticism, (ed.) L. W. Wagner, (Michigan State University: Michigan State University Press, 1973), pp. 155-178.

⁸ On the content/lexis side of language it is the latinate vocabulary and rhetoric that may give the reader pause to think. Hypotaxis refers to clauses in a relation of subordination, parataxis refers to clauses in a relation of logical and linguistic equality.

⁹ A. Kazin, On Native Grounds, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), notes Faulkner's debt to the gothic tradition and the qualities of denial and occlusion that haunt his sentences and tease his reader in his attempt 'to express the inexpressible' (p. 457; 462). See also the role of rhetoric in Faulkner's style, and his use of Southern grotesques and the 'weird tale'. (p. 464; 466).

oxymoronic formulation; in danger, in the course of describing this style, of falling into a mimicry of it myself. Yet perhaps it is this intrusion of unavoidable mimesis that may enlighten us as to the relation between the Faulknerian manipulation of form and its tortured content; between the themes that run through his work and their means of expression. Difficulty in description may lead to mimesis: difficulty of theme (for whatever reason: unresolved conflict, taboo topic) may result in the difficulty being performed by the formal means available, either as an alternative to an inability to express this theme, or as an alternative to the lack of desire to express it openly. It is here that we approach the question of the 'performativity' of William Faulkner' style.¹⁰

Performativity in Faulkner, the shift from content to form as the means of expression, as the carrier of the 'message', indeed, of the enacting of the 'message' by formal means, would suggest that 'difficulty' in Faulkner's greatest novels is not simply the product of a technician's desire to use modernist innovation to play with the desire of the reader. Rather, it would be the evolution in the early part of this century of an international modernist wave of experimentation in the arts that would have *enabled* Faulkner to express the problems and complexities of his subject matter. It was the difficulties, both local and 'universal', in the commentary on the topics of race, sex, and the family, and the transgressions related to them (simultaneously content and a comment upon the content) that demanded a means suitable to its (suitably) veiled expression. Thus not only does the 'formal' transgression enact the 'content' transgression, but it also enacts its desire to remain hidden, perhaps compensating for this desire. It may also imply that the author himself did not know what to do about the problems expressed, that art yet again was called upon to resolve

¹⁰ See for example, Lyotard, 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of their Experimentation: Contribution to the Idea of Postmodernity'.

what must remain irresolvable in the realm of the real, but which, in this case, was to result in something more akin to an 'analysis interminable'.¹¹

What might we then say about the nature of a 'Faulknerian sentence'? That the form (syntax, clause structure), is transgressive (both 'marked' and 'difficult'), as is the content (on the level of theme and of its semantic expression) and that as a result the reader experiences both excess and absence simultaneously.¹² This excess may be valedictory, nostalgic, evocative of a history or of a tradition: it may offer plenitude, and the possibility of solution - or just the loss of an evoked plenitude.

Absence, the feeling on the part of the reader that 'something is missing' (caused, in part, by semantic contradiction), may add to the element of 'what next' in the text's narrative economy; the implanting of an enigma which looks forward for its resolution (prolepsis). Absence may thus signal a problem in the sense that (in literature) solutions are supposed to follow problems, indeed the 'problem/solution' pattern has been suggested by some theorists of narrative to be fundamental to the idea of 'plot' (we may note its resemblance to the pattern 'fall/redemption' which I will have cause to mention later).¹³ Then there is the role of confusion (as excess, as a false plenitude) in the use of pronouns, as in 'The Bear' (the problematic 'he'), and duplication of proper names (the John and Bayard Sartoris'), which provoke the reader to follow false paths, or create the possibility of multiple pathways before these are rejected for a worked out

¹¹ For literary 'working through' as self-analysis, see Richard H. King, A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), who suggests that Go Down, Moses may be read as the end of the analysis. For a broad psychoanalytical approach to creativity see the discussion of the work of Otto Rank given in Chapter I of this thesis. See also Phillip M. Weinstein, Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), who gives an account of Faulkner's writings as self-construction.

¹² This is markedly the case in key or introductory sentences occurring at the beginning or near the end of an episode, section, chapter, or, indeed, book.

¹³ See, for example, the analysis of the Hans Anderson story, 'The Princes and the Pea', in, Michel Hoey, On the Surface of Discourse, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 92-94.

solution. All this adds to the work of the reader, who in turn creates a complex text overloaded with provisional hypotheses, which in turn contributes to the effect of extra or superfluous sense, creating a miasma of background meaning. In this sense confusion becomes a necessary part of style through its role in inciting suggestibility. Absence and excess (too little, too much), we must note, are also facets of stylistic transgression.

It will be useful to differentiate between a typically Faulknerian 'experimental' sentence and those experimental forms which occur for local reasons. An example of the latter would be one of those punctuationless sentences which have a particular role to play in a specific text such as in Quentin's conversation with his father towards end of the second section in The Sound and the Fury. A 'typical' experimental sentence, one that is found regularly throughout his best work, is long, usually builds to a climax, consists of narrative and image, is affective, especially at its climactic point, often plays with the deixis ('it'), doubles, and repetition, is strong on allegory and connotation, and usually appears either at the beginning of a section or chapter (as a tease, taster, or lure), or as part of the build-up to a sectional climax (near end of section). We should note that the climactic clause, especially when poetic/affective, can function as a summary, or comment on what has gone before; the end of a unit being, in the theories of information structure and text grammar, the place for end-focus (intonationally accentuated in spoken language), for new information, or for comment. Or we may find such sentences in sections where there is much to hide; to make it difficult for the reader to clarify what it is that actually is happening, as in Section Four of 'The Bear'. Such sentences are clearly marked as transgressive in their length, the usual rules of syntax being displaced or deferred; but not, as a rule, brazenly altered, (word order, aside from some peculiarities of the

Southern regional variant, is usually left in recognisable forms). The effect then is not one of 'pure' syntactic disruption, but one of a syntactic displacement which incites semantic confusion: 'what is happening?'¹⁴

Here are two sentences from Go Down, Moses (1942), the last great peak in Faulkner's writing.¹⁵ The first is from page 241. The second takes up most of pages 276-278. (See Appendix for second sentence)

The first concerns itself with the ritual death of Sam Fathers and we are invited to make parallels with the deaths of the deer and the bear earlier in the story.¹⁶ This constitutes a transgression: it is an act of suicide (and at least one of those involved suspects murder) and results in a confrontation between those who understand and those who do not (the

¹⁴ Ellipsis (the absence of grammatical parts, the presence of which is usually necessary for the creation of unambiguous meaning) is not something that we would use to define Faulkner's modernist technique. He does use it, however (it is a part of everyday speech and everyday prose), to create phrases that require a second thought (as in the example below). In general (as I have observed in the comments of critics above) it is extension rather than compaction that the key element in the Faulknerian style. Here is an example of elision and its effects from the second sentence analysed below [from, William Faulkner, 'The Bear', in, Go Down Moses, (London: Penguin, 1960) p. 221.] The context is the 'misuse' of freedom by the newly freed Black population: '*Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license.*' The insertion of 'that is' between 'suffering' and 'necessary' immediately makes the sentence clearer. Although this turning of the last part of this clause into a 'th-clause' (or a 'wh-clause' if we use 'which') itself turns out to be part of a series of nestling relative clauses (with 'that' or 'which' + 'to be'); the citation if reconstituted with all possible syntactic elisions returned would look like this: '*Apparently there is a wisdom **that is** beyond even **that** (*one, or*) **which is** learned through **the** suffering **which is** necessary (*in order*) for a man to distinguish between liberty and license.*' It is important to repeat that much, if not all, of the elision noted above would be considered as part of normal usage.

¹⁵ William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses, (New York: Vintage, 1990).

¹⁶ '... and this time McCaslin forestalled any necessity or risk of having to wait whilst Major de Spain's surrey was being horsed and harnessed. He took their own, and with Tennie's Jim already asleep in the back seat he drove to Jefferson and waited while Major de Spain changed to boots and put on his overcoat, and they drove the thirty miles in the dark of that night and at daybreak on Sunday morning they swapped to the waiting mare and mule and as the sun rose they rode out of the jungle and onto the low ridge where they had buried Lion: the low mound of unannealed earth where Boon's spade-marks still showed and beyond the grave the platform of freshly cut saplings bound between four posts and the blanket-wrapped bundle upon the platform and Boon and the boy squatting between the platform and the grave until Boon, the bandage removed, ripped, from his head so that the long scoriations of Old Ben's claws resembled crusted crusted tar in the sunlight, sprang up and threw down upon them with the old gun with which he had never been known to hit anything although McCaslin was already off the mule, kicked both feet free of the irons and vaulted down before the mule had stopped, walking towards Boon. (p. 241)

latter are white male holders of power). One of Faulkner's long sentences, virtually a (long) paragraph, its structure may be described as follows: action (carrying on from previous sentence; travel by carriage), image (enigma; double interment; what has happened), image (Boon and boy, waiting), action (movement towards confrontation). The sentence enacts the movement to a problem (what has happened) then the movement towards the confrontation that will supply the previously denied information. In this way the entire sentence acts as build up to the next sentence (producing verbal and physical action; climax as action; interaction of bodies) which describes the confrontation that will provide the information desired, (climax as revelation of information) later on towards end of the section. In the terms of text linguistics there is no 'comment' at end of this sentence. Indeed, this lack of 'cadence' would suggest that we classify it as 'transitional'; it prepares for or leads on to the following sentence. The only 'new' information that is added in these closing phrases is that of the 'action' of narrative. In fact, old information is inserted into this 'slot' usually reserved for the new; Boon's legendary inability to hit anything (intentionally) with his gun is reiterated. The new information we are waiting for comes as the climax (we realise the truth of Sam Fathers ritual death, a return to a 'older' way). This functions as a comment on the whole previous section (end focus) and indeed on the themes of the book; as with Ike's later renunciation of his property, Sam had arrived at the stage where he wanted out, but in his case it is life itself with which he can no longer compromise.

The second sentence (pages 289-291) is two pages in length and also makes an exceedingly long paragraph. Its form presents a mimetic replication of its content; the flow and the irony of history. The length and depth of the historical process is 'performed' grammatically by the

sinuousness of the phrasing (the sub-clauses) and the transitions, oppositions and contrasts marked by the varying punctuation. The sentence moves from the regional history of the South, from the birth of the new South in the struggles after the Civil War, to history on a universal scale with the comparisons made with the history of the Jews and the universalising assumptions of religion. From the South, we return to Moses. History and memory are represented in the narrative modes of soteriology and the jeremiad, part of the Puritan inheritance of the American literary tradition. An economy of identity and exclusion plays on the parallels and contrast of the roles of southern whites, blacks, Jews, and northerners.

To analyse this sentence we need only observe how the differing and developing semantic fields are separated by the punctuation; semi-colons, then colons, marking off the more important subdivisions. These all appear within the frame of a chronicle and may be listed, in order of appearance, as: the Civil War, followed by the three groups who emerged from it; the Blacks; the survivors of the old South; and the new Northern settlers who stayed on after the war (it is these latter, the 'carpet-baggers', that Faulkner accuses of inciting the displaced whites to form the 'Klan'). From reflection on the role of speculators, we then move to, what must at first appear as a gratuitous inclusion, the arrival of the Jews. However, the stereotypical connection to money-lending and speculation, and the parallels of these with the 'carpet-baggers' provide the connotative link. In contrast to this negative line of allusion, we also have the religious link to Judaism as the precursor of Christianity and the link, through the title, to Moses, the law-giver. This renders the commentary on the 'inheritors' of the situation of the South deeply ambiguous, in line with what we shall find when we examine this richly allusive novel in greater detail below. In terms of text linguistics, it is possible to analyse this final generalisation

(on the Jews, and religion, and who won in the end) as functioning as comment/new information (as a conclusion or a comment is always a 'new' addition). This is the moment of irony when Faulkner comments on the results of the historical process and the harsh joke it has played upon all of the protagonists in the South.¹⁷

In this way long experimental sentences can either show or hide, in both cases the experience of reading is the important one adding performative and affective depth to the events described, either by enacting their rush and confusion (as in the latter example referred to above); or by occluding the information to be discovered in a *performative depth* in which the key point is *buried* beneath a flood of confusing signals. As in the first example the sentence may lead into an explanation which reveals what the hidden element is; or, as in the case of the incestuous relations hidden in the McCaslin journal, we may be left to infer the nature of the allusion, this lack of explication itself enacting its *unspeakable* nature, the desire to *bury* such things away, the very *depth* of the transgression involved.

But what is it that cries out for such a burial, that must hide furtively beneath a dense screen of convoluted clause and syntax? Is such a transgression only formal; or is there a transgressive content hidden beneath: or is that both are yoked to a larger purpose? Transgression and its manifold usages in the works of William Faulkner will be discussed in greater detail in the sections on the three novels below. I will only offer a suggestive sample here, taken from an early work, as an example of how

¹⁷ We may contrast the two sentences discussed above with a similar sentence written much later (also included in the Appendix). This sentence is from, William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust, (London; Penguin, 1960) pp. 9-11. Here we also have a paragraph for a sentence: however it is difficult to find the logic that would demand such a style. What we are left with is a piece of empty 'formalism', typical of the later Faulkner; a tired repetition of a stale technique culminating in an empty flourish in the contrast implied to Greek Classical civilisation at the end.

Faulkner will toy with his reader's expectations and of the early use of a content transgression:

The child came up, still watching Horace with radiant and melting diffidence, and permitted her father to embrace her and fondle her with his short heavy hands.

"Daddy's gal," Harry said. She submitted to having her prim little dress mussed, pleasurable but a little restively. Her eyes flew shining again.

"Don't muss your dress, sister," Belle said. The child evaded her father's hands with a prim movement.¹⁸

We should note the suggestive quality of the contrasting repetitions of 'prim' and 'muss' ('mussed'). Other contrasts of crudeness and delicacy also exist: the 'short, heavy, hands' as opposed to the 'diffidence'. The broader intertextual overtones of "'Daddy's gal'" should remain as a suspicious aftertaste from the reading given in the previous chapter to Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night. What draws our attention to this passage? Simultaneously, we feel that what is involved is more than just play; but much less than child sexual abuse. It somehow makes the attentive reader uncomfortable. Does the text make a (transgressive) suggestion, which (the reader feels) it would be excessive to follow any further? The hint of impropriety is allowed, but not the pursuit to any conclusion. For this unease the reader (in the absence of any further textual evidence) may feel responsible: contextualisation will provide a different view; already, the reader may be beginning to wonder if Faulkner will be making unusual use of the literary child theme with its usual stereotype of natural innocence. Here, in this early novel, Sartoris, we see the beginning of the use of a content-based transgression that we will explore further in the section on transgression itself and in its application in conjunction with the incest theme to three of William Faulkner's

¹⁸ William Faulkner, Sartoris, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), p. 188.

most lauded novels. First, I will discuss an approach to the issue of taboo and transgression and their use in literature.

If culture gives us the possibility of Evil as the transgression of Law, then it is the type of culture that bequeaths to us our particular flavour of evil, our particular instances of transgression. Our Judeo/Christian culture (Catholicism, Calvinism as compared to Classical beliefs or Buddhism) maintains a particularly reactive foregrounding of Evil in contradistinction to the positive role of Good. This in turn has a definite regional expression, both historical and geographical, which would give a particular 'local' flavour to the manifestation of transgression. That the American South from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries provides this historical and spatial locality in the work of William Faulkner is a commonplace, as is the statement that this usually takes some form connected to questions of race. Yet it is the understanding of transgression in general that permits the wider Faulkner readership to appreciate his work; an understanding rooted in each reader's own affective comprehension of the incest taboo, regarded as the fundamental prop of culture and civilisation, a signifier of the limit of the thinkable.¹⁹

In Chapter Five of Eroticism ('Transgression'), Bataille writes, '*The transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it.*'²⁰ This aptly summarises the relation of law to transgression. The following citation will show how this relationship also provokes a transgressive erotics:

¹⁹ In modern mythology the signifier 'Auschwitz' also plays this role. Regarding the cultural presuppositions of the Reader: our (if I may be permitted this homogenisation) reactions to the mixing of sex and race are not that of Faulkner and most of his initial readership. In the terms of the theoretician of reception, Hans Robert Jauss, two different horizons of expectation are involved: is it the assumption of the universality of transgression, and our affective experience of this as classically represented in the incest taboo, that allows us to overcome this 'gap'?

²⁰ Bataille, Eroticism, p. 63.

Men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions: they are driven away by terror and drawn by an awed fascination. Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it. (Eroticism, p. 68)

In the work of William Faulkner we may detect the effect of this eroticisation of the transgressive in the 'miscegenation' which results from segregation and the fascination of the author and his many audiences with this as a textual *frisson*.

The paradox is that religion consecrates the law by endowing it with affective intensity; then proceeds either to break it in its rituals, consecrate the exceptionality of the powerful, or to incite transgression by its very intensity.²¹ But the central point is that as (social) transgression loosens, it binds; and here we should note in connection with this re-binding that 'to bind back' is the etymological root of 'religion'.²² Literature has it both ways: the pleasure of the text plays with the affect; the meaning reaffirms the law.²³

In a telling citation that we shall encounter again below (see the section on Go Down, Moses), Cleanth Brooks comments on the work of William

²¹ Bataille, Eroticism: 'The sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression. It is the world of celebrations, sovereign rulers and God', (p. 68). This would suggest incest as a (supposed) index of power, and the possible use of the incest theme as social critique.

²² There are very few modern theories of 'absorption' or 'repressive tolerance' that have not been pre-empted by Bataille. For example, there is 'nothing to 'absorb', if transgression is born from and leads back to law; 'repressive tolerance' becomes like the sacrifice, the feast day, the tolerance of an exception (ritual transgression) which reaffirms the Law. Is there no way out...? Is Bataille's social whole too like the structuralist's totality, or the functionalist's homeostasis? The answer again seems to be to postmodernise Bataille: in practice Law and transgression are not singular and totalising but fractional, local and dispersed, many 'systems', many 'spaces' with their own versions, some slight and unstable, others, monolithic and requiring the transformation of many institutions and interest groups over a long period of time. After such a 'working through' Bataille's concepts may be made to operate on the level of social and political critique.

²³ Bataille's theory of transgression in literature is a particular secularised instance of his theory of the role of (or the survival of) the sacred in culture, itself an expression of a metaphysical general economy of Nature as *dépense*, or (destructive) expenditure. See Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure'; and 'Part One' of The Accursed Share: Volume One.

Faulkner, 'There is everywhere in his writings the basic premise of Original Sin' (p. 118).²⁴ Like Bataille (although not necessarily in a way Brooks might have approved), Faulkner perceives the formative role of Evil in human society. Brooks also, although from a rather more Christian stand-point, notes this element in Faulkner's writing. Referring to Horace Benbow's investigations in Sanctuary, he remarks that 'he discovers with increasing horror that evil is rooted in the very nature of things.... its penetration of every kind of rational or civilized order' (p. 119). If Law requires transgression (the enacting of evil) to define its fiefdom, then sacrifice is the ritual transgression that reinforces the Law. The size of the experience or judgement of transgression is proportional to the weight of the interdiction; inverting our previous perspective we arrive at: the greater the transgression, the stronger the Law. This does not, of course, imply anything about the 'true' nature of the (transgressive) act itself, of its 'essence', or its character as universal value, only of its relation to the Law. Read in this way, transgression is ultimately conservative of tradition: the more transgressive the event; the more it cements the social order.²⁵ We can see this in Faulkner's Light in August, an example of the sacrificial role of the scapegoat.²⁶ As transgression and transgressor and therefore 'evil', the central character, Joe Christmas, is liable to persecution, thus becoming an example, a prop for the Law, a demonstration of its dominion and an aid to the definition of what is 'good' and 'inside'. In this way all punishment becomes a ritual, and all laws call out for a ritual in which to express their potency, hence the requirement of a scapegoat.

²⁴ Cleanth Brooks, 'William Faulkner, Vision of Good and Evil', in Wagner (ed.), (pp. 117-133).

²⁵ Although the question of context would suggest a more open reading of the effects of the transgressive, the abstract relation would err towards the complicitous; alternatively, repeated transgressions may lead to familiarisation and a change of norms.

²⁶ See also, Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, (London: Yale University Press, 1963), Chapter 4 ('The Community and the Pariah'), p 47.

The incest theme in Faulkner is pervasive; whether as gothic inheritance or modernist innovation (or both), Faulkner's work contains a long line of relations touched by incest. The overwhelming majority of these are of the brother/sister type, this includes the relations of Pat and Josh Robyn in Mosquitoes, of Horace and Narcissa Benbow in Sartoris (and the expanded dealing with this theme in Flags in the Dust) and Sanctuary, of Dewey Dell and Darl Bundren in As I Lay Dying, of Drucilla and her step-son Bayard Sartoris in The Unvanquished (apart from their formal relation via her marriage to his father, Drucilla and Bayard are more akin, in age as in other characteristics, to brother and sister), of the 15 year old Laverne who is sister to her lover's wife in Pylon, of Charlotte and her brother in The Wild Palms, and the reference to Judith and Lothar in Knight's Gambit, which includes the obsessive behaviour of Max towards his sister (a more 'active', that is, more murderous kind of 'Quentin' in his interference in his sister's sex-life).²⁷ The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! feature the brother/sister incest theme, the latter introducing the factor of race.

No brother/sister incest appears in Go Down, Moses. Here it is father/daughter rape that is used to serve Faulkner's most moral purpose; for this, the (unromantic) form of incest/rape was necessary. It may be possible to draw a gradient of the use of the incest theme in Faulkner, beginning with brother/sister as allusion (courtly love) moving to its intensification in The Sound and the Fury, the combination with 'miscegenation' in Absalom, Absalom!, then retaining of 'miscegenation'

²⁷ Frederick R. Karl, William Faulkner: American Writer, (London: Faber & Faber, 1989) adds the following : the unpublished 'Elmer', written in 1925; 'Adolescence', an earlier draft of Mosquitoes (the relation to Estelle); 'Evangeline'; and 'Odour of Verbena'.

while substituting father/daughter incest in Go Down, Moses. This passage is one from romantic rebellion to unrelenting critique.

3:2 The Sound and the Fury

The Sound and the Fury (1929) is a tale told in the four fragments of a broken mirror. An idiot, a suicide, and their brother tell their versions of the events that lead up to the dissolution of a once-proud Southern family. The final section abandons the first person narration of the first three parts and takes a black servant as the centre around which the third person narrative mainly, though not entirely, revolves. Transgression in The Sound and the Fury is expressed either in endogamous or unlicensed forms of sexuality; but without the factor of 'miscegenation' that is such a feature of Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses. Caddie and her daughter Quentin rebel sexually against their family environment whilst the incestuous desire of Caddie's brother Quentin for his sister constitutes the key to his suicide and the mainspring to one of the most admired literary passages in American Modernism. As the theme of incest in The Sound and the Fury is dealt with mainly in Quentin's section of the book, I will focus on the contents of his interior monologue, his 'death music', bringing in events from other parts of the novel only insofar as they add luminosity to the argument.¹

Entitled '2nd, July, 1910', and, in general, occurring before the other three sections of the book, Quentin's section divides itself between the events of Quentin's last day, taking place in and around Harvard, and flashbacks to prior events, concerning either Caddie (Candace, his sister) or

¹ The pecuniary improprieties of their brother Jason Compson, who grows up to be a relatively ineffective but vicious form of 'Snopes' (the clan, who, by their commercial acumen and aided by a total lack of mortality, colonise Jefferson), are technically transgressive and this serves to underline the decline of the family. Yet in relation to the theme of sexual transgression he does keep a prostitute and may be read as pimping of his sister (his theft of her financial gifts to her daughter).

his father. The narration is 'first person', in the style usually described as 'stream of consciousness', or 'interior monologue'. In the terms of narrative theory, Quentin is both 'narrator' (source of words used) and 'focaliser' (source of vision). Space, and its articulation into objects, is detailed, especially those portions with affective or symbolic import (the watch) which often form a metaphoric trail through text (poetic cohesion). The type of time in which this takes place is a looping, circular, obsessive combination of metonymic narrative (the day) with its linear progression, and memories, organised both by both metonymy (narrative) and metaphor. The latter, by resemblance, repetition, and variation, gives coherence to episodes, and links these together as a set of intertexts or voices.² The style is, in general, wordy, showing an educated lexis, and melancholic, tending towards the poetic.

On Quentin's relationship to his sister, Cleanth Brooks suggests (paraphrasing Quentin's father) that: 'Quentin is not really in love with his sister's body, only in love with a notion of virginity that he associates with her.'³ I find Brooks' reading of Quentin altogether too poetic, too sublimated. (As Brooks is a Southerner whose roots are in the early part of this century, it should not be too surprising to find the old Southern code of chivalry at the root of his interpretation; the Southern female as virginal paragon and the role of the Southern male as custodian of her honour). What we are left with is a kind of 'incestuous' Platonism!

Brooks supports his argument, but by quoting from Faulkner's appendix, added later.⁴ The idea is that Quentin is to be read as a type of Tristan, after Denis de Rougemont's reading in Love in the Western

² Similar to the use of numbers, objects, etc as non-realist narrative devices in the films of Peter Greenaway, or the eye/egg in George Bataille's, Story of the Eye, (London: Penguin, 1989).

³ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 327. Paraphrasing Mr. Compson.

⁴ See, William Faulkner, 'Appendix. Compson: 1699-1945', in, The Sound and the Fury, (ed.) David Minter, (London: W. W. Norton, 1987) pp. 224-236.

World where the archetypal courtly lover is really in love with death.⁵ The intertextual use (and reading) of the courtly love theme, whose parodic trace can be identified in Faulkner's use of the incest and childhood themes as analogues for the impossible object of ideal love, can be seen in the limited edition Mayday and in the early short stories.⁶ These themes will be commented upon as they re-echo through The Sound and the Fury and especially in Quentin's monologue.

From another perspective it is the Law that Quentin is in love with, as much as with his sister. It is that which he desires, that which he lacks; although we can also see the Law, as interdiction, as a kind of death. Desire and Law are evenly balanced, or rather blended together in a confused and contradictory fashion, rendering Quentin impotent. Quentin's father can not be of any help or guidance to his ailing son; he is too feeble to carry the weight of the Law, to actualise it, which therefore becomes abstract.⁷

⁵ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 332.

⁶ For courtly love and 'passion' á la de Rougemont in early Faulkner, see Mayday, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), a pastiche of the Middle English romance (Gawain); but with death as the only redemption. The Introduction notes a list of features which reappear in Quentin Compson's monologue; the impossible 'ideal' woman, 'sister Death', Saint Francis of Assisi, travel and the 'nihilistic' lesson of Time; also both protagonists drown themselves (pp. 27-28). Mayday can be read as an allegory of courtly love whose concerns will resurface in The Sound and the Fury (pp. 31-32). See also Panthea Reid Broughton, 'The Economy of Desire: Faulkner's Poetics, From Eroticism to Post-Impressionism', The Faulkner Journal, 4. 1-2 (1988), pp. 159-177, who notes the blending of the impossible object of courtly love with virginity and youth (or childhood)(pp. 160-161). Both Mayday and the unpublished 'Nympholepsy' make the connection of the unattainability of the ideal to the death wish (p. 165). Broughton notes that 'here Faulkner is not so much sexualising art, as exposing others habits of doing so' (p. 167). For the continuation of these themes into Faulkner's later life and writing, see Joel Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History, (Oxford: OUP, 1993), who notes the connection of childhood and ambiguity of desire in The Hamlet, the description is of Eula, 'that face 8 years old and a body of 14 with a female shape of 20' (p. 390). A link is made to Faulkner's fondness for childlike, virginal women; with Joan Williams and Jean Stern, both in their teens, both regarded as 'virginal' in appearance, with Helen Baird, 'the waif, the child-girl' (p. 396), and Faulkner's affair with Meta Carpenter 'both virginal and endlessly sexual' (p. 253). The role of the child woman in Faulkner is noted in Judith Bryant-Wittenberg, Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography, (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 170; 223; 228. The relation of text and life, 'self satire', is described in Faulkner's own words as a 'delayed vicious juvenility' (p. 229).

⁷ There is a parallel here with the Lacanian 'Name of the Father' as bearer of Law and positioning within the Symbolic Order (of language and culture) without which the putative subject is supposed to fall into psychosis. Sundquist notes that Faulkner later admitted that Quentin's discussion with his father, and hence the conversation on Caddy

However, this is too vague for Quentin to use to recover himself as his own subject of action; but still strong enough to be a producer of guilt: therefore the suicide. Quentin's desire, however, is also a sickly desire, too weak even to make him capable of the attempt to transgress physically, or to find another object onto which to attach his desire.⁸

Conversely, it may be that Quentin is trying to escape a father figure, whose weakness is therefore a secondary factor, possibly a facilitating one, and that a tabooed alliance with his sister, even if only imaginary, may be one way of loosening the binds of paternal law within the family. Nineteenth century literature is replete with examples of the use of the brother/sister incest theme as an oppositional symbol. However he is too weak to free himself of all Oedipal ties and therefore falls back into perversity and self-destruction.⁹ It is in this falling back into inaction, of inertia as the sole response possible, of lack of tension as the only salvational state, that we may see the work of the death instinct as passivity in the face of a 'difficult' world.

Brook's himself provides support for the argument that suggests that it is the 'abstraction', the disembodied tyranny which refuses the role of guide, that is part of the problem:

and incest, is imaginary (as, indeed, it is possible that all of the events, 'remembered' or otherwise, in Quentin's section may be)(p. 16). If Quentin perceives, or feels, his father to be of no help to him then that is the case; the conversation then becomes an index of Quentin's impasse in search of a father figure, ego-ideal, or a way beyond such, and not a contributing cause (which would be the case if the conversation were real, although whether as fantasy or reality both would be caused by Quentin's deeper problems with his paternal role-model).

⁸ Whilst not wishing to join in the game of psychoanalysing 'Quentin', a proper name without a referent (the text has no unconscious except that of the reader), I would of course agree that to read Quentin's desire as solely sexual would be to close unnecessarily the range of connotations, the possibility of readings, available to the reader. However, as we shall see, Quentin may be read as making one last attempt at transferring his sexual attentions onto another.

⁹ It is not necessary to read this as a rational choice on Quentin's part, any more than conscious rationalisation is a necessary implication of an orthodox psychoanalytical reading. Quentin's behaviour would simply be the path taken by a desire trying to free itself from certain configurations, avoiding channels which it finds constricting or inadequate. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, for a comment on the symbolic 'incest of deterritorialisation' (p. 67; 79).

Quentin is emotionally committed to the code of honour, but for him the code has lost its connections with reality; it is abstract, rigidified, even "literary". Quentin's suicide results from the fact that he can neither repudiate nor fulfil the claims of the code.¹⁰

The Law is such that Quentin can neither obey it or escape it.

The theme of time, reappearing periodically in the image of the broken watch, when connected to the theme of the Father as (failed) Law removes the possibility of both past and future. The loss of the future in Faulkner's novels has been noted, most notably by Jean-Paul Sartre, in 'On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the work of Faulkner'.¹¹ 'In The Sound and the Fury everything has already happened', and 'Everything *was*' (p 89). In this reading the past pulls on the present, which has not the ability to resist, resulting in a denial of the demands of the future.¹² The implication is that there is no escape from a Law firmly esconced in the past, a Law which belittles the present as inadequate, a pre-ordained failure, and makes an abortion of the future. 'Faulkner's characters, because they are committed to the past, are helpless.'¹³ Yet, if the symbolism of stopping the watch involves the stopping of time, stasis, the denial of the future, and the stopping of life itself, (the logic of Quentin's suicide), then the stopping of the watch, as a denial of the efficacy of paternity as the source of Law, must also lead to the denial of genealogy, to the denial of the past. History is also denied.¹⁴ This rejection may now be

¹⁰ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 337.

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the work of Faulkner', in Faulkner, a Collection of Critical Essays, (ed.) Robert Penn Warren, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 87-93.

¹² This is Faulkner's technique in *all three* of the novels dealt with in this chapter; the action is over, only the telling remains. Or only interpretation remains... a more open category.

¹³ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 328.

¹⁴ The stopping of paternal time may also be read as a desire to return to the mother, perhaps the pre-Oedipal mother of the situation prior to the emergence of a self and of

read, either as the rootless situation which drives Quentin to suicide (lack of the past as guide, no route to the future), or as a partial escape from the clutches of the past, from an unbearable history, which leaves him with no exit from an equally intolerable present (the past as residue, the future blocked). This later reading would invert the usual model of Quentin as incapable of finding (due to his mother's influence), or not being offered (due to his father's incapacity) the right role which would surmount his difficulties (the Oedipal reading), and describe the attempt to escape from time as a failed result to escape from his father's time (the time of paternal law, or of a *kind* of paternal law). Thus the watch smashing would be read as an act of rebellion, and the loss of life (loss of will to live) as an index of the failure of Quentin's project (of escape) and not its culmination (the project *as* suicide) as in most readings.¹⁵ Here the only option may be to practise a kind of (open) double reading, noting the bifurcation possible in certain literary structures and commenting upon the differing nuances produced when these readings are placed in given contexts.

When Quentin asks Caddie about the necessity of her marriage, the question of the paternity of the forthcoming child (also to be named Quentin) is implicit in the conversation ('*Progenitive*', '*philoprogenitive*' p. 105). Thus the father of Quentin (Caddie's daughter) remains absent (and unknown) just as the the problem of a father-figure for Quentin (Caddie's brother) remains unsolved. This echoing or repetition of the

symbolisation- of a return to a personal pre-history. In this sense to return is also to wish for death as the annihilation of the sensible self.

¹⁵ Just as the tortured syntax of the Faulknerian sentence, part of the many experiments that constitute the torturing of the *syntax of narrative* in this novel, may be read, as a collapsing together of time and syntax with paternity, either as the effect of lack of an adequate father (Freud/Lacan, and the 'Name-of-the-Father' as positioning the self into the symbolic order of language), or as the result of an attempt to escape this same father (Deleuze and Guattari, the 'anti-Oedipal' reading). Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*, notes that the 'plight of Quentin Compson', is that of, '*being-helplessly-caught-up-in-the-Other*' (p. 86). From the purview of a Lacanian-informed psychoanalytical reading this would probably be true of all subjectivity this side of autism.

question of paternity may be posed thus: the desire for an absent father. But we should note that, in keeping with the double reading I am engaged in, that the 'for' in the phrase 'desire for an absent father' may indicate either, a lack of a positive (the preposition relates to the noun alone), or the desire for the absence (the preposition relates to the noun-phrase as a whole), the negation of the positive.

If the step from the lack of an adequate father figure to the collapse of sexual prohibitions internal to the family is a short one (if incestuous desire is the result of the collapse of paternal law), then this collapse of law could also lead to a collapse of order in matters sexual external to the family.¹⁶ Internally, the sexual behaviour of Caddy and her daughter can be read as the (rebellious) product of this collapse: externally, the episode of Quentin and the little Italian girl (whether interpretable as conscious or unconscious on Quentin's part) suggests a slide towards child sexual abuse. This interpretation would work well with a Freudian or Lacanian reading in which Quentin would slide into a psychosis that would unseam his links to the sexual interdictions of prevailing social mores and then to reality itself. It would also fit in with a key theme in all of Faulkner's 'transgression' novels: the need for a 'new' Law for the South; although his work often seems to display a nostalgia for the old Law (on racial segregation for example; see the discussion of Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses, below).

This re-reading of the episode of the Italian girl would also work in the alternative reading (a type of repetition forward) of a failed attempt at escape. The implication would be that those who fail to escape would, in a Bataillan turning of the screw, be more likely to become perverse: that is,

¹⁶ A similar structure obtains at the conclusion of Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop, (London: Virago, 1981). From this perspective, the collapse of the law goes beyond, even denies the possibility of, transgression with its reliance on established morality. A collapse of the law results in amorality -or another kind of law.

they would not transgress to escape; but transgress to transgress. This in turn could lead to suicide as an alternative to continuing on along the very edge of escape, the edge of transgression, with no hope of actual release. We might imagine Quentin as caught in such a dilemma and preferring death. When he thinks of the young Caddie smeared with mud as he walks along the river with the Italian waif (p. 118), this may be read as both an abject attitude to himself (the rejection and abasement in the mud) and a potentially perverse attitude to the remembered sister as child, and thus, potentially, the child present at his side. This would signal Quentin's precarious relation to transgression. Is his inability to cope about to push him into child abuse? Whether as a sign of his desperation and the degree of his descent or as an index of his potential development into the direction of transgressive perversion, if Quentin himself is aware that the only option he has is one of an abjected sexuality that preys upon others then he may indeed have chosen suicide as the preferable alternative.

Let us examine the scenes in which reminiscences of Caddie metaphorically accompany his metonymic progress with the little Italian girl into their denouement in the hands of the local law. The process of memory parallels the progress of Quentin's walk; each may be read as a repetition-commentary of the other. If priority is given to the walk then the present is read as conjuring up the past (the usual reading): but if the memory sequence is given priority (it is chronologically prior) then we may read it as exerting a causal effect upon Quentin's actions (as is clearly the case in the the fight with Caddie's ex-lover). In the latter case his desire to accompany the Italian girl begins to appear less altruistic; indeed the more he remembers Caddie the further along the river he walks with the Italian girl in a direction opposite to that of her family. Dirt and mud feature regularly in both the real and the imaginary narratives, perhaps an

echo of the 'muddy drawers' of Caddie as a child.¹⁷ Already this fetishistic image suggests the ideal of childhood as tarnished, or more specifically, the inverting of the nineteenth century cult of the little girl as paragon of innocence. This contrast is not unlike the amalgam of purity and menstrual horror described to Quentin by his father (pp. 110-111); gender joins generation in the trope of the fallen ideal. Another clean/dirty contrast is present in this section as a gender difference; the boys swim, the girls are dirty: a cleansing operation (connoting baptism, renewal) parallels the increasing wallowing, both literal (remembered) and figural (sexual abjection), taking place in Quentin's imagination. Later Quentin will also enter the river with the hope of self-cleansing.

Walking along a river with the little Italian girl, Quentin sees a group of boys swimming; after drawing the girl's attention to this and addressing her as 'sister', he is reminded of the past (and, after hearing his still ticking but handless watch, of time):¹⁸

'Hear them in swimming, sister? I wouldn't mind doing that myself.' If I had time. When I have time. I could hear my watch. *mud was warmer than the rain it smelled awful. She had her back turned I went around in front of her. You know what I was doing? She turned her back I went around in front of her the rain creeping into the mud flattening her bodice through her dress it smelled horrible. I was hugging her that's what I was doing. She turned her back i went around in front of her. I was hugging her I tell you.* (p. 118)

All this after a previous reference (previous flash back) to '*dancing sitting down*' (p 117) and leading up to:

¹⁷ See also other references dirt and female children: 'little dirty child' (p. 107) and 'dirty dress' (p. 109). In addition to the mud scene which forms the main remembered counterpoint to the walk Quentin also remembers a 'dirty girl like Natalie'(p. 115).

¹⁸ Patricia H. Hope, *The Brother-Sister Incest Motif: Melville and Faulkner*, Ph.D. Thesis, Tulane University, 1987, notes that when Quentin and the little girl watch the boys swimming, Quentin makes the following remark, 'She won't hurt you. we just want to watch you for a while', and suggests that this represents a 'salacious attempt to sexual initiation of a young girl' (p. 122). Hope further notes that Quentin notices the 'pinkness' of undergarments hung out to dry and that he finds them 'cheap' and 'vulgar', she finds in this proof that his mind is on matters sexual (p. 123).

*I wiped mud from my legs smeared on her wet hard turning body
hearing her fingers going into her face but I couldn't feel it even
when the rain began to taste sweet on my lips.*
(p 118)

Clearly Quentin's advances (or fantasies) are not as Platonic as Brooks would like to believe. Also Caddie is persistent in this, as in other circumstances, in fighting him off; the incestuous desire is strictly one-sided. The last lines indicate something approaching a sexual epiphany on Quentin's part, however desperate the circumstances. In this context the reader might ask his or herself what a grown man is doing re-living a sexually charged memory that involves one young girl (the teenage Caddie) in the presence of a female child (the Italian girl); indeed we may leap to the same conclusion as the child's brother, who accuses Quentin of kidnapping and child molestation, actual or attempted (unlike Quentin and Caddie, the child's brother *is* capable of defending his sister, another repetition as variation). It is a remarkable fact about the positioning of the arrival of the little girl's brother in the text that it effectively *pre-empts* any interpretations of a similar nature that the reader might be about to make.¹⁹ This, like the positioning of the purloined letter in Poe's story of the same name, renders the accusation too obvious, too crude; Quentin was, after all only trying to help. After all, he did try to lose her... didn't he?²⁰ So Quentin, the narrator, states. Yet, after running away, he finds he has doubled back to where he left the Italian girl standing, 'I had forgot about the river curving along the road' (p. 115). Intention and action appear to be at odds. He has run away to return full circle; both to the

¹⁹ See also direct references to the sexual nature of the encounter of Quentin and the Italian girl by other characters(p. 125 twice, p. 123, p. 126). If the narrator does not comment it is because it is Quentin who is the first person narrator (even if it appears that at times it is his unconscious that takes over the narration) as when he can only laugh, black out, and his memories take over.

²⁰ The Sound and the Fury, pp. 114-115.

memory and to the actual child. After a brief interruption the parallel narratives can continue. Quentin and the Italian girl must retrace their steps back past the swimming boys just at the moment when Quentin's memory returns to Caddie in the mud and the rain (pp. 118-119).

After the accusation that he has tried to 'Steal his sister', Quentin undergoes an attack of hysterical laughter:

'Oh,' I said. Then I began to laugh.... and I tried to stop the laughter but I couldn't.

'Watch him, Anse, he's crazy, I believe.'

'I'll h-have to qu-quit,' I said, 'It'll stop in a mu-minute. The other time it said ah ah ah,' I said laughing. 'Let me sit down a while.' I sat down, they watching me, and the little girl with her streaked face and the gnawed-looking loaf, and the water swift and peaceful below the path. After a while the laughter ran out. But my throat wouldn't quit trying to laugh, like retching after your stomach is empty. (pp. 120-121)

The reader at first assumes that what he or she hears is the laughter of irony; Quentin, having tried to help the girl, now finds himself accused of 'meditated criminal assault' (p. 120). Also, he finds that his own loss of Caddie is thrown back at him as an accusation, hence the iteration of the phrase, 'Stole his sister' (p. 120). This phrase brings together the double narrative in an inversion, or twisting together of the roles of loser and taker, of abandoned brother/protective brother and seducer/'kidnapper'. Quentin and his rival for his sister's desire exchange roles when the sister is exchanged for the little Italian girl. In this way the sheer excess of Quentin's hysterical attack, together with the parallelism of his association of the Italian girl with the younger Caddie suggest a third option; the ironic laughter of (self) recognition. When faced with a mirror Quentin experiences an uncanny combination of recognition and horror which provokes a physical ab-reaction; the Other has given him his innermost

secret and it is found to be unacceptable. The accusations and sexual innuendo that surround him force upon Quentin a recognition of the possible outcome of his unconscious (not openly professed in the text) desire to repeat.

In the midst of his attack Quentin notes two images: the first is that of the Italian girl, and in close proximity to her the 'swift and peaceful' water, the latter reminding us of the manner of Quentin's forthcoming suicide, together they make up a image representing sex and the solution to its problems, death ('little sister death'). The end of the laughter and the continuation of the retching (the silent laughter of the unconscious) may suggest that Quentin is indeed trying to rid himself of a part of himself.

This attack and its contributory factors are reprised a few pages later; but this time it climaxes in an orgiastic vision of his sister. The sequence includes, in order; seeing the girl, becoming hysterical again, thinking of his virginity, and Caddie's sexuality:

...the little girl stood by the gate.... and I began to laugh again... But still I couldn't stop it and then I knew that if I tried too hard to stop it I'd be crying and I thought about how I'd thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girl voices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldn't be anything, what was I and then Mrs Bland said, 'Quentin? is he sick, Mr MacKenzie?'(pp. 126-127)

Quentin then continues to swoon and remembers questioning Caddie about her sex life, *'ever do that Have you ever done that, '* before abandoning himself to envisioning it, *'running the beast with two backs and she blurred in the winking oars running the swine of Euboeus running coupled within how many Caddie '*(p. 127). He then loses himself in his memories until he, the text (and the reader) rejoin the events of his last day after his fight with Gerald.

There is an important element of repetition in the fight sequences: all three fights (with Julio, with Dalton Ames, and with Gerald) are over a girl, another metaphoric link between Quentin's sister and the little Italian girl. Whilst the fight with Julio may be partly responsible for reminding Quentin of his encounter with Dalton Ames, the memory of the latter was certainly responsible for the fight which Quentin provokes, albeit semi-consciously, with Gerald (pp. 119-120; 139-142). With reference to the modernist element in the style, it is interesting to note the reversal of realist narrative technique that is involved in this sequence of repetitions: in the realist text the reading usually proceeds from present event to future echo, things happening in the future are recognised as having meaning due to their connection with the original event; with Faulknerian modernism we first read the echoes, the variations on a key event, then discover the origin in the past. All meaning becomes a type of recollection or an impossible nostalgia. But is it necessary to read The Sound & the Fury, and especially Quentin's monologue, in this way? I would suggest that open, active or 'forward' repetition may not necessarily lead to 'escape', this would be to define it by its results and not its movement or degree of variation or use.²¹ Such a reading would suggest

²¹ Donald M. Kartiganer, 'Faulkner's Art of Repetition', summarises the philosophical genealogy of 'repetition' into two broad types: Platonic/ Nietzschean or grounded/ ungrounded (defined relative to origin/ no origin, all is in 'series'). Kierkegaard suggests recollection and repetition as a basic opposition; recollection would be 'repetition backward', of the same kind as the 'grounded' form: leaving 'repetition' to mean 'recollection forward', the 'ungrounded' form. The former are presumed to be 'unhappy' or frozen in the habits of the past; the latter are designated 'happy', almost free of the past (full freedom being impossible), and able to choose (pp. 29-30). Richard C. Moreland, Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting, (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), finds it useful to make the further distinction between 'revisionary repetition', and 'compulsive repetition' (pp. 4-5). I prefer to demarcate two possible approaches to 'repetition': repetition as a reading practise, as a means to interpretation (repetition I); and repetition as a result of reading, a reading of repetition (repetition II). The first kind will work by the positing of ever new chains of variation by a reader motivated to produce new or different readings. This enablement is renewed in every new reader who wishes (for whatever reason: via the conscious or unconscious application of a perspective) to positively reconstruct the text in the face of prior interpretation and closure and is thus guaranteed by a permanent excess. As a reading strategy it must work against finitude by

that Quentin's dilemma consists of a (failed) attempt to escape by a desire insufficiently strong; but one which, nevertheless, attempts to counterpose active, creative, escape, for bound, obsessive, *ressentiment*. The leap of open repetition, as with the opening procedure of repetition as a reading practice, may lead to events, or to a reading, where the mode is not one of solution, but one of tragedy.

If the fight that occurs on Quentin's awakening is an indication of the extent to which the present and re-collected past have become entangled, the degree to which the past is being re-enacted in the present, then this is another example of how Quentin's actions are to be understood as a re-enactment of the past. However, this is not simply a question of repetition in the passive sense (Kierkegaard's 'recollection'): with the Italian girl, as with the fight sequence, Quentin is repeating to go beyond; to succeed in his desire and his defence where he originally failed. His tragedy is that this time his 'repetition forward' results in a situation with clear overtones of child sexual abuse and an act of ineffectual violence.

Quentin's hysterical attack can thus be given two readings, which may also be read as complementing each other: firstly the laughter and the fit as the emergent symptom of (unconscious) guilt, the attempted (verbal) denial is choked off by a violent (bodily) reaction; this latter itself either

re-enabling each new reader - in this way a method is provided to justify and provoke the creation of new meaning. The second type of repetition (as *a* reading, or means to meta-narratological closure) has itself been the subject of (at least) two attempts at theorisation: closure or entrapment and openness or escape (a compromise position of 'working through' is also available). Regardless of attempts to maintain an open-ended reading, the direction of interpretation would appear to begin with repetition I and proceed to repetition II as the process of reading crystallises into *a* reading: once the latter has been arrived at no amount of apparent 'openness' can reverse the process; a reading which stresses openness is still *a* reading. The foremost use of the concept of repetition in Faulkner is John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner, (London: John Hopkins, 1975), who applies the Freudian reading of 'repetition' to literature: 'Quentin's narcissism is, in Freudian terms, a fixation in secondary narcissism,' (p. 42); '...Quentin's problem is repetition' (type II, closed)(p. 69). I would prefer to read this as a question of the organisation of the text; in this sense Quentin himself is part of the structures of repetition (type I).

being caused by, or leading to, the unacceptable self-recognition of hidden desire for a female placed under a taboo by her age, a metaphorical variation upon his sister, a female forbidden to Quentin by the incest taboo. The combination of images which Quentin 'remembers' during his seizure (Caddy) together with the context which triggers these recollections and fantasies (the little Italian girl), together with the repetition of the seizure, which the second time provokes a fantasy with a pronounced sexual emphasis, suggests to us that, whether consciously or unconsciously, Quentin was in fact leading away the little Italian girl whilst rationalising away his motivations to himself.²² What we as readers have been presented with is the first person narrative of his metonymic or realist journey (connection by contiguity), in a tale in which metaphor (repetition, similarity, variation) plays the most important part. The Sound and the Fury is, after all, an experimental modernist text and if read with an eye for the connections and parallels invited by its use of modernist literary techniques (non-realist narrative devices, metaphor, series, repetition, variation), then the reading offered here will not encounter too much resistance.

If the little Italian girl is a textual variation on the earlier appearance of Caddie, Quentin's sister, then she is also a double, variation, or repetition (in the reversed time of interpretation) on another little Italian girl, the raped and murdered Italian child in Tender is the Night. Or is she, in gender, generation, and connoted nationality, a double variation on, or anticipation of another famous literary child; 'Lolita', from Nabokov's

²² André Bleikasten, The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, (London: Indiana University Press, 1976), observes that, 'Quentin is the one who cheats most, and if he cannot deceive others, he deceives himself. Another of his tricks... is *denial*' (p. 107). Bleikasten also notes that Quentin's passion is not for an abstract virginity, but is a real desire in search of a real object (pp. 107-108). The implications of the textual proximity of sexual (one might even say climactic) thoughts about this object (Caddie) to the episode of the little Italian girl are explored above.

novel (to be discussed in the following chapter). Whether in a metaphorical relation of repetition/variation resulting from the act of interpretation (incest, childhood, courtly love), or as individual products of a shared general causality originating somewhere in the 'real' (the historical context of the writing and of subsequent readings - itself also inextricable from the act of interpretation) the coincidence of these three texts is certainly suggestive.²³

The episode of Benjy and another little girl, narrated by Jason, marks a final repetition, a final variation, of the theme of a transgressive sexual relation that re-echoes through the relations of Quentin to his sister and to the little Italian girl.²⁴ This episode, in which Benjy chases the child until her father knocks him out with a picket, is itself an echo, or variation, of his desire for Caddie, the only person he felt any significant connection with (they slept in the same bed as children).²⁵ This is itself both a parallel

²³ The viewpoint of the implied reader in all of these examples is that of the White Anglo Saxon Protestant (Wasp); the *females*, however are not-Wasp, that is, they are of 'low' origin. We may note the coincidence of the Low Other as female and as foreign (and as 'child?'). 'Italian' appears as a cultural synonym for licentiousness, the iteration of the stereotype of southern European libidinality and the continuation of an intertextual tradition in (north) European writing since the Renaissance. It is thus no coincidence that, in The Sound and the Fury, all the narrators are white males: the females are the focalised; Dilsey is centre of narrative only as *focalised* third person centre of consciousness; her perceptions are filtered through the external narrator; she has no voice of her own.

In his attraction to little girls, Quentin joins Dick Diver and Humbert Humbert as a character who may be read as being incapable of forming sexual relationships with mature women. A relationship modelled upon a gross power disparity appears to be necessary for them to function (sexually) as males.

²⁴ For the episode of Benjy and the child see, The Sound and the Fury, (pp. 227-228). Richard Feldstein, 'Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* : the Incest Theme', American Imago, 42. 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 85-98, notes the use of the term 'rape' by Faulkner to describe Benjy's action: 'he tries to rape a young girl and is castrated' (p. 88). (Originally from Selected Letters of William Faulkner, (ed.) Joseph Blotner, (New York: Vintage-Random, 1978) p. 44.

²⁵ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, dismisses Benjy and Caddie incest as proposed by George R. Stewart and Joseph M. Backus, ("Each in Its Ordered Place": Structure and Narration in Benjy's Section of *The Sound and the Fury* ', American Literature, 29 (1958) , 455n; and Joseph M. Backus, 'Names and Characters in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* ', Names, 6 (1958), 228-29). The latter proposes incest to be 'especially significant in the degradation of the Compson's' (cited in Brooks, p. 7). However, Bleikasten, suggests that the incident between Benjy and the little girl 'must be viewed as an attempt at incest' because she 'functions as substitute for Caddie' and that therefore the castration must be read as a punishment for the symbolic attempt to break the incest taboo (p. 78).

and a variation of Quentin's desire for their sister. As a variation, it echoes the centrality of Quentin's transgressive attraction in the narrative: as a parallel it suggests the doubling that constitutes the resemblance of the movement from Caddie to replacement and of the replacements to each other (Quentin is to the little Italian girl as Benjy is to the little girl who happened to be walking past the Compson residence).

Indeed, all three brothers are implicated in relations that are both incestuous and related to child sexual abuse. To the examples of Quentin and Benjy we may add that of Jason and Caddie's daughter (voyeurism, manhandling, and the 'unfastened' kimono episode, p. 158). Here repetition may be read as constitutive of theme; contributing to a reading that would foreground the overlap of the themes of incest and childhood. Taken further this theme would also suggest that, in The Sound & the Fury, the relations of the sexes are mediated by the hierarchic and transgressive aspects of taboo and generation.

We may also find a reciprocal doubling, or variation, in the relation of Quentin to Benjy's castration. Both lose Caddie, both fail with her replacement; castration as loss, both are left virgins. Both are brought before the law and punished; this time the castration is literal for Benjy, symbolic for Quentin. Finally Quentin commits suicide; the ultimate form of self-castration.

Quentin's section of the novel ends with another ghostly dialogue; perhaps the most spectral in this procession of disembodied memories. Quentin's final 'remembered' conversation is with his father, apparently an attempt (or a ironic retrospective upon such an attempt) on Quentin's part to seek advice from his alcoholic and cynical parent (who will only survive his eldest son by two years). Yet whilst verbose, seemingly knowing and worldly-wise, at times even possessing a certain glib

lyricism, his father's language is empty, superficially profound - but vacant.²⁶ Indeed, this, together with Quentin's meekly desperate interjections, makes of the last pages of the novel a death song, a death wish which impels us towards the final empty rituals with which Quentin organizes the everyday possessions which will survive him.

²⁶ Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject*, p. 16, suggests that, 'Quentin and his father are free to talk casually to each other throughout *The Sound and the Fury*' (p. 16). As we have seen above, Quentin's conversations and flashbacks may be treated as fantasy. However, regardless of actuality, these (on Quentin's part) fraught and anxiety-laden conversations may be said to be anything but 'casual'. Weinstein then states that, 'They ratify each other's identity through argument'. It is precisely Quentin's father's *inability* to 'ratify' his son's identity that is part of Quentin's crisis. This ratification of identity becomes even more tenuous if we follow the reading that suggests that Quentin is attempting to *escape* from the influence of an inadequate ego-ideal. These comments may also be applied to the following sentence, 'Quentin and his father achieve a satisfying narrational relationship' (p. 24).

3:3 Absalom, Absalom!

On one level the plot of Absalom, Absalom! is simple: as a child Thomas Sutpen originates a 'design', his life will henceforth consist of four attempts at its realisation; during one of these, his son kills a friend; during the last attempt Sutpen himself is killed. Tragedy pursues his descendants. This structure is easily recognisable as a failed quest or failed problem-solution narrative. This can hardly be one of the more 'difficult' books in the canon of American Modernism. A more detailed 'take' is necessary.

The Sutpen family come down from the hills to live amidst plantations worked by slaves. After numerous experiences which combine class and racial difference, the young Thomas Sutpen (age 14) is turned away at the door of a white plantation owner's house by a black servant. Sutpen conceives his design; to become such a plantation owner himself. He runs away to Haiti where his intervention in a plantation revolt leads to his marriage with the plantation owners' daughter. When the birth of their son reveals that she is of mixed race, Sutpen leaves to begin again in the South, where he establishes a plantation and marries a respectable citizen's daughter. His son, Henry, is sent to the local university where he meets Charles Bon who becomes the suitor of Sutpen's daughter, Judith. Sutpen refuses the match and the two young men leave together for the Civil War. On their return, Henry kills Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred and disappears. Sutpen attempts to begin again with Rosa, his dead wife's sister; however, he insults her and she leaves. Sutpen's fourth attempt is with Milly, the daughter of his 'poor-white' side-kick, Wash Jones, who kills Sutpen, Milly, and their newly-born child. Bon's son appears and marries producing an idiot son. Rosa and Quentin (to whom

she has just related her side of the story) visit Sutpen's Hundred and discover that Clytie, Sutpen's daughter by one of his slaves, has been hiding Henry for four years. When Rosa returns with others, the house, together with its occupants, is consumed by fire. The longer exegesis hints at the existence of enigmas and aporias. There is much the reader would wish to know. A mystery demands revelation: let the reading experience commence!

However, the outline of the plot given above does not give any idea of the reader's experience of the story as it is narrated out of chronological or causal sequence by a confusing number of different voices, combinations of voices, and mediated by layers of narrative relay (in chapter seven, for example, General Compson has told Mr Compson, who has told Quentin, who, in turn, tells Shreve and the reader).¹ Yet, after all this: there is no revelation. The rest of the story (Henry's motivation, Bon's race and paternity) is sheer conjecture; Faulkner gives the reader one possible version through the reconstruction attempted by the (mainly) third-person narrator Quentin Compson and his friend Shreve. The single reconstructed story of the reader can be therefore sub-divided into two kinds of story representing two moods or modalities of narrative voice: the narrative-indicative of textual fact; and the narrative-subjunctive of conjecture, the narrator's preference. It is here that a link can be made to the failed problem-solution narrative; insofar as the solution to a problem posed in the plot remains merely desired, or that the preferred solution is not feasible, it may be said to take the narrative-subjunctive mood. This

¹ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, (London: Penguin, 1971). In addition to those mentioned above (General Compson and Mr Compson), two other narrative voices occur, Rosa Coldfield, whose memories dominate chapters one and five, and an occasionally ambiguous choric voice, the collective narration of Quentin and Shreve in chapter eight. The other chapters are narrated by: two to four, Mr. Compson; six, Shreve, Quentin and Mr. Compson; seven, General Compson; and nine, Quentin -again all accounts are filtered through Quentin who re-narrates these fragments to Shreve (esp. ch. 6-9), or simply recounts the collected narratives to himself.

combination of the problem/solution pattern with the subjunctive is repeated on many levels: Sutpen's design, the South, race relations, Quentin's life. Sutpen's repeated tries at his design at plot level are also echoed at the level of the narrative, where Quentin and Shreve attempt to fill in the gaps, and in the reader's attempts in the course of the reading process at decoding the story and reconstituting a plot.

Much of Quentin and Shreve's reconstruction, as individuals and as chorus, appears to be in the past conditional, whether signalled by syntax, 'would have', 'would have been', 'could have', 'could have been', or, more generally, by semantic means, as in the following example which employs both ellipsis and the subjunctive mood: 'I reckon he looked at her' (p. 223). The ellipsis is demonstrated in a full grammatical reconstruction, 'I reckon that he would have looked at her'. The use of the subjunctive mood is clear from the affirmation of personal belief expressed in subject and verb, 'I reckon (that) he'. Another example is the conjoining adversitive, 'but', which is used to create the effects of the zig-zaging of story, of shifting temporality, of assertion and denial, of description read as (past) indicative retracted and revealed to have been a (present) subjunctive re-construction, as when, after a long description of Rosa's actions and motivations (told in the present and the past conditional), the reader is presented with the following: 'That's what she would have been expected to do. But she didn't' (p. 71). If the prior use of the conditional referred the story forwards, adding more information about the past, then the adversitive 'but' returns it to the previous position (further accentuated by the periphrastic use of the auxiliary 'do', instead of 'be', in the past and with the negative), withdrawing this information as unreliable or incorrect and referring the reader to the 'present' of narration for its origin. This effect recreates, on the level of syntax, the zig-zags of narrative voice.

With the inclusion of the personal interest of the narrators (Quentin, Shreve), neutral possibility becomes motivated preference. This introduces the parallels of the conditional tense with the mood I have chosen to call the narrative-subjunctive; the conditional, like the imperative and subjunctive, waits upon a future event -regardless of the tense in which it is expressed (but only in the progressive aspect). Moving from syntax and narrative mood to the elements of interpretation (key semantic and lexical fields), I want to suggest a relationship between the conditional and the question of textual exchange relations, temporalities, and closure. With the conditional an exchange is awaited, a process is incomplete; this expectation of return also suggests a broken cycle or incomplete reproduction. In terms of the narrative-subjunctive, whose role it is to close or complete the relation, a circuit of desire has not yet been completed. Taking the step to the general meaning of the text, I would suggest that these linguistic elements signal syntactically (on the level of sentence and text), the absence of a satisfactory narrative closure, the temporal exchange is left incomplete, there is no future, for the South, for the resolution of the dilemmas of the implied author, and for the text's lead narrative voice - Quentin's suicide is not far away.

Apart from the elements noted above, Absalom, Absalom! also contains the usual syntactic, semantic, logical, and lexical games of Faulkner's style in its high-modernist phase. If the concept of transgression can be extended to include the breaking of the prescriptive aspects of linguistic use, as well as the proscriptive side of systems of law, regulation, and taboo, then the concept of formal transgression can be used to complement the category of transgression at the level of a given text's themes and content. The aspect of formal transgression in Absalom, Absalom! is represented by the use of 'marked' forms of narrative order (extreme story/plot distinction), syntax, information structure, and text

grammar (word order and cohesion), semantics, logic, and lexis (meaning, sense, and definition), 'tense' (the general use of the semantic and syntactic conditional), and, as a result of this latter, a tension between indicative and subjunctive moods at the level of narrative. The relation of these formal factors to the themes of sacrifice and law, and to the concepts of exchange and reproduction will continue in the examination of Absalom, Absalom! that follows.

If the inclusion of Quentin Compson as narrator and third-person centre-of-consciousness guarantees that the reader treats Absalom, Absalom! as a continuation of The Sound and the Fury, then a continuation of perspective, of themes and transgressions, of the vicissitudes of sex and race, is also to be expected.² Before dealing

² The exact status of Quentin Compson's role in the narration of Absalom, Absalom! remains open to debate. At one end of the spectrum Irwin, Doubling and Incest, suggests that the novel may be treated as the product of Quentin's imagination, that he either largely invents or slightly colours the narrative he reports. Here the assumption is that any signs of an external (extra-diegetic) narrator above those features traceable to the text's four internal (diegetic) narrators (Rosa, Mr Compson, Shreve, and Quentin) are those of a Quentin remembering, in effect, re-telling, the events of the recent past with his role in these proceedings being subsumed under a third person centre-of-consciousness: 'he' (p. 26).

Taking issue with Irwin's interpretation, Renard Doneskey in, "'that pebble's watery echo": The Five Narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* ', in Heir and Prototype: Original and Derived Characterisations in Faulkner, (ed.) Dan Ford, (London: University of Central Arkansas Press, 1987), argues that there is, in fact, a fifth narrator, also external, who can creatively overcome the impasse that Quentin finds himself in (p. 113, p. 130). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in 'From Reproduction to Production: The Status of Narration in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* ', in Degres, 16 (1978), pp. 1-19, also suggests that there are signs of an extra-diegetic narrator (p. 15); but she does not develop this to show whether this may be Quentin recollecting (she does note that much of the narrative is Quentin as third person centre of consciousness, a traditional method for recounting the activity of a younger self, p. 3) or some other entity (external narrator as implied author), preferring to read this 'contradiction' as that of a patient 'working through' an incompletely recoupable past, as performatively circling around the irreducible gap between language and event (pp. 18-19). Whilst acknowledging the irreconcilable ambiguities noted by Rimmon-Kenan, I prefer Irwin's view, a position not irreconcilable with the others, if the 'fifth' narrator is defined as an extra-diegetic Quentin recollecting. A separate fifth narrator is an unnecessary entity, as all the examples given in Doneskey can be easily assimilated onto a model of third person narration which does not exclude Quentin as candidate (p. 126). To this I would add that only Quentin appears to be (on his own evidence) party to the secret of Henry's final motive for the murder of Bon (and does not report it, directly or indirectly) and not any form of a fifth narrator who is clearly separable from Quentin; indeed there is no evidence whatsoever of a truly independent fifth voice (no separate focalisation or use of a different lexical register). It may also be possible to question the classification of Shreve as one of

specifically with the question of content or topic transgressions in Absalom, Absalom!, I will examine other factors which are common to both novels, which indicate a shared set of problematics, and imply, at least initially, that a continuity of reading strategies may continue to be rewarding.

Both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! are set in and around a dwelling and concern the fate, not only of its inhabitants, but of the land itself; the decay and diminution of one parallels the degeneration and depravity of the other. Both novels feature a perspective upon these processes set in a different cultural and geographical locality; the hot Southern landscape is counterpointed to Harvard, in the grip of an icy northern winter. This use of opposites, of times, of climates, of symbolic economies, or contrasting cycles, goes beyond simple structural opposition: at issue is textuality as dynamic, as movement in meaning which also consists of contradictory or conflicting material. The positing of differing economies, as contrasting temporalities, for example, gives the divisions of personal/public, individual/collective, Quentin/ Sutpen, and

the key narrative voices in the text since he does not narrate in the same sense as the others do, describing events or reporting others descriptions or memories; rather, he recasts and returns the narrative to Quentin after the latter has recounted it to him. In this sense Shreve's comments become examples of direct speech reported by Quentin as diegetic (or extra-diegetic) narrator. Alternatively, we might wish to read Quentin and Shreve as a collective narrative voice. If Quentin is the text's final frame (all-encompassing narrative voice), then Shreve would play the role of his mirror or alter ego enabling him to imagine scenarios that he might not wish to admit to himself (for the choric merging of Quentin and Shreve see, Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 249-250; 289-290, and the *italic* choric voice on pp. 286-288; 290-295). In this way that which has been offered as evidence for the impossibility of having been 'filtered through Quentin's mind', Shreve's observations on sex and incest, may be turned into the contrary (indeed the obsession with sex, and incest should be said to be pre-eminently those of Quentin, given the context of a reading of The Sound and the Fury) (Doneskey, p. 126). In this consummate solipsism, Quentin becomes both narrator and narratee. In this way any supposed reference to an extra-diegetic narrator could be re-defined as self-referential allowing the narrative to be interpreted as coiled into a hermetic circle - locked into a trajectory which is a product of Quentin's suicidal mind, a mind that imparts a doom laden, melancholic light upon all that it touches. As the novel may unproblematically be read as beginning with Quentin's recollection of Rosa Coldfield's narrative and as the rest of Absalom, Absalom! may be conceptualised as proceeding in the same mode (if the argument given above is accepted), then Quentin may be said to have had both the first word, and the last: of his literal last words, the last words of the novel, more will be said at the end of this chapter.

local/mythic a new dimension that adds not only movement, contradiction, and transformation, but also of subjectivities in motion and collision. The narrator or narrative voice may often span contrasting economies, as in the case where both symbolic geographies (North, South) are informed by Quentin, for whom distance does not seem to increase objectivity. The geographical site of many of the novel's key episodes is 'Sutpen's Hundred', Sutpen's hundred acre plantation; and the time scale of the story is almost a hundred years of history, from the date of Sutpen's birth to the destruction of his house and family.³

'Sutpen's Hundred' gives me my second use of the cyclic as an important mode of interpretation in Absalom, Absalom!; as the site of reproduction, of dream, of design, of lineage, of family and land, and, therefore, of society. We may read 'a hundred' as a figure connoting the mythic proportions (or pretensions) of Absalom, Absalom!, its breadth of scale charting the angle of decline on a graph of generations as compared to the snapshots of a family dissolution in The Sound and the Fury (the time scale of 'a hundred years' will be used again in Go Down, Moses). This time span also connotes an ethical element; processes set into motion in the past are worked through into a position of judgement, if not into full restitution and solution (should such a thing be historically possible). The ending of Absalom, Absalom! suggests dissolution as one type of resolution. This ethical or critical element suggests that the third reading of cycles, to be used, will involve the meta-narratological position of judgement; involving the reader's active criticism in identifying certain textual patterns and their movement (cyclic or economic) as of particular importance to a critique that may include a reversal of perspective or

³ Sutpen is born in 1807 in the genealogy, 1808 in the text. Sutpen's Hundred is burnt down in 1909; we may assume the date in the text to be correct and that therefore the date in the genealogy, 1910, to be wrong as Quentin commits suicide in April 1910 and therefore could not be alive in September of that year.

polarity. Perhaps no other factor carries with it the weight of critique, than that of paternity, figure for origin, responsibility (as cause and duty), power, and its abuse.

The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! feature the problems of the father/son relation: in both a demand for recognition and aid is rejected or unavailable; in both the response is a turn towards incest. The role of paternity, power and responsibility, particularly generational responsibility, is questioned - this nexus of generation and responsibility will be repeated again in an exacerbated form in Go Down, Moses, and, with a further intensification, in Light In August. Both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! use the incest theme in its doomed brother/sister variation. A discussion of Absalom, Absalom! in relation to its major pre-text is also a discussion of the role of Quentin in the novel.

In, 'The Design and Meaning of *Absalom Absalom!* ', Ilse Dusoird Lind notes Quentin's investment in the Sutpen saga:

The passionate delivery of the Bon-Henry conflict derives wholly from Quentin's morbid investment. Aroused by the question of incest, which the Bon-Henry-Judith relationship poses, Quentin shapes the history in terms of his own vicarious incest wishes and creates the poor doomed Henry as an image of himself. (p. 277)⁴

Quentin is, in a sense, both Henry and Bon, although he is less decisive than either. Structurally, this suggests the incest theme as the major rhetorical device or privileged comparative of both novels; whether this is due to the centrality of the incest theme as a topic in its own right or its addition to intensify the 'horror' of miscegenation depends upon a choice of focus. This is also true of the relation of narrative and enigma; incest is, first, a hidden cause (why did Henry do it), then, disallowed in favour of

⁴ Ilse Dusoird Lind, 'The Design and Meaning of *Absalom Absalom!* ', in L. W. Wagner (ed.), (pp. 272-297).

miscegenation. Henry himself is the solution to the other enigma: what is hiding in Supen's Hundred?

This point is noted by Brooks who suggests that, even if we accept the role of miscegenation as key in this, as in other stories, it is the theme of incest that most intrigues Quentin and most sensitizes him to the anxieties of Bon and Henry.⁵ This may suggest that the concern of the text as a whole, or the implied author, is focused upon miscegenation, whilst the issue of incest most concerns the character Quentin. Therefore, the possibility of Quentin's 'creation' of the incest angle, which is, however, inextricably linked to miscegenation; it is Bon's mixed parentage that makes incest possible. The reader is aided in the uncomfortable task of empathising with miscegenation by the rhetorical utilisation of the incest theme. Faulkner has sutured the two together into an affective reconstruction and symbol of the white paranoia and prejudice of the period (of writing, as of previous post and ante-bellum phases of Southern history).

The particular question of Quentin's interest is perhaps best read through an intertextual frame where the incest theme re-figures the courtly love theme in its doomed or impossible aspect. This thematic collocation, so important in The Sound and the Fury, reappears in Absalom, Absalom! in conjunction with miscegenation, and contrasted to rational calculation (this latter point is apparent in the relation of Sutpen and his first wife, and, perhaps, again in Bon, Sutpen's putative son, in his relation to Judith, Sutpen's daughter, where the three themes of incest, courtly love, and miscegenation are present together). The joint incest/courtly love theme is absent in the politics of sexual ownership of Go Down, Moses, which requires only the un-romanticized combination of miscegenation and incest.

⁵ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 318.

At the end of Absalom Absalom! the reader finds that it is only Quentin who discovers the secret of Bon's parentage, although how this happens is never revealed. Yet it is Quentin, as third-person focaliser or centre of consciousness (when not as first-person narrator), who effectively 'tells' us this.⁶ Or does he? There is no citation of Henry or any other person (free direct discourse, direct discourse, free indirect discourse), no report of such a conversation (indirect discourse, paraphrase or summary) - only Quentin and Shreve's suppositions (indeed the description of the scene when Sutpen was supposed to have revealed the truth of Bon's race and paternity to Henry is entirely Shreve's).⁷ The question of which 'taboo' provided the motivation for Bon's murder must remain linked to the question of viewpoint and to the (implied) desire of the narrator - if not that of the reader and his or her preferred mode of interpretation.

⁶ For a proponent of the theory that it was Henry who told Quentin of the motivation for Bon's murder, see Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: Towards Yoknapatawpha and Beyond, (London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 309; 320-323. However Brooks can only show the possibility of such a revelation; the truth is that 'we are not told precisely how the secret was divulged or by whom' (p. 309). Although Brooks claims that 'the author has made it thoroughly plain that it was Quentin who discovered the secret and on what occasion he made the discovery' (p. 322), all he is entitled to claim is that Quentin has indicated to the reader that he returned from Sutpen's Hundred after seeing Henry 'knowing' something that he did not know before, '*if father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back*' ('Absalom, Absalom! p. 146). Yet 'knowing' is not synonymous with 'discovery', nor 'discovery' with 'being told', like Brooks' ('I believe that he learned the secret from Henry's own lips', Brooks, p. 322) Quentin's conviction may also rest upon belief. A realisation, intuitive as much as rational, is not a 'discovery'. This is why the narrator is coy about the origin of his 'knowledge'. It may be of Quentin's own invention.

⁷ Absalom, Absalom! p. 243. See Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction, for a discussion of these terms and the question of speech representation in narrative (pp. 109-110). Given Quentin's personal investment in incestuous relationships, might it not be possible that the addition of the angle of incest is of his own invention; that Henry killed Bon for reasons of race and prior 'marriage' as Mr. Compson believes. If we remember that everything we know concerning Bon's parentage and Sutpen's supposed reaction is based upon the supposition of Quentin and Shreve and that there is no other connection made between the family that Sutpen abandoned and that of Bon, then this reading must be considered a possibility. Sutpen's own reference to the dilemma of the second attempt at his design does not specify Bon, but only hints at a connection to his previous attempt and its abandonment (Absalom, Absalom! p. 225).

Yet, if Quentin did discover this taboo laden secret from Henry (or otherwise) on his visit to Sutpen's Hundred at end of Absalom Absalom!, this would have an aesthetic and structural logic in accordance with the place of the incest theme in the other two novels in which it appears, The Sound and the Fury, and Go Down, Moses. In both, the theme of incest is submerged in formal experimentation: in the former, hints emerge in the course of Quentin's death music; in the latter, the entry of a suicide in a journal is all we have to go on. Aesthetically, the response in the reader is disproportionate, and we shall see just how far a detail can be made to go in the discussion of Go Down, Moses that will follow.

The frame, then, of Absalom, Absalom! is that in the last months of his doomed incestuous love, Quentin Compson, shortly to commit suicide by drowning, investigates the story of the 'love', rendered more doomed still because of the factor of 'race', of a half-brother and half-sister caught in the trail of the wake of their demonic father.

The discussion of the role of Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! has suggested that incest and miscegenation are the key terms in which the issues of the novel are figured. Yet, however crucial this pair, and their twinning, are for the novel, they are but two of an interlocking set of content transgressions. This latter term may be defined as the textual inclusion of serious illegalities, traditional taboos, and the hitherto 'unspeakable', topics that are, or have recently been, taboo. The range presented in Absalom, Absalom! includes, in addition to incest and the regional taboo of miscegenation: kidnapping (the French architect); slavery; rape (Sutpen and female slaves); bigamy (p. 248); procuring (Henry for Bon, p. 88); homosexuality (p. 89; 260); a sexual triangle in emotional, if not in physical terms; homicide and fratricide, including the murder of a son; and last, but not least, the horrors of revolt and war.

Much of what has just been mentioned could equally be classified under the heading of destruction and waste; of people (most of the novel's characters), especially those connected to Sutpen, as of property (the Haitian plantation, on which Sutpen works, burns, as does Sutpen's Hundred at the end of the story). Destruction and waste are otherwise definable as tragedy and sacrifice - and will be discussed under the heading of sacrifice below. If a symbolic economy of destruction or waste dominates the story of Absalom, Absalom!, then, from the purview of the metaphors and concepts of exchange, cycle, and reproduction employed in this reading, this kind of expenditure signals the expectation of a return on the level of identity (individual and collective, geo-political and mythic). Transgression, on this reading, bears the function of identifying sovereignty and community through destructive rituals - here Sutpen and his conception of the white slave-holder class of 'the South'. The general transgression of life (murder, fratricide, war), includes, through Quentin (intertextual frame, The Sound and the Fury, and extra-textual hint, the appended genealogy, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 316) and Coldfield (plot incident) the ultimate in sacred self-transgression: suicide.

Another field of transgression in the text resides in the use of the child theme; a transgression of innocence.⁸ Rosa is said to resemble 'a crucified child' by Quentin, who again imagines her in the 'figure of a little girl' (p. 6; 17). The figurative use of 'crucified' may also suggest Rosa's life as one long sacrifice, martyred in her life with her father, Coldfield, then, again, in her life after her rejection of Sutpen. Rosa continually refers to herself

⁸ See also Henry James, 'The Turn of the Screw', in The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume 2, (eds.) Nina Baym et al., 3rd ed., (London: Norton, 1979) pp. 356-426, for a case of child abuse: sexual if the previous servants included them in their sexual games; mental and physical if the governess is read as the children's persecutor. The child theme in its aspect of corruption or betrayal emerges again in other James short story's, as in many other of his writings from the last five years of the nineteenth century.

as a child having to face an predatory world; her reference to Sutpen's children uses the language of innocence betrayed.⁹

Chapter one, especially, features the referential and rhetorical use of the child theme: referentially in the descriptions of the Sutpen children; rhetorically in Rosa and Quentin's descriptions of Rosa, as in the element of personal viewpoint in her descriptions of the Sutpen children. The rhetorical element extends to Quentin as narrator (his relationship with his sister Caddie and with the little Italian girl in The Sound and the Fury suggest that the 'figure of a little girl' that Quentin employs be read with an ear to his own concerns), and to the rhetorical re-appropriation of all references to childhood by the exigencies of textual interpretation. The child theme attaches itself to all of Sutpen's line: Bon is a child abandoned by its father; Bon's death robs his son of *his* father; Bon's son and grandson, Jim Bond, remains forever a child, mentally.¹⁰ The pathos of the doomed child may be a nineteenth century literary cliché, but Faulkner breaks new ground with its appropriation into the American gothic modernism of Absalom, Absalom! - just how transgressive this appropriation is, has been demonstrated by its use in The Sound and the Fury; how critical this usage may become will be seen in the stories of Go Down, Moses.

If the mythic quality of the plantation house encapsulates both the glory and folly of the Old South as a kind of Romantic symbol or as a philosophical landscape, then Thomas Sutpen must figure as the tragic, that is, flawed, hero who encapsulates the mythic, doomed character of the great individual of Southern culture, of the tragedy of (white) Southern

⁹ For Rosa's self-description see, p. 12; 14; 17; 18. For her reference to the childhoods of Clytie, see p. 25; of Judith and Henry, p. 14; 18; 19; 24, and for the corruption of innocents, especially Judith, see p. 20; 25. Rosa is also involved in a kind of incest: Sutpen's attempt to begin again with Rosa, his dead wife's sister, would have been regarded as incest in some cultures (Puritan New England).

¹⁰ See also Lillian Smith, Killers of the Dream, (London: Cresset Press, 1950), for the referential (socio-historic) side of 'black' child rejection (p. 108-109).

culture itself. Yet as a 'philosophical personage', he may also be read as a Romantic incarnation of the American Dream in which poor boy makes good, but in which, like Jay in The Great Gatsby, the origins of the wealth are rooted in dubious action. As the French literary critic Roland Barthes notes in S/Z, the mysterious origin of riches is a literary cliché which signals to the reader that their possessor will not be able to complete his project.¹¹

Like Go Down, Moses, with its interacting sets of transgressions, Absalom, Absalom! also features hybrids, creatures existing on the border between one category and another. Sutpen is of 'low' social origin, 'poor white' in the terms of the Southern aristocracy; and he not only fights with his slaves, transgressing the colour bar, but fights like an animal, crossing the boundary between human and beast, Nature and Culture.¹² After the war, Sutpen returns to caste to become a Snopes (a shopkeeper of poor-white origin) and begins to thrive again. This return to an original class position, from which he had schemed so hard to escape, constitutes a double transgression of class difference. All forms of transgression add mythic force to Sutpen's characterisation.¹³

¹¹ See references to 'Enigma 2', under the Hermeneutic Code in, Barthes, S/Z, p. 31.

¹² Absalom, Absalom!, p. 23.

¹³ There are similarities with Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, also a novel of transgression. Sutpen would parallel Heathcliff who returns to claim a dwelling and a mode of life, to repeat, or unconsciously parody, the Other that initially ejected him; a strong parallel with Freud's idea of the (victim's) identification with the aggressor. We may also note the combination of a Romantic theme, the South, and a Modernist style. See also Rank, The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, in the light of which both the father, Sutpen, (albeit without the original 'noble' birth) and the son, Bon (hero as bastard), can be read as variations of the mythic hero who is cast out of a 'noble' family and who returns to wreak vengeance and achieve honour (p. 65). Faulkner's tale reads like an inversion of the typical mythic structure with the 'noble' origin and end omitted in favour of a tragic rise and fall pattern (as opposed to the more typical fall and return). The theme of the brother rivals, often twins, is another mythological staple as is the link to incest; Rank's theory would suggest that the avenging of the almost miscegenated incest was caused by Henry's incestuous desire itself (although, given Sutpen's uncontrolled sexual appetite, it may appear that he was being suspiciously possessive of his daughter). On the possible relation of the author to the mythic figures he creates Rank suggests that 'myths are, therefore, created by adults, by means of retrograde childhood fantasies, the hero being credited with the myth-makers personal infantile history' (p. 84).

Bon, like Sutpen (perhaps as a variation on Sutpen, as the theme of the son is often a variation upon the theme of the father), also personifies a chain of hybrid relations, as he is both black and white (although 'black' to Sutpen and the South), both brother and husband-to-be (to Judith), and both brother and mortal foe (to Henry). We are shown the situation, as the two friends imagine it, from the viewpoint of Sutpen: first, the supposed recognition of Bon by Sutpen; then the engagement of Judith to Bon, thus threatening a double transgression, miscegenation and incest, showing the intersection of exogamic and racial taboos. These in turn will lead to fratricide, a transgression of life and blood.

At one point in the text brother/sister incest is presented (by Shreve) as consciously attractive to Bon: 'and who to say if it wasn't maybe the possibility of incest' (p. 267).¹⁴ The presence of the interdicting law has become an incitement to transgression; taboo an incitement to incest. A transgressive volition is added to the unconscious possibility of incest (a staple of the eighteenth century denunciation of adultery which was supposed to be the unwitting cause the tragedy of brother/sister incest). Although this is attributable to Shreve in the text, it is, more logically traceable to Quentin who is himself a harbourer of conscious incest desires for his sister in The Sound And the Fury. The narrator notes that, 'Quentin could have spoke now', he should indeed have had much to say, 'but Quentin did not', another sign, perhaps, of Quentin's sovereignty in matters of narrative voice, or of the importance of the symbolic value of this type of incest to the implied author (p. 267). This list of content transgressions exacerbates further the gothic atmosphere of the novel and

¹⁴ The potentially incestuous stare of the son for the mother, '*I am looking upon my mother naked*', is also imputed, also after Shreve, to Bon, in an analogy of Bon's recognition of his mothers imputed motive of revenge (p. 252). A motive that is supposed to reveal his life as a means to an end; a revelation that leaves him an emotional orphan. A final rhetorical usage of incest yet remains to exhaust the options available: the father/ daughter form is alluded when Bon's son is rumoured to be that of Sutpen and Clytie (p. 166).

reinforces the incest theme in its traditional gothic role as measure of depravity and disaster, the bearer of shock and horror which in Absalom, Absalom! in turn reinforces the affective reconstitution of 'miscegenation' (actually miscegenated adultery) and eventually leads to the superseding of the incest taboo by miscegenation as 'the worst' that can occur.

This accumulation of transgressions knots the text into its tragic whole like a set of variations on an idea (transgression) forming what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls a 'plane of immanence', a field unified by the varied repetition on a theme, where all the key elements exist in a relation of variation to each other.¹⁵ Whether the repetition is of a closed or open character, the sign of an obsessive trap or an attempt at escape, I prefer to leave to the preferences (or psychology) of the individual reader. Psychoanalytical readings that foreground the Oedipal complex as a key interpretative 'deep structure' would usually find for the 'closed' interpretation, although as Freud's 1914 article 'Remembering, Repetition, and Working-Through' ('remembering' is usually translated as 'recollection') indicates, psychoanalytic practice does have its own method of escaping what Kierkegaard termed 'recollection' or 'repetition backward'.¹⁶

By contrast, other types of libidinal, reader based, or dissenting schools of psychoanalytical interpretation would tend to bring forward the possibility of an 'open' reading (precisely in *both* senses of the word

¹⁵ For a detailed examination the concept of the plane of 'immanence' as unifying yet non-hierarchical, see Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, What is Philosophy, (London: Verso, 1994) pp. 35-61. A perspectival or (active) reader reception approach would stress the role of the reader in constructing such a unity (the text).

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repetition, and Working-Through', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol. 12. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975). Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and Repetition, (Gilford, Surrey: Princeton UP, 1983), p. 186; 226; 297. See also Andrew Benjamin, The Plural Event, (London: Routledge, 1993) for an application of 'working through' to destruction/deconstruction in combination with the concepts of gift and sacrifice. See King, A Southern Renaissance, for an application to Faulkner's Go Down, Moses, which he considers as the termination of his literary self analysis.

'open'; as plural and as placing the emphasis on the variation rather than the repetition). However the cumulative nature of the transgressions involved here, which result in the destruction and decay that end the narrative, leaving the reader with a sense of tragedy and loss, would signal the dominance of obsessive repetition within this text.¹⁷ This would also accord with the aspects of my reading of William Faulkner which suggest that the conservative tendencies complicit in transgression, and therefore in its mobilisation for affective purposes in literary aesthetics, must be acknowledged before the process of overturning or producing a contradictory 'double reading' can commence.

The triple braid of family, sex, and race are taken from the narrative of The Sound and the Fury and are re-twisted together in Absalom, Absalom! into the threat of incestuous miscegenation which, with an epic expansion of frame, produces an intensification resulting in another narrative of degeneration and transgression. Behind these two different kinds of deviation from a prescribed norm, the reader may discern the archetypal figure of the Fall. Onto transgression is devolved the task of revealing the depths of degeneration. Yet, the relation of index to origin is confused as effect becomes cause repeating and reproducing the origin that within it carries the hidden trace of racial exclusion that will emerge to undermine it. The emergence of this exclusion occurs at the centre, in the family, at the heart of the sacred unit of social reproduction. The door-way of this emergence will be the portal of the profane, it will be clothed in the language of the limit, the tabooed, the incestuous. Shadowing miscegenation is the incest theme; this again suggests that we read Absalom, Absalom! as repetition, or variation, of the key concerns of The Sound and the Fury.

¹⁷ For an alternative view see Kartiganer, 'Faulkner's Art of Repetition', who regards The Sound and the Fury as the only example of 'repetition backwards' in Faulkner's writings (p. 32).

To the list of content transgressions reviewed above, I have added the general categories of waste and destruction; these may be otherwise defined as tragedy and sacrifice. It is under the rubric of sacrifice that I would now like to continue my examination of Absalom, Absalom!.

If there can be no transgression without law, then it is also true that there can be no law without transgression - the very presence of the interdiction suggests a realm of possibility beyond. Yet not all of these possibilities are necessarily profane. If the inevitability of transgression, due to the pressure of desire, capability (power), or incitement is tamed and transformed in ritual sacrifice, then the absorption of these ritualised transgressions provides the definitions of what is proper and what is not - the latter being shown in tamed form in the course of the ritual. A change of context turns the profane into the sacred.

If ritual transgression is a form of sacrifice, a loss, it is also a form of affirmation. The waste or wrong is transformed into a gift, or right (rite), by becoming part of an 'economy', not of commodity exchange, but of identity.¹⁸ Thus a 'gift' in one kind of exchange relation becomes that which is exchanged (as sacrifice, gift, potlatch) for the confirmation of collective identity within a group (or against another group) in another kind of exchange. The economy of identity transforms the loss, or destruction of other forms of circulation ('rational', economic 'profit' etc) into a 'productive' gain in terms of individual or collective sovereignty. Again, a change of context or viewpoint turns waste into investment, the profane into the sacred. Here 'sacrifice' is the double-voiced term that bridges both cycles, perspectives, or readings

¹⁸ In this context, the contrasted terms, 'gift economy/exchange economy', involve a question of dual, or of many kinds of, economy or exchange (commodity/ identity, constructive/ destructive, objective/ subjective, rational/ affective, economic/ ideological), which in turn are produced by, or reducible to, a single textual economy as the identification and interpretation of movements of meaning via difference in the text.

It is in this way that we may understand the mock marriage that Bon is involved in, as one of many forms of sacrificial relation in Absalom, Absalom!.¹⁹ Part ritual, part 'allowance', such marriages, Faulkner suggests, were common in the New Orleans of the time and functioned to 'legitimate' what was, in the terms of the South of the time, a transgressive desire. More importantly, it allowed white male desire to function relatively freely, whilst preserving the white female in her virginal role in the chivalric order.²⁰ Virginity also seems to have been a problem for many of Faulkner's male characters: for the young Sutpen, for his son, Henry, as for Quentin the narrator, who was obsessed with his own sister's virginity.

Here the courtly love theme has more than just intertextual or psycho-biographical importance; in its Southern avatar it appears to have played a role of some importance, both before and after the Civil War, in the conception and construction of the good woman. The connection of this ideational complex to the incest theme, the childhood theme, the cult of the little girl in late nineteenth century Western culture, and, more distantly in this connection, to child sexual abuse has been noted in the section on The Sound and the Fury. If black female children were defined as opposite to their white counterparts, as outside of the system that was supposed to protect the latter, then this classification would have allowed the sexual use of child slaves by their owners before the Civil War and by white males in general during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow periods).²¹

¹⁹ See also Dinnah Pladott, 'William Faulkner: The Tragic Enigma', Journal of Narrative Technique, 15. 2 (1985), pp. 97-119, for an account of Faulkner through the concept of sacrifice in classical Greek tragedy .

²⁰ See also Smith, p. 12-139.

²¹ See Catherine Clinton, "'Southern Dishonour': Flesh, Blood, Race, and Bondage', In Joy and in Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900, (Oxford: OUP, 1991), on the ubiquity of the sexual exploitation of slaves (p. 62).

If the pleasure of the powerful can often find ways around the laws that guarantee their power, and, in older societies, this prerogative was often disguised as a sign of holiness, then the 'mock marriage' can be seen as a function of this fusion of power, illegitimacy ('miscegenation') and its legitimisation (the marriage as ritual). At the same time, these mock marriages would be a classic example of a transgression that also function to maintain the law: by reinforcing the segregationist line (only those from opposite sides would be able to enact the ritual of mock marriage, a kind of racial exogamy), by maintaining the status quo for white males and females, and by conferring elite status upon the transgressor. The ultimate object of sacrifice in this ritual would be the 'black' female, placed in the precarious position of being outside of the general (legal/racial) economy (in terms of identity she is both 'black' and white') in order to guarantee it (whilst benefiting in strictly economic terms from material support). In terms of a dual economy model, she would be sacrificial in the former relation of identity exchange whilst benefiting from the latter relation of commodity exchange in the ambiguous mode of being both legal and illegal; prostitution/ 'marriage'.

If Bon may be read as a sacrificial victim then, as do all who believe in the rituals in which they are taking part, he goes willingly to his death.²² Self-sacrifice, read otherwise, may be interpreted as suicide; is it that Bon's complicity in a system which, in terms of his race, paternity, and desire, has no place for him, finally leads him to prefer personal extinction at the hand of his friend and brother? Henry too, as executioner, is also a believer in this religion that must place itself above all other ties, resulting in 'a fraternal love that must be violated' at the call of a larger god (expressed in a paternal racial commandment). It would appear that both Bon and Henry may be read as functions in an economy of sacrifice. This

²² See also Sundquist, p. 127.

may be read on two levels: first, as an aspect of Sutpen's role of central character, also a familial relation, with Sutpen as all-demanding patriarch around whose ambition-driven vision (the interpretation of) all other characters must swirl and turn (this is exemplified in the tendency to treat a central textual character as centre of the text; for example, Dick Diver in Tender is the Night). Here a character or a vision commands sacrifice.

Second, sacrifice may be read in the light of a general textual economy where 'the design' is part of the construction of 'Old South', which itself is indistinguishable from the guiding rhetoric of the text itself. In this case, the text's dominant textual strategies constitute the vortex which binds Sutpen and reader alike to its gyre and which governs both the expenditure of characters and the character of the text's aesthetic expenditure. That the murder of a friend, fratricide, and destruction of offspring is the sacrifice demanded by the system of the Old South, is the best critique of this system and its code of ethics and racial identity. The rhetoric constructs the text's affective edifice: the sequence of tragedy is its critique.

Reading sacrifice on the first level, that of Sutpen as the central character or narratee, suggests that it is possible to read the death of Bon as an absolution from his transgressive existence, his mixed blood, his illegal 'marriage', his incestuous intentions. Certainly he can be read as designed (from Sutpen's viewpoint) to be the sacrifice that will wash away Sutpen's prior transgressions and enable him to begin his design again. Henry is also sacrificed to Sutpen's design, as is his daughter, Judith, widowed before her marriage. The tragic irony for Sutpen lies in the fact that the impediments to the realisation of his plan are the very tools with which he was to achieve it. This auto-destruction of Sutpen's design from the inside attests further to the jealous potency of the god at whose shrine he worships: Sutpen will destroy his own children rather than deviate from

the commandments which he must serve if he is to realize his desire. If the reader is reminded of Saturn eating his children, then the phonic resemblance of proper names reinforces the rhetorical role of ruined childhood as critique; a rhetoric supported by the referential predicament of children of mixed race of this period, sacrificed because of their 'taint'.²³

Structure also supports the judgemental function of rhetoric; it is the paternal principle that is the text's central character, centre of the text's concern: the destruction of its progeny, combined with its own self-destruction, reminds the reader that, as in the earlier American use of the adultery and incest themes, the critique proceeds by way of the father. If in literature, it is usual for the fall of the paternal principle to be followed by the optimism of a new generation, then the absence of such a succession signals nihilism. But we have missed a step: from the fate of a generation it is necessary to examine the reproduction of generations.

Reproduction (the generation of a generation) in Absalom, Absalom! follows the rule for Sutpen's design; the white side (Ellen, Milly) is presentable; the black side (the unnamed wives of Sutpen and Bon) appears subject to something akin to a grammatical ellipsis. The female characters also play a sacrificial role; sacrifice themselves - or are sacrificed to the reproduction of an ideal, a family, a plantation, a name and a kind of society: Sutpen and the Old South.

The implications of the position of Bon's wife have been discussed above with reference to the sacrificial aspects of 'mock-marriage'. Rosa and Clytie, peers on either side of the race-line, one an aunt who was younger than her niece, the other a sister who was also a servant, do not reproduce in biological terms: Rosa reproduces information, she opens and closes a narrative cycle; Clytie reproduces the material of society, a

²³ See Smith, for an account of child rejection as a 'product of miscegenation' (p. 108-109).

property, a house, a home, and she maintains a shelter for Henry when he returns. Both enter the sacrificial loop in their different ways. Rosa is insulted by Sutpen; after initiating a process of engagement, he offers to marry her only if their firstborn is male, that 'they breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry' (p. 146). She casts herself aside into permanent spinsterhood through a combination of her own scruples and Sutpen's calculating lack of them: 'mine was to be some later, colder sacrifice' (p. 136). In this way, Rosa is denied the opportunity to serve or to play the traditional role of wifely self-sacrifice on terms which she can regard as proper: 'I will acquiesce, succumb; abet him and plunge down' (p. 136).

Clytie is left to sacrifice herself to the cause of a family that would not lend her their name or the title to their land, a perverse re-figuration of the stereotypical loyalty of the Southern black mammy, self-sacrificing to the point of personal abnegation, even self-destruction. Rosa and Clytie form a complementary female counter-circuit to the male axis of narration and action in the text. In the absence of the paternal principle this circuit comes to pre-dominate in the narrative and the plot. This can be seen in the competition for power in the mansion during Sutpen's absence at the Civil War.²⁴ After the insult delivered to her by Sutpen, this competition takes on the aspect of revenge. A revenge that will not accept the escape of the hate-object into death: 'Dead? You? You lie; you're not dead; heaven cannot, and hell dare not, have you!' (p. 141). In order to dominate or destroy in name, what she could not possess or destroy in the body, she sacrifices her life to revenge upon Sutpen, his name, and the property that bore his name. This competition (or desire for revenge) tragically leads to the deaths of Henry and Clytie in the burning of Sutpen's Hundred. The

²⁴ Is it too far fetched to suggest that her acceptance of Sutpen's engagement, not long after the death of Ellen, Sutpen's wife and Rosa's sister, may, in part, have been due to a desire to defeat Clytie -a victory she felt she was owed because of her colour.

white avenging angel inadvertently succeeded in destroying that which she could not possess nor tear from the ministrations of the black demoness of care. In another ironic reversal, Rosa, like Sutpen, the 'demon' she hates above all else, has allowed her life's trajectory to be warped by a single event.

If Bon's wife hardly plays a role, a textual as well as a sexual and social sacrifice, then Bon's mother (Sutpen's wife) is even less visible. Initially this invisibility appears to allow her to function as an absent centre, or hidden mover, of revenge. Yet, she is denied a major role in plotting Sutpen's downfall in favour of the 'lawyer' episode imagined by Shreve and so excluded textually from volition: 'it was the lawyer who had chosen it for him' (p. 258). This seems a displacement unnecessary to a plot where the revenge of a wronged woman would have been both apposite and adequate. These textual absences of a structurally important figure (the origin of Sutpen's second attempt, of its failure, and therefore of the plot, of the narrative) are performative not only of Sutpen's abandonment, but of the downgrading of all in the text that combines the feminine with mixed race - this issue leads to the general relation of sacrifice in the text.

The second level of sacrifice in Absalom Absalom! involves the general interpretation of racial, socio-economic, and sexual difference (sexual reproduction and the incest theme) in the text as part of a rhetoric which performatively reproduces the (white) affective structure of the 'Old South' - only in order to critique it. The specific organisation of racial (and other) significant factors that are deemed proper to the culture of the 'Old South' lead inexorably to a tragedy that undermines the text's primary dependence upon this same hierarchical organisation of racial difference. This inversion occurs by figuring the degeneration of the line that was to be part of the realisation of Sutpen's design (based upon racial

difference at its origin, its construction, its very possibility as the product of the slave culture of the South) in a rhetoric that utilises race, not only as the undermining factor of Sutpen's dream (his first wife's mixed blood, the return of his illegitimate son), but also in the terms employed to figure the decay of his blood-line into idiocy (Jim Bond). Race figures all, origin, aim, obstacle, and decline; it provides the text's main rhetorical tool, its key negative comparative, as well the story's main referential obstacle or problem. Yet, the apparent priorities of this rhetorical usage are overturned by the sustained use to depict its own referential failure.

How can a reading tell that the decline of Sutpen's Hundred, and the string of tragedies caused by Sutpen's design, indicates more than just that slavery is being denounced due to its inhumanity and incitement to miscegenation (a racist anti-slavery argument) and that this use of the figure of miscegenation (the racist term for inter-racial sex) indicates that, regardless of the humanitarianism shown in this brand of abolitionism, racial difference is still felt to be of hierarchical (and affective) significance? If the product of miscegenation, of the mixing of the races, is habitually depicted as degenerate, does this not indicate the aesthetic priority of a rhetoric of racial difference as segregation? I do not believe that this question can be satisfactorily resolved in such a way that it is possible to say that the text is finally in favour of an anti-segregationist stance. Much depends upon the position adopted by the individual reader and his or her interpretative agenda. I would suggest that this aporia in Faulkner's powerful exposé of a way of life indicates only the complicity of the author with the limitations of his culture, community, and period. If the reader decides that the implied author is, on balance, finally *for* segregation *and* racial justice, then this can be taken as the limitation imposed by a vicious social context and the coercive power of the community to which one belongs. The key for engaged interpretation appears to lie in the novel as a

tragic dead end in which all signs, all frames, point to dissolution. It is up to the reader to take the next step. Types of reading which specialise in turning the text's rhetoric against itself have the advantage here.

A reading that utilises the concept of sacrifice will also work for Go Down, Moses, (Ike's renunciation of the heritage of slavery, the deaths of the Bear and Sam Fathers), as for The Sound & Fury (Quentin as self-sacrifice, Caddy as sexual sacrifice). Whilst these may not all be ritualised and sanctioned, like the mixed marriages of New Orleans (although the hunt is certainly a ritualistic form of killing), it is still possible to conceive of them as part of the cultural cement of the system described in Faulkner's texts. In this sense the work of William Faulkner may again be read as conservative in tendency, as reaffirming by its very subversion; sacrifice being read as a form of transgression, the latter becoming a necessary sacrifice for the continued survival of the law (or white identity and its law). A change of historical or cultural perspective, however, will find that the very introversion of one of the best of Faulkner's novels, its claustrophobic dependency upon a racially inflected rhetoric, itself suggests that the texts are products of an unresolved set of problems, social and personal, which later texts, or readings, may go some way to resolve.

With Jim Bond, idiot son of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, who is the son of Charles Bon, we reconnect, perhaps as variation or repetition, with Benjy of The Sound and the Fury.²⁵ Two endlines of two southern families -one old, one new- both end by producing idiots. In the case of Absalom, Absalom!, the endline reverts to 'black'; the general rhetorical economy would indicate that this is a further sign of degeneracy with all the implications of this for the text's implied authorship. In Go Down, Moses, the 'black line', product of miscegenation and incest, parallels the 'white line'; the 'same' family is segregated by colour and re-unites

²⁵ Absalom, Absalom!, see pp. 304-309.

periodically in 'incest'. However, in 'Delta Autumn', it will not be what the descendants become that will carry the ethical charge: it is how they will behave.

Quentin's grandfather, General Compson, makes the following observation about Thomas Sutpen: "anyone could look at him and say, *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*", suggesting the transgressive trajectory of of Sutpen's ambition and his capacity to sacrifice anyone to his aim.²⁶ Yet it is important to note that, Sutpen (again like Heathcliff), contrarily to all appearances, does not make his own laws. Even in the depths of his most wilful and sadistic behaviour, Sutpen does not live in the shifting half-light of a morality erected purely in the interest of self-justification. His life's trajectory pursues a teleological end which is overseen by a greater and prior Law: greater in that it determines even one so rational and single-minded as Sutpen; prior in that the design originated in the young Sutpen's encounter with a given structure of socio-economic and racial organisation as exemplified by the upper and opposite end of this structure, the plantation mansion. The power of this latter institution was such that it included the miraculous ability to invert the established racial hierarchies that Sutpen has learnt were a defining feature of life in the South (a black mansion-servant is worth more than a poor-white tenant farmer). This inversion would have suggested the possibility of a further inversion to a Sutpen lost in the depths of *ressentiment*.²⁷

²⁶ Absalom, Absalom!, p. 38.

²⁷ See Irwin, Doubling & Incest, where the theme of repetition is read as an attempted 'revenge against time', as an 'attempt to get even'; in support of his argument he cites an observation from Friedrich Nietzsche: 'This, indeed this alone, is what *revenge* is: the will's ill will against time and its "it was".' (pp. 101-102) Nietzsche suggests that will itself becomes *ressentiment* in the face of time: his solution was the practice of active forgetting. Sutpen, like Quentin, cannot forget.

This further inversion, Sutpen's design, would later justify his unscrupulous circumvention of certain everyday laws, customs, and morés in deference to a greater ideal by which he must live. This 'Law', as I have chosen to call it, may be read on a number of levels: as a personal code of ethics and aims, a self-administered personal law, the edicts of an ambitious superego; as the sum of the prescriptions and prohibitions which guide the rational or the use of reason; as the ideal or end desired construed as the law which justifies the means; as an ideal position in society exemplified by those whose word is writ, who appear to make the law and benefit most from the law (the white planter class). The choice to place one law above others, the Law, here a summation of the laws pertaining to race in the period of slavery in the South, may also be taken as a crystallisation of the written and unwritten laws (customs, and morés) of the period and place, this latter becoming a kind of distillation, symbol, or touchstone of an ideal 'South' as imagined by Sutpen. Such a conception would combine an affective element (the linking of the incest taboo to miscegenation) with an ideal which would be both prescriptive and proscriptive. Hence Sutpen's aborting of the first two attempts at realising his design; when the race 'taint' was discovered or surmised a central element, the inversion that placed Sutpen and his progeny in the position of the white planter would still have taken place. However, the second inversion, which would have placed Sutpen and his lineage in command of the black servants or slaves who had the power to order 'poor whites' of plantation-house porches, would not have taken place. The very difference which should have been 'outside' or 'other' to those in the position of ownership and power turns up on the 'inside' confusing the classification of the 'same'. Class position is to be augmented by racial difference. The products of this conception of Law, the attempts made to serve it, and the tragedy that results, also produce a critique of Southern

slavery and the related notions of race that it produced (white supremacy, segregation).

In differing ways and with differing emphases it is such a conception of Law, even if only as appearance before the Law, that also determines the final goals of Henry and Bon. Both wish to behave properly, Henry saves Bon's life and remains loyal to his friend until the last possible moment: 'To behave properly' is a commandment in thrall to a greater Law. Had Bon simply wished revenge, racial or otherwise (Edmund's 'God stand up for bastards' in Shakespeare's 'King Lear'), he would not have acted as he did - or was surmised too. According to Shreve and Quentin, here in choric mode, recognition was his only aim: *'He did not ask you to send me to him?.... That was all he had to do.... He didn't need to tell you I am a nigger to stop me.'* (p. 294).

Sutpen, despite the means employed, worships at the same shrine; for him certain props, a wife, a son, a plantation, a mansion, are necessary if he is to live in the *proper* fashion, to achieve his aim which is to achieve a mimesis or repetition of the plantation on which he was insulted by a black servant.²⁸ This revenge involves repetition as a self-created representation (Sutpen as Artist) and must involve an inversion of positions; property ownership and the power it conveys includes the ownership of slaves. Sutpen now can move into the place once taken by the greater power at the behest of which he was humiliated. However, this situation requires the positing of racial difference as the equivalent of the difference between human (citizen/owner) and inhuman (chattel); white and black. This factor is important if we are to understand Sutpen's

²⁸ This rejection follows the ejection of Sutpen's father (witnessed by his young son) from a bar by a black man (p. 185). The young Sutpen has learnt about the hierarchies of race and class that order the South (p. 185; 186). That these hierarchies allow the violent revenge of the poor-whites upon other blacks ('the balloon face of the nigger'), in exchange for the indignities they suffer at the hands of the white planter class and their black body-servants and slaves, does not assuage the wound of feeling that they (the poor-whites) are below the lowest in the social structure (p. 191).

rejection of his first wife for having a racially mixed past. All must be in order; and this order is one that is policed by a segregationist Law. As in the story 'The Bear', from Go Down, Moses, this propriety is the desired end, a propriety defined by adherence to a Law centred on racial difference; but whereas transgression in 'The Bear' triggers a self-cleansing ritual sacrifice on the part of Ike who opposes excess (slavery, incest, and forced miscegenation) through his belief in Biblical Law (a ritual metaphorically replicated in the hunt for the bear), transgression in Absalom, Absalom! (Sutpen's excesses) becomes part of the means by which Sutpen pursues his particular goal. If Ike's Law still seems to retain a (temporary) place for segregation (he opposes consensual 'miscegenation'), Sutpen's calls for slavery and denial of equal rights as a means to an end. Ike opposes excess: Sutpen employs it.

'Sutpen is a "planner" who works by blueprint and on a schedule. He is rationalistic and scientific, not traditional, not religious, not even superstitious.'²⁹ In this he exemplifies the instrumental rationality that Weber saw as lying at the heart of the 'modern'. Yet what does this rationalism serve? As with the reason of Renaissance man, exemplified in the example of Iago, Shakespeare's negative portrayal of the former, reason does not serve itself, it is not transparent. It may serve the desire of the individual, which, in turn, may set itself up as a arbitrary Law, changing at every mood, or reason may worship at the shrine of a greater god, the given imperatives of a social structure. This is the moment of irrational worship that motivates the application of reason to means.

A comparison of Sutpen and Coldfield will explicate this further. Two broad parallels in the text are those of Sutpen and Coldfield, the landowner and the shop-keeper. These parallels are contrasting cycles, or symbolic economies, which the reader usually interprets as opposite and

²⁹ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 306.

complementary. Sutpen, as we have seen, has incorporated the Southern ideal as his 'Law': Coldfield pursues the Protestant ethic in typical spiritual and economic fashion. Sutpen will not accept gifts; he wishes to be in the position of the giver not the debtor, 'a sort of balance of spiritual solvency', to make a profit would, in his view, place him in a position of debt, as would the acceptance of a loan, which he refuses to accept from the General (p. 33). Coldfield calculates his return on everything (ethics included): 'his conscience may have objected... not so much to the idea of pouring out human blood and life, but at the idea of waste: of wearing out and eating up and shooting away material in any cause whatever' (p. 68). This is the classic contrast of the pre-capitalist 'gift' to rationalised forms of commodity exchange; an apparently noble and qualitative relation of exchange (economic, social, and personal) is contrasted against a putative penny-pinching obsessed with quantitative equality and profit. Coldfield's wealth grows by slow accretion: Sutpen's design by the bold gestures of a destructive expenditure. Where Coldfield is prepared to die for his God (suicide as self-sacrifice), Sutpen can only conceive of the sacrifice (use) of others in pursuit of his design. If Coldfield regards his life's commandment or law as issuing from a place beyond himself, to which he is accountable, then Sutpen, 'the one man in the town with whom he [Coldfield] could have had nothing in common', sees himself as identical with his ideal (p. 35).

However, a closer look at the structure of these parallel economies reveals many similarities. Some of the differences are due to the unwitting adoption, by the reader, of a perspective from within one of the economies described. The 'waste' of unprofitable expenditure appears so only through one type of reason; that of the rationalist productive ethos of exchange for economic profit, all other kinds (of exchange) are classified as 'waste'. Sacrificial exchange is understood only if it takes the form of

saving.³⁰ Yet, whilst Sutpen's design is not ultimately economic, it is rational in planning and execution: '*no madman's plan*', it employs 'formal logic', and 'logical steps' the affair of Bon is simply 'a mistake' in his 'cold and ruthless deliberation' (p. 137; 231; 217; 220; 35). Exchange is more than merely economic (in the narrow sense); identity, sovereignty (the right to dispose), community, and ontology are all at stake. Coldfield too has a pious identity to cherish, 'a man with a name for absolute and undeviating and even Puritan uprightness', he is part of a religious community which is sure of its place in a theological ontology (p. 35). The issue is less that of Protestant reason versus Southern ideal, than that of reason operating in the service of different ideals, differing designs, pursuing different ends. The ideals of both Sutpen and Coldfield have their origins in a plebian Protestantism: one reacting against the Old South; the other incorporating it - there is some irony in interpreting Sutpen as a committed Calvinist who has simply exchanged gods. The parallelism of Coldfield and Sutpen is apparently one of opposites, yet these share many structural features and may be better described as different economies of identity.

Both of these, however, have been 'masculine' economies. If the economies of the women of the novel may be read as a version of the gift economy in its worst sacrificial aspect, then Ellen, Sutpen's wife, and daughter of Coldfield exemplifies this aspect in relation to the 'masculine' economies described above. Ellen, as gift and provider of gifts, of the

³⁰ If sacrifice is read as a promise, a demand upon the future (and not as a appropriation of the past), then this attempt to move from the narrative-subjunctive and into a contract with fate is the nearest thing to the future indicative (an attempt to abridge different modes of temporality). It is interesting to note the use of contract imagery throughout Absalom, Absalom!, often after Shreve, who makes reference to an imaginary 'ledger', where we find the unity of the rational, the legal, the commodity, property, and emotional debt (the affect) - this unity of incommensurables in effect constitutes an identity calculus (see p. 244; 248; 278: see also p. 69; 98; 216; 217; 218). However, the contract does not dispose of the conditional, the sacrifice must still be performed: therefore the cycles, exchanges, and returns continue. Temporalities will not be abridged. The ledger image will be used again in Go Down, Moses.

reproduction of a line, of a dowry, of self, of 'the shape and substance' of social 'respectability' (p. 33-34). Nowhere in this exchange does Sutpen feel that he is incurring a debt. Only perhaps to her father. 'Feminine' exchanges are folded into and redefined by the exchanges of the men - despite their differences.

'His trouble was innocence', says Quentin of Sutpen, after his grandfather, General Compson (p. 181), like Jay Gatsby perhaps; but also like Boon, in Go Down, Moses, another executioner/sacrificer who is also 'innocent'.³¹ Such an 'innocence' is, however, the result of a certain ethical blindness; yet, by definition, innocence is also the reward of those that follow the law - within such an unknowing there is very little to choose from between innocence and evil.

The fratricide that results from Sutpen's (conjectured) manipulation of Henry is easy to understand from the point of view of the founder of 'Sutpen's Hundred'; the racial transgression which Sutpen felt he had rid himself of had returned, yet again, to imperil his grand design. But why did Henry murder his best friend, his guide and mentor in the world? This is perhaps the novel's chief enigma. Which transgression was it that drove him to shoot, at the very steps of his house, and after surviving a war together, the man who was engaged to his sister? Indeed: '...something is missing' (p. 83). It is not that Bon was already 'married', or the incest, but the race factor... so surmise Quentin and Shreve (we will never know for sure). If miscegenation is compared (and this is its function in Faulkner's texts), to the bursting of the boundary of the incest taboo, then the reader is not surprised if the factor of miscegenation was not the final argument that Sutpen used to ensure his son's compliance. Textually, all that the reader has to go on is the surmised remark (by

³¹ Moreland, p. 100.

Shreve and Quentin in collective choric voice), from Bon to Henry, 'So its the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear' (p. 294). The choric function traditionally expresses the feelings of the community; here the community is the white one and their feelings on the question of sex across racial difference are made plain. The other textual clue lies in the following, initial statement by Henry, reply by Bon (also surmised): '-You are my brother./ No I'm not. I'm the nigger thats going to sleep with your sister' (p. 295).³²

Eric J. Sundquist in Faulkner; The House Divided, discusses the role of miscegenation in the politics of racial difference, as a key to the understanding of the debates of the period.³³ Sundquist's thesis, in bringing community and identity to the theoretical foreground rather than seeing them as 'effects' of a deeper structure, suggests that fear of black (male) on white (female) miscegenation was the lynch-pin of segregation. No matter if actual or even possible, the barest hint of this form of miscegenation would excuse any kind of prophylactic action. The other form, white male on black female, was tolerated providing it did not interfere with property rights, that is, it made no open appearance in the public sphere (p. 109). Sundquist notes the extent of mulattoism and everyday miscegenation in the antebellum South. We may note the similarities of the sexual abuse of slaves to child sexual abuse (as indeed, in practice, it often was); of people in the same 'family' with a relation of power and ownership over others that enabled them to operate with

³² Who surmises? Shreve, or a collective voice made up of Shreve and Quentin, and thus finally Quentin (if we accept that Quentin is the final textual frame)? This would suggest that the argument that it is Shreve who wants it to be race, and Quentin to be incest becomes a question of Quentin's games of suggestion and denial (p. 289). Finally, this must remain an open question.

³³ Sundquist, see p. 98.

impunity in the face of the relative ineffectuality of a taboo designed to sexually separate.³⁴

A quote from Mississippian Henry Hughes' Treatise on Sociology, Theoretical and Practical, will indicate the strength of feeling involved, the attempt at justification by yoking a 'universal' taboo to one of local origin, and the rhetorical power gained by this combination:

Hybridism is heinous.... The same law which forbids consanguinous amalgamation forbids ethnical amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest.³⁵

The Southern horror of miscegenation is (or appears to be) equal to that of the dread of incest, the oldest, most potent of taboos: or perhaps it is even greater... Certainly this is what Quentin and Shreve infer when they surmise that it was this that Henry could not pass over; that Sutpen's trump-card was that Bon was classifiable as 'black'. Leslie Fiedler is right to point out that Absalom, Absalom! is remarkable in the genre of American gothic fiction 'for having first joined to the theme of slavery and black revenge, which is the essential sociological theme of the American tale of terror, that of incest, which is its essential erotic theme'.³⁶ If Fiedler extends Southern race factor to whole of American literature: then the implication is that of a widespread American paranoia of race: here the community of interpretation, or implied readership would be white.³⁷

³⁴ See Smith, for an account of lynching, its supposed role in the control of blacks, and its constitutive role in white identity (esp. p. 54). She also explains the role of female sanctity and virginity in the white imaginary (pp. 122-139). See also James Baldwin, Going to meet the Man, (London: Black Swan, 1984).

³⁵ Cited in Sundquist, p. 111.

³⁶ Cited in Sundquist, p. 121. More particularly, Fiedler notes the role of brother/sister incest and necrophilia in a kind of a textual return of the excluded (p. 12) .

³⁷ In such a context, literary pleasure would be, simultaneously, a policing of the 'colour line', whilst, and because of, eliciting transgressive pleasure in the reader (the transgressive nature of the pleasure of the text only serves to underline the boundaries of what is proper). Here the transgressive 'inoculation' or sacrificial gift would work to consolidate collective and individual circuits of an economy of identity (the reader and 'his' place in society), where the exchange of literary transgression would yield a return consisting in both the pleasure of the illegal and the security of knowing that the breach is

Incest is yoked to miscegenation to lend it the power of a taboo thought to be universal. With this lent strength, miscegenation is then proposed as the final motive for fratricide. A sexual transgression which crosses racial difference is less exchangeable than one which crosses the same bloodline. The supersession of the incest taboo makes its point eloquently.

If the title of the book draws our attention to its Biblical source, where David cries out the name of his son, Absalom, who has been killed after having murdered his (Absalom's) brother for the rape of their sister, then we must not interpret this as a cry from the heart of Thomas Sutpen for the fate of his son Henry; the title is profoundly ironic. It is only for the loss of his dream that Sutpen feels any remorse.³⁸ The cry of a father for his son; this is the absent relation in William Faulkner's incest novels. This silent abrogation of paternity brings back the question of generation in its inter-generational aspect. The focus is upon the generational difference between fathers and their children, especially father and son, Sutpen and Bon. The failure of generational responsibility (the childhood theme) is the critique of the older generation as responsible for the problems of the present (the Old South as an inheritance).³⁹

purely literary. This would, of course, depend upon the actual reader (possibly so constituted, but resisting); if my reading of the position of the implied reader in this text is correct then the inference is that, even if the actual readership were from the North, the response to the text's presentation of miscegenation would be subtly racist. In this sense the literary function of miscegenation would be an extension, or even a replacement, of the role of adultery in the history of literature; a prescriptive binary sexual identity is augmented by a racial identity organised on similar grounds: a policing of behaviour that appears to apply to (white) males, but visits the punishment most severely upon blacks and women. See also Tanner, Adultery in the Novel, .

³⁸ See also Sundquist, p. 130.

³⁹ In Lacanian psychoanalysis *le nom du pere* is also the phonic equivalent of *le non du pere* (the name-of-the-father as the castratory no-of-the-father, the interdiction that supports the law of the symbolic order of signification) in Absalom, Absalom! the 'no' of father is also the absent 'name of father' for Bon, the refusal of the paternal relation by the father. This relation is comparable to Quentin's problem with a paternal role model in The Sound and the Fury, and the irresponsible paternity of Go Down, Moses, and Light In August.

Generation also figures two other processes in Absalom Absalom!: one describes the reproductive relations of family, class, race, and society; the other involves the generation of the text in the course of the reading process. As reproduction, the 'generation of generations' would consist of the cycles and economies that participate in the reproduction of ideals, of the family, of a kind of society. This would include the actual and figurative roles of the maternal. That this reproduction prefers a certain kind of generation to others, even at the cost of a generation, and prefers certain laws before others as more definitive of its social structure, allowing incest whilst pretending to oppose miscegenation, is a critique of the very moral foundations of the slave-owning South.

From reproduction in the text to the reproduction of the text, we move to the interpretative relation. The generation of a reading, of an interpretation, of criticism falls upon the reader, the generator of the symbolic or rhetorical cycles and economies of the text and their inter-relation and movement. If the presence of tragedy suggests that the text may be read as an auto-critique, then the economy of waste, sacrifice and failure functions as a critique of the kind of identity that it attempted to support, together with the kind of community that it presupposed. Destruction acts as the deconstruction of the text's structural rhetoric (the role of miscegenation and incest). The gap between reference and rhetoric allows the reader a gap for critical appropriation.

However, generation is also a relation in time: as an act of generation (reproduction) it is a reference forward; as the question of generations (paternity) it contains a reference back. The relation of the past to the future, of memory to the present, configure a problem: what use of the past (memory) in the present will allow a viable future. The dead-end presented in this text is figured by the syntax, tense, and mood (narrative and syntactic), by the use of the conditional, the subjunctive, and the 'to-

and-fro' and aporias of the narrative. On the level of content and thematics, the different exchanges, rates of repetition or rhythm of reproduction or re-cycling, are themselves analogous to, and constitutive of, different kinds of temporality, of different subjective experiences of time. This relation of subjectivity and temporality returns us to Quentin.⁴⁰

If Absalom, Absalom! finishes on a note of Quentin's self-hate and self-disgust, pointing us towards the events of his last day and reminding us of his impending suicide in The Sound and the Fury (thus folding the epochal Absalom, Absalom! into an episode within the dark and brooding light of the short time span of the prior novel), then it is nevertheless Quentin who has the last word. The implications of this simple reiterated phrase ('I dont hate it') have generated much interpretation.⁴¹

My preferred reading of this, also the text's, final phrase is as a performative metaphor for an unfinished process. Negation may be

⁴⁰ Is it possible to compare the relations of paternity, temporality, and the presentation of a fragmented narrative vision in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!? The answer would appear to lie in the question of the experimental modernist style as an aspect of a local crisis of legitimation (the South) and the general crisis of Modernity. The style performs the move towards many or uncertain origins, a constellation of centres, heteronomous viewpoints and plural temporalities.

⁴¹ The role of negation and the interpretation of this line have been subjected to a thorough discussion collected in Lothar Hönnighausen (ed.), Faulkner's Discourse: An International Symposium (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989). Varying readings emerge: Quentin does hate it; a result of reading the line as a double negative, or 'litotes' (p. 21). Quentin hates both it and himself (p. 32). The utterance expresses neither love nor hate, but ambivalence (p. 35). The latter position comes closest to my own, expressing either a third option (neither/nor, suggesting a position yet to emerge from in-between the contraries of love and hate) or the undecidable 'both' of 'either/or' (the inclusive disjunction) which suggests (when both terms are contraries or contradictories) a radical ambiguity. However, there is a difference of levels between syntax and semantics involved: it is only the 'dont' that functions directly as the syntactic negative marker; 'hate' can be read as synonymous with negation only on a specifically semantic reading. The negation (here expressed in conjunction with the auxiliary verb), therefore, is of the semantic intensity of the main verb. Analysed this way the negation implies not the opposite of 'hate', 'love', but the opposite of intense feeling, a lack of feeling. Or a different kind of ambiguity, the denial of feeling itself, where the affect is denied in order to aid the desire *not* to think about 'it'. A single negation implies that a singular or simple intensity (hate) is not enough to express the complexity of Quentin's actual feelings; yet again, we are returned to another kind of ambiguity. See also Sigmund Freud, 'Negation', in On Metapsychology, The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 11, (London: Penguin, 1984), who reads denial or distance as confirmation or admission (similar to the reading that emolys the double negative, or litotes above); on this reading Quentin only allows the expression of hatred through its negation.

conceptualised as the first step in an unfinished transition: from a to ~a to b (from contradictory to contrary), to a new quality defined as itself (given its own name) and not only as a negative read relative to a prior term. Quentin does not 'hate' the South, he has moved beyond hate to not-hate but can not go any further; a new positive, as a appraisal of the South, its problems, its potential solutions, and hence a re-appraisal of himself, is beyond reach. It is as if Quentin was in the midst of a 'working through' which had failed; the problem is left unsolved, the process unfinished.

In one sense this returns the reader to Quentin's last day as described in his monologue in The Sound and the Fury: for an attempt to work through or resolve, even if only in a very partial manner (pun intended) some of the impasses indicated in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! and their relation to the incest theme, we must turn to the parallel stories of Faulkner's 1942 novel Go Down, Moses.

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3: 4 Go Down, Moses

From transgression as the harbinger of death and dissolution in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!, we move, in the stories of Go Down, Moses, to transgression as that which calls out for sacrifice. This relation is exemplified in the originary transgression revealed in 'The Bear' which demands ritual atonement from succeeding generations. If transgression rears its head (as represented by its privileged sign; incest) in The Sound and the Fury, it is as consequence and index of the fallen state of the Compson family since the distant glory of the first settlers and the estate that they forged. In Absalom, Absalom!, land and almost supernatural effort come together in the story of Thomas Sutpen's enactment of the American Dream Southern style: but this time the poison of decay is already present in the heroic origin; the descent that leads to loss of land, the dilapidation of the estate, and the spawning of half-wits begins just before Sutpen's dream is to reach fruition. Succession is foiled, first by miscegenation (his first marriage), then by the threat of incest (the return of his son, Bon, which would also threaten a further act of miscegenation).

In Go Down, Moses, the loss of land is voluntary; a palliative action made to propitiate the original sin of a distant ancestor. The symbolic unseaming of the ethical and social fabric is accomplished by the transgressing of a double taboo, incest for society as such, miscegenation for the local structure of Southern society, which occurs at the origin; deep in the midst of the long antediluvian summer a near Edenic pastoral is revealed as the scene of sexual abuse and racial domination. As in the 'Snow' chapter in Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain, where a classical landscape replete with visions of a childlike, paradisaical innocence is shown to be rooted in obscene and bestial practices, so the slave-owning society of

the South is shown, by the behaviour of a white slave owner toward his slaves in general, and to his black daughter in particular, not only to be complicit in the kind of transgression that it must deny in order to maintain itself as a society ordered by racial difference; but also with the transgression of exogamy (the incest taboo), a taboo regarded as necessary if a society is to be recognised as any kind of 'civilised' society at all.¹

It is this inheritance that Ike does not wish to accept, that he abjures upon his discovery of the primal scene of miscegenation and incest. It is a discovery that also creates difficulties for the reader, requiring many tentative hypotheses and some cross-checking, a search that is performative of the 'depth' in which such a transgression 'ought' to be hidden; its depth (difficulty) is the index of the importance of its interdiction. Incest, the breaking of this apparently most fundamental of taboos, is signalled in the text by a small detail; just enough is shown for the reader to register the shock of transgression, the horror of disbelief. Small and, in quantitative terms, insignificant though this detail may be, relegated as it is to an obscure entry in a journal kept in a near illiterate hand, yet, like a stone dropped into a still pool, its ripples traverse the text to its limits, requiring the reader to reconstruct entirely the meaning of the whole.

¹ For the definitive statement of the constitutive role of the incest taboo in the constitution of the social see Lévi-Strauss, The Elementary Structures of Kinship. See also Girard, Violence and the Sacred, where he remarks that: 'Incestuous propagation leads to formless duplications, sinister repetitions, a dark mixture of unnameable things' (p. 75). In short, the incestuous creature exposes the community to the same danger as do twins. For Girard and Lévi-Strauss alike, incest and twins provide the gateway to unlawful repetition, the 'formless duplications' that upset the sanitizing categories of the everyday, a transgressive de-stabilising with potential to unpick the seams of the social order. Whilst biological twins do not occur in the Faulkner texts I am discussing, the relation of Bon to Henry in Absalom, Absalom! and Ike and the white McCaslin line to his unnamed black cousin and the black McCaslin line in Go Down, Moses indicate the effects of twinning at its most (socially, symbolically, and, not least, racially) disturbing. With reference to literature the 'uncanny' destabilising of signs and meaning may itself be taken as a sign of things themselves (society) becoming unstable.

However, as we have seen in the commentary on Bataille, the echo of transgression, no matter how distant, is also the echo of Law; and it is this, I will suggest, that is the real link between the stories of this volume. Whilst we may read Go Down, Moses as an attack on slavery, as a denunciation of slavery as the South's original sin (or originary transgression), we may not, I will suggest, read it as an unproblematic critique of segregation. A transgressive aesthetic, as we have already seen, if left to itself, can only be conservative. Thus the rhetorical formula: to attack slavery by means of miscegenation and incest is to leave open the option to *preserve* segregation.² In what follows I will first try to show how this formula is maintained by the use of well established literary intertexts (the incest theme, the childhood theme), the text's aesthetics or affective rhetoric (transgression) and by the combination of these factors with a textual economy based upon the disjunctive parallelism of the binary opposites black/ white, male/ female, adult/ child, and nature/ culture - and then undermined by these same means to result in a critique of this formula and its complicit hierarchies of race, gender, and generation.³

² In Violence and the Sacred, Girard comments: 'The *sacrificial crisis*, that is, the disappearance of the sacrificial rites, coincides with the disappearance of the difference between impure violence and purifying violence. When this difference has been effaced, purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, and reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community'(p. 49). What results then is, 'a crisis affecting the cultural order. This cultural order is nothing more than a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences between individuals are used to establish their "identity" and their mutual relationships' (p. 49). Slavery having been abolished, the job of maintaining 'a regulated system of distinctions' now must devolve onto segregation. Insofar as his desire is to maintain segregation, Ike's personal attempt to maintain this kind of order, his sacrifice, ultimately fails. In practice, the application of the 'purifying violence' of the Jim Crow lynch mob helped to resolve the 'sacrificial crisis' by re-instituting a new kind of 'sacrifice'.

³ The question of representation of race and gender in Go Down, Moses is specifically addressed in Arthur F. Kinney (ed.), Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The McCaslin Family, (Boston, Massachusetts: G. H. Hall, 1990), who notes in his introduction that 'in 1880 a new Mississippi code considered miscegenation outside marriage acceptable but inside marriage an act of incest' (p. 13). A de facto recognition of the state of affairs obtaining after the Reconstruction period and an indication of why Lucas felt that he may as well gamble with his life in demanding the return of his wife from the McCaslin

Cleanth Brooks in William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country summarises the central tragedy at the heart of the McCaslin history as:

Old Carothers McCaslin's incest and of the suicide of his Negro mistress when she finds that her daughter by old Carothers is to bear a child begotten by old Carothers himself. (p. 245)⁴

Resulting in:

Isaac's attempt at expiation for the family's guilt and his vow of renunciation, the keeping of which entails the sacrifice of his home and his hope for a son. (p. 245)

Ike chooses self-absolution, preferring personal propriety to property and patrimony. This self-absolution itself constitutes a transgression against paternity and tradition. However, Ike is a moral puritan; Law in its abstract and universal form must come before paternal law. Isaac is, in this way, the son of his biblical father, Abraham, performing himself the required sacrifice that his father was supposed to perform upon him. Brooks has suggested of Faulkner: 'There is everywhere in his writings the basic premise of Original Sin.'⁵ The stern moralism especially evident in

household in 'The Fire and the Hearth'. This 'code' would only have applied to relations between white men and 'black' women. Elisabeth Muhlenfeld's paper, 'The Distaff Side: The Women of *Go Down, Moses*', (pp. 198-211), notes the hunting metaphor that is present throughout the stories of Go Down, Moses and its relation to the minimal roles given to women in the book; they are seen as the cause or the object of a hunt, or, interestingly, the hunters, as when Ike's wife tries to get him to keep the farm, Sophonsiba to marry a McCaslin (she succeeds), and, in an inversion of the metaphor as applied to herself ('a doe') the unnamed black woman returns to claim a McCaslin descendant for herself. Also in Kinney, Richard H. King, 'Lucas Beauchamp and William Faulkner: Blood Brothers', (pp. 233-243), observes that the novel shows how 'black' is a construction of the white community and that Lucas (who very nearly upstages Ike and Sam) and Sam Fathers must be read, not as victims, but as players of the system (p. 235; 238). This paper also contains an appraisal of the ambiguities of Faulkner's views on race (pp. 238-239). See also Richard H. King, 'Faulkner and Southern History', in The Mississippi Quarterly, 46. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 485-493, for Faulkner's unresolved problems with segregation and miscegenation (p. 492).

⁴ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country.

⁵ Brooks, 'William Faulkner, Vision of Good and Evil', p. 118.

Go Down, Moses, reminds us of the original transgression of Christianity, of the 'fall' as a foundation to a teleology which leads to repentance, redemption and eventual salvation. However Christian the idea of Original Sin may be in Faulkner, Brooks notes that, 'The concept of grace.. is either lacking or at least is not clearly evident in Faulkner's work'(p. 119). Grace is, of course, not necessary to (social) Law, it may indeed weaken it (certain types of Puritanism certainly thought so). If I am right in my submission that the strength of Faulkner's writing emanates from his manipulation of transgression, then 'grace', in blunting the absolute nature of the Law, would only dull the affective bite of the appearance of transgression, given the latter's dependence upon the degree of prohibition demanded by the former.

This quality of the sacramental and the comparisons evoked by the role of Nature in 'The Bear' will be discussed below. Here it is important to note that in conjoining the breaking of the incest taboo with the sexual breaching of the 'colour line', it is a putative Natural Law (the incest taboo read as a Law of Nature) that is evoked to support the Social Law, the written law and cultural mores of the period of writing (Jim Crow). If the incest taboo is regarded in both commonsense and anthropological terms to be the nearest thing to a 'natural' taboo, to a universal 'thou shalt not', as the very gateway, or hinge, between nature and culture, partaking of both and thus demarcating their difference, then the yoking of this taboo to the local racial taboo of miscegenation must be seen as Faulkner's (the text's, the implied author's) attempt to accumulate transgressive capital which can then be expended aesthetically to cement a Law based upon racial difference. Incest has been co-opted to add its considerable transgressive clout to make of miscegenation a comparable abomination (and we must not forget that, whilst a similar operation took place in Absalom, Absalom!, it was *miscegenation* that Quentin and Shreve

decided upon as the final reason for Henry's murder of Bon). For Ike, because of his formative experiences in the as yet untamed parts of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, this double transgression is also a breach of the Law of Nature, which furthers the inference that racial division and segregation are, supposedly, based upon a law of nature rather than a cultural arrangement. This is the core of Ike's argument with McCaslin in section four of 'The Bear' where property is opposed to properness, a commercial to an ethical inheritance, the secular to the sacred, as McCaslin attempts to persuade Ike to accept his birthright. The first paragraph established the origin of the now 'tamed land' in primeval 'wilderness', the result of having 'scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches': Nature is posited as a source of deeper truth, underlying, longer lasting, more authentic and hence more ethical than that which will follow; all of Ike's subsequent argument will begin from this premise (pp. 243-244).⁶ Ike's response then suggests that 'just as':

old Carothers McCaslin, knowing better, could raise his children, his descendants and heirs, to believe the land was his to hold and bequeath... just as, knowing better, Major de Spain and his fragment of that wilderness which was bigger and older than any recorded deed: just as knowing better, old Thomas Sutpen, from whom Major de Spain had had his fragment for money: just as Ikkemotubbe, the Chicksaw chief, from whom Thomas Sutpen had had the fragment for money or rum or whatever it was, knew in his turn that not even a fragment of it had been his to relinquish or sell (p. 244)

so too the land is not Ike's to relinquish nor to sell. Yet the doublet 'to relinquish/sell' can be governed either by a single meaning; Ike can not sell or give away what he does not own, the emphasis being upon the contrast between legal ownership and origin; it was never 'really' his in the first place. Yet, the disjunctive 'or' suggests that 'to relinquish' and 'to sell' may be read as governed by a dual economy of interpretation, that the

⁶ William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, (London: Vintage, 1990).

phrase can also mean that Ike can neither relinquish (in the ethical economy), nor sell (in the commodity economy) what he has responsibility for. Ike cannot claim his freedom, his moral propriety, in any kind of final sense by either form of exchange.

Further, this move suggests a temporal difference within the ethical economy: from a narrative of origin, past historic, to a future of obligation, future imperative, you can not give away responsibility - already Ike's limitation is exposed, despite sharing out the money put aside for his black cousins (economy of commerce, and ethics in past historic mode) he ignores the remaining obligation (ethics as future imperative). An excess remains in the ethical realm; ethical foreclosure or restitution for the future is impossible. The particular form of the restitutive act leaves the general situation relatively untouched, as the text (Ike's interior monologue) prophetically notes, of those 'in thrall '65 or no', that 'for another hundred years not even a bloody civil war would have set them completely free' (p. 244). It is in this sense that McCaslin is right when he maintains that Ike can not 'relinquish' and Ike is both right *and* wrong to maintain that 'I cant repudiate it'; right to maintain that 'it was never mine to repudiate', but wrong if he believes that this has absolved him of all future responsibility - to relinquish is not to make restitution (p. 245). The implication of this limitation will manifest itself in 'Delta Autumn'.

The dual economy at work in this text is symbolised in the two texts that underpin this section of 'The Bear', the Bible (economy of ethics and identity) and the ledger (economy of ownership and exchange), the latter a profit and loss account of the estate whose calculations include the lives of its slaves (p. 246).⁷ While the language of the Bible stylistically inflects the

⁷ In a meta-narratological moment the problem of interpretation, hence the arbitration of truth, is solved by the authenticity of self-presence; personal intuition is given as the source of the truth, 'the heart already knows', because 'there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart', the Bible, as book of the soul, must be interpreted in this light if it is to yield the truth (Go Down, Moses, p. 249). This may be contrasted to Ike's

language, as well as the rhetoric, of the two protagonists, it is in the ledger that the truth emerges (pp. 255-259). Indeed, nature comes to the aid of the cultural record in providing an index of the degree of the (obliquely) recorded transgression; *'Yr stars fell'*, heaven revolts at the enormity of the offence, the image performs the fall of Ike's prior view of his inheritance and his ancestor (p. 257). The entry of suicide *as* suicide in the ledger marks its transformation from a simple profit /loss account into a record of protest or resistance (of suicide as an act of resistance), leaving a textual trace of another economy (ethics, identity) in a text of economics; humanity (even if only in the negative) is asserted, its mark on history made. The words *'His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him'*, signal Ike's realisation of his grandfather's incest (p. 259). Ike's response is to categorise his grandfather as an 'evil and unregenerate old man who could summon' his own daughter, 'because she was his property' re-inforces the connection between property and evil (p. 281).

The scales of justice are so overloaded that Ike can have no doubt as to the correctness of his sacrifice. Yet, as we shall see, freedom for Ike also includes freedom from the taint of the hybrids and transgressions that result when Nature, as the pantheistic Face of God, is crossed.⁸ The ultimate origin of hybridisation, in Go Down, Moses, is, of course, 'miscegenation'. If this term is negative in its first use, augmented by incestuous rape; it is still negative in its second incarnation (Roth's mistress), even when shorn of its non-consensual element: the prerequisite for miscegenation as transgressive in-itself is a belief in sexual segregation according to racial difference (racial endogamy). Although this

discovery of the incest in his exegesis of the ledger (the book of the world), a discovery the reader must performatively repeat, which suggests that it may be interpretation rather than 'presence' that holds the key to the constitution of the 'truth'.

⁸ See also Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 264.

belief is disguised or omitted (Ike's youthful idealism) in 'The Bear', it returns with a vengeance in 'Delta Autumn'.

In the light of a greater Law whose source is the Bible but which is mirrored for him in the mysteries of the natural landscape as revealed to him by a descendant of the Indians who once peopled that region, Ike has found his way out; "Sam Fathers set me free"(p. 286).⁹ But his wife will not accept this negative freedom that involves the loss of his patrimony and, after revealing herself naked to him (something she has refused to do before) in an attempt to persuade him to keep the farm, she makes love with him and then never allows him to touch her again. Ike responds by falling back upon his vision of Nature and their (the human) relation to it: '*She is lost. She was born lost. We were all born lost*' (p. 300). Ike still believes that his way will save him. However in 'Delta Autumn' he will learn again what he should have learnt from his wife; that he may 'save' himself, but that this will not prevent others from continuing as before. Sacrifice does not undo the past: nor does it prevent repetition. Thus when Ike confronts Roth's mistress and realises her 'colour' and her genealogy (she is a descendant of the incestuous encounters of old Carothers McCaslin), he is confronted, in his old age, by a repetition both unpleasant and highly ironic. This repetition occurs despite all of Ike's losses, a 'return' of both miscegenation (she is classified as 'Black') and (more distantly) 'incest', (she is a cousin to Roth).¹⁰ Thus the story of the McCaslins both begins and ends on a double transgression; a double denial

⁹ Here it is Sam's role as link to the Indian as bearer of mysterious ancient knowledge, rather than as part Negro (or hybrid), which is the more important. The non-whites also have a hierarchical order of ascendancy or authenticity in Faulkner's texts. As we shall see with the treatment of Roth's mistress, to be black and female is to be on the bottom rung.

¹⁰ Dorys Crow Grover, 'Isaac McCaslin and Roth's Mistress', in Dan Ford (ed.), Heir and Prototype: Original and Derived Characterisations in Faulkner, p. 22, also notes repetition in the rejection of a son; originally by Old Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, then again by his descendant Roth (and we may hear the echo of the rejection of Bon by Sutpen). The author comments that Roth's lover sees Ike in order to ask him to persuade Roth to recognise their son. Ike, in his present of the old hunting horn, indicates that he would willingly give anything but this.

of the 'law' of Nature and a double reinforcement of this same Law. We are reminded of its presence and severity as this tale outlines its limits and spells out its sanctified interior.

I am in agreement with Brooks when he suggests that critics who, 'have expressed themselves less that satisfied with Isaac McCaslins behaviour', have misunderstand the motivation of his actions.¹¹ Yet his behaviour towards Roth's lover is in no way inconsistent with his decisions elsewhere in Go Down, Moses; only if the assumption is made that Ike's renunciation was based upon an opposition to racial segregation would such a lack of satisfaction be apposite - neither at the time of the action nor at the time of writing was segregation subject to serious challenge. Ike has ethically and idealistically opposed the legacy of slavery, its violence and abuse of power as exemplified in the complex of incest, rape, and miscegenation; he believed his personal restitution was complete. This 'return' shocks and outrages him because he believed that he had, by his sacrifice, distanced himself from such recurrences: this 'return' must call into question the validity and effectiveness of his past actions - the legacy of slavery includes segregation and any restitution must also take this into account. This is what the older Ike was, when tested, unable to do. However, as Brooks states, 'Faulkner has not aimed at a tract on civil rights' (p. 274).

As an example of the confusion it is possible to fall into when attempting radical re-readings of Faulkner without first examining the text's aesthetic implications, witness the following:

Through erotic relations with his "possessions", Old Carothers has paradoxically erased his society's chief figures of division: economic (between "property" and "owner"); racial (between "black" and "white"); and genealogical, through incest with

¹¹ Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, 1963, pp. 272-273.

his mulatto daughter Tomasina (between "daughter" and "wife-lover, "father" and "husband-lover").¹²

Only apparently. Certainly these transgressions, as transgressions, can be read as 'erasing' differences, yet due to the prerequisite for a law to exist before it can be transgressed, and through the effect of transgression of demarcating, and thus reinforcing the difference policed by the Law, the net effect is to maintain tradition, to maintain the Law.¹³ Thus the list of differences given above are actually re-enforced by the sacrificial offering of a transgressive sacrifice; this is how the Law in general, in its capacity as the expression of the will of the dominant, when it is indeed *the* Law, recuperates and utilises transgression. Also, it is nonsense to say that the difference between "owner" and "property" is 'erased' in this example (the incest between McCaslin and Tomasina). Clearly property is to be used by the owner, this is part of the definition of ownership. By using his property Old Carothers is re affirming that it (she) is indeed his property, the fact that the incest taboo is transgressed in the process only affirms this more strongly.

Indeed, Eric J. Sundquist, Faulkner; The House Divided, takes the issue of sex between the races as a defining element in a sociology of racial difference and domination. He reads Faulkner through the history of the period in which he wrote and its post-civil war ideological inheritance. Unfortunately, Sundquist relegates the role of incest to that of a pawn in a

¹² James A. Snead, Figures of Division: William Faulkner's Major Novels, (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 193. For another example of a reading which seems to identify Ike as a civil rights activist born before his time, see John T. Matthews, The Play of Faulkner's Language, (London: Cornell University Press, 1982): 'Ike believes that his denial restates the ideal of brotherly possession and the corresponding ideal of racial fraternity' (p. 258).

¹³ For the view that it is Ike who wishes to erase difference see, Patrick McGee, 'Gender and Generation in Faulkner's "The Bear" ', in The Faulkner Journal, 1. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 46-54. McGee speculates upon, 'Ike's unisexual dream of a world without difference' (p. 52). From the viewpoint expressed in this paper, it is precisely the contrary, the rigid demarcation of difference (sexual *and* racial), that the rhetoric associated with Ike appears to desire.

play of rhetorics. Whilst this viewpoint would certainly support my contention that in these issues one must read Faulkner first as a conservative and only then begin to look for the contradictory elements in his work, it does elide the combined role played by the incest theme, aesthetics, and the reader, and the important role played by transgression in an aesthetics of reading. The difference of approach may be summed up as either treating the text as the product of History, or as a product of the Reader. One can have no argument with a Jaussian reconstruction of the 'horizon of expectations' of the novel's first readers and critics (1941-42), especially those from the South.¹⁴ However other readers, particularly modern readers, will have differing 'horizons', different cultural presuppositions, and will respond to the 'universal' elements of transgression before they react to those of a local historical and geographical character; indeed they may only react to the latter, albeit reluctantly, because of the effect of the former.

For example, the affect called forth by the text for whites at the time of writing (*Jim Crow*) would have been based upon fears and prejudices that were prevalent at the time: but the affect produced in the readership of today, especially if they come from a different cultural milieu, would be caused by means of transgression, felt, in the case of incest, and informed by the text in the case of miscegenation (unless we interpret the latter as a species of rape, which, given the relation of slave to master, would be precisely what it was). The modern reader, unless a racist, will not feel the disgust felt, or pretended, by an implied Southern audience of the 1940s. It is here that incest and other transgressive blendings lend their particular flavour to 'miscegenation' reminding us to read it 'as if'... announcing the statutes of the Law and its ruling on division according to the local

¹⁴ See Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, for an account of his concept of 'horizon of expectations' (pp. 20-36).

assumption of a particular text.¹⁵ Textual transgression may be seen as the breaking of a set of interdictions which *exist to be broken* ; the latter constituting the text's affective frisson and, if integrated into the plot, defining a 'problem' which must be solved, shaping the contour of the narrative. Such transgression would remain ineffectual only if the reader maintained such a cultural distance that these separations would cease to have any meaning.

Of Isaac McCaslin's decision to refuse to accept his father's plantation, to earn his living as a carpenter, and to live in a rented room, Cleanth Brooks suggests that:

There are two powerful motives that shape this decision: the sacramental view of nature which he has been taught by the old hunter, Sam Feathers, and the discovery of his grandfather's guilt in the treatment of one of his slaves: the grandfather had incestuously begotten a child upon his own half-Negro daughter.¹⁶

The transgression of incest and miscegenation taboos leads to a self-sacrifice; a self-cleansing and a propitiation of the Law. This leads us to a discussion of Nature as 'sacramental' and its relation to transgression in 'The Bear'.

The relation of 'Old Ben' (the bear in the story 'The Bear') to his environment and of this to his hunters, to human society and its problems, constitutes at once one of the most enjoyable 'reads' in Faulkner and a passage so densely symbolic as to admit infinite interpretation. The long short story, 'The Bear', by far the longest story in

¹⁵ In this sense readers are in an analogous position to that of anthropologists who must try to discover the meaning of 'incest' in a new cultural formation by immersing themselves in the Durkheimian 'total social fact'. In this text the themes of childhood, incest and the varying binary oppositions with which they are involved play a similar orientating role with respect to 'miscegenation'.

¹⁶ L. W. Wagner (ed.), p. 123.

the volume even if we detach it from its prologue, 'The Old People', and its epilogue, 'Delta Autumn', has a two part structure which is divided into five parts: parts one-to-three and part five deal with the hunt, with matters pertaining to questions of natural heritage. Part four consists of the scene of Ike's discovery of his forebearer's transgression, and the futile attempts of Cass Edmonds and his (Ike's) wife to persuade him into keeping his inheritance, and may be said to deal with questions of social or cultural heritage, questions which are reprised in 'Delta Autumn'.

The two sections of the story have parallel double losses: a double death completes part three (Sam and the bear); and part four ends with Ike losing his land and his wife, both an economic and a sexual castration. Part five reprises the hunt, referring to Ike's first kill as a boy, and ends on a dark note of comic irony; a fool and his false heaven of plenitude (a tree full of squirrels) in the midst of an ever-decreasing wilderness. The overall effect of the story is one of melancholic loss and a certain nostalgia for a lost (and probably impossible) time. (We remember the transgression in the antediluvian Eden).

This is aided formally by a contrast of styles between the two sections. The hunt sequence is written as a recognisably realist (referentialist) narrative albeit with a surfeit of symbolism that suggests nineteenth century Romanticism (or Transcendentalism Southern style). The end of the hunt with its double death may be read as the end of (a) time as the section which follows (part four) presents a merged set of narratives connected metaphorically by the the theme of transgression and Ike's response. The style here, the connection by metaphor and not realist contiguity (metonymy), use of lists, repetition, fragmentation, an echoing dialogue, is immediately identifiable as modernist and recalls the techniques Faulkner used in *Quentin's death music* and the later sections of Absalom, Absalom! From realist-symbolic plenitude to fragmented

modernist loss, the story enacts its narrative thematics of a passage from authenticity to loss, from wholeness to division, from nature to alienated culture (history). The Fall is the dominant narrative trope.¹⁷ The return to nature in part five is anti-climactic and bathetic implying a more thoughtfully ironic comment upon the themes of the story.

The role of proper demarcation is crucial, given the many differences and divisions that flow through the novel. Whether of the relation of Nature to Culture, or of the races to each other, of the sexes (of gender roles), or of sex (miscegenation), of generation (incest), or of geography, place and role are to be clearly demarcated and defined by a law which rests equally upon secular as on spiritual foundations. At least this seems to be the desire of Ike, the text's main character (and arguably that of the implied author in his or her manipulation of literary transgression): however, as the novel makes clear, the opposite situation is the one that obtains:

This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations.... where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares. . . . (p. 347)

¹⁷ Wesley Morris, *Friday's Footprint*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), notes that, in part four, Faulkner's writing moves into an anti-mythic mode, in contrast to the romance symbolism of the hunt (pp. 12-13). History, inscribed in its modernist mode, lost or hidden, fragmented or polyvocal, but reconstructable and recognisably linear, is contrasted to the eternity of myth which rests upon the cycles of nature. When Morris states that Ike's 'failure' lies in not being able 'to complete the MacCaslin myth', he presumably means the unification of the narrative of the two families, black and white, into a single whole (p. 46). The viewpoint taken in this chapter would suggest that 'the MacCaslin myth', like all myths ends with a fall and is observed from the perspective of the fallen: better, an escape from the rhetoric of myth into a future orientated perspective. In this sense the use of the incest theme in a mythic context symbolises a foreclosure on the future; a 'turning back' rather than a 'going on'.

The clearly demarcated difference and stable social order so intensely desired by Uncle Ike has collapsed in his vision of modernity with its flows of capital and blending of races (a similar vision informs the end of Absalom, Absalom!). If we take the above quoted passage alone, we may read it as a parody of segregationist sentiment and so as criticism of Ike's views; but taken in the context of the text's use of transgression it may be better read as part of a demand for fixed identities. We might note the description of economic privation and its rhetorical pairing with a egalitarian approach to race. We might note also the role of the model of the 'fall': from a state of the good and the true (and the clearly differentiated) to that of the degeneracy of transgression. An ironic position: *all* nostalgia must take the form of a dive into a state of ever increasing transgression as the view from the site of transgression is therefore 'in' and 'of' the fallen world and therefore incapable of seeing or judging from a position that will allow it to tell origin and fall, good and degraded apart. The act of nostalgia is the act of defining the present as transgressive. Yet the judgement of the present as the result of a fall is made from a position of enunciation whose site is that very present. As a part of the condition of degeneracy how can it envisage the golden city from which it assumes its moral superiority? This is, of course, the role of religion, myth, and metaphysics in human life: to provide the impossible ground for an impossible comparison.

Sam Fathers and Old Ben, the bear, have much to recommend them as parallels, they are both old and out of place in the coming world, the last representatives of a passing order (p. 206). The use of 'too' signals the textual twinning of Sam and the bear: 'only the boy knew that Sam too was going to die' (p. 236). Their futures are bound together and both exert an uncanny influence on the young Ike. The bear appears as a figure of,

and for, prehistoric time, a time before the fall. It seems to the reader to be too big for the present; so overpowering in its presence that it constitutes a positive that throws society into the shadow world of the negative; it is too much of Nature for the culturally doctored world that is evolving around it (p. 185). If the bear functions as a symbolic position from which we may infer a criticism of modern society then it is as a symbol of that position that it is to be sacrificed in the course of a ritual hunt. Culture exacts its revenge for having the light of the negative cast upon it; society only demands that the sacrifice reminds the participants of their own humanity. As a ghost they will permit it to trouble their dreams: as flesh and blood the bear must perish before it is allowed to accuse.

What the hunters hunt down then, is their own roots, their past, their origins (in Nature, it is Culture that is to hold undisputed sway over life and landscape). It is this that they destroy in the bear. When the bear is compared to a locomotive, it is as a metaphor from the focalisation or point of view of Culture and industrialisation; the choice of lexis indicates focalisation after the Fall. It is important to remember that the boy (Ike) and Sam do not kill the bear when they have the chance. Those who carry out the act of sacrifice must be innocent and unknowing, like Boon, the holy fool, Faulkner's comic Parsifal. The boy and Sam are on the side of Nature; this is especially true of Sam who wills his own death after the death of the bear; and is, like the bear, seen out by Boon, who is thus, ironically, on the side of modernisation, of the realm of a Culture that will deny him an equal place in its midst. Perhaps he too, like the bear, is a fulcrum, a border, a *hinge*; also a transgression, like his dog, an attempted unity, or mix, of Nature and Culture, another impossible blend of disjunctive opposites in this novel full of hybrids. An exception to the rule of hybridity may be the Bear; a symbolic absolute Other, pure Nature, the link between past and present, a remnant of the past in the present and

therefore transgressive of the present, ripe for sacrifice. This symbolic archaism will soon to be destroyed by another hinge, a combination of man and dog, both human and animal (Boon and his dog, 'Lion'). The dog itself is a hybrid; of wild origin and only partially tamed, it is already on the borders of Nature and Culture, of the animal domain and that of the human (both inside and outside of human space). Racially, Boon, like Sam is a mixed blood, part Indian, part Negro, and part white. We must also note that the only animal that can carry a human near to the Bear is a mule. Thus the only creatures who can deal with the Bear are the product of a transgressive mix of kinds and (as human creations) of Nature and Culture, and thus a kind of Supernature. The only creatures and humans that can pull down the bear, as a purity that exceeds all others in the story, are hybrids, transgressors, the 'super-natural'; those that are simultaneously damned in an economy of purity and separation (segregation, racism) *and* elevated to the powers of demi-deities by an economy of religion that links transgression to divinity. This relation of transgression to divinity must cause us to re-examine our classification of the bear as Outside, as a remnant of pure Nature, and reconceive it as the 'join' between Nature and Culture. Does the bear define the economy of Nature and Culture, and if so is it outside it, and thus in a contradictory position, an 'ungendered progenitor' (p. 202), oxymoron, transgression of logic and sense? I would like to suggest that it is in this way that the bear plays the same role in this textual economy as 'incest'. Not as opposites where they may be read as symbolising the moral extremes of the poles they represent (the bear as pure, untamed nature: 'incest' as the very nadir of a corrupt culture), but as sharing a position on the 'outside'. As the bear is to the division of Nature and Culture from the side of Nature so the incest taboo is to this same division from the side of Culture. As taboo and hinge to this particular textual economy, both bear and incest would play

the key role of the impossible external operators of an economy or structure of which they are also a part.¹⁸

The sacramental role of nature in Go Down, Moses and its relationship to the trope of the Fall emerge again in the final sequence of part five (pp. 313-315). The epiphanic description of the snake, a prehistoric survivor whose presence oozes death and who symbolises an ancient and vanished knowledge, is seen as bearing the same relation to Ike as the 'ghost' deer of 'The Old People' did to Sam. Both are symbols of a vanished plenitude; but whereas the symbolism of Sam's 'deer' is one of visionary nobility (Sam as last chief), perhaps even of the resigned wisdom of one whose time is past, the symbolism of Sam's snake suggests a fallen knowledge (the possible reference to the snake's mythical role in Eden, and its older signified of wisdom are not to be overlooked) which has become twisted and cynical in its survival.¹⁹ Ike, this symbolism suggests, is more akin to the snake than to the deer, still part poisoned despite his sacrifice of his land, which, like the Indians, he does not believe should belong to anyone. It is this poison of disillusion that will surface in 'Delta Autumn' in his encounter with Roth's lover.

The final image complex of 'The Bear' brings together the railroad as the bearer of progress, civilisation, and industrialisation, as an act of ecological transgression, with the 'tree of knowledge', a natural plenitude full of squirrels which here play the role of the forbidden fruit, a fruit

¹⁸ See Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in Writing and Difference, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 278-293, for an account of Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural role of the incest taboo as external centre and Derrida's critique of the contradictions into which it falls. See also Matthews, for a Derridean account of the role of language and play in Faulkner, which nevertheless refuses to follow up the implications of the role played by the Nature/Culture opposition in Go Down, Moses.

¹⁹ Alternative interpretations include, Sam's calling of the deer, 'Grandfather', as referring to Old Lucius Carothers, the 'original sinner'; the deer becomes a symbol of evil. Here Nature would take on its Christian label as the source of pagan evil. This latter point also applies to the interpretation that it is the snake which refers to Ike's 'Grandfather' Carothers (Morris, p. 43).

ironically denied to Boon, who will thus remain the unknowing 'perfect fool', as he is incapable of hitting anything with the gun he is so desperately trying to repair. A fool's paradise for Boon; a comic epiphany for us.

Yet it is Boon, the holy fool, who completes the sacrifice of the bear, not realising that what he has done is part of the process that will eventually destroy every last vestige of a habitat unshaped by Man. It is Nature herself that has fallen in the ritual hunt for the bear: henceforth the tamed landscape of the reign of Culture will predominate. This is a loss, a Fall, which is irreversible; as an aspect of 'time's arrow', this denial of the possibility of return carries a symbolic weight which inclines it toward polysemic interpretation. This fall, modernisation as a fall from Nature into Culture, may be read as a parallel for the fall of the Old South and of the antediluvian way of life in the Civil War.²⁰ It may also be read as a parallel for the fallen state of the Old South which is symbolised in old Carothers McCaslin's incestuous transgression, the originary transgression of slavery which is based upon the division of humanity into races (the 'family of man'). This originary division itself being a parallel of the fall of humanity from Nature into Culture in the process of maturation and language learning. Perhaps all of these allegories of the fall, of the originary transgression, may be only figures for the fundamental division into organic and inorganic, between agitated existence and stasis. From this perspective all attempts, all rituals, all sacrifices that try to enact a return to the pre-lapsarian state can only fail. Worse, as to go beyond Culture is itself a tabooed enterprise (to go beyond what is natural: witchcraft, the illegality of suicide), in which case even the act of searching for the means to affect a cure is itself transgressive. And futile... as all paths that lead ultimately to the final healing of the gap that is the

²⁰ See *Go Down, Moses*, p. 284 for references to the 'cursed' land.

difference between Nature and Culture must also lead to the blind insensible sleep of the inorganic. The return to nature produces only the 'return' of the death instinct. Incest in this abstract mythological light is but the most taboo ridden, the most highly transgressive, of our desperate attempts to return.

In The Sound and the Fury the childhood theme and the incest theme (attached to the theme of courtly love) appear together (Quentin and Caddie as children, and the Italian girl); in Absalom, Absalom! they appear separately (the courtly love theme is present in the impossibility of many of the character's relationships, childhood appears in order to be betrayed); in Go Down, Moses the incest theme and the childhood theme appear in parallel; the incest theme being linked to a young black woman, the childhood theme to a white boy. In this way Ike is linked to nature, innocence, and purity in an intertextual continuation of the Romantic idea of childhood; this, in its turn, plays a part in the binary opposition adult/child. Although not quite a child the black slave girl also shares in this economy as the former term in the opposition adolescent/adult: the young black woman is linked to the incest theme - the opposition black/white (adolescent/adult) ties the incest theme, as in Absalom, Absalom!, to miscegenation. The courtly love theme may perhaps be conceptualised as present only in its negative image with incest as symbolic of the impossible ideal. This organisation by race and gender results in the boy as bearer of the ideal: with the girl taking the role of negative ideal; that this 'negative' (to pursue the analogy with photography) is also a 'black' image suggests that a moral economy of colour is metaphorically joined to one of race. The implications of this conjunction appear to suggest that the subject of the incestuous abuse was fallen as much as she was a victim. Conversely, in its aspect of

adult/adolescent (in age, generation, and symbolically, due to her position as a slave, the girl occupies a childlike position), the incest theme as it is used here is closest to that of the father/daughter form, traditionally used to denote the use of the incest theme in its critical aspect.

The intertextual themes are attached to an economy of age/generation, the binary of adult and child/adolescent, which in turn is attached to the other major oppositions in the text, of race, gender, and of nature and culture. The two intertexts (incest, childhood) and their affiliation indicate a dual economy centering upon a rhetorical fulcrum consisting of the paired binaries child/nature and adult/culture. Which of this pair of doublets takes the negative and which the positive depends upon their connection to the other binaries at play (race and gender). The hierarchical organisation (and re-organisation) of these terms occurs according to whether child/nature is attached to white/male (in which case it becomes the 'upper' term, Ike as a child, the child theme, innocence as truth), or to black/female (when child/nature is judged as part of the complex 'lower term' from an adult/culture position, the older Ike, the relation of the young Ike and his black cousin to their guardians/elders). This tagging usually indicates or follows the hierarchy (dominant/dominated) obtaining in the Southern culture of the period. The rhetorical use of childhood, nature and race (native Americans) is opposed to the actuality as depicted in the text itself (rhetoric opposes both depiction and historical referent).

This leads to the second stage, which spans the stories 'The Bear' and 'Go Down, Moses', where the positive, or privileged viewpoint, moves from the young Ike (child/nature) to the older Ike (adult/culture); in this transition the trope of the fall is re-enacted upon Ike's moral sense. The first story critiques white culture in relation to ecology, gender, and race responsibilities (child theme): the second appears to be judgemental in

favour of segregation and at the cost of further progress towards equality (the older Ike attempts to dismiss his cousin, a black woman who is with child). Yet the echo of the incest theme present in the appeal of Ike's opposite number in the parallel 'black' McCaslin line undermines his position; his previous ethical decision returns both to critique his current stance and to suggest that simple negative action, or moral hand-washing, is insufficient to deal with the legacy of an unacceptable past.

A textual economy apparently centered upon the conjoined oppositions of adult/child and Nature/Culture (generational difference and ontological difference) which is, by default, also male and white in its implied viewpoint, is decentered by the other terms of the binary oppositions of race and gender, the black and the female, until contradictory forces tear apart the text's conservative aesthetic (the reinforcement of the law, segregation, as a product of the rhetoric of transgression). The powerful critical momentum opened up by the intertextual use of the child and incest themes in 'The Bear' can not be denied in the retrenchment of 'Go Down, Moses'. The implied lawgiver of the early Ike is different from that of the older Ike and it is in this gap (often closed by readings which are too quickly 'conservative' or over-emphasised by those which are too quickly 'progressive'), which is also the gap between the text's idealism and its conclusion, its implication and its stated intention, its transgressive and intertextual rhetorics: it is in this gap that the space of dissent can be found.

From structure (identifying the role of binaries), to its movement (incompatible, double, or 'flipping' valencies or economies), we have moved to options on interpretation, to critical or political re-appropriations, the possibility of which is opened up by the instability of the text's rhetoric. I will conclude this section by taking a closer look at the site of the text's attempted turn to conservatism, a turn which is

nevertheless simultaneously a re-turn to its previous critical perspective, this conservation being a result of the return of the 'other' McCaslin line in the story 'Delta Autumn'.

A conversation that takes place in the course of the hunting trip that constitutes the *mise en scene* of 'Delta Autumn', reiterates the theme of Law and its relation to the individual. Ike (now an old man) affirms that, 'most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be' (p. 329). Roth, his cousin, and descendant of Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin replies that if that is really all he has 'finally learned about the other animals' that he has 'lived among' then, 'where have you been all the time you were dead' (p. 329). Roth's view of human nature is more pessimistic than Ike's. When someone asks him, "' Meaning that its only when folks happen to be watching him that a man behaves at all.... Is that it?'" , he replies, "'Yes.... A man in a blue coat, with a badge on it watching him'"(p. 329). Ike begins to respond, "'I deny that.... I dont__'", but, 'the other two paid no attention to him'(p. 330). Ike is about to say that he does not require to be watched; that he is capable of moral self-government. In this discussion of Law and human nature, the significance of the title becomes ever more apparent, the role of Moses as the law-giver is required yet again: we may also note a possible contrast between Mosaic law and pagan sacrifice.²¹ Uncle Ike did not need a policeman to tell him what was right or wrong, for him the pagan (although we might say puritan) way worked; his relation to nature and to a pre-Christian people ensures his sense of justice. The inference is that for the rising generation (this story is dated as having 'taken place' at its time of writing) a policeman, a visual reminder of the law and of punishment, is necessary

²¹ If the title of the book, Go Down, Moses, refers to the song of the same name, which takes Moses as the deliverer, then we may interpret this as the call for the deliverance from lawlessness. Otherwise we might wish to regard it as yet another double-edged irony.

to insure that 'a man behaves at all'.²² Thus in the final story of the text, bearing the same title as the book as a whole, the Law of Moses is obeyed and punishment is visited on a young black man who has been involved in organised crime and a killing; the penalty is death.

It is the role of the Law (generalised, symbolic, even reified), and the propitiation that it demands, that is therefore the key to the supposed lack of unity in Go Down, Moses.²³ It is this that makes the otherwise unconnected story, 'Pantaloone in Black', the story of a bereavement that results in a death, fit into pattern of the novel as a whole. The transgression of Law must be punished; criminality, here the taking of life, must be punished and here (regardless of possibly extenuating circumstances), as in the final story of the book, the death of a young black man is the price to be paid for transgression. Moses is called upon to descend from his communion with God to bring back the tablets of the Law: yes, for the transgressing whites like old Lucius and Roth McCaslin; but also, for the black characters of the stories, 'Pantaloone in Black' (with its blend of tragedy and irony) and 'Fire and the Hearth' (a very serious comedy). Perhaps even to make the latter remain firmly on their side of the Jim Crow line. To argue that this story is unconnected to the others in the novel, due to there only being a tenuous link to the McCaslins, that its main character is not part of the McCaslin family, is to miss the point of Faulkner's theme.²⁴ The critic Olga Vickery points out that a type of symbolic hunt is involved in all of the tales in Go Down, Moses, I would agree, although the types of search do differ, as Stanley Tick maintains.²⁵ The point to note is that causally the hunt is secondary to the quest for

²² Stanley Tick, 'The Unity of *Go Down, Moses*', in Wagner, (ed.), pp. 327-334, (p. 331). The date would be sometime in 1940-41.

²³ See Wagner, (ed.), for a summary of this debate. See especially Cowley and Trilling on 'looseness' (p. 327).

²⁴ Wagner, (ed.), p. 330.

²⁵ Wagner, (ed.), p. 329.

propitiation and punishment, the result of a transgression actual or perceived, as judged from the purview of a greater law. This difference between legal and universal law, between 'law' and 'Law', is also that between the referential (in the story and compared to the practice of the period) and rhetorical (its links to Nature, miscegenation, and incest) aspects of the story. This division will be further complicated by the inclusion of another perspective, suggesting another economy of restitution.

Writing on the closing lines of 'Delta Autumn', Robert Penn Warren notes that, 'Roth, in a double sense, has killed a "doe" and has violated honour'.²⁶ Yet another transgression, and again the context of the hunt signal to us that it is a transgression against Nature, against life itself, the reproductive capacities of the doe having been ignored in favour of a quick kill. This parallels the return to/of 'incest' and miscegenation at the end of the cycle, the taking by Roth of another 'doe', this time under taboo for her race. If this return makes Ike's sacrifice appear in vain, as a wasted sacrifice or sacrificial waste, then this is to read his action as a taking on of responsibility (for the future) and not as the settling of an account (with the past): Ike's is to be tested yet again and this time he will fail. Yet, on a textual level, the actions of the older Ike do attempt to perpetuate the Law as the text's fundamental rhetorical edifice: the generator of transgression; the Law that was to separate black and white. It was this that made of forced miscegenation a rod to beat the back of slavery without stopping to question what it was that the concept of 'miscegenation' itself was based upon (the addition of incest helped mask this question). It is the continuation of this assumption of transgression, this assumption of Law, which is apparent in the responses of the older Ike to a 'miscegenation'

²⁶ Robert Penn Warren, 'Faulkner: The South, the Negro, and Time', in Warren (ed.), Faulkner, a Collection of Critical Essays, p. 266.

that is consensual. As in Absalom, Absalom!, where the same tropological yoking of incest to miscegenation occurs, the text's rhetoric is turnable, its Law rejected; in Go Down, Moses it is irony rather than tragedy that carries the critical edge. If the level of character is subsumable to the level of rhetoric, then Ike's behaviour may be read as continuing with the old rhetoric in new circumstances (a new generation); his morality is now shown to be partly immoral. This forking of rhetorics, of the perspectives of the central character and of his female visitor, bearer of the contrasting ethical position, raises the question of the viewpoint from which 'miscegenation' is judged as negative. This division may be read to imply ambiguity in the position of the implied author regarding questions of race (the biographical step to the actual author would suggest that Faulkner was also divided on this issue). Hence Ike's sacrifice, *not* for an end to race division, but for a justice conceived as reconcilable with segregation; he believed that his sacrifice appeased the Law that his uncle had broken because he not only believed, 'that racial distinctions cannot be overcome, that the responsibility for them can only be renounced', but (as his older self in 'Delta Autumn') felt that they should not (at least not yet) be overcome.²⁷ Despite everything, like his grandfather (even like Sutpen), Ike too can not grant recognition to those that need it (placed in the paternal position, Ike, like so many of Faulkner's fathers, comes to bear criticism for his shortcomings). This would also explain his unforgiving and condemnatory comments at the end of 'Delta Autumn', when he says to Roth's lover, 'you are a nigger', and advises her to go north and marry a man of her own 'race' (p. 344; 346). To which she replies :

²⁷ Sundquist, p. 148.

"Old man," she said, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (p. 346)

This is a darkly ironic blow for Ike, who gave away his patrimony to maintain his clean and proper self in full observance of the Law (re-echoed in the gift of the hunting horn, a misrecognition on his part of her desire for recognition, or propriety, not property). In giving away his property, Ike caused his wife to deny him her body, leaving him childless (no property to hand on, no heirs to hand it on to); he has thus denied himself an option on the future, a stake in any kind of reproduction - this also may explain his rejection of Roth's lover, who has the son he wanted. Thus, like Albrecht, the Nieblung in the opening scene of Wagner's epic 'Ring' cycle, Ike has also exchanged Love for, what he believed to be, a higher (in this case moral) power. However, we might note, this denial of love is also a denial of life (as desire and as procreation), and thus a denial of nature. Avoiding one transgression Ike has committed another. In equating the segregationist law of his culture to a law of Nature he has himself stepped over a dividing line which is the foundation of all dividing lines. The attempt is akin to trying to enforce (a) difference by abolishing (all) difference. The 'black' woman and her child, in her appeal to Ike's memory, to his past, has also reminded the reader, if not Ike himself, of his previous idealism and of the formative childhood experience that led to his sacrifice. The text has returned the reader to the critical edge of 'The Bear'.

For Ike a clean conscience before the Law must always be prior. But not the conscience of a liberal: and never the conscience of a reformer. Ike's is the conscience of a conservative; the Law he serves is administered by a god who insists on absolute division, like the God of Moses, another jealous god, who prescribes sets of rites for personal and spiritual purity,

and who judges failings harshly and without forgiveness.²⁸ The title of the final story of the book, as of the collection itself, can be read as a plea for the return of the tablets that carry upon them engraved the Word of God, for the physical presence of unbending Mosaic Law, a plea for a deliverance from a chaos peopled with racial hybrids and sliding moralities which is to be made eternal and incarnate in unyielding stone. Yet, if this Law, 'the Law', has become revealed as just 'a law' in the contrast of perspectives that occurs in 'Delta Autumn', then the text's dominant rhetoric has also become just 'a rhetoric', not superseded, but coexisting with its competitor, awaiting the judgement of the reader.

²⁸ In a psychoanalytical frame we may make the parallel between the demands of the jealous god of law and the demands of a unconscious formed by an Oedipal configuration which exerts the pull of repetition on the present. It is in this way that King can observe the 'pessimism' inherent in John Irwin's reading of Faulkner and suggest that we read Go Down, Moses as Faulkner's attempt at a performative working through of the problems under discussion (see A Southern Renaissance, Chapter 6, p. 113).

Chapter Four: *Lolita*: a single name; a double reading; a third voice

Lolita is about love. Perhaps I shall be better understood if I put the statement in this form: Lolita is not about sex, but about love. Almost every page sets forth some explicit erotic emotion or some overt erotic action and still it is not about sex. It is about love. (Trilling, in Bloom (ed.), 1987, p. 5.)

Lo-li-ta... a precociously seductive girl. (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1985, p. 703.)

Lolita: loose woman. (Roget's Thesaurus, 1988, p. 452.)

Harold Bloom in his introduction to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, remarks that 'rereading Lolita now... no one could accuse the book of being pornography'.¹ 'No one'? Clearly there is an appeal to some consensus; but of whom, where and when? Is Bloom referring to an academic consensus, or perhaps to public opinion (not precisely the same thing)? Is he suggesting that Lolita is no longer bannable; or, is it that it has become high art, canonised, and hence beyond reproach? Yet the initial critical response to Lolita was unfavourable. Rejected by American publishers the novel eventually found a publisher in France, with Girodias's Parisian 'Olympia Press', a company notorious for the sexual character of its publications; this can only have encouraged what was, for the most part, a rejection by critics on moral grounds. Interestingly, it was in the act of becoming 'literature' that the child Lolita became 'lost'; firstly, in the sense of disappearing from the foreground of moral concern (Humbert, the abuser, becomes the centre of moral and psychological speculation), and secondly, in becoming morally 'lost' (she joins Humbert in being morally culpable). Yet in one sense (and for one audience) Bloom is right, if only because the question of 'pornography' as an accusation has

¹ Harold Bloom (ed.), Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), p. 2.

become a little out-dated. Recent criticism prefers to find this text (and sometimes its author) ethically irresponsible.

So what is the problem with Lolita? Denials and condemnations fly: accusations of moral irresponsibility are met with counter-accusations imputing lack of literary sophistication. Has there been a confusion of modes of address: perhaps a misconstrual of genre or mood, where a revelation (indicative), a matter of reference and deixis, is misread for an appeal (vocative, subjunctive), a matter of the reader's ethical sense? Or is it the combination of the functions of entertainment and education (performative), a matter of a playful level of transgression, that creates the difficulty? Or is there more? Does the problem lie with the character of Lolita: unquestioningly portrayed as nymphet and seductress in most criticism from the 'fifties to the 'seventies, (Dupee, Proffer, Fowler; and recent editions of Webster's Dictionary and Roget's Thesaurus)?² Or is it Humbert Humbert, the novel's narrator who must carry the ethical opprobrium; where Lolita is read as a victim and hapless child, as in most criticism of the 'eighties (Kauffman, Maddox, Rampton).³ Or does the problem lie with the text itself, in its form, its use of parody, its intertextual thematics, (critics from Lionel Trilling, to D. Barton Johnson)? Or with Nabokov, the artist (Bader) and the man (Centerwall)?⁴ Or, more

² F. W. Dupee, 'Review of *Lolita*', in Nabokov: The Critical Heritage, (ed.) Norman Page, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 84-91. Carl R. Proffer, Keys to Lolita, (London: Indiana University Press, 1968). Douglas Fowler, Reading Nabokov, (London: Cornell University Press, 1974).

³ Linda Kauffmann, 'Framing *Lolita* : Is There a Woman in the Text?', in Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy, (eds.) Patricia Yaeger & Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 131-152. Lucy B. Maddox, 'Necrophilia in *Lolita* ', The Centennial Review, 26. 4 (Fall 1982), pp. 361-374. David Rampton, 'Lolita', in Bloom (ed.), pp. 99-117.

⁴ Julia Bader, 'Lolita: the Quest for Ecstasy', in Bloom (ed.) pp. 53-68. Brandon S. Centerwall, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Pedophilia', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 32. 3 (Fall 1990), pp. 468-484.

broadly, on the tendency of the private and aesthetic aspects of human existence to conveniently deny recognition to the other (Rorty)?⁵

On any referential reading (a comparison to an actual practice) Lolita is clearly 'about' paedophilia, or child sexual abuse, with just enough incest to further compound the issue. Read as an example of social realism, the text is about a nonconsensual sexual relation between adult and child: rape. Yet the text not only indicates otherwise (at least initially); but does so in an ornate literary style: the result is controversy. Indeed most critics seem to posit some version of the ethics versus irresponsibility, didacticism versus pleasure argument. Which is not to say that they necessarily agree on how to distribute these terms. For example Lolita may be read as the brilliant yet misunderstood product of a very moral art, (Bloom, Trilling,) or simply an unregenerate example of bad art, and a bad morality (Kingsley Amis).⁶ All varieties are available.

I will begin by examining the role of narrative voice, parody and their relation to the 'pleasure of the text' (whether that of transgression or moral rectitude), and then proceed to consider the ground of parody: the thematic or intertextual traditions cited and the place of these traditions in the body of Nabokov's writing. I will examine the issue of generational difference (the rhetorical use of age) in the text and attempt to replace a stereotype with a voice. This will then be contrasted against the dominant readings of Lolita and their historical evolution from the 1950s to the

⁵ See Richard Rorty, 'Nabokov on Cruelty', in Contingency, irony, and solidarity, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 141-168, who notes of Lolita that, 'the moral is not to keep one's hands off little girls but to notice what one is doing, and in particular to notice what people are saying.... Just insofar as one is preoccupied with building up to one's private kind of sexual bliss, like Humbert, or one's own private aesthetic bliss... people are likely to suffer still more' (p. 164). Commenting on Nabokov's possibly 'irresponsible' use of 'aesthetic bliss', Rorty suggests that, 'like the honest man he was, Nabokov wrote his best books to explore the possibility that his harshest critics might, after all, be right' (p. 157).

⁶ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', & Lionel Trilling, 'The Last Lover; Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita', in Bloom (ed.), pp. 1-4; 5-12; Kingsley Amis, 'Review of Lolita', in Page (ed.), pp. 102-107.

1980s. I will suggest that the antithetical nature of the positions taken has occluded a positive reading of generational difference in the text. Textual and referential readings, combining close reading and current historical context, will be shown to be complementary in their ability to highlight the limitations of prior stereotypology.

The relationship of morality, transgression, and the narrator are discussed in Martin Green's article, 'Tolstoy and Nabokov: The Morality of Lolita', who notes that the authorial games, the pattern of play and parody, begin early: the foreword, signed 'John Ray, Jnr., Ph. D.', is stylistically the same as that of Humbert Humbert, the narrator.⁷ The novel begins with an attempt to frame the text. A psychologicistic introduction informs the reader of the text's social value: however, this turns out to be a barely disguised parody. The introduction is revealed as the beginning of the text itself; in reading the introduction the reader has already entered the novel. This unreliability of the narrator leads to the evaporation of the real in the text; the admission that the text may be a game, a fantasy in which frames of reference and the play of language are related to pleasure - in short, that the text may be a species of erotica, a play of transgression in which denial and satisfaction go hand in hand. In this way it is possible to read Lolita as a novel in which the linguistic pleasure of word play and parody covers and slips (metaphor and metonymy) into erotic pleasure; in which the function of the game is to allow a multiplicity of erotic readings which would feature a child created and captured, a kind of masturbation fantasy which draws upon the literary traditions of adultery, incest, and courtly love, and, less blatantly, the girl child cult of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the greater

⁷ Martin Green, 'Tolstoy and Nabokov: The Morality of Lolita', in Bloom (ed.), pp. 13-34 , (p. 17).

pleasure (moral or otherwise) of the reader. Martin Green describes this system of denials as:

a series of concessions, a self-criticism, a self-defence, and a moral theory of art. The major concession is making Lolita sexually experienced before she meets Humbert, and having her seduce him. This is right for the novel in several ways, but one most important way is as a concession to the reader's outraged sensibility, an easing of his act of sympathy with Humbert. Let Lolita be entirely innocent and our feelings about the story would be very different. (p. 26)⁸

Continuing the theme of parodic denial or doubling, Thomas R. Frosch, in 'Parody and Authenticity in Lolita', notes that:

It has been said that Lolita is simultaneously "a love story and a parody of love stories" and that its parody and its pathos are always congruent." ...I wish to explore what such a condition - that of being both parodic and authentic at the same time - may mean. (p. 83)⁹

In this way parody not only creates new meanings out of old, but also becomes the means to read on many levels simultaneously; of maintaining opposite or contradictory meanings in a fruitful opposition that may point beyond a simple either/or choice of inadequate readings. Frosch also notes the utilisation of the 'double' (or *Doppelgänger*) story and the revenge story. But, more interestingly, he comments on the role played by:

the daimonic (that is, a quality of uncanny power possessed originally by beings, whether good or evil, midway between

⁸ Julia Bader, in 'Lolita: The Quest for Ecstasy', suggests that the afterword to Lolita is also 'an impersonation of Vladimir Nabokov talking about his own book' and relates this to the role of parody elsewhere in the text (p. 58). On the pervasiveness of parody in Nabokov, see John Hollander, 'Review of Lolita', in Page (ed.), pp. 81-83, who identifies the key roles of 'parody and pastiche' in Lolita in 1956 (p. 82). These features will later be identified by Fredric Jameson as the typical formal means of reference and organisation of postmodernism as an art form. A Bloomian 'anxiety of influence' and the use of parody push a modernist writer with a desire to continue searching for originality (albeit in a new kind of way) into what we would now call 'postmodernism', where realist allegory becomes the norm, with self-referentiality and parodic citation being the clues to the post-modern nature of the genre. Such literature would now be classifiable as 'high' or classic postmodernism.

⁹ Thomas R. Frosch, in 'Parody and Authenticity in Lolita', in Bloom (ed.), pp. 83-98.

gods and people), which is a primary characteristic of romance as a literary mode. (p. 83)

First, this excess over and above the merely human in character is also a feature of postmodern writing, where characters often sustain an allegorical dimension suggesting semantic references beyond their immediate 'realist' contexts; the effect is one of realism - but not quite.¹⁰ Second, the medieval romance could always be subdivided into those that featured the courtly love theme and those that dwelt upon the quest or trial. These two aspects of the medieval romance originated two genres which have since periodically rejoined: the romance (the novel of adventure, trial, or quest) and the romantic novel (the novel of sentiment or seduction). Amidst the violent depredations of the romance quest (prototype of our Western and Space genres) the reader could often find gentler episodes in the courtly love tradition. The mock-heroic or inverted elements of quest, courtship, and allegory in *Lolita* parody the trace of the courtly love tradition in the modern romantic novel.

In Humbert's own words (contrasting Lolita's end with her relationship with him), 'even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest'. This suggests that all he has achieved is a burlesque of the nineteenth century or Romantic form of the brother/sister incest theme which figured the impossible love relation of courtly love, and replaced it with the abusive relation of step-father/daughter incest. But the movement from an intra-generational to an inter-generational form of incest may also include the move to child sexual abuse. As Frosch remarks, 'Humbert is pleased to inform us that Dante and Poe loved little girls', thus drawing together the intertextual connections between the Romantics and the Italian Renaissance, and between the worship of

¹⁰ The techniques used to achieve this include fantasy, denial, an unreliable narrator, clichés, stereotypes, the irruptions of the fantastic in magic realism and, inevitably, parody and pastiche.

impossible love objects in courtly love and the nineteenth century cult of the little girl (p. 92). It is this romantic tradition, together with its modernist heritage, that Nabokov inherits.¹¹ This is also evident in the use of the brother/sister incest theme in Ada where the doomed incest relation of nineteenth century writing is playfully inverted and provided with a happy ending. In Lolita the little girl cult is present in its inverted form whilst the form of incest is that of father/daughter (parent/child) incest, the 'minority' incest form taken from the nineteenth century as critique, as the negative form of the incest theme. These elements are then used to affect a parody of courtly love. In Lolita the latest inversions of the courtly love tradition and of the little girl cult meet on the grounds of (step)father/daughter incest. In this perverse apotheosis, the courtly love theme and the inverted child theme find their polemical analogies in the languages of 'high' and 'low' culture; the language of literature is pitted against that of consumerism (Humbert skilfully deploys the former: Lolita expresses herself through the latter).¹² If popular (American, new world) consumerist culture is a source of mockery throughout Lolita, then the position of enunciation of this critique, that of the (European, old world) narrator, self-destructs with Humbert's transgression and fall. Yet it is not only 'old' and 'new' worlds that are juxtaposed here; a youthful but empty consumerism is contrasted to a mature but degraded high culture. Generational difference is rhetorically yoked to the division of labour (manual/mental). In this light Lolita may be read as an expression of pessimistic cultural conservatism.

¹¹ David Rampton, Vladimir Nabokov, (London: MacMillan, 1993), notes, of Lolita, a reference to, and similarity with, Rousseau's Confessions, that is, to the genre of autobiography, particularly the form that reveals the author's sins and darker formative moments; in this way Lolita is also a parody of the genre (p. 79). See Coveney, The Image of Childhood, for the rise of the child in Victorian literature; and Stephen Crane, The Works of Stephen Crane. Volume VII. Tales of Whilhomville (1899-1900), (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), for an early parody or inversion of the cults of the Victorian (girl) child.

¹² See Rachel Bowlby, Shopping with Freud, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 52, p. 70.

The classical commentary on Nabokov's utilisation of the courtly love theme is that of Lionel Trilling in his 'The Last Lover; Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*'. Indeed, the reflexivity of which Nabokov is a virtuoso finds itself articulated in Trilling's own intertextual meditations. Trilling remarks:

Lolita is about love. Perhaps I shall be better understood if I put the statement in this form: *Lolita* is not about sex, but about love. Almost every page sets forth some explicit erotic emotion or some overt erotic action and still it is not about sex. It is about love. (p. 5)

Trilling is suggesting that *Lolita* is about love as a type of literary intertext, 'courtly love', as type of object relation, what de Rougemont calls 'passion-love, a kind of love with which European literature has dealt since time immemorial, but with special intensity since the Arthurian romances and the code of courtly love' (p. 5).¹³ Trilling constructs a reading of *Lolita* based upon a discussion of the courtly love theme in Western literature. This conception is not to be confused with a simple eros/agape distinction that separates physical desire from spiritual love. Rather, 'passion-love' is a matter of the particular combination of eros and agape that is created by distance and denial and that therefore cannot survive the convention-bound institution of marriage. In its ideal form, then, 'passion-love', the centre-piece of the courtly love tradition, can only exist outside of marriage, where it can be further intensified by a lack of consummation.¹⁴ Whatever the relation to historical reality, this formula has become part of

¹³ It would be worth questioning the historical validity of the term, 'immemorial', as well as the homogenisation of history implied in the phrase 'since the Arthurian romances'. The issue is not one of history but of which traditions are evoked by a given set of references. In this sense intertextuality resembles the trope of *Prosopopoia* in its ability to call up the past.

¹⁴ In an earlier version of this article, Lionel Trilling, in Page (ed.), pp. 92-102 (first published in *Encounter*, October, 1958), comments that one must feel some sympathy for a rapist who, in the best traditions of courtly love, 'feels deathless devotion for the victim', but Trilling is being, in best Nabokovian style, provocatively parodic, as he makes clear in the next paragraph where he suggests that he has been demonstrating how, 'we have been seduced into conniving in this violation' (p. 94).

an important inherited literary convention (whether originating in the abstentionism of Catharism, or in Gnosticism with its tradition of opposition to worldly matters).

We can see an example of the use this tradition is put to in Nabokov's use of description; as Trilling notes, 'there is nothing in Lolita so archaic as its way of imaging the beloved' (p. 9). In a process of pastiche, Humbert the narrator dresses desire in courtly cloth, much as the stories and manners of *courtois* functioned as the ideology that made bearable the 'ape-like' behaviour of feudal warriors inside and outside of marriage (the latter often forms of exchange arranged to cement alliances). Humbert uses the term 'ape-like' to parody himself, an expression of the fact that he too needs the courtly love tradition to prettify, and so excuse, his actions.¹⁵

Trilling's reading provides insight insofar as he points out the relation to tradition and its implications. But to go further and to proclaim what that relation must mean (how we must read it) is to go too far - especially given the dominant role of parody in this text and the free hand this allows to the reader. This attempt at interpretative closure reveals a blind spot to other kinds of reading, notably those which concern power and its abuse. Such an ellipsis, which includes the denial of the referential, that is, current, synchronic, factors in interpretation, effectively reduces the text to a reflection upon the past unmediated by the taint of the present.

The combination of courtly love and incest themes is made on the grounds that incest is the nearest modern equivalent to forbidden

¹⁵ In an ironic inclusion of a literary intertext habitually ignored by critics, David Rampton, in 'Lolita', observes of Humbert Humbert that: 'standing behind him is someone like Stavrogin who, again like Humbert, is at one point confronted by the ghost of a little girl he has "killed". The emotional resonance of this kind of antecedent looms up as soon as Dostoyevski is mentioned in Lolita. Even when Nabokov rejects his predecessors, as he does Dostoyevski, for what he considers their false values and their melodrama, he ends up rewriting and extending their stories' (p. 106). Stavrogin, in Dostoyevski's novel The Devils rapes the girl-child of his landlady. The child dies shortly afterwards. As in Go Down Moses, death is given as evidence of a violated self, as a trace of another voice in the text that appears only under the sign of the ultimate protest.

medieval love and that it may provide the nearest (literary) effect. Yet, Denis de Rougemont, in 'Lolita or Scandal', suggests that Lolita can not be read simply as a latter-day example of the evocation of 'passion-love' 'for the necessary obstacle would be missing between the two protagonists, the necessary *distance* by which the mutual attraction, instead of being mitigated or exhausted by sensual gratification, is metamorphosed into passion' (p. 49).¹⁶ Something else is being evoked: the aim is not a simple repetition but a re-use for a different end. Otherwise put, the context in which the reader hears this echo of the theme of courtly love suggests that it is as a means rather than an end that this well-worn chain of literary connotation is being re-worked. The answer also lies in de Rougemont's article.

De Rougemont refers to 'two protagonists' and to 'mutual attraction' as the source of this type of passion; yet in the next sentence this becomes 'H.H.'s love for Lolita'. Lolita's feelings are elided and despite her supposed seduction of the narrator there is nothing 'mutual' about their relation as de Rougemont himself notes (p. 53). Once Lolita has moved away from the inferred comparison to its intertexts (the Tristan myth, the courtly love tradition), the novel assumes a more sordid guise. It is here that a comparison with analogous events in recent social history would be more apposite. Paedophilia may also be yoked to the intertextual train of the courtly love tradition: the inverse is also true and permits a transgression to surface as literature. Our current horizon would substitute child sexual abuse (with or without incestuous implications) for paedophilia in this formula. The same double process of addition and literary sanitisation occurs posing new dilemmas for a readership attentive to current horizons of expectation as well as to literary allusion.

¹⁶ Denis de Rougemont, 'Lolita or Scandal', in Love Declared, (New York: Pantheon, 1963), pp. 48-54.

The incest in Lolita is of the (step)father/daughter type. This form of the incest theme, whilst used sparingly in the literature of the nineteenth century to criticise the adult world, is, in this new twentieth century usage, partially inverted so that it is the adult, who whilst being corrupt, is also idealistic and the child is the one who is cynical and willing; that is, no longer innocent. Of course, an unreliable or interested narrator is not to be taken at his word, yet if the reader does not simply wish to base a given counter-reading upon a given referential premise, then it is necessary to locate the textual evidence that will catch the narrator in a trap of his own making. Making the text the source of the narrator's self-parody converts self-referential irony into immanent self-criticism. Before preceding with this step it is necessary to situate the place of these intertextual themes in the larger context of Nabokov's writing.

The twin threads of the incest theme and the adulation of the girl-child reappear in the intertextual braid of much of Nabokov's work. The incest theme usually takes the brother/sister form, which is then parodied and relieved of any heavier 'gothic' associations thus allowing it to enter into the texture of play which is the dominant feature of Nabokov's style. The adulation of the girl-child, whilst being mocked and parodied, will nevertheless still carry overtones of the courtly love tradition and will become transformed into the basis for father/daughter incest, paedophilia, or child sexual abuse.¹⁷

Nabokov's Pale Fire (1962), a novel which consists largely of a commentary upon a poem, is structured upon a set of parodies.¹⁸ First,

¹⁷ With reference to the child image in Nabokov's prose Lucy Maddox, Nabokov's Novels in English (London: Croom Helm, 1983), points to what may be the ultimate inversion of the nineteenth century childhood theme in the apparent role of the child as sacrificial victim in Nabokov's novels: the suicide of Lucette in Ada, the loss of a son in Bend Sinister, the fate of the narrator's young lover in Pale Fire, and of course the life and death of Dolores ('Lolita') in Lolita (p. 13).

¹⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962).

there are two parallel parodies in the relation of form and frame: the use of another's poem to further a personal fantasy or history on the level of the narrator, this reincorporation bears a parodic relation to the original; and a parody of the genre of the 'critical edition' on the level of the text as a whole.¹⁹ The poem itself is a parody of modernism. Second, on the level of content, there is the incest theme and its co-existence with the many references to childhood (including allusions to *Lolita*).²⁰ The references to childhood may be read as an appropriation of the childhood theme which adds overt sexuality to youth and innocence inverting the original into something akin to a 'paedophile theme'.

There are eleven such references in the commentary and two in the 'Index'. Two of these are to mythic images of naked children: to 'putti' (renaissance angel children), and to 'pseudo-cupids' (p. 112; 115). The classical theme is continued with references to a 'faunlet' (a male 'nymphet') and to a 'nymphet' (p. 123; 202).²¹ The modern use of the classical 'nymphet' suggests the shared viewpoint of implied author and implied readership as that of a certain kind of masculinist camaraderie. As an expression of desire this term clearly functions in subjunctive (wish,

¹⁹ See, for example, Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, Annotation by Alfred Appel Jr., (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), and Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, as candidates for such a parody after the event.)

²⁰ In John Shade's 'Poem' (the first part of the novel) we are given two direct references that signal the presence of the themes of child abuse/paedophilia and incest. The reference to 'Lolita' and travel is an allusion to the kidnap section from the novel *Lolita*, and so to the themes of child abuse and father/daughter incest (*Pale Fire*, p. 58). There is also a reference to symbolic brother/sister incest (p. 62). These themes then reappear throughout the long 'Commentary' that makes up the majority of the novel. There are two further mentions of brother/sister incest: a symbolic brother/sister incest, and a possible hint of the same in the allusion to the 'first cousins' of Shade and their link to his wife's grandparents - a technique of hinting perfected later in *Ada* (*Pale Fire*, p. 108, p. 171). There is just one intimation of father/daughter incest (although all references to 'Lolita' may carry this connotation) (p. 233).

²¹ S. E. Sweeney, in 'Io's Metamorphosis: A Classical Subtext for *Lolita*', *Classical and Modern Literature*, 6. 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 79-88, observes that: 'There are several striking similarities between this myth [Io and Jupiter] and *Lolita*, especially in plot, character, and theme. In each a beautiful young girl - a "nymphet" in Nabokov's classically inspired neologism - is raped by a powerful older man; is led from family and home, and forced to go on what Ovid calls "interminable wanderings"; and undergoes a metamorphosis directly linked to male sexuality and female objectification' (p. 81).

difficulty of attainment) rather than indicative (descriptive, referential) mood. In this way the reference to a tavern landlord's daughters as 'nymphets' is an ironic usage for a homosexual narrator, although perhaps not for the heterosexual author of Lolita (p. 296).²² In another parallel, we encounter those who are 'taking liberties with a young page', Oleg, a male equivalent to Lolita (an equivalence suggested not only by age but by the shared phonemes /ol/), who like his female counterpart is also aged twelve (p. 120; 123).²³ As with Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, innocence, childhood, and sexual attraction are combined to cast a dubious light upon the novels main character. With Nabokov, however, the element of textual play may lessen the negative force of this rhetorical combination leaving the reader more room to appropriate the paedophile theme as he or she may desire.

The incest theme alluded to in Pale Fire is brought to a virtuoso peak in Ada: or Ardor: A Family Chronicle (1969).²⁴ The key feature of the novel is clearly the felicitous inversion of doomed brother/sister incest theme found so regularly in nineteenth century literature; the inversion of this theme also cancels out and inverts the critical charge that it carried in this period (anti-paternal, anti-hierarchical).²⁵ The patterns of incest repetition

²² Apart from two more references to Lolita the other child references are to young boys (p. 243; 270). The latter containing Nabokov's revenge on Kingsley Amis's review of Lolita (Pale Fire, p. 227). In his review in Spectator (6 September 1959), anthologised in Page (ed.), Amis attacks the novel's moral stance; but he has a scarcely hidden agenda of anti-modernism in particular and anti-experimentalism in general (p. 102; 104). Thus he argues a case diametrically opposite to that of Trilling when he suggests that Lolita is, 'bad as a work of art... and morally bad' (p. 103).

²³ There are two other descriptions of boy-children as sex objects (p. 235; 239) and two in the 'Index' of Pale Fire, (p. 307; 309).

²⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, Ada: or Ardor: A Family Chronicle, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). D. Barton Johnson, in 'The Labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*', Comparative Literature, 38. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 224-255, suggests that: 'what has not been widely recognised even by critics is that the incestuous relationship of Van and Ada is but the final episode in a series of incestuous matings among the Veens and Zemskis over several generations' (p. 238).

²⁵ Some of the less concealed allusions in the text to the incest theme and the little girl/childhood theme as used in a sexual context include: the little girl theme (p. 58); Ada as aged twelve and her sexual experience with her brother (p. 121); the desire of Lucette, Ada's younger sister, to join in and form a incestuous triangle brings her the appellation

in Ada, which practically amount to inbreeding, here connote both elite exception to general law (a high caste or aristocratic theme, self-perpetuating and, in terms of the novel's narratorial viewpoint, self-representing) and the end of a genealogical line, interpretable as a dying out of corrupt, unviable families (the external view or critique). Nabokov, ever the reflexive ironist, has it both ways.²⁶

On the relation of incest to parody, D. Barton Johnson, in 'The labyrinth of Incest in Nabokov's *Ada*', notes that 'the parallels between inter-generational incest and parody are more basic than one might assume'; that 'both are self-reflexive' (p. 251). Johnson observes that the relation between origin and parody is 'genetic', like that of succeeding generations, and 'illicit', a reference to taboo and the supposedly degraded nature of the parody or copy as second hand or unoriginal (p. 251). The original is supposed to refer to the real; whereas the parody only refers to the original, a copy of a copy, 'like incest it involves a turning inward rather than outward' (p. 251).²⁷ However, Ada is about *intra*-generational (or sibling) incest, that is, precisely *not* about succeeding generations; the repetition of this configuration is not to be confused with *inter*-generational incest (parent/child). The confusion of 'inter' and 'intra' costs him his point on Ada's incest as a performative or a symbol of

'depraved gipsy nymphet' (p. 229). These examples, added to those referred to in the section above on Pale Fire make clear Nabokov's literary infatuation with twelve year old (primarily) girl-children. In one of his early novels, Invitation to a Beheading (first published in English in 1959), a 12 year old jailer's daughter cavorts through the text, clambering all over the doomed hero Cincinnatus. If the Victorian adulation of the girl child is parodied (or lightened, as with incest theme) in Nabokov's oeuvre, it is also sexualised. Other direct incest references in Ada include a play on the word 'insect' (p. 85; also found in James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake) which is repeated in what may be read as Ada's comment upon the affair between her and her brother, 'Insect, incest, nicest' (p.166).

²⁶ For Johnson, 'Ada rejects the "rebellion" component of the romantic model and emphasizes the exclusivity-integrative-solipsistic polarity of the thematic dyad' (p. 248). However it is phrased, the reader is not obliged to accept that the critical impulse (expelled by Nabokov's parodic appropriation) does not return with a thoughtful re-reading.

²⁷ Yet if we (intertextually) lose the idea of an original or classic form in an endless chain of citation then the value judgements appended to the idea of the origin also fall.

intertextual relations (the relation of text to pre-text). The utilisation of performativity would have been more apposite if Ada had used inter-generational incest proper (p. 252).

Ada has two instances of the conjunction of childhood and sexuality; each occurs at one of the limits, or borders, of the concept of childhood. In the first, the reader discovers that Dolly (the mother of Marina who was, in turn, the mother of Van and Ada) is described as sexually precocious at the age of twelve - again Nabokov's favourite number emerges (p. 239). Nabokov's suture of the incest and childhood themes occurs on the ground of the entry into puberty; the ability to become pregnant has become sign of the end of childhood and of the beginning of the incest theme.

The second example is at the border of infancy and childhood and explicitly features the collocation of incest and child sexual abuse in its father/daughter rape form (p. 134). A Russian folk tale is recounted in which a father, Ivan Ivanov, makes his five year old daughter pregnant - and then impregnates her daughter when she in turn reaches the same age! The incommensurability of chronology and physiology identifies this tale as anecdotal (there are parallels with the 'trickster' figure in American Indian mythology). What is significant is the inclusion of paedophilia and child sexual abuse in the context of the incest theme in Ada. Incest does not usually connote child sexual abuse; in other texts the two occur in parallel (in collocation, as in Jeffers' poem, 'Tamar'), where the effect is to pile one transgression upon another. The two habitually subsume different rhetorical functions: conscious and consensual brother/sister incest is usually used for purposes of rebellion or as a marker of elite membership (the unconscious form was usually used as a warning about the effects of adultery); the nonconsensual father/daughter form normally indicates a critique (or a comment on the nature of desire) - most other

forms signify decadence and transgression. The inclusion of (incestuous) child sexual abuse as a literary theme is the logical end of the combination of the incest theme and the fantasy of paedophilia.

If it is accurate to say, with Johnson, that 'incest becomes Nabokov's master metaphor' (p. 254), then we are entitled to look at the novels of either end of Nabokov's writing career to see if they too bear the trace of the theme that he manipulated so adroitly in his middle period. Nabokov's last novel, Look at the Harlequins (1974), is a pastiche of many of the author's previous novels combined into a fictional autobiography of a fictional writer. Citation and play combine with parodic self-referentiality to produce a recapitulation of Nabokov's favourite motifs; the incest and childhood themes and their intersection with the subject areas of paedophilia and child sexual abuse.

Early on in Harlequins we are introduced to the inevitable child, 'ten or so', a 'nymphet' with a 'lewd smile'(p. 29). Iris, the narrator's first wife-to-be, identifies herself with this child and reveals that 'at eleven or twelve' (the typical age), she had an encounter with a 'smelly gentlemen' whom she allowed to fondle her (another example of Nabokov's habitually complicit children); there is also a hint of incest with her brother Ivor (p. 29). Later in the novel it is the narrator himself who admits to the man-handling of a girl-child called Dolly - a sound-alike and synonym of Dolores in Lolita (p. 140). Reference to Lolita occurs again when the narrator assumes responsibility for his daughter Isabel/Bel when she is between the ages of 'eleven and a half and seventeen and a half', a reference to Lolita's age range (p. 168).²⁸

²⁸ The names Isabel/Bel also refer to Poe's poem 'Annabel Lee'; itself referred to in Lolita where the narrator's lost child-love is named after Poe's poem. In the same portion of the text the narrator is at work translating 'Tamara', a reference to Tamar, from the Biblical tale of David. Tamar was the cause of Absalom's slaying of his brother who had incestuously possessed their sister: it is this that provides the title for Faulkner's novel Absalom, Absalom!. This incestuous incident also provides the title for 'Tamar', Robinson Jeffers' long poem which features two generations of brother/sister incest and at least one

There is also a web of incest references (many of them to Lolita) in the section of the text which deals with the narrator's relationship with his daughter as a child; these allusions suggest, but do not confirm (this would not be necessary given Nabokov's allusive style) the possibility of father/daughter incest (p. 168).²⁹ A sexual relation between father and daughter is clearly implied in a heavily suggestive scene where the narrator and his daughter share a bed; this episode involves caresses where the 'new moon' becomes a 'new moan' (p. 171). However, the narrator also chooses to refer to the relationship between himself and his twelve year old daughter, as 'essentially innocent' (p. 173). Predictably though, she has a school friend (of the same age) who is 'a depraved and vulgar nymphet' (p. 173).³⁰

In Look at the Harlequins the narrator's daughter is annoyed at being called 'Dolly', she can not understand why she should be referred to in this way, the connection escapes her (p. 195). It does not escape the reader familiar with Nabokov, to whom her response seems entirely apposite, 'Dolly' is a reference to Dolores, usually known by the name of the novel in which she features, Lolita.

The two early novels, The Enchanter (1936), and The Gift (1937-1938), offer yet more examples to add to the list of incest and child sexual abuse present in the other Nabokov novels (on my count, nine out of nearly twenty novels -nearly half- concern either incest, child sexual abuse or

inter-generational example of father/daughter incest - such a generational string of brother/sister incest are also a feature of Ada - alluded to in Look at the Harlequins as 'Exile from Mayda' (p. 169).

²⁹ The narrator and Bel spend time in a series of hotels; this is a reference to, or variation upon, the kidnap episode in Lolita (p. 170).

³⁰ See also D. Barton Johnston, 'Inverted Reality in Nabokov's Look at the Harlequins!', in Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, 8 (1984), pp. 293-309, where he unearths a veritable web of incest connecting the narrator to his wives and their suitors; most are connected to a possible common father in the quasi-mythic figure of Count Starov (see esp. p. 296-297). This may also be read as a reference to Ada (referred to as *Exile from Mayda* in Harlequins), where a similar underlying structure of brother/sister incest obtains (Harlequins, p. 178).

paedophilia, in some combination).³¹ These two early novels are also of interest as examples of earlier 'versions' of the Lolita story.³² It is not the incest theme alone which Nabokov makes use of as his 'master metaphor' (as with Faulkner, Nabokov's finest novels are also his most transgressive ones); the inverted childhood theme in its paedophile form is even more crucial to his particular brand of literature.

As in the chapter on William Faulkner, my reading of Lolita will focus upon age or generational difference; however this aspect will not be used as an extra, if important opposition in a dance of binary relations, but as a space from which to bifurcate Humbert Humbert's singular narrative vision and move beyond the simplified binary readings of most of Lolita's critics. I will suggest that if the text's readership suspends ethical outrage for a moment, then it will find that the clauses which have hitherto been read as the narrator's 'get out' can also be read as the source of a different voice - that of the 'child' in the text - which can then return to condemn its elision and abuse.

Humbert Humbert's first view of Lolita is accompanied by a description of himself:

while I passed her in my adult disguise (a big handsome hunk of movie manhood) the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty, and these I checked against the features of my dead bride. (p. 40)

Within his comparison of Lolita to his lost Annabel, Humbert includes a view of himself, a description of himself as both Annabel ('adult disguise') and Lolita ('handsome hunk') might see him. Whilst shamelessly self

³¹ Vladimir Nabokov, The Gift, (London: Panther, 1966) see esp. p. 172. Vladimir Nabokov, The Enchanter, (London: Pan, 1987).

³² In The Enchanter, the narrator marries a woman to seduce her daughter (aged 12). After the mother's death he attempts to rape the child, fails and, subsequently, dies. See also Centerwall, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Pedophilia'.

flattering and condescendingly parodic, Humbert's use of the register of popular culture, more particularly that aspect of it aimed at the teenage market, may be read as allowing Lolita a voice; a textual presence that, in this instance, is expressed not only by positing a viewpoint (on the narrator), but also by the use of 'her' kind of language (an example of free indirect discourse).³³ This example, with its narcissistic presentation of the self along with the other, may represent the text's general approach to the representation of Lolita, ironic donor of the novel's title and the narrator's ever-receding object of desire. Lolita's voice is identifiable only at second remove: firstly, filtered through the narrator; secondly, through the language of popular culture (which the narrator uses parodically). Her desire, over which much of the critical controversy of *Lolita* rages, must be recouped symptomatically, as a product of the interpretation of the language(s) in which her volition is presented.

Moving from viewpoint and word to action, Lolita likes to play (the adult) with the narrator, "'You dope," she began, "there is noth-" but here she noticed the pucker of my approaching lips. "Okay," she said co-operatively' (p. 44). Humbert quickly realises that this acting out of adult role models will play into his hands:

All at once I knew I could kiss her throat or the wick of her mouth with perfect impunity. I knew she would let me do so, and even close her eyes as Hollywood teaches. (p. 48)

The apprehension of the other lies only in its immediate use value. Yet in seeing only the mask that Lolita adopts and implying the presence (for him) of the child within is Humbert not forgetting the desire of his

³³ Humbert continues: 'I have all the characteristics which, according to writers on the sex interests of children, start the responses stirring in a little girl: Moreover, I am said to resemble some crooner or actor chap on whom Lo had a crush' (p. 43). Note the move from general ('writers') to particular ('Lo'), that is, from a propensity, or possibility, to a recognition of Lolita's actual desire. This initial recognition will henceforth be misrecognised in Humbert's own interests.

Annabel precisely in order to create Lolita as both sexual, as available, and as child, as unequal? In the supposed re-enactment of the lost affair with Annabel, Humbert chooses to remember the age of his beloved and not the age difference between them. His recreation loses the original relation of equality and keeps only the image of the beloved as child. Only a relation between unequals remains. This desire for inequality signals that Humbert's desire is not for a repetition of the original event (the unconsumated affair with Annabel), this would require a degree of reciprocity incommensurable with Humbert's scheme. If irony may be defined as the distribution of vision and its lack among differing percipients of the same event then the reader's perception of textual relations invisible to the narrator of these same relations would constitute the chief mode of irony in Lolita. The irony of the novel may be that there is more to Lolita than the narrator suspects. He describes her as more than a child as part of a justification for his own sexual purposes: she emerges through this same surplus to condemn his utilisation of her nascent desire. Having added something in excess of the traditional literary stereotype of the child, the narrator is unable to control the meanings this excess may lend itself to. Humbert's observation of Lolita's role-playing admits to knowing more, that her experience, knowledge, and desire is not 'adult' in his own sense of the word (hence his desire); yet he is not aware that her experience, knowledge, and desire is also not 'child' in the traditional (innocent, asexual) sense of that term - something he should have remembered from his supposed ground of comparison: his relations with Annabel.³⁴ The traditional, or stereotypical, categories of the adult/child binary are exceeded in the motion of the text's meaning as they are in the classification of human age and development (child, young

³⁴ Lolita's relation to Humbert is shown again in the trade-off involved in the car trip they take with her mother which includes elements of the economies of recognition (identity: rivalry for attention) and exchange (favour for favour) (p. 51).

adolescent, older adolescent, 'teenager', young adult, etc.). Without a third definition to occupy, Lolita must be both 'child' in one register and 'not-child' in another. Her referential typicality is counterposed to her rhetorical exceptionality.

Lolita's fondness for Humbert, combined with the assertion of her own will, is shown in the episode where he comes up behind her and is forthrightly rejected; later she appropriates this move by coming up behind him, and, covering his eyes, asserts her own vision, and will to action (p. 54). Her re-reading of the move also makes it safe; it is now a game: the initial play, rejected, returns in the re-play, an active 'repetition forward' with Lolita as agent. If this episode is used by the narrator as a source of sexual titillation, it can equally be turned into an account of Lolita taking control, and more; not just as taking control in the narrator's terms, but in making her own reading of the event or game.

This type of reading will allow a reading of the notorious scene (fastidiously avoided in Nabokov criticism) where Humbert masturbates himself against Lolita - apparently without her knowledge (p. 60). On the one hand the reader is presented with a one-sided sex act from a one sided viewpoint: yet on the other hand there remains a relation of ambiguity. How aware was Lolita and was it possible for her to be aware of nothing and yet be described as 'precocious'? Yet if we read her actual responses to this event we find the following phrases, 'sudden shrill note', 'wriggled and squirmed', 'her teeth rested on her glistening underlip as she half turned away' (paraphrasable as: she bit her lip and turned away) (p. 60). All these phrases are readable as signs of resistance read through the narrator's eroticised vision ('glistening underlip') or, at most, as sexually ambiguous, note the conditional given in parenthesis, '(as if we had been struggling and now my grip was eased)', and her rapid escape to answer the phone; if

this is so, then some knowledge on her part of the nature of Humbert's project may be assumed (p. 60).

If the voice of the child (in this case a young adolescent) is to be read into the text it must be initially be as a child-for-itself and not as a child-for-adults or even as honorary adult (the 'honorary' in such instances usually focuses upon one preferred area and not upon equality with the adult position). Second, the avoidance of the stereotypes of childhood (innocence as asexuality, proximity to nature) is necessary if the absence of these is not to be read as connoting the child in question as morally decadent. The removal of the structure that imputes a negative should leave a positive (a child-for-itself, and not for-us, the adult readership), even if this is only present to an (adult) readership as a (textual) space of potential (signification).

Further examples of double vision, of role play and misrecognition, occur in comments attributable to Mrs. Haze. Firstly from her reported speech (indirect discourse), 'Haze, with a dreary laugh, said she had told Lo that her beloved Humbert thoroughly approved of the whole camp idea' (p. 64), Humbert views himself in the third person; yet this may be read as an example of unmarked citation (free indirect discourse). It is a question of whose 'voice' is implied as at the source of this phrase ('beloved Humbert'). If the narrator is 'citing' Lolita through her mother, the tone is affective (with parody as the trace of the narrator as frame), if the voice is read as solely her mother's the effect is ironic. A second example from Mrs. Haze occurs in direct speech (direct discourse), that begins with a reference to fashion ('starlet') and moves on to the euphemistic ('healthy, but'), both of which may refer to Lolita's sexual development, "'You see, *she* sees herself as a starlet; *I* see her as a sturdy, healthy, but decidedly homely kid'", (p. 64). Humbert does 'see'. If his view is elided here it is because the reader already knows it well. This disparity of visions,

misrecognitions on the part of both self and other on what constitutes Lolita's self, will be of use to the narrator in pursuance of his own misrecognition of his object of desire. As Lo's mother remarks, "'This, I guess, is at the root of our troubles'", (p. 64).

Mrs. Haze's comment reminds the reader that the novel is never just a two handed affair of narrator (Humbert) and narratee (Lolita); indeed when she dies, the initially concealed Quilty will replace her as the new third point of the triangle. Always something intervenes between Humbert and his aim, the realisation of his ideal, his object of desire - finally he is led to recognise that the text's third figure (also the figure of the third in the text) is his own misrecognition of the impossibility of repetition (here, against Kierkegaard, and against Freud - both of whom believed in the imperative, and the difficulty, of the escape from repetition - it is repetition backward that is impossible). This misrecognition is also that of the lack of recognition of Lolita; in this, however, he shares much with Nabokov's critics.

If Humbert's relation to Lolita is mediated by her relation to Mrs Haze, then Lolita's relation to Humbert is mediated through her rivalry with her mother. This is not lost on the narrator's cynical awareness, 'the two rivals were having a ripping row', (p. 48). Again: 'I was aware that mother Haze hated my darling for being sweet on me' (p. 53). And: 'The agent of these interruptions was usually the Haze woman (who, as the reader will mark, was more afraid of Lo's deriving some pleasure from me than of my enjoying Lo)' (p. 55). The latter comments witness Lolita's crush on Humbert and her mother's awareness of it - an awareness she may be putting to use for her own ends; marriage to Humbert. Yet, lest the reader suspect that the feelings of Lolita and her mother are a figment of the narrator's self-satisfied imagination, here is Mrs. Haze speaking:

'I think a Summer camp is so much healthier, and - well, it is all so much more *reasonable* as I say than to mope on a suburban lawn and use mamma's lipstick, and pursue shy studious gentlemen'. (p. 63)

With ironic retrospection the reader may again note the sexual connotations in Mrs. Haze's apparently innocent use of the concept of 'health'. However, health and reason function here as adjuncts to Mrs. Haze's perspective: she wants Lolita out of the way.

Finally, there is proof, in writing, from Lolita, of her crush for Humbert and of the disparity of readings between them. The first concerns a pin-up in Lolita's bedroom: 'Lo had drawn a jocose arrow to the haggard lover's face and had put, in block letters: HH', (p. 68). The disparity (of readings, of vision, of desire) is demonstrated again in the farewell hug that Lolita gives Humbert where very different affections are involved: Lolita makes up with an ally; the narrator dreams of rape (p. 66).

Yet again, the reader must beware Humbert's mistake of de-sexualising Lolita only in order to resexualise her in his own fantasy. The effect of Humbert's looks on Lolita remind the reader that her fondness for him is not simply paternal (nor simply based upon exploiting the difference with her mother for her own ends), yet although Humbert himself recognises that 'pubescent Lo swooned to Humbert's charm as she did to hiccuppy music', he denies its connection with an active sexuality (p. 103). Indeed, her concealed admission of her sexual experiment at camp - 'I've been revoltingly unfaithful to you' - may be read as resulting in a further experimental kiss with Humbert where she begins to practise what she has learnt (p. 112-113). In the same way Lolita, tired, having unconsciously taken a sleeping tablet, attempts to confess to Humbert her exploits with Charlie at the camp, before re-enacting her sexual adventures upon a surprised Humbert (p. 122). (In her 'drugged' sleep Lolita calls Humbert 'Barbara', her companion in transgression at the summer camp; her

dream thoughts dwell on the experiences that she will shortly recreate with her pin-up (p. 128)). Again, despite his awareness of her crush for him, he does not really make the connection back to the actively reciprocal partner of his adolescence; Lolita, for him, must remain a parodic copy, primarily child-like and therefore, despite her 'nymphlike' (to Humbert) appearance, volitionally passive (p. 113).

In this way Lolita's actions become freed from a simple ethical economy, where they absolve or damn her into passive victim or active seductress, and given a reading in their own right. Therefore the double logic or double economy of the seduction/rape scene. This is a product of differing trajectories where Lolita finally gets her film-star idol (confirming her own 'Hollywood' identity game and scoring one over her mother); and Humbert gets Lolita... however, the death of her mother has still been withheld from her (pp. 132-133). It is with the revelation of the death of Lolita's mother (her legal guardian) that the reality of the power relation between adult and child, between Humbert and Lolita, emerges (p. 141). Henceforth, until she meets Quilty, she is to have much less volition in her life than under her mother's regime, the rebellion against which Humbert exploits so effectively.

In this way it is also possible to turn around the moral disclaimer and dig at moralists (the 'frigid gentlewomen of the jury') so adroitly used by the narrator ('it was she who seduced me', p. 132) and into an account of the narrator's own abuse of the different 'reading' that is Lolita's, the difference which is that between an adult and a child; which is itself a culturally imposed binary covering a range of differing experiences and levels of development. Lolita is at the edge of puberty: neither neonate, nor toddler, neither infant, nor young child; yet not yet a teenager, adolescent, or young adult. The adult/child binary must elide such

differences, if it is to function successfully as an organiser of cultural stereotypes.

The relationship between Lolita and Humbert contrasts sharply with the two other major episodes in the novel that involve adolescent sexuality. The Annabel episode, supposed origin of the narrator's obsession, contrasts by its equality and reciprocity (p. 18). This episode includes two adult interventions where the coitus of the two children is interrupted: both events counterpose double pairings, two adults to two children. The first intervention involves two adult men, the second an adult couple; the first is deliberate, the second accidental; the first is permissive but intrusive, the second protective but hysterical: both are equally disastrous for the children's experiment and may be interpreted as being critical of adult interventions into children's evolving sexuality (p. 13; 15). These events are castrating in terms of the mutual desire of Humbert and Annabel, defining in terms of Humbert's personal sex drive. Events at the camp form the other pole of contrast. This is the scene of Lolita's own initiatory experience, the contrasting origin of her own sexuality. Here an experiment takes place involving equality in the context of a peer-group. Not castrating as with the narrator's originary experience; it is almost everyday - even functional - in its dismissal of a rite of passage. The portrayal is unromantic; but also unobsessive (there is also reference to an early lesbian experiment (p. 136)). There are other points of contrast between these two origins: one is a (sexual) failure, the other a (sexual) success: Humbert's memory is romantic; Lolita's recollection appears to be pragmatic. The episodes of the camp and of Annabel contrast to Humbert's current approach with its divided time of a sentimental past versus a cynical present. A language of loss excuses an event of domination. The playing out of the text's linguistic game (its punning, its parody) does not only represent language spinning itself out over an absence, a fall; it also

represents its attempt to excuse to itself that which is not excusable. It may be possible, in the light of these contrasts, to question Humbert's retrospective colouring of the scene of his ordinary fall.

Lucy B. Maddox, in 'Necrophilia in *Lolita*' (1982), also observes that, 'Humbert's prose narrative is a tangle of conflicting emotions and attitudes that moves back and forth between cynicism and sentimentality' (p. 362).³⁵ It is as an aspect of this that Nabokov intertwines the themes of childhood and necrophilia (life and death). Thus, writing of Humbert's desire to keep his and Lolita's story from publication until after her death and of his inability 'to express strong, unguarded emotion for Annabel until he first establishes, for himself and for his audience, that she is dead', Maddox notes that 'in both instances the living child inhibits and frustrates him; the dead child liberates and exhilarates him' (p. 365).

The allusions to Poe in the novel, to 'Annabel Lee' and 'Ligeia', imply love of the dead; a short step from love of death. On the role of necrophilia from Poe to Nabokov in American literature we must turn to Leslie Fiedler's thesis: that necrophilia in literature represents immaturity, an inability to cope with adult relations that entails flight into infantile or morbid fantasies.³⁶ Maddox evidently endorses Fiedler's approach for she comments that, 'Humbert's version of necrophilia... his need to verify a lover's death before he can speak without irony of his erotic desire for that lover', betrays a problematic attitude to the desire of the living; 'in his

³⁵ Maddox, 'Necrophilia in *Lolita*', where the opposition of Law to desire is taken as equivalent to judgement and style and thus to didacticism and transgression (p. 361).

³⁶ Fiedler, *Love and Death*: 'The failure of the American fictionist to deal with adult heterosexual love and his consequent obsession with death, incest and innocent homosexuality are not merely matters of historical interest or historical relevance' (p. 12). In the light of Fiedler's thesis we might remark that *Lolita* can be read as a parody of the Sentimental Novel of the eighteenth century, itself a parody (the role of seduction) of the courtly love tradition.

actual dealings with the living Humbert is repeatedly a failure - as lover, husband, rival, father, and friend' (p. 366).³⁷

However, the reader notes with irony the moment when, 'the real child dies for him - with an unapocalyptic whimper - at his own hands, and the daemonic nymphet becomes a Fury' (p. 371). It is *for him* that this loss turns her from a nymphet (a positive) to a Fury (a negative): *for her* this transformation is part of a fight for survival; the extension of her power and the denial of the condition of powerlessness (death) that Humbert requires of her.

Maddox notes that Humbert 'preserves his ecstatic vision of Lolita in the frozen images of his book, and so gives them both at least a fair shot at a metaphoric immortality' (p. 371). A 'metaphoric immortality' which, for the character whose proper name was Dolores, takes the form of the actual notoriety attributed to her nickname 'Lolita'. The name 'Dolores' itself suggests two complementary pathways; as Mexican or Latin it suggests the southern 'other' (and the symbolic geography of 'below') of North America, a parallel to 'Italian' in English and earlier American writing (Fitzgerald's and Faulkner's 'little Italian girl'). By contrast, Linda Kauffman, in 'Framing *Lolita* : Is There a Woman in the Text?', notes that 'Dolores', Lolita's legal and proper name, 'points too directly towards another source - Our Lady of Sorrows' (p. 137).³⁸ We might wish to counterpoint these differing lines of connotation of 'Dolores' to those of the 'Lolita' of Doxa, the sexually precocious child of public opinion.

The elision or demonification of the early adolescent voice or desire that, I have argued, can be identified in Lolita has lead to a variety of critical stances. A short history of the varieties of Lolita criticism will

³⁷ See also, pp. 369-379, for a list of metaphors and wishes concerning Lolita and death (taken from Lolita (Putnam, 1972), p. 64;118; 127;142; 256; 264).

³⁸ Linda Kauffman, 'Framing *Lolita* ', pp. 131-152.

indicate the evolution of these differing critical (and ethical) interpretations showing how their premises rely upon their indifference to the voice of another generation in the text. Three readings will be presented from the period of the 1950s through to the 1970s; these readings have themselves become the basis of oppositional readings by feminist criticism from the 1980s. I will begin with a review by F. W. Dupee (1957), proceed to Carl R. Proffer's Keys to *Lolita* (1968), and then to Douglas Fowler's Reading Nabokov (1974). To these will be counterposed Lucy Maddox's, Nabokov's Novels in English (1983), and an article by Linda Kauffman, 'Framing *Lolita* : Is There a Woman in the Text?' (1989). I will finish on two recent readings of Nabokov that highlight the transgressive value of paedophilia as literary theme and show the influence of a horizon of expectations indebted to the discourses on child sexual abuse; Trevor McNeely's article, '"Lo" and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle' (1989), and Brandon S. Centerwall's 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Paedophilia' (1990).

F. W. Dupee's review, originally published in Anchor Review (1957), includes the following comment extrapolated from the character Lolita: 'the defiant come-on of little girls in blue jeans' (p. 86).³⁹ The movement from particular to general indicates a movement away from the text and on to 'little girls' as a referential entity which suggests that the author may equally be writing in the subjunctive as in the indicative. Furthermore, with the phrase 'the cares of a family man', Dupee appears to refer to the financial responsibilities of a breadwinner beset by the exorbitant demands of his family: yet, in the particular context of the novel, Dupee is describing the actions of Lolita when attempting to gain something for herself from a situation into which she has been trapped (p. 90). Her

³⁹ F. W. Dupee, in Page (ed.).

behaviour attempts to institute an exchange, an economic exchange, "'A penny for your thoughts," I said, and she stretched out her palm at once' -the connotations of prostitution cast a critical light on what their relation has become (p. 90).⁴⁰

Dupee then commits an interesting misreading of Freud, 'Fathers want to sleep with their daughters, daughters with their fathers' (p. 90). Yet it is not Nabokov who suggests this, he is after all a virulent anti-Freudian.⁴¹ Dupee continues: 'by parading the theme of incest, with drums and banners, Mr. Nabokov makes it ridicule itself out of existence so far as Lolita is concerned'(p. 90). If Dupee is referring to the Freudian version, then yes, and rightly so; Freud's positing of the Oedipus complex and its female counterpart, the Electra complex (which he did not develop), applies to infants at around (or before) the age of five and their relation to their parents - not to persons of the age group that are under discussion and (although these impulses may be reactivated at puberty) not to sexual intercourse with them. That should disqualify the side of the equation represented by 'daughters want to sleep with their fathers'.

However this still leaves the critic's, 'fathers want to sleep with their daughters', Freud's Oedipus complex certainly never suggested anything of the sort, although the earlier 'seduction theory' may suggest otherwise. Yet this is palpably the case in Lolita, if only nominally in the form of her step-father. Indeed, such is the object and end of all of Humbert's plotting; he has become her step-father *only* in order to facilitate his conquest. In an irony which Nabokov exploits fully, the means employed further

⁴⁰ See also Kauffman, 'Framing *Lolita*', p. 141, who points to the relation of exchange and prostitution, to Dolores and her attempts at her own gain, (citing Judith Lewis Herman, Father-Daughter Incest, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 4), 'The father, in effect, forces the daughter to pay with her body for affection and care which should be freely given.' However, Dolores is also attempting to save-up in order to escape; Humbert foils this by regularly stealing her hard-earned savings.

⁴¹ See Vladimir Nabokov, Pnin, (London: Heinemann, 1957), for assorted parodies of psychoanalytic explanation.

intensify the transgression that results. This half of Dupee's phrase may be seen as pointing in two complimentary directions: to father/daughter rape (to include stepfathers, and by implication all those in a relation of authority or responsibility over children they are, even distantly, related to); and to Freud's early 'seduction theory' (hysteria as caused by sexual interference at an early age). If it is the case that Freud is being parodied in Nabokov's novel, then the relation between Humbert and Lolita might suggest that it is the original 'seduction theory', which Freud rapidly repudiated, that is the object of parody. Certainly the central relationship of the novel points more clearly to the relation of power abuse called father/daughter rape or child sexual abuse than to any obvious psychoanalytic relation. In this way it is under the sign of sex and power that the incest theme returns to Nabokov; a different guise to that with which he may have parodied and played.

Carl R. Proffer, in his book Keys to Lolita (1968), begins by explaining, 'I have not concerned myself with ... the meaning or morality of the novel... any paraphrase would be more reprehensible than raping Mabel Glave.'⁴² This is an interesting conjunction (and hierarchic comparison) of denial and sexual abuse given the topic of the novel. Indeed Proffer again indulges in a strange comparison, this time a false equalisation, when he notes that 'Humbert raped Lolita - or she him' (p. 72). The appended disjunctive clause acts to neutralise the primary proposition of rape by suggesting that equivocation is possible. Again, it is the choice of definition of the word 'rape' that seems to be at issue. Legally, rape it most certainly is. As her father a 'rape' of responsibility is involved (as also a nominal incest relation); whilst the kidnapping and drugging of Lolita clearly indicate, as do Humbert's own words what his intentions were

⁴² Proffer, Keys to Lolita. See the 'Forward'. If the Glave reference held, as I suspect it did, some irony at the time of first publication, it has been lost; I have not been able to locate a single source. The loss of this context of irony allows a more serious reading.

(legally, -on the level of the narrative- a signed confession, the equivalent of a diary or other record used as evidence). Only in the surprise inversion constituted by Lolita's imposition of her own desire can the term 'rape' be denied to Humbert's actions. Certainly *she* in no way 'seduces' or 'rapes' *him* as he is willing, if a little surprised. It may even be that Lolita, like Pale Fire, can be read as a masturbation fantasy penned by the narrator whilst in prison, or, abandoning the level of the narrative for that of genre, as a melding of erotica with 'art' literature.⁴³ Clearly whilst the terms 'rape' and 'seduction' may be used figuratively to connote the active or complicit role played by Humbert's prisoner they may not be used in any literal sense. Here the reader is given the choice of making a moral from a referential standpoint (what we know of child sexual abuse) or pursuing the figurative, or rhetorical, dimension of (the pleasure of) the text.

Moreover, the use of these terms affects an exchange and neutralisation of the respective positions of an adult and a child and of the context of the event (Lolita is both legally and physically the prisoner of Humbert who is her legal guardian) in a way which is clearly questionable; why the inversion? Also implied is the judgement that if perhaps a woman or child is active, as opposed to an adult male, the result is an opposition of 'unnatural' to 'natural' types of activity. In this sense 'rape' would be used of Lolita to signify her 'unnaturalness', a move which implies the absolution of Humbert from any such imputation himself.⁴⁴ Or, the implication may be that if he must still be regarded as a 'rapist' on legal, technical, or parental grounds, that Humbert is only guilty of rape by

⁴³ In fact this was the first of Nabokov's texts to be treated as such - thanks entirely to the impact it made as being classified as erotica; the inclusion of a 'low' or disreputable genre guaranteed the success of the novel as 'literature' as opposed to mere 'fiction'

⁴⁴ This exchange (of his 'rape' for hers) also appears to imply an equation of rape with sexual initiative. This equivalence drowns out rape in activity and, in effect, confuses consensual and non-consensual passivity; confuses passivity with permission and ignores all other factors.

classification (statutory rape) and not by action; that is, only guilty of corrupting a minor. This seems to be the implication of the argument favoured by most commentators on Lolita in the course of the 1950s and 1960s; a product, I suspect, of excessive reader (critic) identification with Humbert and his actions and of an uncritical involvement in the pleasures of the text. This appears to be the result of a trap sprung by Nabokov who managed to ensure critic complicity by the adroit use of his chief get-out clause: the inversion of the innocent into the knowing, and so the guilty. In this way Dolores the child (or young adolescent) has become Lolita the seductress; the attributes of the former are lost between the stereotypes of virgin and whore.

Writing in the early 1970s, Douglas Fowler, in Reading Nabokov, suggests himself for membership of the 'not rape' school of interpretation with his avowal that 'Lolita seduces him'.⁴⁵ In a book that tries to deal with the evolution of a moral identity, Fowler appears to adopt Humbert's viewpoint. Yet, why, in a parodic text with an unreliable narrator, should such a one-sided identification be necessary? Fowler observes of Humbert that 'love redeems him' after he has seen the damage he has done to Lolita (p. 19). Yet, the viewpoint that finds in Lolita's trajectory after leaving Humbert a downfall... is Humbert's - whose 'redemption' is bought at the price of a life. Lolita dies shortly after. To use the word 'love' to describe Humbert's emotional state is to display a high order of irony: rid of his obsession Humbert simply becomes mawkish.

Fowler informs us that Quilty must be 'viewed as Humbert's perverted and vicious Döppelgänger' (p. 149). Viewed by who, and why? Is Humbert *not* 'perverted and vicious'? Quilty, after all, does not kidnap her, and allows her to leave when she pleases. This moral judgement of Quilty (phonic metaphor: guilty) can only be Humbert's (as with the

⁴⁵ Fowler, Reading Nabokov, p. 149.

classification: 'seduction') - again, the critic takes the narrator's point of view (again the issue of the implied reader as a member of a kind of male club is supported by a critic, again Lolita's will or desire is used in support of this). Fowler notes the importance of the double denial: Humbert does not murder Charlotte and does not deflower Lolita (p. 149). Should we refuse these denials as irrelevant and judge accordingly, or accept them and white-wash Humbert?

To avoid the charge of foregrounding or backgrounding textual details in order to support a thesis, it would be useful if one could do both: 'technically' Humbert does not (murder or) deflower Lolita just as 'technically' he does murder the relatively innocent Quilty (a paedophile but not guilty of kidnapping or drugging a minor) and does (like Quilty, but under conditions of duress, of a greater abrogation of responsibility) 'technically' rape Lolita. She does at least choose to leave with Quilty. The choice of a character for (transferential) identification by a reader can perhaps be traced to the author's literary skill (putting aside the question of the type or kind of reader). The critic, however, ought to be more aware of the wiles of those skilled in the manipulation of 'persuasive language' if not of the tendency of his own predilections (the question of rhetoric and the implied reader).

By contrast to the readings discussed above, Lucy Maddox, in Nabokov's Novels in English, puts herself firmly in the orbit of the 1980s 'rape' or victim school of interpretation when she notes that 'Humbert admits freely to the crimes of child rape and murder' (p. 67). Actually the term 'rape' is Maddox's, a description not a citation, a product of the change of definition and emphasis between critics writing before the 1970s and after. This change of viewpoint also involves a reappraisal of the role of Quilty (as noted in the comment on Fowler above):

With Quilty, as for Lolita, Humbert takes his own metaphors too literally; by calling Quilty "subhuman" Humbert performs a mental manoeuvre that places the killing of such a creature outside the territory in which moral acts are committed. Such a killing would not be murder - just as sexual intercourse with a daemonic nymphet would never be the same as child rape. (p. 70)

We might add that it is precisely the function of these metaphors to allow Humbert his actions and that the metaphors are part of a textual fabric that relies upon play, upon the rapid conversion of things -and morals- into their opposites (the interchangability of the referential and the rhetorical). An essential part of the texture of Nabokov's stylistics is the parodic playing off of (transgressive) pleasure and (didactic) morality against one another never allowing the dominance of one to be sustained for too long.

Linda Kauffman's article, 'Framing *Lolita* : Is There a Woman in the Text?', is a critique of the uses of 'aesthetic bliss' and of 'the text's satiric playfulness' (p. xix).⁴⁶ Commenting on Trilling's article, Kauffman points out that 'one can celebrate Humbert's role as lover only by minimising his role as father', the latter role making possible the former by giving him 'unmonitored access to the girl by designating him her legal "guardian" ': she concludes that the novel is 'about incest'(p. 131). As in a sense (legally, although not in terms of consanguinity) it is; although it would be more apposite to add that it is that form of incest which is primarily sexual child abuse, more particularly the form based upon an abuse of power and responsibility known as father/daughter rape. The use of the term 'incest' alone only connotes the breach of a social (and not necessarily legal) taboo: it does not indicate any relation of consent or its absence. It is for this reason that commentators upon this area of human experience have, in general, preferred the term, 'sexual child abuse', which, backed up with the more specific 'father/daughter rape', had come to replace the term

⁴⁶ Kauffman, 'Framing *Lolita* ', (p. xix).

'incest' in the course of the early 1980s.⁴⁷ Kauffman's aim is to 'show how - through a variety of narrative strategies - the inscription of the father's body in the text obliterates the daughter's' (p. 131). She might have written 'desire' for 'body' (or better still, 'voice'), for, whereas both characters in the novel have 'bodies' that are textual constructs, it is through the desire (or voice) of one, Humbert the narrator, that both are imaged. Lolita is only allowed desire when it suits Humbert's moral needs; to serve as a partial absolution for his crime by indicting her complicity and degraded moral state. Kauffman notes the opposite poles of framing which the preface and afterword entail: the preface, signed by one John Ray Jr., apparently a psychologist, is a mock moral disclaimer which suggests that Lolita will help in 'the task of bringing up a better generation in a better world' (Lolita, p. 7), whilst the afterword is by the author himself, 'Vladimir Nabokov', suggesting that 'Lolita has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss' (Lolita, p. 313). There is no reason why we should read 'Ray' as parodic and not 'Nabokov'; indeed both are now part of the text as the frame in a painting determines perception yet is ignored as secondary. The contrastive approach of these frames cancels each other out; indeed, this play of reversal and denial (of duplicity) is a feature of Lolita throughout. It is this feature, Lolita's key trope, that must be dealt with, and must finally inform any interpretation and be evinced in any didactic comment.

Kauffman says that she wishes 'to reinscribe the material body of the child and simultaneously to undermine the representational fallacy by situating the text dialogically in relation to other texts' (p. 133). That is, she wants to maintain a critique by returning the perspective of Lolita to the

⁴⁷ See, for example, the change in terminology from Meiselman, Incest, (1978), to Ward, Father-Daughter Rape, (1984).

text whilst also maintaining the text's status as an intertextual construction. Yet it is the 'pleasure of the text', the 'aesthetic bliss', which is intertextual, parodic, and diachronic (pre-texts); whereas at first sight it is the referential relation to the 'real' which apparently produces a political, ethical or critical reading. Actual reference to the discourses of feminism or social work would provide such a comparative intertext (a synchronic rather than a diachronic intertextual relation). This intertext would then provide the basis for a re-reading which would allow Lolita a voice over and above those of Humbert and the (given) cultural context. Either way, it is not a case of 'reinscribing the material body'; there never was such! (The only bodies with any relation to the text are those of the author -an absent presence, the implied author is a textual construct- and that of the reader; the addressee of the eternally deictic second person singular of all text: 'you'). The issue is, firstly, can the critical/parodic charge of Nabokov's textual play be made to produce a reading in which Lolita has her own voice (emerging through the generational difference defined against Humbert's adult), rather than that of a demonified (or sanctified) cipher; and, secondly, to what extent can the relation of Humbert and Lolita be read as an analogy of/for incestuous child sexual abuse. This analogy would be born of narrative similarity (personal history as ground; step-fathers as the most numerous category of child sexual abusers) rather than as a figure for the depraved teenagers of popular culture, a comparison born of a narrow ground (her taste in food and lack of virginity). The latter comparison is demonified in the text to allow Humbert's cultural superiority (raising the question of the implied reader as, at least in self-regard, a highly educated, culturally sophisticated, 1950s male who 'knows about this sort of girl'). In a sense the terms 'allegory' and 'referential' have come to share certain features: if allegory is read as an act of comparison, an assertion of a parallel, in which the other term of

the comparison resides in other (non-literary) discourses, in this example the documentation of child sexual abuse and its typical forms, then allegory can be read as a means of constructing the text's reference. Both allegory and reference produce a frame, or deixis, which indicates a context of reading and hence of interpretation.

Kauffman returns to the issue of rape again when she cites the description of Lolita's penetration by the narrator:

a slave child trying to climb a column of onyx... a fire opal dissolving in a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of colour, stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child. (p. 142)

The actual citation should be 'a sultan, his face expressing a great agony (belied, as it were, by his moulding caress), helping a callypygean slave child to climb a column of onyx'.⁴⁸ 'Callypygean' means 'having shapely buttocks'.⁴⁹ The immediate context is also important; the scene is consciously described by the narrator as if a dream or a painting (*Lolita*, p. 134). However, none of this significantly alters Kauffman's main point (although the addition of the word 'trying' does imply greater difficulty for the climber) which counterpoints the pain and constraint of the 'slave child' to the volition of Lolita as seductress. Yet, this episode is clearly signalled as a fantasy: Humbert's reconstruction (with all its terms of excess) may indicate a desire rather than a report (subjunctive as opposed to indicative). Lolita is sexually experienced and it may be that Humbert is fantasizing rape as this would return to him the initiative.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 134. Also omitted from the citation ('onyx... a fire opal') are assorted scenes of sexual innuendo involving aspects of youth culture. This does not alter the tenor of Kauffman's argument.

⁴⁹ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, p. 378.

⁵⁰ There is also an earlier mention to Humbert as the 'Turk' and Lolita as the 'youngest and frailest of slaves'- the masturbation sequence (*Lolita*, p. 60). This reference to age and weakness can also be read as a sign of Humbert's desire for the child as such, and not the woman in the child.

If the first and last terms of this sequence are read, not as an aspect of Humbert's pictorial depiction as fantasy, but as referring to Lolita's absence of liberty and physical discomfort, then a reading such as Kauffman's results: Lolita is 'in such pain that she can not sit because Humbert has torn something inside her' (p. 142). This approach leads to the conclusion that there appears (whether as memory or, more tellingly, in Humbert's fantasy) to have been no sexual pleasure on Lolita's part. Humbert calls Lolita, 'My Frigid Princess', as 'never... did she vibrate under my touch', and that 'she was ready to turn away... with something akin to plain repulsion' (p. 143).⁵¹ Clearly, once the initial experiment was over, Lolita quickly lost interest in Humbert. Kauffman goes on to note the narrator's domination of Lolita, which includes the demanding of reports of how she spent her time, spying, and other features of obsessive control (p. 144). Lolita's response to sex, or 'the operation' as Humbert calls it is noted in the following passage:

The operation was over, all over, and she was weeping... a salutary storm of sobs after one of the fits of moodiness that had become so frequent with her in the course of that otherwise admirable year! (*Lolita*, pp. 166-167)⁵²

Lolita's despair is further indicated by such citations as: 'her "sobs in the night, -every night, every night"'; and her response of 'Oh no, not again!' to Humbert's continued sexual advances (p. 154).

Two recent readings highlight the elements of paedophilia in Nabokov's work: Trevor McNeely, "'Lo" and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle', *Studies in the Novel*, and Brandon S. Centerwall, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Pedophilia'.⁵³ McNeely highlights the lack of

⁵¹ As Kauffman notes, the word 'akin' is superfluous serving only to obscure the narrator's apprehension of the truth from himself.

⁵² Again Kauffman has attempted to gild the lily by omission; 'weeping...', originally read 'weeping in my arms - a salutary storm of sobs'. Kauffman seems to have felt that the inclusion of 'my arms' might water down her argument.

⁵³ Trevor McNeely, "'Lo" and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle', *Studies in the Novel*, 21. 2 (Summer 1989), pp. 183-199; and Centerwall, 'Hiding in Plain Sight'.

morality in the novel's critics and sees the novel as Nabokov's revenge on neglectful critics and public alike. This is achieved through Nabokov's love of language, where the moral affront is excused by style: paedophilia will be excused if it is art! By contrast, Centerwall, directly accuses Nabokov of closet paedophilia. He cites the author's attempt at anonymous publication (p. 472), and focuses upon the episode in Nabokov's autobiographical novel Speak, Memory, where Nabokov is abused by his paedophile uncle (p. 479). Centerwall then finds references to this Uncle in Lolita; the ages of abused and abuser in both are twelve and thirty-seven, (pp. 479-480). Centerwall now notes the reluctance of Nabokov to add fellatio to his transgressive armoury, and observes that Nabokov's characters generally appear to have an aversion to this practise. The remainder of the argument is worth quoting in full (the excerpt is from Lolita, p. 134):

Following his first night with the twelve-year-old Dolores Haze, he paints in his imagination an erotic mural. One scene in the mural is 'a choking snake sheathing whole the flayed trunk of shoit'. The picture equates the child molester with a pig, his young victim with a choking snake. The pig metaphor requires no elaboration. The snake, however, is odd on two counts. First, there is no reference in the text to Lolita choking, either then or later. Second, a snake in all its phallicness is not a logical metaphor for a young girl, whereas it would be appropriate for a young boy. The image points outside the text to another part of Nabokov's mental landscape - to a scene where a young boy is choking as he is coerced (gently of course) into sucking the phallus of his pig-uncle. (p. 480)

The 'outside', of course, is provided by the critic, by his horizon of expectations, all actual references are to Nabokov's novels and to his autobiography. Centerwall completes his argument by locating a parapraxis in Lolita:

There is a confirmatory clue in Lolita: for no obvious reason to do with the plot, Humbert has an uncle Gustave. Uncle Gustave first comes to Humbert's mind when he is on the brink of molesting Lolita for the first time (125) and again when he later observes the as-yet-unidentified Quilty leering at the nymphet (141). Humbert has a pedophilic chess partner,

Gaston, who lusts after young boys; in a slip of the tongue (Humbert's, not Nabokov's), Humbert says 'Gustave' where he meant to say 'Gaston' (204). Uncle Gustave even looks like Quilty the child molester (220). The set of association makes clear that Uncle Gustave is not just any uncle but an uncle who molests young boys. The first time Humbert gets a good look at Quilty (239-240) he has a hallucinatory episode; Quilty *becomes* Uncle Gustave - and Humbert vomits. This emetic response points back to the same scene as before. (pp. 480-481)

Centerwall is referring to oral sex with his (Nabokov's) uncle. Centerwall then observes, that, 'in his autobiography Nabokov explicitly denied having had any homosexual experiences as a child - up to age eleven. What happened at age twelve is left unstated' (p. 481).

In the light of Centerwall's article, which re-reads Nabokov's narratives (including 'Nabokov' himself) as the product of child sexual abuse (either biographical and/or as the interpretative product of a new horizon of expectations), the question may be better rephrased as: is child sexual abuse/ paedophilia a variation of the inversion/perversion of the courtly love theme as incest theme through the medium of the (inverted) nineteenth century childhood theme (the little girl cult)? Or is this employment of the incest theme a cover for the writing of paedophilia? Whilst the interpretation of Lolita in the context of child sexual abuse is timely and therefore to be worked through rather than ignored, this kind of reading bears the disadvantage of constituting 'Lolita' as pure victim and therefore of foreclosing on the issue of her textual voice.

In another, earlier, approach to the paedophile theme in literature, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, in 'The Exile of Adulthood: Paedophilia in the Midlife Novel' (1984), regards paedophilia in Nabokov as a factor of 'middle aged' writing (she also locates it in Proust and Mann); perhaps as part of (Western) culture's continued positing of the child as symbol of innocence and purity.⁵⁴ Whilst the readings of both Gullette and

⁵⁴ Margaret Morganroth Gullette, 'The Exile of Adulthood: Paedophilia in the Midlife Novel', The Novel: A Forum on Fiction, 17. 3 (Spring 1984), pp. 215-232.

Centerwall show the changing inflection of this period with respect to the construction of child sexual abuse, there is no reason why such readings should be taken as mutually exclusive; both, after all, point to the context of the novel, the former to a conjuncture of generation and history with culture, the latter to the trajectory from text to implied author (or a corpus) to the actual, or biographical, author. Which is still not to accuse Nabokov of practising child sexual abuse (something Centerwall is anxious to avoid); but only of being the product of his civilisation.

My reading of Lolita has suggested that a comparison of these two broad groups of critics would show that the elision of each constitutes the ground of the other; both appear to elide the textual existence of the character that the novel is named after. In contrast, this reading has tried to maintain both the volition of this character *and* the domination she is subjected to, a reading which is only possible if the twin antipodes of previous (a)moral readings are supplemented by a third; that which constitutes the viewpoint of the 'child', or young adolescent, of Lolita, or Dolores - of Lolita read against her narrator (her 'friends', and her critics). Ironically, it is Humbert's concern to allow much to himself (as to the implied, if unwilling, reader), that allows the place in his language for the reading of the desire or the difference of another generation (which, in this instance, is also a difference of sex); different lines that run parallel and unmeeting until the narrator's unmasked domination leaves escape as the only option.

Here are two definitions of the word 'Lolita', the first, lexical, from a dictionary, the second, a collection defined by semantic collocation, from a

thesaurus. (1) 'A precociously seductive girl'.⁵⁵ (2) Under the headings 'A Loose Woman' and 'Libertine' (with 'hussy' and 'slut' as near neighbours) as part of the following series, 'nymphet, sex kitten, Lolita, groupie'.⁵⁶ If the everyday definition of the word 'Lolita' is any clue to what a non-sanitised, non-academic reading would be like, then clearly the novel Lolita would stand a more than reasonable chance of being regarded as 'pornographic' by public opinion.⁵⁷ However it is not that Lolita combines pornography and literature that designates it a problem text, but the particular relation of pleasure to domination that it explores. Indeed if Lolita is read referentially, (with an awareness of the contingencies of current history) as a novel of child sexual abuse, and textually, as the unbidden emergence of the voice of the (adolescent) child in a narrative for adults, then a transformation of meaning would appear to have occurred in the assimilation of this title, this name, this word in its strangely predictable journey from 'text' to 'world'. This fate of a proper name in the public sphere, the tell-tale trajectory of a cultural signifier, encompasses a passage from abused child to stereotypical temptress, a gradient which combines gender, generation, and sexuality in a dual concealment of volition and of domination. Such a gradient indicates the complicit role of culture in creating desire and childhood, the problems of

⁵⁵ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam Webster, 1985), p. 703.

⁵⁶ Betty Kirkpatrick (ed.), Roget's Thesaurus, (London: Penguin, 1988). See section 952 (p. 452), 'A Loose Woman' has its anomalies with reference to 'Lolita': 'loose' already carries a disapproving ethical negative, to be fallen is to be guilty; 'woman' as too old for a child or young adolescent, the only a priori shared feature is their sex.

⁵⁷ See David Rampton, 'Lolita', where he notes of public opinion that, 'the appearance of the book in England caused some particularly violent outbursts' (p. 101). Yet despite this moral furore the proper name 'Lolita' had, within the space of a few years, became a part of everyday speech connoting 'sex kitten'. See also Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', where she argues against the 'mutually exclusive definitions of pornography and literature' (p. 208).

their incited but unhallowed blend, and the stereotypes by which they are then misrecognised.⁵⁸

The ethical and aesthetic paradoxes of transgression are an important feature of American writing: one which becomes more acute as we move toward recent times.

⁵⁸ The essential semantic elements of the public "Lolita" would appear to be: *female*, *youth*, including the transgressive thrill of illegality when this term is attached to the following, *sexuality*, and *provocation* (including stereo-typical sexual characteristics and their actual, or implied, use to attract) the latter term working to absolve the enunciator/observer from any guilt that may occur as a by-product of the factors of transgression and attraction. In this way responsibility (guilt) is attached to the object and lower term (inferior by gender, age, strength, and imputed morality). The privilege of apportioning guilt (and therefore punishment) being a defining feature of the 'upper term'. See also the Humbertish words of one Judge Ian Starforth Hill QC, aged 71, who freed 'a man who tried to have sex with an eight year old girl.... because he [the judge] believed...."she was not entirely an angel herself."' Richard Duce, 'Judge under fire for freeing child sex man', The Times, June 9th 1993, No. 64,666, p. 1.

Chapter 5: Referentiality and Transgression in American literature of the late twentieth century

In this chapter I will examine the writing of the incest theme in the second half of the twentieth century and its links to the themes of childhood, paedophilia, and child sexual abuse. Questions of critique and rhetorical appropriation will continue to be addressed, but the politics and aesthetics of the incest theme and its correlates in the late twentieth century suggest that the material be dealt with in two broad, interacting, tendencies: the referential and the transgressive.

The relationships between rhetorical, referential and transgressive elements in my reading will fall into three general types: first, rhetorical and referential levels may conflict within a given text ('child' as part of binary with 'adult' as opposed to 'child' as part of plot); or the conflict may be between a textual rhetoric and reference in its deictic aspect (suggesting a comparison with other texts or recorded events - for example, child sexual abuse). Often these two aspects of reference may fuse or be used separately (parenthesis will indicate which usage is being followed). Second, the contrast of the transgressive to the referential will usually involve a comparison of differing texts, where the aesthetics of shock or taboo are opposed to a deictic comparison made for polemical purposes (incest and child sexual abuse in black women writers). Third, the contrast between transgressive and rhetorical levels will apply to relations within the same text and will imply a difference between the transgressive aesthetic function of an element (the pleasure of the text) and its polemical use (didactics). Despite a possible inference to the contrary ('reference' as beyond rhetoric), neither the 'referential' nor the 'transgressive' tendencies are free from rhetorical implications or appropriations and often combine on various levels and issues. As with any use of ideal types,

the actual material is always of a mixed character; it is a question of which predominates and at what level.

As in previous chapters, I will continue to maintain that the incest theme, particularly in its expanded form, is central to American writing, to the canon of American literature as it is currently constituted. Furthermore, I will suggest that it is not only in the canonical authors that the use of the incest theme may be found, but in the most canonical of their works; precisely those deemed the most worthy by literary history. I continue to suggest that the bringing of a critical focus upon these texts will result in some decidedly uncanonical readings.

In one sense the work of this chapter was begun in the prior discussion of Nabokov and Lolita, where the concept of the referential and the emergence of a hidden voice, or viewpoint, were first pitted against, then constructed upon, Nabokov's transgressive manipulation of 'the pleasure of the text'. Nabokov's virtuoso performance earns him a place in the aesthetic, transgressive of the two streams (what a critical readership might chose to do with his work is another matter, as I hope my own reading has indicated). In this he is to be categorised with Mailer (American Dream), also ambiguous in his uses of sex and incest, and, contrasted to Ellison (Invisible Man). Both of these texts will be subject to scrutiny below.

The two broad strands of the post-war incest theme, the referential and the transgressive, will each be allotted their own section. The first, 'The Rhetoric of Referentiality', will deal with the use of the incest theme by particular groups or interests, such as women or blacks, as part of a politics of recognition or resistance. The second section, 'Transgression & Excess: the Politics of Limits', will deal with the incest theme as a critique of the American Dream in a combination of debunking and pleasure that is usually aimed at a general target (the human condition- read as American)

and that endeavours to speak on behalf of human universals and often on behalf of 'universal' classes. Ironically, this tendency ends by becoming openly partial in perspective, as in the examples from gay fiction.

Both sections will finish on examples of the expanded incest theme as used in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties - the 'present referential' and 'present transgressive' forms and their inter-relation. The conclusion of the latter will ask the question as to whether we are witnessing a fusion of the two trends, a parallel development in differing discourses (literature, oppositional, Welfare) with a general cultural impact, or a contingent merging and a movement beyond to ever new representations of excess.

The Rhetoric of Referentiality

The pattern of use in this section is openly polemical, related to the politics of 'minorities', discrimination, inequality, and representation. The tendency is from an exclusive to an inclusive approach - at least in matters of racial and sexual difference; from concerns either racial or feminist, to concerns racial and feminist.

Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952) combines realism and allegory to present a voyage through America as seen from the viewpoint of a young black man.¹ Although ostensibly a novel of becoming the story ends with the hero in hiding unsure of what he is and what he will do. Innocence and naiveté as a source of downfall have been replaced by a knowledge which seems to lead nowhere; the lack of progress in the novel, expressed formally as a sequence of episodes, comments upon the position of the black American male in the period of the 1930s and '40s.

The incest episode occurs early on in the novel at a stage when the hero is attending a prestigious black college in the South. Given responsibility

¹ Ralph Ellison, The Invisible Man, (London: Penguin, 1989).

for a wealthy white patron, he unwittingly takes his charge on a tour of the less salubrious sights of local black society. The itinerary includes a drinking den and brothel, and a visit to a self-confessed child abuser who proceeds to captivate the young man's white charge with a highly embellished version of his sexual activities with his daughter (pp. 45-62).

During the course of the telling of this story it becomes apparent that Trueblood, the incestuous father, has become a focus of contention between the leaders of the two races. The educated members of the black community, those with hard-won positions, want to get rid of him:

'Fore they heard 'bout what happen to us out ere I couldn't git no help from nobody. Now lotta folks is curious and goes out of their way to help. Even the biggity school folks up on the hill, only there was a catch to it! They offered to send us clean outta the county... (p. 47) ²

Yet whites, especially the white establishment (law, educational institutions) show great interest in the incident and want to 'protect' him (p. 48). When Trueblood goes to the (white) sheriff for protection from the threats of other blacks, he notes that the sheriff:

asked me to tell him what happen, and I tole him and he called in some more men and they made me tell it again. They wanted to hear about the gal lots of times. (p. 47-48)

Soon, as a result of Trueblood's adroit storytelling:

The white folks took up for me. And white folks took to coming out here to see us and talk with us. And some of 'em was big white folks, too, from the big school way cross the State. Asked me lots 'bout what I thought 'bout things, and 'bout my folks and the kids, and wrote it all down in a book. But best of all, suh, I got more work now than I ever did have before... (p. 48)

Clearly Trueblood's own interests are at odds with those who wish to combat white prejudice; he benefits economically from his storytelling,

² Note the use of the disclamatory construction, 'what happen to us out here': 'happen' indicates lack of personal responsibility, infering either group or 'other' origin of the incident; 'to us' indicates passivity; 'out here' suggests that the place of residence is to blame and that those from other areas can not understand, and therefore may not judge.

directly as well as indirectly, as we shall see; whilst, in exchange, he provides the local white establishment with a vicarious sexual pleasure and a reinforcement of the most degraded stereotype of the 'nigger' held by some Southern whites. Class, that is social and economic, difference, also figures alongside racial division as a source of Trueblood's fortunes; he exploits differences between the elites of both communities to his own interest resulting in economic betterment for himself and his family. However, it is not only the difference of caste or wealth that is played out in the struggle over Trueblood. The division of labour (mental and manual) is also involved; when educated blacks ('school folks') attempt to dispose of him, the uneducated Trueblood is not only defended by the white hierarchies of learning and wealth, but also by the unlettered deputies of the sheriff. Trueblood hands local white racism a propaganda victory.³

In the (lengthy) re-telling of his incestuous story that follows, Trueblood skilfully inserts a dream, a story within a story within a story, so to speak, in which he is grabbed by a white woman who then collapses with him onto a conveniently placed bed (p. 52). In this way he incorporates what would be for his Southern white audiences a hint of tabooed racial contact, a oblique reference to 'miscegenation', thus adding the transgression of a local racial taboo to the forthcoming transgression of a taboo held to be universal, the incest taboo. He awakes from his dream finding that he has entered his daughter and that she is fighting him off (p. 53). His tale continues with his daughter apparently acquiescing and his wife waking up (he had been sleeping on one side of his daughter, his wife on the other) and going to get, first, a shotgun, then an axe.

³ See Robert B. Stepto, From Behind the Veil: a Study of Afro-American Narrative, (London: University of Illinois Press, 1979), on the question of 'literacy' and survival (competence in reading sign systems, and writing as creative mastery of other's signs).

Writing of what follows, Houston A. Baker, in Black Literature and Literary Theory, regards the cut that Trueblood receives from his wife as a 'substitute castration/crucifixion' (p. 234) and the spillage of his blood onto his daughter as a penitential offering to atone for the earlier spillage of his sperm.⁴ This seems to me to miss the crucial play on words between 'to move without movin' (Ellison, p. 53) , the words Trueblood uses when he awakes to find himself inside his daughter, when to move would be to sin, that is to enjoy, to ejaculate, and the 'I moves' (Ellison, p. 57), that is his response to his wife's attack upon him with an axe. A reading that would maintain the 'trickster' element in Trueblood's tale, an element highlighted by Baker in his article, would suggest that when Trueblood finally is forced to move, he achieves orgasm. The spillage of blood from his wound would, on this reading, not be a sign of atonement, but, on the contrary, of defloration and the spillage of his sperm into his daughter. The ironic 'trickster' element of the tale is further reinforced if we read Trueblood's wife as both cleanser and cause of his 'sin'; attempting to separate her husband and daughter she only guarantees Mary Lou's impregnation. That making her husband 'come' would normally be part of her activity as a wife, only intensifies the risqué character of the irony. The lack of atonement, together with the 'trickster' theme would therefore signal that the incest theme is here being employed by both character *and* implied author to signal solidarity between males of both colours as a first step in order to gain Trueblood and the (black) implied author a rhetorical advantage over both Trueblood's addressee and the implied (white) male reader. In the case of the implied black male reader, the sexual solidarity would remain, but would be augmented by a racial solidarity that would locate a critique in the fall of Norton into the trap so

⁴ Houston A. Baker, 'To move without moving: creativity and commerce in Ralph Ellison's Trueblood episode', in Black Literature and Literary Theory, (ed.) Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 232-234.

carefully set for him. The text's rhetoric demands that the young female becomes the common object of (vicarious) exploitation.

During this episode the book's hero, the escort of Mr. Norton (the white benefactor of a local Black college), attempts to draw the latter away from Trueblood's recital:

'Mr Norton, sir,' I said in a choked voice, 'its time we were getting back to the campus. You'll miss your appointments...'

He didn't even look at me. '*Please* ,' he said waving his hand in annoyance.

Trueblood seemed to smile at me behind his eyes as he looked from the white man to me and continued. (p. 54)

The intensity of expression revealed by the use of italics indicates the degree of Norton's captivation. Indeed, as can be seen from this example, it is not only the economic advantage that Trueblood gains that encourages him in his narrative pursuits; he literally holds his listeners in his power as he plays with their (supremacist white male) expectations. Trueblood can, like Scheherezade in the Arabian tale, invert the dominant power structure for the duration of his tale; he is empowered in proportion to the fascination he exercises. The last two lines quoted indicate that Trueblood also enjoys turning the tables on the young educated (and relatively advantaged) black man who is supposed to be 'in control' of Mr Norton. Having found a weak spot in the armour of those more powerful than himself, Trueblood will exploit it to the full. That this weakness is sexual is hardly surprising (desire, if not the dream of pure domination, renders power unto the other). An earlier episode in the book finds young black boxers being taunted by the nudity of a blonde (white) woman in order to stimulate both the audience and the combatants. Such a stimulation carries with it the marks of the dominant

power structure reinforcing it as it reminds the boxers that to touch is to face the lynch mob.⁵

As Trueblood's story ends, the hero remarks, with, I suspect, a touch of ironic admiration, 'He was some farmer' (p. 60). In the contrast between the farmer and the student, between manual and mental labour, it is the untutored farmer whose command of language, rhetoric and narrative shows him to be the greater practitioner of intellectual skill. Is it that Ellison is espousing a populist politics that allow him to score a point over, what is after all, his own caste and its own brand of class politics? Both an educated white man and an educated young black man are manipulated by the oratorical skills of an uneducated farmer. Either way, the question of class, more precisely the division of labour defined as manual or mental, including the difference between the educated and the uneducated, joins the oppositions of race, sex and age as players in Ellison's rhetorical strategy.

The textual use of multiple frames for denial and distancing is itself a commentary on the politics of race and enunciation, on what is sayable, to whom, and how.⁶ Within the story told by the hero (first person narration) is the story of a farmer, within this the latter's dream. The dream as 'furthest away' (distance functioning as denial) contains the most dangerous, that is racial, transgression (contact with a white woman: miscegenation). The rest (the central event of this story) becomes, relatively speaking, the mere breeching of the incest taboo by a black man.⁷

⁵ In much fiction of the post war period sexuality, especially the control and use of women, and more particularly those of the opposite colour, plays a significant role in the politics of racial confrontation (See, for example, Baldwin, Going to meet the Man; Alice Walker, 'The Child who favoured Daughter').

⁶ See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Talkin' That Talk', in "Race", Writing, and Difference, (ed.) Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), for a discussion of the problems of the use of the term "race" (pp. 402-409).

⁷ If such a breach, in this context, confirms racist opinion, then, by contrast, the white equivalent would employ the conjunction of the incest theme with membership of a dominant social group as an elite exceptionalism; see Mailer's American Dream, for example.

In this way, as in Absalom, Absalom!, the profanation of the incest taboo is apparently less troublesome than the racial taboo of miscegenation to an audience (or addressee) of either race familiar with the ways of the South before the advent of civil rights. On the basis of this formal distancing which clearly takes seriously the dangers of talking about sex to whites as a person of colour in a racist environment is it legitimate to suppose the implied readership of the novel as a whole as also white? Or as of either race but marked by the dominance of white supremacy in the pre-civil rights South? Or, in a move which would be doubly ironic, as white but written so as to become subject to parody once this (implied) position has been abandoned either by reading as a non-white, or by picking up the text's ironies. The relation of power and taboo in the text points outward to an implied social context (of origin and primary reading at least) and this implied foreknowledge to an implied reader. However on the basis of the text's double handedness, we may wish to divide the implied reader into "white" and "black". (The quotation marks recognise the insufficiency of these terms but would utilise them as would, for example, the French critic Hélène Cixoux, the terms "masculine" and "feminine" in terms of economies of reading and writing in *écriture féminine*). In this way the implied reader may be divided into the implied reader of (and for) the power relations that the text presupposes and the implied reader of the text's ironic stance towards these latter (both reader and relations).

The Russian doll-like nature of the framing and distancing (denial of responsibility on the part of the speaker) also suggests parallel sets of addressers and addressees within and without the text: the listener within the text as parallel to the implied, and so to the actual reader; the teller within the text as parallel to the implied, and actual, author.⁸ This would strongly suggest that Ellison is playing with his reader as Trueblood plays

⁸ See Baker, 'To move without moving', for a similar sequence of framing (p. 224).

with his. If so, then, Ellison is inverting the usual white racist (and urban middle class) assumptions about the site of incest as low, black, rural, etc., by inverting these so as to accuse the (implied) white reader, and thus the literate white middle class, of being equally capable of such kinds of behaviour. Norton (who listens so avidly to Trueblood's incestuous tale) carries a picture of his 'beautiful' daughter whom he describes in the language of loss and courtly love (p. 39). Perhaps Norton is not only enjoying Trueblood's incest as a voyeur, but identifying himself with Trueblood's action; either confusing racial identity or fantasizing miscegenation (or both) - in which case he may also be vicariously sleeping with his own dead daughter in the gap created by the distance of class and race between the addresser and addressee of Trueblood's tale (and the same would be true, by analogy, of the relation of the implied reader to the implied author and by the gap between text and referent). If Ellison first utilises and then parodies the cliché of rural incest, he also places another incest cliché into Norton's mouth: the cliché of the breaking of the incest taboo as 'chaos'; yet as Norton describes (indicative) the incest taboo as beyond reason, beyond all sense and order, he also desires it (subjunctive). In the questions he puts to Trueblood, Norton admits to the union of the interrogative with the subjunctive (p. 46). The lure handled so adroitly by Ellison holds up a mirror to the (white) reader, turning stereotypes on their head.

The use of the incest motive in Invisible Man poses a double contrast to that of Tender is the Night, by adding the aspect of race to that of class (and eliding questions of sexual difference on the level of rhetorical ends whilst employing them as rhetorical means); it is a poor black male who is responsible, whilst a rich white male sits and listens to the former's account. As in Fitzgerald's novel we have another case of metonymy: the

social whole (with emphasis on the dominant) is not involved; only the part (and, moreover, only a 'low' part) could do such things. The guilt of the part absolves the whole, as in judgemental and distancing (by class) in the use of the term 'peasant' in Tender is the Night. However the incest story in Tender is the Night is told for diagnostic reasons: in Invisible Man its telling is enmeshed in an inextricable tangle of power and eroticism. The dominant can, however, listen, safe in the superior knowledge that racial difference can always be mobilised to shield its complicity. However this in turn would suggest the further complicity of the reader through the narrative pleasure of the text which can offer the possibility of a transgressive pleasure providing it is safely 'grounded' at one, metonymic, remove in the guise of some (textually mediated) other.⁹

In one sense the form of incest usage in Invisible Man is unusual in that it was usually the brother/sister or step-relation which was used to provide the element of literary titillation in the literature of the nineteenth century, the inter-generational parent/child forms tending to be reserved for more polemical purposes. However, in retrospect, it does fit the twentieth century pattern of the employment of incest for transgression and critique; the numerical preponderance of brother/sister incest in the literature of the nineteenth century had already been

⁹ See Hortense J. Spillers, 'The Permanent Obliquity of an In(pha)llibly Straight: In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers', in Changing our own words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women, (ed.) Cheryl A. Wall, (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp.127-149, for an article that employs dense texture and deft word play in its discussion of the relation of sex and race via the breaking of the incest taboo. However in her treatment of Ellison's The Invisible Man, no recognition is given to the role of reader, either implied, actual (time of publication) nor of the parallels with the tale's addressee; a crucial part of Trueblood's story hangs upon it as a manipulation of the expectations of this white and educated black audience... In this way the role of the white woman in the dream is lost, as, firstly, teasing or playing with a taboo, especially that of a white audience; and secondly, of the preparation of a white audience for further sexual transgressions in a way that may allow them to imagine a white co-efficient (or co-efficients). This article, therefore, takes 'Trueblood', a textual fiction, at his word; yet the novel's black hero, the 'I' of the novel (in both senses, internal narrator and focaliser and thus narratologically nearer to the implied author and thus the actual author), is driven to remark, with respect to his narrative skills, that Trueblood was 'some farmer', that is, not to be read referentially (p. 60).

challenged by Faulkner and Fitzgerald (among others) in the early decades of the twentieth century, thus clearing the way for more extensive literary exploitation of the other forms of the incest relation.

In Invisible Man this point is emphasised by the treble voyeurism that filters the event. The original actor, Trueblood, is telling the event; it is not presented to us by a 'fly on the wall' focalisation or an omniscient narrator; Trueblood is his own first addressee and voyeur and clearly enjoys his own story-telling. His textual addressee is the powerful white sponsor of the hero's college - whose reader-response is evident. As noted above in the discussion on the novel's implied readership, in the parallel position to Trueblood and his addressee we find the (implied) author and his addressee, the (implied) reader, who constitute the final voyeuristic frame. In this sequence of re-living, hearing, and reading, the latter may be read as complicit, metaphoric distance notwithstanding (the relations in the sequence are like, but not identical to each other), or it may be, as thrice removed from the 'event' itself, that the cumulative gap opened up by the non-identity in the succession of metaphoric relations offers the option of redefining 'reading' as 'witnessing', a critical position which is aware of the minimal voyeurism inherent in all representation.

The place of incest in Invisible Man as a whole is as a snare, a weapon; but not for the purposes of the recognition of the differences of gender or generation.¹⁰ In a strong sense, there has been a use of shared masculinist attitudes to subvert a white opponent whose gender, age, and class position remain unstated but recoverable. Ethical questions may be asked of the rhetorical use of those who are referentially weaker to undermine

¹⁰ See Gary Snyder, 'The Incredible Survival of Coyote', Western American Literature, 9. 4 (1975), pp. 255-272, for an example where the use of the 'trickster' figure as an intertext to subvert the dominant carries within itself the limitations that would signal its problematic use in issues involving women and children. The trickster figure attempts to trick his daughter into being seduced by him (pp. 258-259).

the referentially dominant by those in an intermediate position. Moving from race to social difference, another anomaly arises. The author (mental labour) writing from a position of affiliation with a populist cause, gives Trueblood the farmer (manual labour), the mental upper hand of others on the author's side of the division of labour. This either undermines his own position as enunciator of the story, and negates the story's content, or renders the contradiction of the division of labour already resolved or unproblematic. A (narrato)logical and political irony results. If the transgressive configures the aesthetic then its use sets the limits of the political.

A change of colour and sex results in another partial use of the incest theme for polemical ends. White women writers use the incest theme as a weapon against the masculinist dominant. In drama, Djuna Barnes puts father/daughter (and most other types of) incest to an explicitly feminist use.¹¹ Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath will employ a similar rhetoric in poetry. In these writers the incest theme finds its major oppositional use (as opposed to its utilisation in Mailer and Nabokov) before its appearance in the context of both race and gender in the writing of black women authors of the early 1970's.

The recent re-readings of the work of Anne Sexton by Diane Middlebrook, writing as a biographer, and of Sylvia Plath by Jacqueline Rose, a critic writing against biographical reduction, develop the question, of the link between feminine identity and writing, and of the place taken

11 Djuna Barnes, 'The Antiphon' (1958), in The Selected Works of Djuna Barnes, (London: Faber & Faber, 1962); A Book, (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1923), five of the stories make use of the incest theme. For a commentary on Barnes and incest see Mary Lynn Broe, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy', in Women's Writing in Exile, (eds.) Mary Lynn Broe & Angela Ingram, (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 41-86. See also Marilyn C. Wesley, 'Father-Daughter Incest as Social Transgression: A Feminist Reading of Joyce Carol Oates', in Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 21 (1992), pp. 251-263, for an similar account of an author who regularly uses incest in symbolic form.

by incest and/or child sexual abuse as either referential or figurative illustrations of the problems to be overcome. The figurative utilisation of transgressive imagery in this context will be touched upon with reference to Rose's work on Plath.

In her recent biography of Anne Sexton, Diane Wood Middlebrook discusses Sexton's childhood and adolescence in such a way as to suggest the link between a personal experience of sexual abuse and the incest theme in her poetry and plays. Middlebrook notes that Nana, Anne's surrogate mother-figure, and Anne were often found in bed together and hints at the possibility of sexual intimacy (p. 15).¹² When Nana went mad this event was traumatic for the fifteen year old Anne (p. 16). Furthermore, Anne seems to have been prey to sexual fondling by her drunken father; as well as foul language, he used to refer to her as 'a little bitch', and submit her to sessions of spanking (p. 56). Doubt is expressed as to whether these incidents constitute memory or fantasy; there appears to be no way of authenticating a certain answer (p. 57). There is also reference to Nana, both as witness, and as participant in this sexual behaviour: relatives doubt this (pp. 56-57). However, Lois Ames:

a psychiatric social worker who treated incest survivors and who was very close to Sexton for many years, said unhesitatingly, 'I could never believe anything *but* that Anne was a victim of child sexual abuse by both Nana and her father.' (p. 58)

By contrast again, Dr. Orne, her therapist notes that, 'since she sexualised everything, it would become the metaphor with which she would deal with it' (p. 58).¹³ Both of these views would explain the preoccupation in the plays, The Cure, and Tell Me Your Answer Do, (to become Mercy Street) with a father/daughter rape in which the aunt (the Nana figure) plays the role of 'mad' witness (p. 218, p. 223). Clearly this may be read as a

¹² Diane Wood Middlebrook, Anne Sexton: A Biography, (London: Virago, 1991).

¹³ See also pp. 56-60; 167.

representation of some kind of a traumatic event or problematic issue; but whether it constitutes a mimetic or a symptomatic relation must remain indeterminable. This representation of an incestuous triangle (father, daughter, aunt) is again repeated in the play Mercy Street (pp. 322-323).

Biography and literature share common ground in referring to child sexual abuse. This link is augmented further when Middlebrook writes of Anne's 'games' with her daughters, one of whom, Linda, remembers these nocturnal activities as disturbing (p. 204). Innocent horseplay or furtive repetition in the role of the aggressor? Many commentators have noted the tendency of some of those abused as children to repeat in this manner.¹⁴ Certainly an attempt to interfere with her daughter could be read as reinforcing the view that Anne herself had been abused as a child. Middlebrook then gives an account of such an attempt from the viewpoint of the daughter (pp. 324-325).¹⁵

This further biographical reference to incest augments the literary use of incest so explicitly depicted in the plays and symbolically referred to in the poem, 'The Moma and Papa Dance', from Love Poems (p. 286). Of the poem 'The Death of the Fathers', Middlebrook writes:

As in a dream, she occupies all the positions in the fantasy that shapes it. She has been the daughter incestuously aroused by a father.... She has been the seductive parent too, aroused by a daughter's body and making surreptitious use of it. (p. 344)

Finally here are two verses from 'How We Danced', & 'Friends', from the poem 'The Death of the Fathers', in The Book of Folly.¹⁶ Whatever

¹⁴ See David Finkelhor, A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse, (London: Sage, 1986) pp. 102-104.

¹⁵ See also Middlebrook, Anne Sexton, pp. 223-224.

¹⁶ Anne Sexton, 'The Fathers' & 'Friends', in The Book of Folly, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972) (pp. 37-48; 43-44). See also 'Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)', in Transformations, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971) (pp. 107-112). For an example of father/daughter incest in the poetry of a male writer, see E. E. Cummings, 'annie died the other day', in Complete Poems, II, 1936-1962, (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), (p. 794).

they may connote on the referential level, on the symbolic level these poems express the bitter interweaving of the phallic and the paternal:

You danced with me never saying a word.
Instead the serpent spoke as you held me close.
The serpent, that mocker, woke up and pressed against me...
(p. 38)

And his tongue, my God, his tongue,
like a red worm and when he kissed
it crawled right in. (p. 43)

Whether fact or fancy, a distinction often difficult to maintain, as when memory slides unbidden into fantasy, a realm of personal experience has been conjoined with the symbolism of incest which is treated as its most apposite expression. This too is the case in the poetry of Sylvia Plath who, like Anne Sexton, also ended the problems of her existence in suicide.

Jacqueline Rose, in her book, The Haunting of Sylvia Plath, uses the term 'Extremism' to describe poets such as Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell. This term was originally coined by A. Alvarez and was used to categorise a poetry which, he believed, represented the dying gasp of 'high' culture in its reaction to 'a general cultural mediocrity' (p. 21).¹⁷ Utilising a collective psychoanalysis which does not shy away from what is disturbing, Rose finds parallels between 'Extremism' and Julia Kristeva's analysis of 'abjection' in the French avant garde writer Céline; both Plath and Céline become symptoms of a psychic economy which refers to the social body for an explanation of its extreme content.¹⁸ From the expansion of the interpretative field to the *social* body, it is a short move

¹⁷ Jacqueline Rose, The Haunting of Sylvia Plath, (London: Virago, 1991). See also A. Alvarez, The Savage God: A Study of Suicide, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971). And for a sample of Alvarez's 'extremist' canon: A. Alvarez (ed.), The New Poetry, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

¹⁸ See Julia Kristeva, 'From One Identity to Another', in, Desire in Language, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) pp. 124-147; Powers of Horror, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

to the analysis of the social *writing* of the body; the social construction of gender and its cultural representations.

The result is an analysis in which literary fantasy can be seen as contributing to a poetry of resistance which protests both against the division of the human into nature and culture, into body and mind, and into sign and thing, and against the division of the human species by sex. This imposition of either/or, resulting in the choice between male/female and active/passive according to one's biology ('sex') condemns those defined as biologically female to playing the 'feminine' and passive roles. Yet to write, to make meaning, is to be 'active'; the creative woman must become 'part man' (p. 117). The contradictions and conflicts that undermine a stable identity multiply and are fought out in poetic images.

In Plath's infamous poem 'Daddy' this struggle is waged with a desperation in which the stakes are personal survival. Here we witness the tortures of the divided self in their most extreme expression: with fascism and the Holocaust, we touch upon the ultimate (Western) symbols for inhumanity and the suffering of its victims. Plath's poem conjoins this already explosive material, to a daughter's incestuously obsessive relation with her father. No seduced and abandoned lover has ever poured forth such an accusing paean of dependency and hatred.

Rose deals with 'Daddy' as an example of the inseparability of the personal and the historical. Conditions of extreme personal anguish naturally find their co-efficient in, not extreme historical situations, but those historical events that our culture has designated as paradigmatic of human suffering - or of human depravity. It is the case at the limit, the worst conceivable, precisely the *in-conceivable* that draws the parallel with all other experiences that occur at or beyond a limit. Such inconceivables, such *unthinkables*, would include the poetic, here metaphoric, use of the incestuous (universal taboo) in the context of Nazi

fascism, a taboo event of the civilised West in the sense that it represents -and enacts - its limit. Metaphor becomes the condition of fantasy and identity, the ground of their working out, at the same moment as it becomes the possibility of memory and source of its central problem: how to remember, adequately, that which must not be forgotten, but which can not be conceptualised without a guilt inducing sense of betrayal because its enormity always exceeds the means of language? It is here that the privileged relation of metaphor to the Other, and its use in poetic language, provides a partial answer; only a poetic language (be it text or image, sonic or plastic) can represent the Holocaust, can represent the 'otherness' of pain, of other's suffering. Poetry 'after Auschwitz' may be impossible: but it is necessary.

Plath's use of the Holocaust, then, may be read as an account of the place of the Holocaust and fascism in the folklore, or mythology, of our culture - and in the connections made between these and other elements in our social unconscious. That this event is linked to the worst that is conceivable is, perhaps, the best way in which it can be remembered. That it may be likened to another cultural boundary, incest, and more, incest's own 'worst conceivable', child sexual abuse by the child's parents, is a reminder that all of society's 'limit cases' can be made to make common cause in the struggle for identity. That poetry may result is both the victory of conscience and its betrayal.

Whilst not suggesting that we resort to a biographical supposition that Plath was sexually abused as a child to explain her poetry, I would like to open the possibility of Plath's poetry being interpreted as its product (one of Plath's earlier versions of 'Daddy' had 'incestuous' where the current version reads 'obscene'); transgressive and referential uses of the incest theme once again become confused and impossible to untangle with any degree of certainty (p. 36). From the relation to the Other as terrifying in

the mind of the dependant infant, to the possibility of coded reference to actual sexual abuse, interpretations focusing on the disparity of power relations offer the possibility of a set of readings which may also have cogent statements to make about the occluded areas at the limits of the human subject.

If the problems of femininity and writing lead to the use of images of incest and the iconography of extremism by white women writers, would not this powerful rhetorical resource also be available to women writers of colour. Writing as 'writing the self', especially if that self is perceived as socially excluded, may yield a similar image repertoire in the work of women writers of colour. That this image repertoire should include the incest theme should come as no surprise; that it includes many references to child sexual abuse before the emergence of this issue into the public sphere, is again an indication that, in this case also, it is difficult to extricate matters rhetorical (and intertextual) from those referential (the use of auto-biography).

If the incest theme in Ellison's Invisible Man bifurcates race by class (economics, status, division of labour), then the step which takes African-American writing into the blaze of its second renaissance in the early 1970s subdivides race by gender and, incidentally, by generation. The majority of the writers connected with this movement are women: a topic central to at least one work by each of the major writers of this movement is that of father/daughter rape; the incest theme is pursued into the realm of child sexual abuse. This intensification of rhetoric serves the subdivision of race by sexual difference.

This 'emergence' of a new kind of use for the incest theme in the context of both race and gender is apparent in the black women writers of the early seventies, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and

Gayl Jones.¹⁹ Maya Angelou's auto-biographical novel, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), first in chronology and possibly of influence upon the others discussed, also heralds a trend in recent fiction to represent itself 'as if' biographical, or to contain auto-biographical material which relates to child sexual abuse of an often incestuous nature.²⁰

The title of the short story, 'The Child who Favored Daughter' (1973), by Alice Walker, contains the inter-generational reference: the child who favoured his sister, called 'Daughter' (presumably by their father), then grew up to 'favor' his own daughter.²¹ Read referentially, this may suggest a pattern of inter-generationally transmitted child sexual abuse: read rhetorically, the stages offer the contrast of one type of incest relation to another (brother/sister to father/daughter: impotent to destructive); the main target of the story appears to be the relations between the sexes and the abuse of male power in the context of racial inequality.

The story tells of a black boy who 'loves' his sister (although no indication of the degree of incestuousness of his feeling is given, these are mainly shown through his censorious jealousy of her sex life). The sister leads a promiscuous life style; unfortunately, from the boy's point of view, she seems mainly to sleep with white men, including his boss. Eventually she falls into insanity, is humiliated, and dies, probably (but only probably) by suicide. Later:

His own wife, beaten into a cripple to prevent her from returning the imaginary overtures of the white landlord, killed herself whilst she was still young enough and strong enough to escape him. But she left a child, a girl, a daughter; a replica of Daughter, his dead sister. A replica in every way. (p. 40)

¹⁹ See also James Baldwin, Just Above My Head, (London: Michael Joseph, 1979), who also deals with the question of father/daughter rape.

²⁰ Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, (London: Virago, 1984).

²¹ Alice Walker, 'The Child who Favored Daughter', in In Love and Trouble, (London: The Women's Press, 1984).

He then discovers that *his* daughter, 'a replica in every way', has been having an affair with a white man (now over; he has abandoned her, and it is her letter to him that betrays her). He then beats her, fondles and mutilates her:

She gazes up at him over her bruises and he sees her blouse, wet and slippery from the rain, has slipped completely of her shoulders and her high young breasts are bare. He gathers their fullness in his fingers and begins a slow twisting. The barking of the dogs creates a frenzy in his ears and he is suddenly burning with unnameable desire. In his agony he draws the girl away from him as one pulling off his own arm and with quick slashes of his knife leaves two bleeding craters the size of grapefruits on her bare bronze chest and flings what he finds in his hands to the yelping dogs. (p. 45)²²

We are left to assume that this results in her death. Hate, desire, and (racial) revenge are brought together in the mutilation scene. Sex intertwines with power, 'In a world where innocence and guilt become further complicated by questions of colour and race', (p. 40). The sexual transgressions of the boundaries of family and race (transgressive in this latter case in the eye of the father) coincide. Although no consummated incest occurs, the story's theme is the leading character's obsession with his sister, and its echo in his 'unnameable desire' for his daughter: the mutilation scene may suggest symbolic rape, or a symbolic castration (performed upon the body of another) which ends the 'unnamable desire'. The roles played by the father's white boss and his white landlord introduce class and socio-economic relations; as these also happen to be white *males*, this further complicates the divisions of sex and race. However, despite this reference to economic power, it is a theme common to many of this generation of black women writers that dominates this story: an older black male exploits his position of power within the family.

²² See also Rank, *The Incest Theme*, p. 367, for a possible origin or intertextual echo from the European traditions of mythology and the folk-tale where the removal of breasts and other forms of disfigurement, such as the removal of hands, feature as the forms of self mutilation or the punishment by the father, in cases of incestuous or potentially incestuous father/daughter relations.

It is this relation which is then further exacerbated by questions of race and economics. Incest is the means of expression of problems of gender and generation contorted further by the imbalances of race and economics.

Alice Walker begins her novel The Color Purple (1973) with father/daughter incest.²³ When the mother stops having sex with the father (through illness and absence) he turns his attentions to his eldest daughter:

She went to visit her sister doctor over Macon. Left me to look after the others. He never had a kind word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it. (p. 3)

The mother dies and the child becomes pregnant (twice). The father begins to pay attention to the other, younger, daughter causing Celie, the narrator, to give herself to him to ensure the safety of her younger sister (p. 9). When Celie is given away to marry her younger sister's suitor it is clear that her father is intent on keeping Nettie for himself. Eventually, Nettie leaves home to pre-empt her father's advances (p. 17). Other examples of sexual harassment and abuse include: Sophia hinting that her father and brother had harboured similar intentions, 'girl not safe in family of men' (p. 38). Later Squeak is raped by someone who might be her (white) uncle (p. 84). Families are indeed dangerous places: the older males a special hazard. Incest and sexual abuse by members of 'family' thus constitute an important sub-current even if, as noted by Trudier Harris, 'the issue of incest is still not the subject Walker develops in the novel' (p. 505, fn. 5).²⁴ Whilst the 'father' does, later on in the novel, in fact turn into a 'step-father', the question of the family unit and the place

²³ Alice Walker, The Color Purple, (London: The Women's Press, 1983).

²⁴ Trudier Harris, 'Tiptoeing through Taboo: Incest in "The Child Who Favoured Daughter"', Modern Fiction Studies, 28. 3 (Autumn 1982), pp. 495-505.

of male desire within it is still featured as a major problematic. The relation of Celie's step-father to herself and, potentially, her sister Nettie, and that of Sophia to her father is both incestuous and child sexual abuse. The rhetorical drive to condemn pushes the incest theme into child sexual abuse, which may then be read symbolically or referentially.

As a novel of becoming, indeed, of overcoming, The Color Purple has, even demands, a happy ending, which this commentator, among others, finds forced; the happy reunion with 'husband', Albert, seems highly unlikely. It is perhaps for this reason that the incest/child abuse element in the plot is not developed further; after the critique a reconciliation of the sexes is required. However, the incest theme does play the role of one of the text's two transgressive topics; the other being a sympathetic account of lesbian relations. This depiction of two types of transgressive sexuality, one negative, abusive, touching the exposed nerve of the social: the other positive, enabling, hitherto condemned to exclusion by invisibility, run parallel to one another in the text, their doubling constituting a moral opposition that subtly displaces the habitual divisions of good and evil.

In both of the Alice Walker texts discussed, the short story 'The Child who favoured Daughter', and the novel The Color Purple, the incest theme is *not* used in its traditional form as a source of titillation excused only by some deeper didactic purpose. In this, these texts seem to constitute a break with the past, with the nineteenth and twentieth century traditions of literary incest. The latter used the incest theme to add spice to a plot, deliver bite to a climax, and as a rhetorical weapon; but never as an issue in itself. In a sense, and with the incorporation of the issue of race, the black women writers of the early 'seventies have returned to the pre-Romantic function of incest in the novel of sentiment and seduction of the eighteenth century and its continuation in the popular fiction of the nineteenth century. Incest as a product of adultery,

like incest as a product of paternal domination, is concerned with inequalities and abuses based upon sexual difference and their effect upon generation. Whilst the seduction novel of the eighteenth century used the danger of incest to criticise licentious males from the point of view of the family, the black women novelists of the twentieth century found incest to be at the very heart of the family unit. The incest theme figures issues contiguous to itself and is not superadded to provide the simple stamp of opprobrium. This contiguity also leads to child sexual abuse, which may in turn refer to parallel events in recent history.

Walker's incorporation of the incest theme is not 'gratuitous' but central to the story and the issues raised therein.²⁵ This is clearly the case with the short story; and only slightly less so in The Color Purple where incest features as part of the hellish upbringing that Celie must transcend. The difference between this use and the Romantic form of the incest theme is that here it is not treated as bizarre or exotic, (as well as, of course, a mandatory horror) but as a typical feature of life, particularly of sexual exploitation. Hence instead of appearing as a revelation, strategically placed at the novel's climax, we are told of Celie's ordeal at the very beginning of The Color Purple. In 'The Child who favoured Daughter' whilst the incestuous nature of the father's desires are revealed at the climax, the incest theme is constantly at the story's centre. Differing strategies demand different combinations; relation to topic and textual topology together determine the 'seriousness' of the particular realisation.

A novel in which transgressions accumulate but are not worked through, Gayl Jones' Corregidora (1975) is of interest as a sign of the times; a part of the renaissance in Black Women's writing of the early '70s and of

²⁵ Indeed, the erotic function has been displaced from incest onto lesbianism in The Color Purple.

its favoured themes.²⁶ The plot concerns a black woman's current sexual relations and their connection to her obsessive interest in the incestuous relations between the slave owner and his female slaves who are her ancestors. As such it can be read as a black woman's answer to William Faulkner's Go Down Moses. As in Faulkner miscegenation and incest (of the same type as in 'The Bear') are at the centre of the story (p. 79). The similarity is continued through the utilisation of the 'event' at the origin of a historical narrative as a symbol for the total oppression of the system of slavery, and for this event to be read as a signifier of the position of black women at that period (given the context of ownership 'miscegenation' and 'incest' must be re-classified as 'rape' as questions of consent have no legal purchase). This symbol, if read into the post-slavery period, then constitutes a commentary on the continued 'sexual slavery' of relations between the sexes.

Corregidora may also be read as a parallel text to Walker's The Colour Purple in its utilisation of lesbianism and the incest theme. Jones' handling of the lesbian sub-plot can not be read in the same positive light as that in Walker where the female bonding of Celie and Shug plays an enabling role for the abused and repressed Celie. By contrast Corregidora employs lesbianism as an exotic but negative counter-melody to the heroine's search for fulfilling relations based upon an accommodation with the past; lesbianism is thus painted as either a perverse refusal of the problems of black heterosexuality or as a sinister warning of the consequences of engaging with these problems.

Jones and Faulkner appear to agree on, or use similarly, the theme of miscegenated incest rape as a symbol and critique of the worst of slavery and a pointer to the culpability of the white slave-owning class as a whole; particularly of those in positions of near absolute power; the

²⁶ Gayl Jones, Corregidora, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

fathers/owners as heads of the households. Also both the white male and the black woman writer focus on the theme of the continuing effect of the original transgressive event on the lives and memories of those that follow. Both Ike and Ursa (the heroine of Corregidora) try to escape the past and either fail (depending upon the reader's interpretation) or achieve a compromised solution. The theme of memory leads, in Corregidora, to the question of the role of memory in fantasy. The strain of persisting with the memory of the past leads to the stain of the past persisting as fantasy; the heroine compares and eventually confuses her sex life with that of the slaves of Corregidora himself. The incest of the past can now play a direct role in her sexual life; preserving the past has become self-destructive. There are many similarities to Jacqueline Rose's description of the utilisation of history and fantasy in the poetry of Sylvia Plath discussed earlier in this chapter. The theme of the inescapable past as debilitating also parallels that of Beloved by Toni Morrison, where a child, murdered by its mother to prevent its being taken back into slavery, returns as a ghost, demanding attention to the past, pointing an accusing finger at an entire social system, yet also requiring a further 'working through' so that it does not become a spoiler of the present.²⁷ The work of both Morrison and Jones represents, to some degree, this 'working through', as the sublimation of the past into art/literary pleasure - as do the incest themed narratives of William Faulkner, although as is seen most obviously in Go Down, Moses, from the viewpoint of the male

²⁷ Toni Morrison, Beloved, (London: Pan Books, 1988). See also the 'Afterword', in Paule Marshall, Brown Girl, Brownstones, (London: Virago, 1985. First Published in 1959), p. 319, where Mary Helen Washington suggests that Marshall's fiction, asks the questions: 'how do we remember the past and make it usable? How do we preserve those qualities of survival and endurance which are at the deepest emotional core of one's black identity? How do an oppressed people survive spiritually, and on what grounds can they construct a future in a world... which yields no true self-consciousness but only lets one see the self through the revelation of the other world.' Indeed memory and its effective utilisation in the construction of identity seems to be a major theme in all black women's writing of the post war period.

inheritor of the slave owners rather than that of the female inheritors of the memory of the slaves. This sublimation then becomes a way of dealing with the past, a finding for it of a non-debilitating place within the present.

In an earlier novel, The Bluest Eye (1970), Toni Morrison gives incest a prominent role in the plot's structure.²⁸ The incest theme is placed at the beginning and the end and acts as a frame for the past; for the introduction of the narratives of the 'ancestors' and of the prior lives of the novel's major characters. In this it is unlike Corregidora, which utilises the opposite method: incest is superadded to gild the horror of slavery and not employed as an integral part of the plot. In The Bluest Eye, as in The Color Purple, the incest theme is mentioned early, being baldly introduced at the beginning (p. 3); however, unlike the latter, it is described at the climax position (approximately 2/3rds or 3/4ths of the way through the novel) thus conforming to the prior literary usage of the incest theme as a climactic device.

There now begins an interaction between the themes of incest-rape and child sexual abuse as Pecola is teased by other children about her relation to her 'naked father' and we are introduced to Soaphead Church who has a history as a child abuser (p. 55, p. 76). Morrison's description of Pecola's father's rape of his eleven year old daughter is ambiguous in its revelation of the complex motivations involved on the part of her attacker: of Pecola's inner responses we are given no indication. The text performs the opposition between active and passive by showing only the tangled mix of lust, hatred, and love that drives Pecola's father: the mental state of the daughter is to be surmised from her outward motions and her clothing; metonymy guides us from Pecola's outer to her inner condition (pp. 127-128).

²⁸ Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, (London: Pan Books, 1990).

Within the space of a few pages the reader encounters Soaphead Church again, who this time presents *his* inner rationale for the abuse of children (p. 132). The proximity of Pecola's father's rape of his daughter and the Soaphead Church passage, both of which show the motivation of the adult male whilst denying any voice to their objects of desire, creates a metonymic link which would indicate metaphoric parallels between the two episodes. The text suggests that a connection is to be made between the motivation, desire, or structure of power that produces both incestuous and non-incestuous child sexual abuse.²⁹ The reader is presented with one more incident with Soaphead Church who this time assaults Pecola (p. 143). The fact that he is presented as less harmful than Pecola's father may be a recognition and deliberate underplaying of the cliché of the 'dirty old man'; whilst being used, this stereotype (which victimises the old and the down and out) is relegated to the position of comparative harmlessness. The discovery of Pecola's pregnancy brings her public shame and an open-ended discussion on degrees of guilt and blame in the form of a dialogue (pp. 148-149). However, when we hear Pecola's voice (for the first time in the text) she protests that she gained no pleasure from the rape (which has happened again). The text implies, whilst noting the related questions of age and consent, that it is the victim's response that, for the public opinion of this time, decides the question of Pecola's relative guilt or innocence. Unlike The Color Purple, The Bluest Eye eschews a happy ending: after a miscarriage, Pecola goes mad and lives as a tramp picking around on waste heaps on the margins of the town: 'the damage done was total' (p. 162). The Bluest Eye comes closest to dealing with the incest theme

²⁹ See Trudier Harris, 'Tiptoeing through Taboo', for an appraisal of the position of incest in The Bluest Eye, where the quantitative number of pages expended, 'a brief part of the novel', results in a situation where 'the horror of the act is toned down in the context in which it is related' (pp. 496-497). I do not find that either the depiction of a mixed or ambiguous range of motives or responses, nor the quantity of textual space employed, leads to a betrayal of the seriousness of the theme.

referentially, as actually existing incest or child sexual abuse. The central focus appears to have moved from gender toward its combination with generation. From the doomed love of brother and sister (courtly love theme), or figure for a decaying order through a figure in the rhetoric of race, or sexual difference to the foregrounding of the question of generation, we have arrived at a use of the incest theme where the referential and the rhetorical appear to coincide.

First published in 1969, Maya Angelou's autobiographical, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, predates the utilisation and transformation of the incest theme by black women writers in the early 1970s. Yet, whilst her texts are autobiographical and hence constative, or referential, the utilisation of the augmented incest theme (incestuous child sexual abuse) continues to be rhetorical (the happy ending of The Colour Purple could be described as subjunctive in its aspirations). Hence the literary exposure of child sexual abuse through black women's interests, figuring sexual oppression within the black community through the sexual abuse of the daughter by the father, is, in part, accidental. Insofar as the sexual exploitation of children paralleled that of women, the two issues could emerge together; insofar as these issues raised differing questions, children's differences were subsumed until later writing began to give them distinctive voices. Autobiography, as the novel of memory, began to do this.³⁰

In this way elements of race and gender, of the introduction of the politics of gender into the politics of race, functioned so as to argue rhetorically for children's interests and to depict some aspects of their sexual exploitation. It would be difficult to adduce the degree of influence

³⁰ The literary autobiography has a distinguished history in American writing in general and in African-American writing in particular. The latter traces its antecedents from the slave narratives of escapees to the autobiographies of Malcolm X and James Baldwin.

of Angelou's text, whether as origin, or as early part of a more general cultural phenomenon (a 'sign of the times'). It does seem to have acted as a model for a generation of black women writers by suggesting a 'classic' model of how they might use the literary incest theme (the father/daughter form expanded to include step-fathers, uncles, mother's boy-friends and other 'friends of the family') and the childhood theme (innocence corrupted) in a way which many seem to have followed. These themes were also incorporated by much white feminist and lesbian fiction, until the broader aspects of child sexual abuse emerged as encompassing both male and female children and became a regular feature of the literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

With the entry of child abuse and child sexual abuse into the public sphere, particularly given the linkage of the latter with the incest theme in art and literature, we would expect to see the emergence of a sexual child abuse/incest theme in the genres of popular culture (or a re-emergence, the turn of the 1800s saw the great popularity of the incest theme in the early American novel of seduction). It is especially in the fields of the fictional biography (novel of becoming) and the auto-biography, that we might expect to find an appearance of incest survivors tales, successors to Alice Walker's The Color Purple, and Maya Angelou's I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings. Autobiography becomes a means of revelation, self-analysis, and exorcism. This most intimate form of referentialism (together with its less proximate relation, biography) will serve others in a similar fashion becoming the genre of resistance through remembrance and enunciation.

In the auto-biography of Sylvia Frazer, My Father's House, sub-titled A Memoir of Incest and Healing, and Hadley Irwin's fictional Abby, My

Love, we find stories of escape from sexual abuse.³¹ This development in both the auto-biographical and the fictional forms suggests continuity with previous traditions: of a new twist in the heritage of the eighteenth century novel of seduction and of a latter day version of the predominantly nineteenth century slave narrative. It is in this 'genre' that the referential aspects of incest and child sexual abuse (as deixis *and* as mimesis) and their rhetorical aspect (transgression and aesthetics) come closest to synonymy.

Transgression & Excess: the Politics of Limits

If Nabokov's fusion of parody and transgression in Lolita took as its targets American popular culture, its products *and* its critics, Norman Mailer's An American Dream takes aim at the morality of the American ruling class itself.

Notorious at its time of publication for its supposedly misogynist stance An American Dream typifies the use of the incest theme in its didactic, critical, and transgressive manifestations.³² In a rapidly paced plot that takes place in a little over twenty-four hours the narrator, Rojack, kills his wife (an event he attempts to disguise as suicide) and embarks upon a

³¹ Sylvia Frazer, My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing, (London: Virago, 1989), first published in 1987, is a personal history in which an emotional crisis reactivates hitherto amnesiac memories of incestuous abuse. The author's memories were corroborated by outside sources. Hadley Irwin, Abby, My Love, (Boston Atheneum, 1985). See also Jacqueline Spring, Cry Hard and Swim: The Story of an Incest Survivor, (London: Virago, 1987), and Rebecca Stowe, Not the End of the World, (London: Virago, 1992): the first is autobiographical; the second fiction (an escape narrative). See also Jane Smiley, A Thousand Acres, (London: Flamingo, 1992). For a more morally complex use of the incest theme, see Joyce-Carol Oates, Foxfire, (London: MacMillan, 1993), which includes child abuse and sibling incest in an anti-male stance which is, however, not simply 'feminist'; rather, all must become violent and sexually exploitative (self-prostitution) in their need to survive in a brutal social Darwinism of the under-class. We might contrast implied class viewpoints in Foxfire to those implicit in the earlier use of similar themes, particularly the clichéd use of the incest theme in its sadomasochistic (step)father/daughter form, concerning a young girl's slum upbringing in Oates', them, (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1970).

³² Norman Mailer, An American Dream, (London: André Deutsch, 1965.)

sequence of picaresque encounters which range across the extremes of the social body, from the police to the Mafia, and from ghetto dwellers to the city's elite. Mystical elements, the moon, and a female Fate add a 'feminine' non-materialist dimension which completes the novel's breadth of reference and, in questioning the narrator's reliability, bring into dispute the text's status as 'pure' realism. The contrast between complementary 'masculine' and 'feminine' economies questions the hierarchical dominance of the former through its reliance upon the latter. This opens up An American Dream to the possibility of parodic or ironic readings. Indeed, the sexual encounters with the maid and the night club singer (who can only 'come' with *him*), are so baldly clichéd that they suggest this to be a self-conscious parody of the masculine imaginary of the culture and period - a self-parodying male fantasy. Mailer, like Hemingway before him, may be re-read as exposing the frailties of stereotypical masculinity (leaving it open to re-definition as male masquerade), even whilst apparently exploiting it. Like Brett Easton Ellis's American Psycho, Mailer's An American Dream attempts to be as provocative as possible whilst undermining (but not denying) this provocation with carefully planted disclaimers which can also function as a critique of the American Dream through a condemnation of a society's highest social strata.

The novel contains a double incest reference. Cherry (the nightclub singer) has a sister and brother who maintain an incestuous relation in what appears at first to be a straightforward utilisation of the usual literary incest theme of doomed brother/sister love; however, the text hints that this relation may be non-consensual.³³ The other incest relation is that of

³³ Other examples of the brother/sister incest theme from this period (from 1945 to 1985) would include the work of Vladimir Nabokov, Andrew Lytle, The Velvet Horn, (New York: McDowell, Oblensky, 1957), discussed from the point of view of the rhetoric of wholeness in Anne Foata, 'Time and Eternity in Andrew Lytle's *The Velvet Horn* ', Southern Literary Journal, 19. 1 (Fall 1986), pp. 3-15, and the following: Sylvia Townsend

Deborah (Rojack's wife) and her father which is revealed near the end of the novel. This is, perhaps the classic use of incest; its reservation for the element of unmasking and theatrical revelation that constitutes a good literary climax.³⁴ This relation would also appear to be to be non-consensual (despite denials by the father), a continuation of the lesser Gothic-Romantic literary incest tradition connoting decadence by parent/child sex. However, the father's role is certainly one of rape, on the technicality that she was a minor at the time, and this renders the action doubly illegal if we add the transgression of a prohibited blood relation. This latter form of incest, of father/daughter rape, is the other, and statistically speaking the more 'realistic', example of actually existing incest.

The first reference to this break of taboo is ambiguous. Deborah is said to be 'up to something with her Daddy-O' (p. 151). However the donor of this information is presented as a bit 'mad', and was 'locked up' by Deborah in a mental institution last time she mentioned 'her Daddy-O'. A seed has been planted for the fruition of which we must wait until the novel's end.

The brother/sister incest theme appears in the story of her life told to Rojack by the night club singer Cherry. 'My brother was chasing my sister every night', she informs him and recalls her child's fantasy of hearing

Warner, 'A Love Match', in Swans on an Autumn River, (New York, 1966); Theodore Sturgeon, 'If All Men Were Brothers Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?', in Dangerous Visions: Thirty Three Original Short Stories, (ed.) Harlan Ellison, (Garden City, N.Y., 1967); John Irving, The Hotel New Hampshire, (New York, 1981); and Piers Paul Read, The Villa Golitsyn (New York, 1982). A traditional use of incest as product of rural isolation and degeneration can be found in Cormac McCarthy, Child of God (1973), (London: Picador, 1989) and, Outer Dark (1968), (London: Picador, 1994), where the degeneration of country families is shown through the two indices of childhood promiscuity and incest; these themes are also a feature of the tradition of Southern Gothic. See also the 'low grotesques' of Erskine Caldwell, Tobacco Road, (New York: The Modern Library, 1947).

³⁴ The double incest reference can be found throughout the American literary tradition from William Hill Brown, The Power of Sympathy, (1789) through William Faulkner, Go Down Moses, (1942) to Anthony Burgess, MF, (1972), where the function of the first reference is to prepare the reader for the climactic revelations of the second.

her absent parents' voices, 'I used to hear my mother and father talking to me on the way from school. "Tell big brother to stop her silliness," they would say' (p. 171). There is insufficient textual evidence to decide on the degree of consent or otherwise present in this relation. However, as the language used here is not that of traditional romantic doomed brother/sister love (with its intertextual reference back to the courtly love tradition) and as the character/narrator (Cherry) appears to blame her (half) brother, as against the opinion of her fantasized parents ('stop *her* silliness'), we may assume that as titular head of the family it was he who took advantage of his position of power. We learn of the sister that 'she went potty' after he left to get married, and 'used to be out each night with a different man - she was doing it for quarters and dimes' (p. 171). Prostitution, promiscuity or insanity are noted by welfare departments as a result of exploitative sexual relations at an early age. The brother, by contrast, flourished: 'They [the town], still admired my brother - I guess all that incest taught him how to move politically' (p. 172, my parenthesis). Striking a more mysterious tone Cherry remarks 'I guess incest brings back the dead' (p. 172). Could this be a reference to the taboo break as a crime against the gods? Or pessimism, a deference to the whims of Fate? Either way we are led to the theme of mysticism and the supernatural in An American Dream.

Kelly (Deborah's father) tells Rojack of an incident with an ex-lover of his who seemed to possess supernatural powers, The implication was that if he had been prepared to have had sex with both Bess and her daughter, as some kind of sacrifice or ceremony, he would have made President (p. 248). Again we come across the belief that to break this taboo is to become as a god.³⁵ But he flees and the house next door burns down. As with the

³⁵ For the breaking of the incest taboo as access to (the status of) the sacred, see John Barth, Giles Goat-boy, (New York: Doubleday, 1966), & The Sot-weed Factor, (London: Secker &

Fate figure or moon goddess that Rojack hallucinates when he experiences vertigo, women and nature, or better, supernature, are linked together in opposition to the male pole of civilisation. This stereotypical gender tagging of the nature/culture division condemns the feminine to a shadowy existence on the margins of sense and sanity; either as irrational as unthinking (nature) or as irrational as beyond reason (supernature). As Kelly remarks, 'Incest is the gate to the worst sort of forces, and I'd had my belly-full early' (p. 248). Yet the final incestuous revelation is yet to come, for this also is just a prequel to the unmentionable; again, Mailer is preparing us, building up a gradient of transgression in which each revelation is to be worse than the one before.

We learn that Deborah's marriage took place when she was already pregnant and that she left her father for her husband; the possibility is that the child is either her father's or one of her other lovers (Rojack, for example)(p. 249). Kelly himself describes the time when Deborah lived with him as, "'Happy times," he said, "Of course one does well not to talk of that"' adding that 'I was happy until Deborah got married to Pamphli' who was 'too old for her and ill' (p. 249). The inference appears to be that she did it to escape from her father, who had previously had her locked up in a convent, as well as to find a father for the forthcoming child. However Kelly does 'talk about that', he describes his temptation when after kissing her, she kisses back, 'a horror', and his resistance (she goes to the convent)(p. 252). The narrator does not share Kelly's belief in his resistance: 'and knew what it had been like with Deborah and him, what a hot burning two-backed beast,' [they had been] (p. 256).³⁶ And Rojack continues with the observation:

Warburg, 1961). In these encyclopedic novels most versions of the incest theme are employed.

³⁶ This description may well be a product of Rojack's own lecherous imagination, spurred on by his jealousy on discovering that all of the women he has slept with in the course of the novel have also slept with Deborah's father; perhaps this is a parody of the stereotype of

he wanted all three of us on that Lucchese bed to lick and tear and spit and squat, roll and grovel, gorge each other in a disembowling of sex for this Lucchese had been the bed where Kelly went off with Deborah to the tar pits of the moon. (p. 256)

In this transgressive climactic sentence virtually all of society's key taboos are broken and their transgression flaunted, including homosexuality and the implication, by metaphor, of bestiality.

An American Dream utilises incest for its capability to shock and to pass judgement. Brother/sister incest is given a twist which no longer renders it a slightly perverse example of the genre of romance but an indicator of the predatory nature of everyday life. The father/daughter incest theme continues the nineteenth century tradition of regarding parent/child sex as a symbol of family decadence. Mailer enlarges this into a criticism of caste and class, as a signifier of the corruption at work at the heart of American capitalism and as the negation of the false hope of the American Dream. Formally, the incest theme plays a role in defamiliarisation: the use of shock for originality which reconfigures the new as the return of the repressed. The jaded intensity of sex and violence in American literature needed refreshing - where better than the hidden world of blood and shadow, of the incest taboo, to go in search of a stimulus capable of delivering a renewed aesthetic and critical bite. From

male sexual competitiveness. William Faulkner, has also used this image, 'making the beast with two backs', taken from Shakespeare's play, Othello, (1602-4), act. 1, sc. 1, l. 107, where the context is jealousy, and used it in the context of incest and jealousy. Mailer uses this image for the act of incest itself; the narrator imagines his wife and her father: in The Sound & the Fury the image is thought of by the bearer of the incestuous desire, of his sister and another. The animality of the image reinforces the negative tagging of the sexual act, this is the usual rhetorical purpose of this image (typical context): that it is used (in this context) of incest is apposite as (i) without its elite connotations incest becomes the tabooed activity only practiced by animals and the (economically) depraved and (ii) the singular term 'beast' indicates a monadic, narcissistic, or self-referential type of activity which is the everyday connotation of the term 'incestuous'.

An American Dream to American Psycho, transgression will provide the negative charge for social criticism.

By contrast, E. L. Doctorow's Loon Lake (1980) continues the everyday use of incest as occasional symbol of decadence and of critical disapproval whilst also re-cycling the Romantic use of brother/sister incest as a generational revolution against the old order.³⁷ The symbolic incest is a product of ruling class sexual morés in which the position of women is one of slavery or (high class) prostitution and leads to the anti-oedipal revolt of a brother and sister as an alliance of (near) equals against capitalist hierarchy.³⁸ In a gently subversive irony, the lover of the boss's girlfriend becomes the boss's adopted 'son'.³⁹ Loon Lake is another parodic dismantling of the American Dream, another variation on the Gatsby theme - without the fall; but with a sting and ironic counter twist in the tail.⁴⁰

³⁷ E. L. Doctorow, Loon Lake, (New York: Random House, 1980). An example of the brother/sister incest motive used in a socially critical manner in nineteenth century literature would be such works of Shelley's as 'The Revolt of Islam' (the incest theme is more pronounced in the poem's earlier version 'Laon and Cythna') and 'Epipsychidion', in P. B. Shelley, The Complete Poetry, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁸ See Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka, for a discussion of the oppositional use of brother/sister incest in the works of Franz Kafka.

³⁹ Reinforcing the point made by Fiedler, Love and Death, that in the history of American literature it is 'incest, which is its essential erotic theme' (p. 414).

⁴⁰ Incidental inclusions of the incest theme span Katherine Anne Porter, Ship of Fools, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), to Tama Janowitz, The Male Cross-Dresser Support Group, (London: Picador, 1992). Tennessee Williams follows general tradition in employing incest as a symbol for victimisation (father/daughter form), and adds local tradition (Southern writing) in pursuit of the transgressive (brother/sister form). See Tennessee Williams, Fugitive Kind, put on in December 1937 (never published); Suddenly Last Summer, in Baby Doll, Something Unspoken, Suddenly Last Summer, (London: Penguin, 1968); 'The Purification', in 27 Wagons Full of Cotton & Other One Act Plays, (New York: James Laughlin, 1953); Sweet Bird of Youth, in Sweet Bird of Youth, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Glass Menagerie, (London: Penguin, 1962). See also Tennessee Williams, Memoirs, (London: W. H. Allen, 1976), where, in the context of his sister's incest accusation against her father, he refers to his own relation with his sister as incestuous (pp. 119-120), and Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams, (London: The Bodley Head, 1985) p. 58; 69; 70.

For an entirely original working of the incest theme as a criticism of the American condition we must turn to Shepard's play 'Buried Child'.⁴¹ At the centre of this play, hinted at, but never fully acknowledged, is the incestuous union of a mother and her adult son. The product of this relation is killed and buried, the site of the burial lost until the very end of the play when the son/father recovers the remains. The child was killed by the mother's husband who could not accept the child's origins. Such an example of mother/son incest, one not based upon mistaken identity, is rare; as is the positive, as opposed to the typically critical use, to which it is put. Whilst the incest theme is used for all of the literary and theatrical effects to which we have become accustomed - those of shock and revelation - and is also an integral part of the plot and its moral didacticism, it also configures a positive pole in the midst of the play's critical force. As Johan Calens observes, in his article 'Memories of the Sea in Shepard's *Illinois*', the incest theme is used in two opposing ways, simultaneously informing two differing perspectives.⁴² In its negative form (the traditional utility of shock and didacticism) it attacks the cult of the American Dream:

The fate of its [the play's] midwestern family mirrors the simultaneous disintegration and tenacity of the Dream; the double offence of incest and infanticide reveals as much its power as its defilement. (p. 406)

Read in this way, the play reveals a descent into degeneration, a 'regression of the male characters into irresponsible, childish behaviour' (p. 404). It is not only incest which is being used as a double metaphor: the

⁴¹ Sam Shepard, *Buried Child*, in *Seven Plays*, (London: Bantam, 1981). See also Sam Shepard, 'Fool for Love', in *Fool for Love & The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing his Wife*, (London: Faber, 1984), where Sam Shepard reworks the traditional Romantic story of a brother/sister love that is unconscious of its blood relation and therefore of its status as taboo. For another version of the step-relation as constituting the possibility of incestuous transgression, see Arthur Miller, 'A View from a Bridge', in *Plays One*, (London: Methuen, 1988).

⁴² Johan Calens, 'Memories of the Sea in Shepard's *Illinois*', *Modern Drama*, 29. 3 (September 1986), pp. 403-415.

theme of childhood also displays this divided rhetorical effect. This leads to the second use of the incest theme where it becomes a metaphor for (lost) unity, (lost) collectivity, and the (im)possibility of return. The latter reversion taking the transgressive form of incest due to its impossibility in the realm of everyday time. Thus 'on the mythic-symbolic level the incest carries positive connotations' (p. 413). It is ironic that, despite its absence (it happened many years ago) and its transgressive character, the incestuous relation between mother and son appears to be the only warm or intimate relation in the play. The use of liquid landscapes, the emphasis on touch, and their connection with the feminine in the play's imagery would suggest that space and the visual are privileged in a masculine economy of metaphor (p. 407).⁴³

If interpretation is not to remain in a double economy of loss (a lost or fallen 'masculine' economy looking back nostalgically to a lost original 'feminine' economy) as a figure for birth, separation, or fall (antedeluvian, psychoanalytic), which is then interpreted as a critique of a given human condition, then attention must be given to the positive elements in the text. These include the rhetorical elements of liquidity (terms of description or comparison) and proximity (mode of apprehension or description; 'feels like' as opposed to 'looks like') both of which connote the 'feminine' attributes of touch (tactility as opposed to vision) and, in this context, care. Unlike Fool for Love, another Shepard play utilising the incest theme, Buried Child makes original use of the incest theme by moving beyond the formulas established in the nineteenth century.

⁴³ See Luce Irigaray, 'The Mechanics of Fluids', and 'When our Lips Speak Together', in This Sex Which Is Not One, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 106-118; 205-218, for a discussion of the implications of the metaphorical economies of liquidity and touch.

Towards a conclusion: the incest theme, child sexual abuse, popular genres, and 'a postmodernism of transgression': literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s

Profanation in a world which no longer recognizes any positive meaning in the sacred - is this not more or less what we may call transgression?

(Foucault, 'Preface to Transgression', p. 30)

... a form of thought in which the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality and the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions.

(Foucault, 'Preface to Transgression', p. 50)

The primary meaning of the gothic romance, then, lies in its substitution of terror for love as a central theme of fiction.... More than that, however, the gothic is the product of an implicit aesthetic that replaces the classic concept of nothing-in-excess with the revolutionary doctrine that nothing succeeds like excess.... Dedicated to producing nausea, to transcending the limits of taste and endurance, the gothic novelist is driven to seek more and more atrocious crimes to satisfy the hunger for "too-much" on which he trades.

(Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p.134)

Two factors coincide to define the use of incest and child sexual abuse as a literary themes in the late 1980s and early 1990s: first, a vogue for extreme and violent forms of content transgression (torture, dismemberment, S/M). This emphasis on the description of excess replaces (or utilises) the prior emphasis on formal transgression or stylistic excess that was based upon parody and pastiche and defined the earliest phase of postmodern writers, Pynchon, Barth, and Coover. This phenomenon appears to encompass all forms of postmodern culture. Second, the arrival or 'emergence' (in the double Foucauldian sense of

visibility of profile and of usage by various cultural trends) of child sexual abuse and its incestuous variants as an almost everyday part of cultural experience.⁴⁴ In the case of the factor of excess, we appear to have a complement and alternative to the focus of experimentation on form in previous decades. The second trend appears due to the the general public exposure of the child sexual abuse issue, including the use of child sexual abuse in court cases to lever children from one parent to the other, and newspaper headlines (Woody Allen, Michael Jackson). The combination of these two social and cultural trends, strongest perhaps in America, but with Europe trailing not far behind, results in the cultural utilisation of child sexual abuse to augment its repertoire of shock, a *verwindung* (reconstruction, reuse) made easier by the small step from the ever popular incest theme to incestuous child sexual abuse and beyond. Modernist writing has shown how incest and child sexual abuse have a strange affinity for one another, collocating in literary texts long before the re-emergence of sexual child abuse into the public sphere in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The horizon of expectation which suggested that we read incestuous child sexual abuse into certain appropriate texts has passed into a general cultural pattern in which this 'discovery' has become absorbed into the mainstream of cultural production; becoming an extra 'flavour' in the current range of transgressive titillations which have been co-opted to refresh the voracious but quickly jaded palate of late twentieth century (Western) culture.⁴⁵ As usual the provocation of affect mobilised by

⁴⁴ On the use of violent content, see also Fiedler, *Love and Death*, where, writing on violence in fiction, he notes two stages: (1) '*the urbanisation of violence* ', or the movement from nature to society (p. 482). (2) '*the ennobling of violence* ', the movement from politics to literature, to allow yet more to literature (already , and always, very violent)(p. 484). Now it seems we are witnesses to *the aestheticisation of violence*, the movement of the sublime into the moment of destruction; this in both high and low culture, in experimental as in pop culture, in film as in literature/fiction.

⁴⁵ Examples of this trend, with its foregrounding of the body in extremis, would include: in art and photography the work of Joel-Peter Witkin, Andres Serrano, and Helen Chadwick;

literary representation has far out-paced any referential function which may have been suggested by its subject matter. In this disjunction we may perceive a kind of arrival as well as the danger of a new kind of invisibility (the invisibility due to over-exposure; awareness fatigue).

In literature exemplars of this trend, which I would like provisionally to call 'a postmodernism of transgression', would include Brett Easton Ellis and Pat Califia, both of whom explore the unorthodox and excessive in their textual representations of the body.⁴⁶ Navigating a subject area initiated by de Sade and Lautr  amont, the work of Dennis Cooper is a good example of this literary trend.⁴⁷ I will discuss his novel, Frisk (1991), in connection with the incest /child sexual abuse theme.

in film, Reservoir Dogs, One False Move, and the Belgian Man Bites Dog (original title, 'C'est Arriv   Pr  s de Chez Vous') all made in 1992.

⁴⁶ For example: Pat Califia, 'Calyx of Isis', in Macho Sluts, (London: Alyson, 1988); Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho, (London: Pan Books Limited, 1991), and, for yet another use of dismemberment (castration), this time in allegorical mode, Eurudice, f/ 32: The Second Coming, (London: Virago, 1993). This novel also contains the apparently almost mandatory references-in-passing to incest and child sexual abuse, (p. 34 , age 12 again; 165) and is itself a stylistic heir to Kathy Acker, Blood and Guts at High School, Plus Two, (London: Pan, 1984), where incest is part of a self-destructive personal transformation.

Two other general definitions suggest themselves: paralleling the contrast between 'classical' and 'baroque' to modernism and postmodernism, Omar Calabrese, Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), suggests the term 'neo-baroque'; 'stretching to the limit and experimenting with excess. The age and cultural characteristics that we have defined as "neo-baroque" clearly belongs to the second category' (p. 50). The new trend might be said to constitute a neo-baroque orgy of excess. Or we may wish to continue with Fiedler's gothic analogy. Writing of the 1950/60s Fiedler, notes that 'the third wave of popular gothicism appeals to the fear of the future, and is based upon a fundamental ambivalence towards science,' and therefore lead to the science-fiction gothic romance (fear of science and red-scare communism?) (p. 500). The first two waves were: (1) fear of the past (counter-revolution in the late 1700s); (2) fear of the present (post-slavery, mass culture as threat to civilisation in the late 1800s), would the present (fourth wave) re-birth of virulent neo-gothicism perhaps owe something to a fear of the absence of time as a singular grand narrative (or to *many* times; the pluralisation of time), to the the feeling of an outside or end of history, the decline of the West etc... (arguably an extension of the 'third wave' fear of the future; the *future present*).

⁴⁷ The term, 'transgression', is used due to subject matter (content), often excused by frame (form/narrative, unreliable narrator). This emphasis on the frame was defined by Lyotard, 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of their Experimentation', as definitive of the postmodern phase of modernist experimentation, see, for example, the work of Cindy Sherman. This focus on the frame has been utilised by later forms to maximise content excess. Hence the continued use of the term 'postmodern' in the generic sense. 'Postmodern' may also be used as a periodisation; as a suitable label for a general trend in film, literature, advertising, etc. In general, if the Romantic sublime achieves its effect via terror and horror then the apparition of the transgressive in the late twentieth century (a

The high/low or elite /mass culture distinction looks ever more dubious when applied to this wave of postmodern culture. Are the lesbian and gay orientated fiction of Califia and Cooper easily classifiable as 'high' or 'low'? Perhaps 'both' or 'neither' would be more apposite; or a more nuanced classification involving types of readership and modes of consumption, combining social and economic difference with differences of sex and sexuality, for example, and the latter with a politics of identity based upon consumption. This method of reclassification would work outside of the simple high/low binary of modernity. Certainly both Califia and Cooper show considerable sophistication in their narrative techniques whilst refusing the 'ornate' style of the classic high postmodernisms of the 1950s and 1960s (Pynchon, Barth, Coover) in exchange for a 'simple' style that nevertheless uses narrative denial, parody, pastiche, and allegory to achieve a 'depth' unusual in the usual bearer of the 'simple' style, popular fiction. Before discussing the relation of the incest/child sexual abuse theme as it appears in these works, I will take a short detour through several supposedly popular or 'low' genres of fiction (as opposed to 'literature'), all of whom nevertheless confound the high/low distinction by their intertextual use of traditionally 'serious' themes and their appeal to varied types of reader.

The genres of mass culture are well known: detective, romance, adventure, western (these latter pair transmuting into science fiction and fantasy and their sub-genres); the supernatural and the horror; erotica and pornography; biography and auto-biography; and the various permutations that result when all of the above are recycled in exhaustive recombination.

'postmodernism of transgression') would suggest an aesthetic based upon a transgressive sublime.

Perhaps the most outstanding example of the thoroughgoing exploitation of the sexual child abuse theme and the incest theme in recent literature, sharing referentialist and transgressive (aesthetic) concerns with genre, can be found in the detective fiction of Andrew Vachss.⁴⁸ The author himself is an attorney who specialises in cases of juvenile justice and child abuse. His fiction, as 'hard-boiled' as it comes, uses child abuse and incest as regular features of his stories: these topics make up both the background, the taken-for-granted of modern life, and is foregrounded in the lives and actions of his leading characters, 'heros' and villains alike. Vachss' 'hero', Burke, works mainly on child-abuse and incest cases, and their interface with the world of runaways, child prostitution, kiddie porn, snuff video, baby-farming, and with the connections of these, in turn, with big business, the Mafia, and the white supremacist fascism of neo-Nazi groups. The inclusion of all of these elements together would itself function as a transgressive feature; an intensification of the transgressive atmosphere over and above that of previous 'dick' (and other) novels. Yet simultaneously such fiction manages (with the odd lapse) to be part of the trend of 'politically correct' postmodern detective fiction (mainly feminist detective fiction). Thus we find, hand in hand with a cast of ethnic minorities (such novels will typically feature groups made up of a 'rainbow alliance'), gays, lesbians, transvestites, and a range of low life, or otherwise socially transgressive human types, a penchant for descriptions of extreme violence (as in film the theme of revenge allows graphic excess) and detailed sex scenes. It must, however, be noted that the sexual child abuse theme, even as it gains exposure, becomes a source of transgressive reader pleasure

⁴⁸ It also appears, in passing, in other writers of this genre. See, for example, Patricia Cornwell, *Postmortem*, (London: Warner, 1990) p. 69; Charles Willford, *Miami Blues*, (London: Futura, 1985), an example of sibling incest connoting degeneration and criminality (p. 55). *Miami Blues* was made into a film in 1990.

(representing the unrepresentable, playing with the limit, taboo as incitement to discursive treatment). In terms of a poetics of transgression, such literature is an example of the piling up of content transgressions to achieve a particular aesthetic effect. In such an aesthetic the extremes of representation (the limits of the social) appear to bear an affinity for one another coming together in the process of cultural production. Socially too, the implication is that many such 'extremes' may also have an affinity that is more than purely textual.

As heir to the gothic fantastic the genre of science fiction would be expected to evince some recent example of the incest theme. As a key popular genre science fiction would be expected to utilise topical themes with transgressive potential. A sub-genre of science-fiction, 'cyberpunk' has recently reached critical respectability due to its fusion of the space opera with the timely issues of information technology, computer hacking, and virtual reality. One of its prime exemplars is William Gibson whose 'cyberspace' trilogy, Neuromancer (1984), Count Zero (1986), Mona Lisa Overdrive (1988), contains elements of the incest theme on both the literal and the symbolic levels.⁴⁹

Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney, in their book, Shopping in Space, have characterised the new generation of American 'highbrow' or 'serious' writers of the last decade as the 'blank generation' (the term is taken from a pop lyric of the 'punk' genre that was an important part of the culture of the writers of the 1980s and 1990s). This 'post-punk writing' of the 1980s is simultaneously accessible to both 'low' and 'high' readers; thus fulfilling a typical postmodern feature in transgressing the traditional binaries of elite (or 'art') and mass culture (p. 3).⁵⁰ The authors

⁴⁹ William Gibson, Neuromancer, (London: Grafton, 1986), Count Zero, (London: Grafton, 1987), Mona Lisa Overdrive, (London: Grafton, 1989).

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney, Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992).

of Shopping in Space suggest the term 'post-realism' to cover this kind of recent fiction as it represents a new wave of postmodern writing; occurring after the 'high' or classic postmodernism of the '1950s and 1960s (Barth, Pynchon), and after the 'dirty' and 'new' realisms of the 1970s (Tobias Wolf, Andre Dubus) (p. 14). 'A postmodernism of transgression', the term I have used in the title of this section, tries to identify a general cultural trend in terms of its relation to excess; much 'post-realist' fiction would fit comfortably into this category. An example of this habituation to excess and of the negatively nihilistic morality of the 'prevailing ethos' of such fiction is given in Shopping in Space:

When Clay objects to the depravity of a friend, Rip, raping a twelve year old girl Rip snaps: "What's right? If you want something you have the right to take it. If you want to do something you have the right to do it."(p. 40)⁵¹

However, such nihilism should be viewed, at least in its literary manifestation, with suspicion; it may function to *excuse* the representation of the previously unacceptable. Or its intensification: here again we find the intertextual twelve year old of American literature (referentially the age of transition and ambiguity, the onset -for some- of puberty). The two authors that I wish to focus upon as typical of this trend and of its use of the incest/child sexual abuse theme are Mary Gaitskill and Denis Cooper.

In Mary Gaitskill's novel, Two Girls, Fat and Thin (1991), the telling of two contrasting sexual assaults upon children happens in the first half of the book, a structural feature shared with some black women writers (Morrison, Walker), and of importance because it is usually an indication that the sexual abuse is to receive 'serious' treatment (referential,

⁵¹ Originally from Bret Easton Ellis, Less than Zero, (London: Picador, 1986) p. 189). Also see his The Rules of Attraction, (London: Pan, 1987), p. 183, for an incidental reference to the 'town's incest victims', a sign of everydayness achieved through large scale media exposure.

persuasive) and is not just included for the sake of impact at the novel's climax. Gaitskill does depict violence and a sado-masochistic scene in the climactic position in the text; but it is written in such a way as to symbolise the rescue of one girl by the other and result in their dual empowerment.

In the course of an interview about Dorothy's involvement with Anna Granite (the philosopher Ayn Rand) Dorothy reveals that she was abused by her father at the age of 14 onwards until she left home. Her interviewer, the novel's other heroine, Justine, (her surname, Shade, taken in conjunction with her Christian name contain a double reference to the Marquis de Sade, the author of Justine, the ironies of this will become apparent when Justine's sexual references are revealed) then reveals that she too was abused, aged 5, 'by a friend of my father's', (p. 18).⁵² The novel then describes Justine's abuse and how the rest of her life has been tainted by this episode in the form of compulsive sadistic and masochistic desires - the latter are not dealt with here in their voluntaristic aspect; but only as an obsession born of early sexual interference (pp. 51-53). A manifestation of this sadism occurs when Justine re-enacts her abuse from the position of the abuser; she rapes a younger girl with the handle of a toothbrush (pp. 108-109).

Dorothy, in turn, describes her father's assaults upon her (pp. 126-127). The abuse creates in Dorothy a feeling of self-revulsion which will augment her obesity, which in turn will aggravate her self-hatred; yet this despair can alternate with a transgressive exaltation at having broken a fundamental taboo and possessing forbidden knowledge (p. 165). Other kinds of child sexual abuse are also mentioned: the reference to a teacher who abuses her pupils adds institutional and Satanic ritual abuse to father/daughter rape and sexual assault by a 'friend of the family'; it also

⁵² Mary Gaitskill, Two Girls, Fat and Thin, (London: Vintage, 1992) p. 18.

adds the dimension of female adult as aggressor - Justine's abuse of another child was as a child herself (p. 253).

Denis Cooper's Frisk plays with reader expectation.⁵³ A sequence of unreliable narrators signal a realm of fantasy where transgressive pleasure is to be taken to the limit, but where its character as fantastic is ultimately made clear. The result is a sexual play on the borders of the real and the unreal which is itself performative of a pleasure that relies upon the borders, and their (temporary, complicit, and acted) confusion.⁵⁴ Ultimately these frames include that of the novel itself: the epistolary form, the author's name inscribed within his text. Frame, genre, and classification act as the ultimate disclaimer: it is only (a) fiction.

The only hint of incest occurs when Julian is attracted to his younger brother Kevin (twelve again, in the context of a different sexuality) who has a crush on his brother and his brother's boyfriend (p. 15).⁵⁵ Julian's friend (the narratives' central 'I', or Denis, aged eighteen) does have an affair with Kevin; but the situation is ambiguous: legally it would be classified as child sexual abuse; ethically it is clear that 'Denis' does take advantage of Kevin's 'psychological problems' (p. 31). Here the proximity of a sexual child abuse of sorts and of the incest theme is hardly accidental; thematically close, these incidents help to introduce the less innocent,

⁵³ Denis Cooper, Frisk, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992).

⁵⁴ See also Fiedler, Love and Death: 'The line between "pornography" and literature has blurred; and certain traditional themes in American literature -the love of white and colored males, for instance, and the vilification of women- are rendered in explicit sexual detail' (p. 29). Fiedler goes on to comment that, 'it is a long way from James Fenimore Cooper to James Baldwin, or from Herman Melville to Norman Mailer', we might be tempted to add that the road travelled from Mailer to Bret Easton Ellis and from Baldwin to Denis Cooper is not quite as long. Fiedler adds: 'we continue to dream the female dead, and ourselves in the arms of our dusky male lovers'; whilst Cooper (Denis) takes the confluence of the violent and the sacred and the homo-erotic to its logical limit, the addition of the factor of race to homosexual serial killing seems (as yet) far too explosive a combination.

⁵⁵ See also David Wojnarowicz, Close to the Knives, (New York: Vintage 1991), in the biographical, 'The Suicide of a Guy who once built an Elaborate Shrine over a Mouse Hole', the father of one of the narrators attempts to sexually abuse his son as a child (p. 266).

more deadly games of sadistic child sexual abuse that are to follow. When Denis writes to Pierre about his 'torture-and-murder-boys fantasy' we shall see that some of the 'boys' actually are boys (the male homosexual equivalent of the male heterosexual use of 'girls' for young women; in both cases the term denoting the younger is habitually used to connote the older) (p. 81).⁵⁶ The novel reaches its climax with Denis's first person diary which focuses on the dismemberment of his victims; and, more precisely, on a boy aged 'ten or eleven' (p. 102). There are, however, a number of textual disclaimers; for example, the site at the heart of the enigma is an empty centre, the chamber of horrors, storage place of mutilated corpses, the narrow attic room with concealed body, is non-existent, just a small empty space (p. 122; 123).

This lack of evidence flatly contradicts the testimony of 'Denis's' letters and indicates that all was play, a charade, a playing out of fantasy. An ultimate denial resides in ultimate self-referentiality: first, we have a reference to the effect that the representations of dismemberment encountered in the text were not actual but fantasy:

"I realised at some point that I couldn't and wouldn't kill anyone, no matter how persuasive the fantasy is. And theorising about it, wondering why, never helped at all. Writing it down was and still is exciting in a pornographic way." (p. 123)

The narrator then negates the possibility of such an account ever appearing in a novel, "'But I couldn't see how it would ever fit into anything as legitimate as a novel or whatever'", which, of course, it has; as the 'letters' from 'Denis' to his addressees were only fantasies so is the text as a whole. We are reminded of what we already know (but which we conveniently 'forget' as we read); that we are dealing with a work of fiction. The transgression that enacts denial here is the reference to the

⁵⁶ See also Cooper's *Closer*, (New York: Grove, 1989), where one of the characters is raped as a child (p. 3).

novel as if from somewhere outside of the text and its conventions by the narrator referring to himself as the author (called Denis 'in' the text as on the cover; the 'outside'). Such a ploy usually functions to draw the reader's attention to the text's constructedness and therefore its lack of reality or realism - even in terms of its own fictions. Morally, then, the coast is clear: the pleasure is all in the representation, of (written down) fantasy, that which the reader has in fact just experienced in reading this book. Is it that what we are offered is a counterfeit tale, a counterfeit killing; and thus not an 'actual killing', even in terms of the suspension of disbelief that usually functions as part of the process of reading fiction and which this novel undermines? What we are offered may be akin to a gift; the usual return of ethical opprobrium or visceral disgust is attenuated. However, such textual pleasures (remembering, of course, that only readers have pleasure) are usually either denied by morality, the reaction of disgust, or, in the text itself, by a weighty didacticism that is apparently intended to mobilise shame and revulsion (or self-revulsion, if the innocent reader gets too involved). In this way the foregrounding of the counterfeit element acts as a mechanism of cleansing or denial which facilitates the literary (that is, second hand) enjoyment of hitherto morally indigestible transgressions. If didacticism can no longer be an excuse for the representation of the transgressive then the frame must take over this function (the ethical relation moves to the form).

I will cite the final description of the snuff-photo that opened the novel and projected the hero on his sadistic quest. This photo is a fraud, as the hero learns when it is too late. This is made clear in the second reconstruction, where self-reference again acts as signifier of artifice in its denial of the *vraisemblable*, of the authenticity of the origin. Only the trace of the maker appears. The signature, usually the guarantor of

authenticity, is the proof only of inauthenticity. That the signature takes the form of the fingerprint, only extends the irony:

'Close-up. The "wound" is actually a glop of paint... sculpted to suggest the inside of the human body. you can see the fingerprints of the person or persons who made it.'(p. 128)

As with the appearance of the same proper name both within, and on the cover, of the text, this functions simultaneously as a denial and as an affirmation, a performative of the relation between text and referent -it didn't happen: its only a text- a double negation that affirms the reader's pleasure of the text.

Frisk and Two Girls both show a kind of literary collocation that I have found in some of the other novels that I have discussed: the co-location of incest and child sexual abuse within the same text. Sometimes this pair will appear unconnected to one another by character or by plot, as, for example in Jeffers' 'Tamar', where the connection is semantic; a perceived family resemblance leads to their inhabiting the same classificatory space, as transgression, or double transgression, of age and of blood. Certainly postmodern literature, operating from within a very different set of horizons of expectations, would seem to perceive incest and child sexual abuse as occupying related categories; where we find the one the other is reasonably sure to appear.⁵⁷ Recent writing has seen the fusion in many works of sexual child abuse and the incest theme to form incest/child abuse theme, broadly co-eval with the prior area of operation of the incest theme but, due to the priority of the transgressive aesthetic, less directly amenable to the kind of symbolic readings that have traditionally been mobilised to explain the varied uses of the incest theme in the literature of previous periods. But already a turn has occurred: no sooner had the

⁵⁷ The shared elements of the two sets that would constitute such a semantic field would include; sex, taboo, age differential, and family locus.

referential and rhetorical aspects of the incest theme and child sexual abuse appeared to fuse, then (as in Frisk, and perhaps in Two Girls) the rhetorical seizes hold of the new referential dominant or commonplace and transforms it into another textual excess, another rhetorical opening onto fresh fields of meaning whose provoking touch is an aesthetic of transgression.

Conclusion

Both of the sections above concluded with examples of the expanded incest theme as used in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties. The 'present referential' found child sexual abuse written about as an exposé of itself, and the 'present transgressive' noted the inter-relation of postmodern form, a transgressive sublime or aesthetic of excess, and, as part of the latter, the cultural arrival of child sexual abuse to augment the role of the incest theme. Whither the future? The conclusion of 'a postmodernism of transgression' poses the question: are we witnessing an imaginary epidemic (or fashion) as opposed to the representation of an actual practice? Has there been a change in the social imaginary (the collective self-image)? Or is there a point of reference (a deixis of abuse)? Indeed, these questions may be so co-implicated as to be inextricable, ultimately unquantifiable.

Or perhaps, we have been observing a process of (historically) contingent merging (of transgression *and* reference) and a movement beyond (as excess ceases to exceed). This movement would include the transition from featured to incidental, a habituation that results in a consignment to background; or to yet a further fold of parody, of pastiche, a ground for new tropological constructions and new utilisations - and to other sources of shock or de-familiarisation... (the worst is yet to come).

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wrung with terror that some among them would seriously propose moving their very capital into a foreign country lest it be ravaged and pillaged by a people whose entire white male population would have little more than filled any one of their larger cities: except Jackson in the Valley and three separate armies trying to catch him and none of them ever knowing whether they were just retreating from a battle or just running into one and Stuart riding his whole command entirely around the biggest single armed force this continent ever saw in order to see what it looked like from behind and Morgan leading a cavalry charge against a stranded man-of-war. Who else could have declared a war against a power with ten times the area and a hundred times the men and a thousand times the resources, except men who could believe that all necessary to conduct a successful war was not acumen nor shrewdness nor politics nor diplomacy nor money nor even integrity and simple arithmetic but just love of land and courage—

'And an unblemished and gallant ancestry and the ability to ride a horse,' McCaslin said. 'Don't leave that out.' It was evening now, the tranquil sunset of October mazy with windless woodsmoke. The cotton was long since picked and ginned, and all day now the wagons loaded with gathered corn moved between field and crib, processional across the enduring land. 'Well, maybe that's what He wanted. At least, that's what He got.' This time there was no yellowed procession of fading and harmless ledger-pages. This was chronicled in a harsher book and McCaslin, fourteen and fifteen and sixteen, had seen it and the boy himself had inherited it as Noah's grandchildren had inherited the Flood although they had not been there to see the deluge: that dark corrupt and bloody time while three separate peoples had tried to adjust not only to one

another but to the new land which they had created and inherited too and must live in for the reason that those who had lost it were no less free to quit it than those who had gained it were:—those upon whom freedom and equality had been dumped overnight and without warning or preparation or any training in how to employ it or even just endure it and who misused it not as children would nor yet because they had been so long in bondage and then so suddenly freed, but misused it as human beings always misuse freedom, so that he thought *Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license*; those who had fought for four years and lost to preserve a condition under which that franchisement was anomaly and paradox, not because they were opposed to freedom as freedom but for the old reasons for which man (not the generals and politicians but man) has always fought and died in wars: to preserve a status quo or to establish a better future one to endure for his children; and lastly, as if that were not enough for bitterness and hatred and fear, that third race even more alien to the people whom they resembled in pigment and in whom even the same blood ran, than to the people whom they did not,—that race threefold in one and alien even among themselves save for a single fierce will for rapine and pillage, composed of the sons of middle-aged Quartermaster lieutenants and Army sutlers and contractors in military blankets and shoes and transport mules, who followed the battles they themselves had not fought and inherited the conquest they themselves had not helped to gain, sanctioned and protected even if not blessed, and left their bones and in another generation would be engaged in a fierce economic competition of small sloven farms with the black men they were supposed to have freed and the white descendants of fathers who

had owned no slaves anyway whom they were supposed to have disinherited and in the third generation would be back once more in the little lost county seats as barbers and garage mechanics and deputy sheriffs and mill- and gin-hands and power-plant firemen, leading, first in mufti then later in an actual formalised regalia of hooded sheets and passwords and fiery christian symbols, lynching mobs against the race their ancestors had come to save: and of ~~all that other nameless horde of speculators in human misery, manipulators of money and politics and land, who follow catastrophe and are their own protection as grasshoppers are and need no blessing and sweat no plow or axe-helve and batten and vanish and leave no bones, just as they derived apparently from no ancestry, no mortal flesh, no act even of passion or even of lust: and the Jew who came without protection too since after two thousand years he had got out of the habit of being or needing it, and solitary, without even the solidarity of the locusts and in this a sort of courage since he had come thinking not in terms of simple pillage but in terms of his great-grandchildren, seeking yet some place to establish them to endure even though forever alien: and unblessed: a pariah about the face of the Western earth which twenty centuries later was still taking revenge on him for the fairy tale with which he had conquered it.~~ McCaslin had actually seen it, and the boy even at almost eighty would never be able to distinguish certainly between what he had seen and what had been told him: a lightless and gutted and empty land where women crouched with the huddled children behind locked doors and men armed in sheets and masks rode the silent roads and the bodies of white and black both, victims not so much of hate as of desperation and despair, swung from lonely limbs: and men shot dead in polling-booths with the still wet pen in one hand and the

unblotted ballot in the other: and a United States marshal in Jefferson who signed his official papers with a crude cross, an ex-slave called Sickymo, not at all because his ex-owner was a doctor and apothecary but because, still a slave, he would steal his master's grain alcohol and dilute it with water and peddle it in pint bottles from a cache beneath the roots of a big sycamore tree behind the drug store, who had attained his high office because his half-white sister was the concubine of the Federal A.P.M.: and this time McCaslin did not even say Look but merely lifted one hand, not even pointing, not even specifically toward the shelf of ledgers but toward the desk, toward the corner where it sat beside the scuffed patch on the floor where two decades of heavy shoes had stood while the white man at the desk added and multiplied and subtracted. And again he did not need to look because he had seen this himself and, twenty-three years after the Surrender and twenty-four after the Proclamation, was still watching it: the ledgers, new ones now and filled rapidly, succeeding one another rapidly and containing more names than old Carothers or even his father and Uncle Buddy had ever dreamed of; new names and new faces to go with them, among which the old names and faces that even his father and uncle would have recognised, were lost, vanished—Tomey's Terrel dead, and even the tragic and miscast Percival Brownlee, who couldn't keep books and couldn't farm either, found his true niche at last, reappeared in 1862 during the boy's father's absence and had apparently been living on the plantation for at least a month before his uncle found out about it, conducting impromptu revival meetings among negroes, preaching and leading the singing also in his high sweet true soprano voice and disappeared again on foot and at top speed, not behind but ahead of a body of raiding Federal horse and reappeared