

THE CONCEPTUALIZED AMERICAN IN SELECTED NINETEENTH  
CENTURY AMERICAN NOVELS

by

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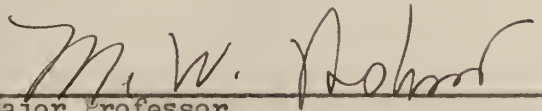
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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to discuss four fictional characters as uniform, conceptualized Americans in selected nineteenth century American novels, namely: The Deerslayer by James Fenimore Cooper, whose central figure is set against quasi-historical background; The Marble Faun by Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose protagonist is portrayed in a mythical setting which is correlated to the myth of the fall of man; Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, whose hero is developed in a recent American society; The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, whose focal character is delineated in contemporary European society.

In his book, The American Adam, R. W. B. Lewis has defined the character traits of the prototypical American and has examined the work of Cooper and Hawthorne in which the American Adam emerges against extremely different backgrounds. This report will extend Mr. Lewis's thesis to the work of two additional nineteenth century writers, Mark Twain and Henry James, for their work seems to carry on the depiction of the Adamic traits found by Mr. Lewis in the literature of the early nineteenth century.

The main objective of this report is to explore the characteristics that the principal literary agents display through the context of the story in which they appear. This context derives in part from the agent's personality, character, and moral values, and in part from his relationship to society, to his own past, to himself, and to his environment. Since each agent is a creation of his author's imagination, he cannot be considered real or actual. None, that is to say, actually existed then or now, but each functions as a representative American character--representative

in that he displays the characteristics of the conceptualized American.

The norms of a story within which a given character is manipulated determine in a large measure the quality of the personality that is evoked for the reader. The quality of Natty Bumppo, in other words, would be completely different if he were shown having tea at Gardencourt with the Touchetts and Lord Warburton. This report, then, is in part concerned with demonstrating four major contexts used by the selected nineteenth century American writers. However, it should become clear in the course of the study that in spite of the differentiated contexts presented by different American novelists, the same characteristics of hero and heroine curiously and consistently emerge.

From the vantage point of the twentieth century, some foremost critics of American Literature like Richard Chase, D. H. Lawrence, Leslie Fiedler, and R. W. B. Lewis view the American novel of the nineteenth century as one filled with contradiction and opposing forces. Such contradictions are traceable to the historical fact that the American found himself isolated in the New World and that he faced a dual allegiance, for his intellectual culture belonged both to the Old World and the New.<sup>1</sup> But historically the American, in overthrowing the fatherland, had frequently severed ties with England so completely that he lost his patronymic and the responsibility which goes with it.\* This American Adam is related only to God, who affords no patronymic. He is free to take a succession of names; he can change his name at will. Given the frontier where he can

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, (Garden City, New York, 1955), p. 11.

\*Melvin W. Askew



move freely, this man without a name sets forth to make his own name; given the free resources of America, he can acquire riches and move vertically upward through society. Spiritually this American Adam can be born again and again merely by sloughing off the old skin, or the past and its responsibilities, and by living again in a new place as a new creature.

To the Adamism of the American can be added the Manichean world view which was perpetuated by New England Puritanism and which permeated all American culture. Puritanism separated the elect from the damned, the kingdom of light from the kingdom of darkness, and good from evil. The greatest Puritan trope was the belief in original sin, and this trope has dominated much of American literature throughout all of the nineteenth century--so much, in fact, that the Fall and the Redemption of man remains the principal action by which the American prototype is identified, even when his involvement is secular and materialistic rather than religious and moralistic.

The struggle between good and evil apparently appealed to the imagination of the American, for the prototypical form of his expression became melodrama. Melodrama in American literature is, in part, the direct outgrowth of the Manichean structure professed by Puritanism and the physical fact of the American frontier.<sup>2</sup> The frontier provided no middle ground. There was the settlement which was associated with civilization and linked with time, responsibility, suffering, pain, guilt, and death. Then there was the frontier which was associated with

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<sup>2</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 47

freedom and represented space, rebirth, escape, a new way of life. Thus the American hero moves from time into space, and the chronicle of America is what happens to this hero, who is almost always free and moving.

#### NATTY BUMPPPO

The archetypal American found his first visible form in the work of Cooper, who placed his hero in the vast American frontier where he is freed from the responsibilities of civilization and free to make of himself what he will. He is free to change his name to suit his circumstances, and he does, for Natty Bumppo has left his white home, his fatherland, back in the civilized area which is but a dim memory for him, and he has made his home in a new Eden, the original woods where Nature and God alone rule.

Twentieth century literary critics have reacted variously to Cooper's character creation. D. H. Lawrence, for example, describes this essential American as "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer;" some, however, found themselves alone and searching for a way through life.<sup>3</sup>

American Adam is the name given to Natty Bumppo by R. W. B. Lewis, who sees Natty as springing from nowhere and standing alone at the edge of the forest in the presence of God and Nature.<sup>4</sup> But the consensus is that Cooper's hero is America's first mythical hero, for Cooper made him the embodiment of a way of life. Cooper added the final touches in the creation of the myth of Natty Bumppo in the fifth and last of a series of five novels about the frontiersman known as Leather Stocking. In this

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<sup>3</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>4</sup>R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam, (Chicago, 1955), p. 105.

fifth novel, Deerslayer, the author takes the hero into mature life through a series of steps recognized in that time as essential to the "making of a man." These steps included Natty's killing another human being for the first time, his proving a high regard for honor, his willingness to risk his own life for another.<sup>5</sup> Since for Cooper, the mythical hero must also be chaste, the novel shows Deerslayer resisting the sensuous charms of a beautiful woman.

While Richard Chase saw Leather Stocking as a mythical hero, Leslie A. Fiedler sees him as a "Faust in Buckskins." This view is supported by pointing out Natty's impatience with civilized white society and its law, by his love of nature and solitude, by his refusal to accept geographic limits, and by his denial of the Fall of Man, for in Natty there is no recognized evil but only good.<sup>6</sup>

Warren Walker, another critic, sees Natty as the "beau ideal" of the white frontiersman, even a messiah-like martyr--a martyr because he is destroyed along with the Indian by the civilized world as it closes in on the frontier. Cooper, then, has given white society a kind of atonement embodied in the death of his hero for the wrong inflicted on the Indian race. Walker expresses this concept of Natty in these words:

. . . the white men thus martyred afforded partial expiation for the annihilation of the Indians. . . the Leather Stocking myth which Cooper delineated provides a means for satisfying a psychic need felt keenly by nineteenth

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<sup>5</sup>James Franklin Beard, "Introduction," Deerslayer, Harper's (New York, 1960), p. 189.

<sup>6</sup>Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York, 1960), p. 189.



century Americans and to a lesser degree by Europeans; in the figure of Natty Bumppo Cooper gave America its first distinct messiah image.<sup>7</sup>

"A democratic knight of the wilderness" is the romantic title given to this protagonist by David Brion Davis, who sees in this knight the observance of a code of Christian ethics which is inherent in the man, not learned as in the Age of Chivalry.<sup>8</sup>

James Franklin Beard, seeing Deerslayer set against the historical background of the frontier, conceives of him as a "noble savage" or a "product of natural law," which makes him "the personification of the American spirit." Affinity between moral goodness and the great truths found in the unwritten laws of God's own nature was a vital force for the fathers of our country, who even went so far as to try to institutionalize what they saw as "Natural Law" in the Bill of Rights.<sup>9</sup> Here in the heart of an almost Miltonic nature with "mountains like black barriers to exclude the outer world,"<sup>10</sup> Cooper has placed his hero. Surely if anywhere this is where man can achieve a harmony with the natural laws of the universe. "The whole 'arth is the temple of the Lord to such as have the right minds," says the Deerslayer, "and the light of the sun is little more than a glance of his eye."

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<sup>7</sup>Warren Walker, James Fenimore Cooper: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York, 1962), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>David Brion Davis, "The Deerslayer, A Democratic Knight of the Wilderness," Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels, (Detroit, 1958), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>Beard, op. cit., p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.



Cooper himself points out the virginity of this Edenic scene in which he has placed his hero:

In a word, the hand of man had never yet defaced or deformed any part of this native scene, which lay bathed in the sunlight, a glorious picture of affluent forest grandeur, softened by the balminess of June and relieved by the beautiful variety afforded by the presence of so broad an expanse of water.

With such constantly recurring phrases as "the reign of nature" and the "holy calm of nature" and "untouched by the hands of man," the natural virginity of the setting is emphasized. Deerslayer is in the novel an outgrowth of this phenomenal environment--an environment which produces a "noble savage," a "personification of the American spirit."

"... gifts come of circumstances," says the Deerslayer when he attempts to explain that he is a white man with a white man's code of ethics. Those "circumstances" are, of course, for Natty the earthly paradise of the American frontier, but what are the "gifts" which belong to Natty Bumppo? Physically this hero is no different in appearance from other borderers; in fact his physical characteristics and garb must be quite similar to those of many frontiersmen within Cooper's own experience. Cooper himself wrote of this in a preface to a late edition of The Leather Stocking Tales:

The author has often been asked if he had any original in his mind for the character of Leather Stocking. In a physical sense, different individuals known to the writer in early life certainly presented themselves as models, through his recollections. . .

The innate natural goodness, the built-in sense of right and wrong, that inner morality with which the archetypal American was imbued, is reflected in Natty Bumppo. When asked, as the novel begins, whether he has ever killed a human enemy, Natty replies, "To own the truth, I never

did, . . . I hold it to be onlawful to take the life of man, except in open and generous warfare." Nor would Natty trap the animals of the forest. "I live by the rifle," says Natty. Natty does admit to some contact with Moravian missionaries who traveled among the Delaware Indians, but it is not the dogma of an institution which rules his hand, but "I turn my mind altogether to the forest; that will not deceive you, being ordered and ruled by a hand that never wavers," says Natty.

Cooper elevated his protagonist to a peak of innocence, natural moral goodness, almost to the level of a Christian saint; he did this within the framework of the historical setting of his novel. Deerslayer's inner morality tells him that it is wrong for the white man to scalp Indians and receive the bounty paid by the government as a reward; it is wrong for the white man to kill wantonly the abundant game abounding in the forests. Even Nature thunders her reproach with the echoes of Harry March's shot at a deer not needed for food:

Them echoes are more awful in my ears than your mistake,  
Harry: for they sound like the voice of natur' calling out  
ag'n a wasteful and onthinking action.

The dichotomy of good and evil is ever present in the story. On the one hand, Deerslayer, the "good" Delaware Indians, and the natural setting represent goodness. On the other hand, Harry March, Tom Hutter, and the cruel Mingos represent evil. It would be impossible for Deerslayer to find a middle ground in this novel for the structure of melodrama is here, thus there is only predominate good as opposed to predominate evil. Thus Harry March becomes a counterpoint to Natty Bumppo in the novel, for March seems to have and do and be all of the things that society approves of. He is physically handsome; he scalps Indians for



bounty paid by the government; he kills and destroys at will; he brings to the wilderness the evil and corruption of the civilized world.

But Natty is not a helplessly innocent wanderer in the woods for he can kill when necessary and has learned the skills needed for survival in the wilderness. The author describes Deerslayer's great skill with a rifle in Chapter VII at the moment when Deerslayer kills another man for the first time. Deerslayer has turned his back on his enemy when a chance glance shows that the Indian has aimed his rifle and is about to shoot.

Then indeed, the long practice of Deerslayer as a hunter did him good service. Accustomed to fire with the deer on the bound, and often when the precise position of the animal's body had in a manner to be guessed at, he used the same expedients here. To cock and poise his rifle were the acts of a single moment and into the bushes where he knew a body ought to be in order to sustain the appalling countenance which alone was visible. There was not time to raise the piece any higher or to take a more deliberate aim. So rapid were his movements that both parties discharged their pieces at the same instant, the concussions mingling in one report. The mountains, indeed, gave back but a single echo. Deerslayer dropped his piece, and stood, with head erect, steady as one of the pines in the calm of a June morning, watching the result, while the savage gave the yell that has become historical for its appalling influence, leaped through the bushes, and came bounding across the open ground, flourishing a tomahawk. Still Deerslayer moved not, but stood with his unloaded rifle fallen against his shoulders, while, with a hunter's habits, his hands were mechanically feeling for the powder-horn and charger. When about forty feet from his enemy, the savage hurled his chief weapon; but it was with an eye so vacant, and a hand so unsteady and feeble, that the young man caught it as it was flying past him. At that instant the Indian staggered and fell his whole length on the ground.

Description of such incidents as this prompted Mark Twain to write in an essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" that "crass stupidities shall not be played upon the reader as 'the craft of the woodsman, the delicate art of the forest,' by either the author or the people of the tale." However skill with the use of the rifle was just one of those



"gifts" which made it possible for Natty to survive in his "consequences." In fact, this study notes that each of the four characters being considered developed certain special skills which made survival possible in threatening situations. Huck's ability to lie, Isabel Archer's refinement of perception, or Donatello's recognition of life might be equated to Natty's skill with the rifle. Given the differentiated circumstances of the four novels being considered, innocence alone is not adequate protection for any one of the characters, but each must develop special skills of his own in order to survive, and the skill of each represents a direct response to a specific environment.

Likewise the close tie of friendship between Natty and Chingachgook is a realistic alliance in the frontier setting. The two successfully escape from many frightening contacts with their enemies; escapes which Twain found utterly unbelievable. Natty's great respect for his Indian friend is reflected when he tells Harry March about his friend:

If he had his rights, he would be a great chief; but, as it is, he is only a brave and just-minded Delaware; respected, and even obeyed in some things, 'tis true, but of a fallen race and belonging to a fallen people. Ah! Harry March, 'twould warm the heart within you to sit in their lodges of a winter's night, and listen to the traditions of the ancient greatness and power of the Mohicans!

Natty's friendship with Chingachgook is comparable to Huck's tie with Jim or the useful alliance between Donatello and Miriam or between Isabel and Ralph Touchett. Each of these four conceptualized Americans is closely allied with another individual--noticeably an individual, not a group or an institution.

Natty Bumppo, who in Deerslayer is represented as the prototypical American wandering in the space of the frontier, can in no way accept the

restrictions of society, not even the love of Cooper's most sensuous and glamorous heroine, for Deerslayer has another love:

She's in the forest, Judith--hanging from the bough of the trees, in a soft rain--in the dew on the open grass--the clouds that float about in the blue heavens--the birds that sing in the woods--the sweet springs where I slake my thirst--and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's Providence!

This attitude separates the Deerslayer, not only from the opposite sex, but from other white men as well. Huck too cannot indulge his passion for Mary Jane but moves on; Donatello's union with Miriam is seen only as a concept; Isabel wants to maintain an aloofness from sexual intimacy.

Another of Natty's "gifts," his built-in sense of honor, is quite incomprehensible to the white men of the story. When Natty is on "furlough" from his capture by the evil Hurons and his return promises certain death, he insists upon the binding nature of the bargain he has made:

There's them that thinks it madness to keep their words, and there's them that don't, Hurry Harry. You may be one of the first, but I'm one of the last. No red-skin breathing shall have it in his power to say that a Mingo minds his word more than a man of white blood and white gifts, in anything that consarns me. I'm out on a furlough, and if I've strength and reason, I'll go in on a furlough afore noon to-morrow!

Although Mark Twain found many of Natty's characteristics foolish, they are not foolish for Cooper. Nor are they foolish for all Americans. For although Natty Bumppo often appears in a crude literary style and with troublesome consistency, Cooper fairly obviously created a character which can realistically function in American literature and is lifelike for the American imagination.

Cooper himself stated in a preface to the Leather Stocking Tales that he did not aim at creating a "monster of goodness," but his naturally

good hero would certainly become just that in any other framework. As an American Adam in limitless space his goodness can realistically come from his contact with nature, from a built-in sense of right and wrong, from his rite of purification by the waters of the beautiful Glimmerglass. For Natty his physical surroundings have definite meaning:

This is grand!--'tis solemn!--'tis an edication of  
itself, to look upon. . . everything left in the ordering  
of the Lord, to live and die according to his own designs  
and laws!

Given, then, the physical fact of the frontier and the Manichean influence of Puritanism whose irreconcilable polarities of good and evil are in intimate contact with the fictional character, Cooper has created the conceptualized American in Natty Bumppo. For the world and for America, Cooper gave visible form to the American prototype--the mythical man who embodies primitive American goodness, innocence, and freedom to maneuver in space.

#### DONATELLO

Hawthorne chose to express the American experience in an allegory with a native Italian representing the naturally innocent American. Hawthorne saw the conceptualized American in a different setting from that in which Cooper had envisioned his hero. For Hawthorne the protagonist must be brought back into time; he must accept his place in society and cannot be left alone in space. Thus in The Marble Faun, the conceptualized American functions within the norms of an allegory, a sharp contrast to the quasi-historical setting of The Deerslayer.

The central idea of this romance is the fall of man--the felix culpa--for greater rewards are Donatello's for having entered the fallen state.



Since allegory has been used as a vehicle for the central idea, each character plays his role at the literal level in the story, but each simultaneously stands for a definite allegorical concept. Therefore the movement of the characters in the story becomes symbolic even though their actions are a valid part of the narrative as such. Obviously to develop characters who can function at the literal level within the framework of the story and at the same time serve in an allegorical sense is no small task. Roy Male points out that apparently Hawthorne himself felt dubious about his success in The Marble Faun for he once said, "The thing is terrible," but at another moment he called it "the best thing" that he had ever done.<sup>11</sup>

The fabric of this romance is woven about four characters: Miriam, who represents life; Donatello, who represents man; Hilda, who represents Puritan spirituality and purity and the pastoral of religion; and Kenyon, who represents the pastoral of art. The setting for the interplay among these four characters is Rome. Perhaps nowhere else could a fusion between setting, action, and characterization of the allegory be so effective.

Nineteenth century Rome had grown old, and with that age had come all the evil and corruption known to man; beneath the streets were the catacombs filled with the dead; towering from its clutter and rising heavenward were the spires of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> "Everywhere. . . a cross, and nastiness at the foot of it, is the description of Rome."<sup>13</sup> Here,

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<sup>11</sup>Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision, (Austin, Texas, 1957), p. 158.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

indeed, was the ideal place for man in his pristine innocence to meet life, lose his innocence through sin, and to struggle with life to find a way to maturity. Within the norms of this story, whose principal trope is the fall of man, Donatello functions like the Adamic American. In the timelessness of Cooper's frontier, Donatello would be completely "unreal;" but placed in time, as represented by the city of Rome where his innocence must inevitably be challenged and subsequently destroyed by life, Donatello becomes a true character for the American imagination.

While Donatello represents the Adamic innocence of the American, Hawthorne had added depth to his allegory by placing him in Italy, where his family had wandered in space in an Adamic condition for centuries. However Hawthorne does not leave his character in space as Cooper did, but he brings him to time and the human state through Miriam. By alluding to Donatello's family as springing from prehistoric mists of the Golden Age itself and by many references to Arcadia, an Eden in legendary myth, Hawthorne, at first, identifies Donatello with man in his naturally innocent state. The legendary progenitor of the family of Monte Beni was not altogether human for he had certain faun-like qualities which caused him to be at one with nature, but he married a human maiden. From this marriage "sprang a kindly race of man. . . their lives rendered blissful by an unsought harmony with nature." About once every one hundred years a son would appear who produced the ancient qualities of the original family.<sup>14</sup> A typical Monte Beni is described thus:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

Beautiful, strong, brave, kindly, sincere, of honest impulses, and endowed with simple tastes and the love of homely pleasures, he was believed to possess gifts by which he could associate himself with the wild things of the forests, and with the fowls of the air, and could feel a sympathy even with the trees, among which it was his joy to dwell.

This description of the typical Monte Beni could just as well serve to describe Cooper's Natty Bumppo for both are the naturally good, innocent men wandering in a timeless Eden. Their "gifts" are one and the same—innocence, natural goodness, built-in morality, versatility—but Donatello is allegorical for he represents not only the Adamic American as Natty Bumppo did but also all man.

Donatello's natural innocence and oneness with nature is further noted by emphasizing the striking resemblance between him and the marble statue of the Faun of Praxiteles. "The pointed and furry ears are the sole indication of his wild, forest nature," but whether Donatello has the "pointed, furry ears" is left unanswered, as it should be, for likening him to the faun effectively denotes his Adamic innocence and helps to establish a conception of his character for the reader.

But Donatello is not placed in that world from which he sprang ". . . before mankind was burdened with sin and sorrow, and before pleasure had been darkened with those shadows that bring it into high relief, and make it happiness." As Miriam noted ". . . that world is sadly changed nowadays; grievously changed, poor Donatello, since those happy times when your race used to dwell in the Arcadian woods. . . You have reappeared on earth some centuries too late." Donatello is placed in nineteenth century Rome where the "weight of the past" is heavy and where the evils which civilization in passing has imposed upon Rome link Rome to all Time.



Rome's history too begins in the "sylvan life of Etruria, while Italy was yet guiltless of Rome" and moves through the sin and fall of Rome to the rise of Christianity from its evil depths.<sup>15</sup> In this tri-partite division of Rome's history the author has provided the foundation for the allegorical transfiguration of man as represented by Donatello. Donatello, who must lose the innocence of the Faun of Praxiteles, fall into the depths of sin, and rise to a moral wholeness must also lose his natural simplicity and accept the complexities of life. Just as Rome has lost its early simplicity and has become complicated by life so must Donatello pass through the same transformation.

Miriam, who is allegorically life and, therefore, linked with evil, ties Rome to all time at still another level in the story. She is dark and sensuous, European, a mixture of many races. She springs from a vague lineage which is shrouded in mystery though she is supposedly from a family of high rank and great wealth. She is linked with time and guilt; she has been stained with a horrible sin from which she cannot escape. The exact nature of her sin is only hinted at by the author. The insinuations are very subtle and serve to strengthen her link with time; therefore, Miriam's likeness to the painting of Beatrice Cenci, who was involved in the murder of her father and with incest, implies the rebellion against the father and the adulterous act which is, of course, fundamental in the fall of man. Her sin is allegorized in the story by the Model who haunts her and from whom she cannot escape. He is described as a "spectral personification of sin and guilt." On the other hand, Miriam is vivacious and free; like life she cannot be captured and imprisoned. As the story

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

closes, she rides free in a carriage with a high official; she is wearing a blood-red ruby, the rose of life, and moving on. Miriam is ambiguous and complex just as life is ambiguous and complex, but Donatello is irresistibly drawn to her. Frolicking about in the Borghese woods, he simply exclaims, "I love you."

Before Donatello and Miriam can become one, before Donatello can embrace life, he must fall from his innocence through sin. At the literal level this is accomplished through Donatello's murdering of the Model, Miriam's tormentor, or her sin and guilt. This fall from innocence sends Donatello rushing away from Miriam. He retreats to his native Monte Beni to analyze his position. If in his disillusionment he refuses to return to Miriam and life, if he rejects her, he is lost. On the other hand, if he will return and accept her, then she can educate him and Donatello can become a part of the stream of life.

On his return to his native Monte Beni he seems to have acquired a maturity which prompts the old servant to refer to Donatello as "The Count of Monte Beni." But Donatello's Eden is now pictured as anomalous for it is no more a paradise than the wicked city from which he has returned. Now that he has sinned his communication with the "wild things of the forest. . .the fowls of the air" and his "sympathy even with the trees" are gone. The tower looks like an abandoned fortress, the entrance hall like an Etruscan tomb, the frescoes on the walls are peeled and cracked, the urn held by the maiden of the fountain is broken, the holy water stoup in the chapel is filled with dry mud, and the top of the tower is a room

holding a death's head.<sup>16</sup> Having killed the Model who in death becomes a Capuchin monk, Donatello has killed his own innocence.

Milton's words that to cast one's lot with the sinner only means that one is "certain to undergo like doom" are true for Donatello as they were true for Adam. For Donatello, whose great love for Miriam led him to kill the Model, has killed his own innocence. He has fallen, as did Adam, into humanity where life is "darkened by the shadows" of sin and sorrow but with "shadows that bring it into high relief and make it happiness." In fact echoes of Paradise Lost are prevalent throughout the romance.<sup>17</sup> The innocent man closely united with nature is cast into sin by his love for the woman who has rebelled against the father, and both are cast into the human state where only "troubled joy" can be theirs.

It is for Kenyon, the artist and the aloof point of view character, to interpret the literal story. This, in Hawthorne's opinion, is the true role of the artist, for art is a pastoral mode removed from life and subject to limitations not placed on life; art is an imitation of life. The truths of life are seized upon by the artist and combined to capture the flow of actual life in rigid art; therefore Kenyon cannot really understand the passionate living of life which Donatello must accept. Kenyon can only view Donatello's situation as a conceptualized experience such as might be done in marble by the artist. It is Kenyon, then, who brings Miriam and Donatello together after the crime has been committed. It is Kenyon who can stand in the tower of Monte Beni and see the pattern of

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<sup>16</sup>Rudolph von Abele, The Death of the Artist, (The Hague, 1955), p. 93.

<sup>17</sup>Male, op. cit., p. 169.



Donatello's moral growth in the landscape before him:

What made the valley look still wider was the two or three varieties of weather that were visible on its surface, all at the same instant of time. Here lay the quiet sunshine; there fell the great black patches of ominous shadow from the clouds; and behind them, like a giant of league-long stride, came hurrying the thunderstorm, which had already swept midway across the plain. In the rear of the approaching tempest, brightened forth again the sunny splendor, which its progress had darkened with so terrible a frown.

Donatello's decision to accept the responsibility for his crime is evidenced at the literal level in the story by his return to Rome and his reunion with Miriam under the statue of Pope Julius. It is Kenyon's words which seem to express a pontifical blessing upon the pair:<sup>18</sup>

Not for earthly bliss, but for mutual elevation, and encouragement towards a severe and painful life, you take each other's hands. And if, out of toil, sacrifice, prayer, penitence, and earnest effort towards right things, there comes, at length, a sombre and thoughtful happiness, taste it, and thank Heaven! So that you live not for it,--so that it be a wayside flower, springing along a path that leads to higher ends,--it will be Heaven's gracious gift, and a token that it recognizes your union here below.

It is Kenyon, the artist, who sees the union between the two in concept. Remaining true to the artist's role, Kenyon does not become involved with life, but holds himself aloof to view it where he is free to draw intellectual and aesthetic conclusions.<sup>19</sup> Kenyon can warn Donatello that "it was needful for you to pass through that dark valley, but it is infinitely dangerous to linger there too long; there is poison in the atmosphere, when we sit down and brood in it!"

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<sup>18</sup> von Abele, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Male, op. cit., p. 171.

Donatello and Hilda are innocent. But Donatello's innocence is natural, while Hilda's is that of the American Puritan, an institutionalized Christian innocence, an innocence which heartlessly refuses to recognize the existence of evil but dwells apart from life as it actually is. Both Donatello and Hilda become aware of evil--Donatello by participating in it and Hilda by observing the crime; however, only Donatello is transfigured. It is he who loses his innocence and becomes, because of his union with Miriam (life), a prisoner of the human heart; literally he is imprisoned in a dungeon of Rome. Thus while losing his freedom, he wins a place in humanity. Hilda only becomes aware that evil does exist, and with Kenyon, who imitates life, she can leave the "weight of humanity" in Rome and return to America to reassert her aloof innocence rather than to accept humanity as represented by Miriam. Hilda, though married to Kenyon, continues to dwell in her tower of innocence and security above life.

Donatello, the beautiful, unspoiled animal in man, has been led from the sterile sunshine of his pastoral world into the shadowy complexity of life. All is not lost, for now he has become a part of the human race and has entered the world of tragic responsibility. He has been ennobled by his crime within the fabric of the story. It is Miriam who puts this conception into words:

The story of the fall of man. Is it not repeated in our romance of Monte Beni? And may we follow the analogy yet further? Was that very sin, into which Adam precipitated himself and all his race,--was it the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter, and profounder happiness, than our lost birthright gave? Will not this idea account for the permitted existence of sin, as no other theory can?

The allegorical presentation of the fall, as Hawthorne tells it, enhances the catholicity of the romance. "The tendency of Hawthorne's



art is always outward; it shows a habit of endowing the hidden and private with a high degree of publicity, and of revealing not the unique differences in men's souls but the hidden samenesses."<sup>20</sup> This statement by Marius Bewley supports the contention that the emphasis of this novel is on the fundamental truths of the human heart, the "hidden samenesses" of men's souls--even the "hidden samenesses" in Donatello and Natty Bumppo.

Although Donatello is principally allegorical and representative of the Adamic figure, he, nonetheless, bears a remarkable similarity to the unallegorized Natty Bumppo. He is at one with his environment just as Natty Bumppo is in Deerslayer. Curiously enough both are simple, brave, honorable men whose morality is built-in, and whose oneness with nature is responsible for a natural innocence which equates each to the Adamic figure. Cooper's hero is left to wander in the timeless paradise of the Edenic frontier; he is removed from contact with time which would cause his world to become "shadowy and darkened by evil." For even though he murders, or more accurately kills another human, his act is rationalized and justified by a natural law of self preservation. However Donatello's Eden crumbles to nothingness when he falls into time, sin, and guilt by casting his lot with the adultress, with life, with Miriam by murdering without either natural or moral justification. She has disobeyed the father; now he too must be cast out of his Eden to join her in the human state. Donatello's life passes from the innocence of the tower high above Monte Beni to the acceptance of life, symbolized by the dungeon where life has imprisoned him. He must dwell forever in the prison of the human heart.

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<sup>20</sup>Marius Bewley, The Eccentric Design, (New York, 1959), p. 141.



Hawthorne's Adamic hero is at one with the allegory, the fall of man, just as Natty is at one with the "circumstances."

Hawthorne, the artist, speaks through Kenyon, the artist, in the final pages of the story to suggest that Donatello's adventure illustrates the fact that "Adam fell that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his." Hilda and all the world may call Donatello's action a sin, but his fall was an upward step--an entrance into that true reality, which for Hawthorne is measured by time.<sup>21</sup> It is Kenyon who, wandering about Donatello's Monte Beni, looks upon the setting "with somewhat the sensations of an adventurer who should find his way to the site of ancient Eden and behold its loveliness through the transparency of gloom which has been brooding over those haunts of innocence ever since the fall." So it is that Kenyon comments, "Adam saw it in a brighter sunshine, but never knew the shade of pensive beauty which Eden won from his expulsion."

For Hawthorne, then, the Adamic American must come to terms with time before he can become a part of life. Donatello's reality is certainly not, as Hilda wonders, in whether or not his ears are fuzzy; his reality lies in his experience, the catholicity of which this novel testifies. Just as Natty Bumppo becomes "real" and true for the imagination through his experience in the quasi-historical American setting so too does Donatello become true for the imagination through his experience even though his experience occurs in a far different context.

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<sup>21</sup>R.W.B. Lewis, op. cit., p. 126.

## HUCK FINN

While Natty Bumppo was free to move in space and was removed from all but minimal contacts with society and while Donatello was brought back into the stream of life and placed in contact with society, Huck Finn maneuvers back and forth between space and time. The unforgettable hero of Mark Twain's masterpiece, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, emerges as a prototypical American and is just as representative of the American myth as Natty Bumppo is. Portrayed in Huck is the unending conflict in the American soul between materialistic, institutionalized morality and that inner morality which characterizes the American. There is that sense of right and wrong inherent in the American which, if it has a definite source, springs directly from the primeval natural setting of America as opposed to institutional doctrine. Huck's moral struggle and ultimate moral growth take place within the framework of Twain's novel, set before the middle of the nineteenth century. On the one hand are the settlements, or civilization with all its intrinsic evils, and on the other the vast American prairie, a vital symbol of freedom, innocence, and goodness. Through this setting flows the Mississippi--the river which for Huck is a retreat and an escape from contemporary society. Here Huck's character is evoked by the author in such a way that he functions as an Adamic American.

Lionel Trilling's words, "Huck is at odds, on moral and aesthetic grounds, with the only form of Christianity he knows, and his very intense moral life may be said to derive from his love of the river," describe

forcefully Huck's position.<sup>22</sup> In addition something in him rebels against the life of his derelict father; yet he cannot accept the Widow Douglas's way either, for it destroys his freedom. The widow's way demands that he wash, eat regularly, change his clothes, go to school and to Sunday school. Huck, who is unable to accept this "sivilizin'," sets out to find his own way through the contemporary world of the 1840's which surrounds him.

After each brush with society, he returns to the raft and the river where his praise of life on the river is most eloquent. Huck testifies that the river is a refuge, a source of spiritual renewal, at one point in the story in these words:

Two or three days and nights went by; I reckon I might say they swum by, they slid along so quiet and smooth and lovely. Here is the way we put in the time. It was a monstrous big river down there--sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights and laid up and hid daytimes; soon as the night was most gone we stopped navigatin' and tied up--nearly always in the dead water under a towhead; and then cut young cottonwoods and willows and hid the raft with them. Then we set out the lines. Next we slid into the river and had a swim, so as to freshen up and cool off; then we set down on the sandy bottom where the water was about knee deep, and watched the daylight come. Not a sound anywheres--perfectly still--just like the whole world was asleep, only looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line--that was the woods on t'other side, you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn't black anymore, but gray; you could see little dark spots drifting along, ever so far away--trading scows, and such things; and long black streaks--rafts; sometimes you could hear a sweep screaming; or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far; and by-and-by you could see a streak on the water, which you know by the look of the streak, that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way; and you see the mist curl up off the water, and the east reddens up, and the river, and you make out a log-cabin in the edge of the woods, away on the

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<sup>22</sup>Lionel Trilling, "An Introduction to Huck Finn," Richard Lettis, William E. Morris, Robert F. McDonnell, Huck Finn and His Critics, (New York, 1962), p. 229.



bank on t'other side of the river, being a woodyard, likely, and piled by them cheats so you can throw a dog through it anywheres; then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you over there, so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell, on account of the woods and the flowers. . . And next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun, and the song-birds just going it.

Here Huck is at one with the natural setting of the river where he sees "everything smiling in the sun" and the "song-birds just going it" just as Natty Bumppo saw "the holy calm of natur'" and described it with "'tis beautiful! 'tis grand!" The Adamic seeks his own awareness apart from society: Huck's Edenic refuge is the river; Donatello's refuge was his native Monte Beni; Natty's, of course, the wilderness; and Isabel Archer found hers in the darkened chamber of her Italian home in the justly famous "vigil" scene.

As Huck moved down the river, each brush with his contemporary world sent him fleeing to the raft. After the Shepherdson-Grangerford feud which ended in the death of the entire family including Huck's friend Buck, whose face he buried, Huck spends no time in reflection but heads for the raft and Jim and a meal of corn-dodgers, buttermilk, pork and cabbage, and greens:

There ain't nothing in the world so good, when it is cooked right; and while I eat my supper we talked, and had a good time. I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't; you feller mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.

These contacts with the civilized world along the river's edge serve to emphasize in Huck's mind the good life on the raft. Being a prototypical American, he finds his freedom in a oneness with nature as opposed to man and his institutions. Life is "free and easy and comfortable" on the

river and fraught with anxiety and horrors in the settlements.

Huck's experiences along the river certainly make him aware of his world. He is shaken by pity, torn by fear, stunned by man's inhumanity to man; he struggles to find his way to maturity through the pitfalls of society and represents in microcosm the human experience.<sup>23</sup> But regardless of his dismay, like the prototypical American he can find new strength in the natural setting, the river. Like his fictional predecessors, Natty Bumppo and Donatello, he shares a oneness with nature.

Huck, the conceptualized American, is alone, without patronymic, free to move at will, in space and free from responsibility to the past. He can "light out for the territories" and use whatever name or identity suits him best. Huck exercises this American characteristic by running away from old "Pap" Finn, for as a completely debased, immoral character, Pap represented no authority for Huck. Each brush with society seemed to demand that Huck acquire a new name and identity, a painless change for Huck. In the novel Huck uses several aliases among them Sarah Mary Williams, George Peters, Charles William Allbright, Aleck Hopkins, George Jaxon, and finally, he even assumes the name and identity of Tom Sawyer.<sup>24</sup>

True to the Adamic Character, Huck is completely isolated from all authority. He ran away from his father, and he fled from the Widow Douglas's "sivilizin'." His loneliness in the world is made absolute and complete. Huck cannot accept the ways of the community; his father is his worst enemy; even Nature to which he flees offers, along with the joy and calm,

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<sup>23</sup>Warren Beck, "Huck Finn at Phelps Farm," Archives Des Lettres Modernes, (Paris, 1958), June-September, Vol. III, No. 13-15, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Melvin W. Askew. "The Pseudonymic American Hero," Bucknell Review, Vol. X, 1962, p. 227.



hazards of fog and storm. Huck has the American sense of alienation with time; "lonesome" seems to be his favorite adjective.<sup>25</sup> "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead," are his words.

This loneliness which develops into a preoccupation with death is pervasive in American literature. In fact, Huck even plays dead in order to survive when he fakes his own death scene. During one of his drunken stupors, Pap had mistaken Huck for the angel of death. This gave Huck an idea--by pretending to be dead he could escape from his father and society.

At the end of the novel just before his friends at the Phelps farm realized that Huck was alive, there is a rebirth scene which Huck describes in the words, "It was like being born again." But now the old preoccupation with death comes again as he is about to return to the society like that from which he fled:

. . . there was them kind of faint dronings of bug and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody's dead and gone . . . it makes a body wish he was dead, too, and done with it all . . . When I got a little ways I heard the dim hum of a spinning-wheel wailing along up and sinking along down again; and then I knowed for certain I wished I was dead--for that is the loneliest sound in the whole world.

Civilization for Huck is lonesome and dead; while the river with its movement is life and living.

Huck experiences a kind of rite de passage, or initiation into the mature world, as he travels along the Mississippi and visits the settlements on its shores. Here as he moves from one scene to another, a panoramic

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<sup>25</sup>Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York, 1960), p. 581.



view of contemporary society passes before his eyes. The essential realities of the civilization he sees are observed and reported with an "impassive clarity" which gives the novel an aura of truth. Huck reports "unspeakable violence and cruelty, fraudulence and pretense, sordidness and glory, the sublime and ridiculous, pride and humility"--all these in the episodes that epitomize American society.<sup>26</sup> Huck, who found it difficult to accept the Widow Douglas's heaven and hell, sees clearly the falseness of conventional religion when he attends church in the country with the Grangerfords just before the ancient feud between the two families ends in death:

Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching--all about brotherly love, and suchlike tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace and preforeordination, and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet.

The artificiality of the Grangerford society is made clear through Huck's observation of the artificial fruit and the imitative painting and poetry of the Grangerford daughter. Huck escapes from the chivalric world of the Grangerfords with a small sense of guilt and a large sense of relief. "I covered up their faces, and got away as quick as I could. I cried a little when I was covering up Buck's face." After all, Huck had carried the message that started the final action of the feud, but he is escaping

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<sup>26</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 142.

from a world which would make him a gentleman according to its chivalric code, if not a Christian.<sup>27</sup>

Not only does Huck observe the falseness of Christianity as it is practiced in his world, but both the Shepherdson-Grangerford feud and the Colonel Sherburn episode introduce Huck to the brutality of murder. Huck can take part in the hoax perpetrated by the King and the Duke at the revival meeting; he can even assist in the Royal Nonesuch to defraud the populace, but the cruelty of the hoax on the Wilks girls is too much for him. He has not been able to show his disapproval of the other tricks pulled by the King and the Duke with any kind of retaliatory action for, after all, as Huck rationalizes for Jim, they profess to be royalty and that's the way royalty is. This time his disapproval finds expression in action when he steals the money and hides it in the coffin of the dead Peter Wilks. His sentimental feeling for Mary Jane prompts the action; but Huck, if he is to remain true to character, must keep on moving. There is just a touch of pathos as he moves on:

I hain't ever seen her since that time that I see her go out of that door, no, I hain't ever seen her since, but I reckon I've thought of her many and many a million times, and her saying she would pray for me; and if ever I'd 'a' thought it would do any good for me to pray for her, blamed if I wouldn't 'a' done it or bust.

Of course, Huck remains unconvinced of the power of prayer, so he didn't find it necessary to try to pray for Mary Jane.

At the Phelps farm Huck moves again to a matriarchal world; this time dominated by Aunt Sally who would take him in. Tom Sawyer is here

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<sup>27</sup> Fiedler, op. cit., p. 583.

too with all of his romantic ideas about rescuing Jim just like its done in "the books," but Huck has seen so much of the real world that Tom's romantic ideas are no longer exciting. This final episode of the story brings Huck into close contact with an example of the dominant social and cultural group of his world--the Phelps family.<sup>28</sup> These people, like Miss Watson and the Widow Douglas, live by an institutional moral code which allows them to extend warm hospitality at a family gathering while Jim, the "nigger," is kept in chains and confinement. The only window in Jim's cell is boarded shut, but Aunt Sally visits him to be sure that he is "comfortable," and Uncle Silas "comes in to pray with him." After Jim's unsuccessful attempt to escape when Tom asks about him, Aunt Sally can answer with a clear conscience, "Him? . . . the runaway nigger? . . . They've got him back, safe and sound, and he's in the cabin again, on bread and water, and loaded down with chains, till he's claimed or sold!" Thus in the final chapters of the novel Huck is brought into contact with the most admired and respected social group in his world. The morality of this group who live by the law is sharply contrasted to Huck's inner morality and goodness.

The crux of Huck's moral growth is his relationship with Jim, Miss Watson's runaway negro. Jim offers much to Huck but asks nothing in return: his love for Huck is self-sacrificing; there is no threat of social obligation in Jim's company; he offers companionship but without a code of honor; and here is the kind of adventure with a friend such as

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<sup>28</sup>Henry Seidel Canby, Turn West, Turn East, (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 144.



that offered by Tom without all of the romantic, imaginary frills.<sup>29</sup> The struggle which goes on between Huck's mind and his heart is revealing. He knows that to help a Nigger to freedom can only mean sure damnation; besides Jim has vowed to return for his wife and family, so on Huck's conscience will be the freedom of, not one, but several slaves. Finally at Cairo he vows to turn Jim in and clear his conscience, but at the last moment he lies, saying that there is smallpox aboard the raft, and Jim is saved from detection. Huck is cruel to Jim on several occasions; his shame grows as his awareness of Jim as another human being grows. On Jackson Island when the two first join, Huck perpetrates a cruel joke on Jim which ends in a snake bit on Jim's leg which almost causes his death. Huck cannot bring himself to apologize, but he does nurse Jim back to health and begins to feel concern for Jim's safety. Later on the river when the two become separated in a fog and Jim finally, mourning Huck as dead, falls asleep, Huck returns and tantalizes Jim into believing that there was no separation, no fog, only a dream. When Jim realizes that Huck has been teasing him, he is deeply hurt:

Jim looked at the trash, and then looked at me, and back at the trash again. He had got the dream fixed so strong in his head that he couldn't seem to shake it loose and get the facts back into its place again right away. But when he did get the thing straightened around he looked at me steady without ever smiling, and says: "What do dey stan' for? I'se gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what became er me en de raf'. En when I wake up an fine you back again, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck day is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er day fren's en makes 'em ashamed."

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<sup>29</sup>Fiedler, op. cit., p. 585.

Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that.

At this point all racial difference between the two is wiped away; Huck loses forever the sense of his white superiority: "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't sorry for it afterward, neither."

The climactic moment in Huck's moral growth comes when he learns that the King and Duke have turned Jim in for the reward money, forty dollars. His old training prompts him to write the Widow Douglas, to confess his part in Jim's flight for freedom, and thus to clear his conscience. But he is overcome by memories of the experiences he and Jim have shared floating down the river, of Jim's self-sacrificing loyalty and affection, of Jim's love for his wife and children. Huck cannot bring himself to turn Jim in. Although he cannot understand the moral conflict which he is undergoing, Huck acts upon his own inner sense of right and wrong and denies the morality of society and its teachings.<sup>30</sup> Looking at the letter he has written to Miss Watson, he meditates:

It was a close place. I took the letter up and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: "All right, then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up. It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't.

Huck's natural goodness is emphasized again when he and Tom sneak off to town to warn the King and the Duke that they are about to be

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<sup>30</sup> Frank Baldanza, Mark Twain: An Introduction and Interpretation, (New York, 1961), p. 117.

tarred and feathered, for news of the Royal Nonesuch hoax has already reached the townsfolk. Even though the two have done Huck every possible kind of injury, Huck feels pity for them when he arrives too late to warn them and sees them, tarred and feathered, being ridden out of town on a rail:

Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor, pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world.

Jim and Huck, who represent the lowest level of society--the one black and the other white, are, nonetheless, the naturally good characters of the novel.

The King and the Duke, who are false pretenders, the Grangerfords, the Shepherdsons, and Colonel Sherburn, who are false gentility, nonetheless, represent evil in the novel. Tom, Huck, and Jim represent different levels of civilization. Tom's words make clear that he is a product of a pretentious, institutionalized society. Thus he says, "Why, blame it all, we've got to do it. Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books and get things all muddled up?" Tom's cultural order, then, is a pretense according to a set pattern, but Jim's civilization is also pretentious and artificial, for his rules are limited by voodoo and superstition, which give him a kind of "dark knowledge." Huck, however, stands on the middle ground representing "Walt Whitman's dream of the great American who should be simple and free." Huck alone, then, is really free from the rules of society and free from the rules of taboos; he is the "natural



man" guided by the voice within himself.<sup>31</sup>

Huck's story, then, is the story of the conceptualized American; he is free to move in space limited only by his own desires; he is free to change his name or identity as befits the circumstance; he is the possessor of an inner morality which guides him to right and wrong; he is versatile and intelligent with "gifts" at his command to assure him of success (Huck can lie for survival just as skillfully as Natty could use his rifle);<sup>32</sup> he moves between the evil complexities of institutionalized society and the natural freedom and goodness of the frontier and nature. Huck emerges as a character who functions, then, as the Adamic American, for his moral growth results from his constant and repeated contact with society where he finds brutality, hatred, violence, and hypocrisy. True to himself and to his own moral judgment, Huck moves on as the novel ends:

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.

#### ISABEL ARCHER

Henry James saw the conceptualized American as one who must "affront her destiny" in society. Huck Finn could "light out for the territories," but Isabel had to confront the world of society for that confrontation was as inevitable as the American confrontation of time and the frontier. In

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<sup>31</sup>Gladys Carman Bellamy, "Mark Twain As a Literary Artist," Richard Lettis, William E. Morris, Robert F. McDonnell, Huck Finn and His Critics, (New York, 1962), p. 341.

<sup>32</sup>Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huck Finn," Richard Lettis, William E. Morris, Robert F. McDonnell, Huck Finn and His Critics, (New York, 1962), p. 358.

The Portrait of a Lady James saw the conceptualized American as a young lady who was completely innocent, eager to know life, intelligent and versatile but who did not feel the need of moral guidance. The American girl, true to her Adamic traits, knows what is right and what is wrong without the pressure of social custom or conformity to a social code; she knows what she is obliged to do. In the end it is this sense of obligation, this built-in morality which wins the independence for Isabel which she values so highly.

Henry James wrote to his brother William in 1876, "I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America." Isabel Archer's story is an exemplification of this aspiration, for James' American heroine seeks to preserve her American innocence yet to move freely and independently among the complexities of European society. For the naive, unworldly Isabel found an earthly paradise in Europe, but one from which she could not escape without bringing moral destruction upon herself. Her story is the story of the moral decision that is inevitable if she is to become truly alive and significant. Isabel's moral maturation is more than a choice between black and white, or right and wrong; it is her awareness of her obligation to keep the promise made to Pansy, who in her very innocence is a symbol of Isabel's youth. This free choice leads her to a full matured life, filled with pain, indeed, but asserting responsibility. Isabel learned that the significant life cannot be lived by simply viewing life from an aloof vantage point as one views a piece of art and that passionate participation in life and a compassion for others are essential to the

realization of the freedom she values so highly. James brings his American heroine into contact with the evils of the society of the old world where she must accept the consequences and responsibilities of her love for freedom, liberty, and independence or face moral destruction.

The influence of Hawthorne upon James has often been noted; both seemed to see that the Adamic American must lose his innocence and freedom and accept the responsibilities of time before he can become a significant person. Each of these two authors stands apart to observe life; Hawthorne provided an artist in various novels who intellectually and aesthetically judged what he saw--Coverdale in Blithedale Romance and Kenyon in The Marble Faun. In The Portrait of a Lady James provided an observer, though not a neutral one, in Ralph Touchett. In a way Ralph too is an artist, for he attempts to give shape and form to Isabel's love of independence by providing her with a fortune. The tubercular Ralph is precluded from participating in life because of his illness, but he loves his cousin Isabel because she can live the life denied to him. Ralph, also an expatriate American, persuaded his dying father to give half of Ralph's inheritance to Isabel so that she could have her chance for personal independence. Ralph was intrigued with the idea that the money would provide the freedom for Isabel to take full advantage of her curiosity about life, knowing too that she might meet destruction in European society; he, nonetheless, gambled on her integrity and her love of freedom.<sup>33</sup>

The theme of the Fall of Man, a favorite trope in nineteenth century American literature and especially dramatized in The Marble Faun, is again

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<sup>33</sup>Henry Seidel Canby, TURN WEST, TURN EAST, (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 155.



dramatically present in The Portrait of a Lady.<sup>34</sup> The lovely, naturally good American girl, whose key words--freedom, liberty, independence--are at one with her innocence, is expelled from her homeland by her own desire to gain power through herself. Like Milton's Eve, who would become more like the angels by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Isabel too is motivated by her own egoism, for she:

had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only under this provision life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization (she couldn't help knowing her organization was fine), should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. . . She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, or irresistible action. . .

By leaving her homeland and her past, Isabel seeks to know all and to be completely free, but Isabel seeks her independence by an attempt to move freely through the complexities of contemporary European society, as opposed to Natty's or Huck's search for freedom in the American frontier.

Both Natty and Huck could escape from the disillusionment of social contacts by retiring to the natural scene, Natty to the wilderness and Huck to the river. Even Donatello, disillusioned by his contact with life, could retire to his native Monte Beni. Isabel's total disillusionment is fully realized in the self analysis scene when, in the dead of night before a dying fire, she becomes aware of her husband's true character--his immorality and his oneness with social convention. In this masterfully presented scene in which Isabel views her life, she recognizes

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<sup>34</sup>J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), p. 46.

that the very freedom and independence which she cherishes are traits in her which are deeply hated by her husband. Isabel becomes fully aware in this poignant scene that she is obligated to accept the life with Osmond which she has chosen. This same conclusion was reached by Donatello who returned to Miriam and Rome just as Isabel, later in the novel, returned to Rome to face the consequences of her own decision and to honor the promise she had made to Pansy. For Isabel sees a promise just as Natty Bumpo did--an obligation not to be denied.

Isabel's original sin is innocence, but it is an innocence "coordinate with pride" and an innocence which Isabel believes can protect her from evil--evil which to her is remote.<sup>35</sup> Her pride stems from her "meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic." Yet Isabel senses that full knowledge of the world will bring her to face evil for she says to Ralph, ". . . I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself." She does not seem to realize that one cannot see without feeling experience, but Ralph is aware of the fallacy in her thinking. "You want to see, but not to feel."

At another time Isabel expresses a vague awareness that she must experience evil in order to reach her goal, for she asks Ralph to show her the ghost of Gardencourt; his answer indicates that to reach her goal of knowledge she must experience evil:

Ralph shook his head sadly. "I might show it to you, but you'd never see it. The privilege isn't given to every one; its not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it. I saw it long ago," said Ralph.

"I told you just now I'm very fond of knowledge," Isabel answered.

"Yes, of happy knowledge—of pleasant knowledge. But you haven't suffered, and you're not made to suffer, I hope you'll never see the ghost."

But Isabel does see the ghost of Gardencourt on the night that Ralph dies, for she has suffered and suffered greatly in her contact with evil, and she has gained some "miserable knowledge." But the fall from innocence is a felix culpa for Isabel too. That very innocence which had caused her to be ignorant, proud, and free to do as she desired is now changed through experience. Now she can realize the morally right path which she must take, for she becomes aware that "one should neither renounce his ideals nor make life conform to them, that the ultimate achievement in life is the preservation of the integrity of the human character."<sup>36</sup> To preserve her own integrity her only path leads back to Rome to keep her promise to Pansy.

Thus her rejection of Goodwood's offer is right, for as the story closes, if she were to accept his offer as a way out of her difficulty, she would be denying the very thing she has fought for. Goodwood is the confident American businessman who can love her for what she is regardless of her uncle's fortune and who offers her freedom from Osmond's cruelty and evil.

It's too monstrous of you to think of sinking back into that misery, of going to open your mouth to that poisoned air. . . . Why shouldn't we be happy--when it's

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 49.



here before us, when it's so easy? . . . We can do absolutely as we please. . . . Were we born to rot in our misery? . . . The world's all before us--and the world's big. I know something about that.

Goodwood's remarks are reminiscent of the old Isabel, but Isabel has now matured through her contact with evil just as Donatello matured through his murdering of the Model. Thus Isabel's renunciation of escape with Goodwood is her triumph. She does not turn her back on evil as Hilda and Kenyon do when they return to America, but she stays to know the "more pensive beauty of an Eden darkened by sin." Like Hawthorne, James does nothing to minimize the suffering which Isabel must endure; and like Hawthorne, he suggests that the acceptance of this suffering is the only way to become a part of life, and, thus, the only way Isabel can attain her goal--to experience life. "When Isabel partakes of the Tree of Knowledge in the world of experience, she is made forcefully aware of the presence of evil, but in a sense her earlier ambitions are fulfilled."<sup>37</sup>

So Isabel Archer sets forth among the complexities of contemporary European society to taste life; she wants life for life's sake, and like Thoreau, she will accept nothing less than all of it for fear of missing some vital part. James borrowed from Milton words to describe Isabel as she walks forth into a London fog after having seen her relatives off for America, "The world lay all before her--she could do whatever she chose."

Isabel's fall is brought about through the machinations of a dilettante, Gilbert Osmond, and his accomplice Madame Merle. Like Isabel

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

they are also expatriate Americans; they seem to be fulfilling themselves through a superiority to things and an indifference to the opinions of others. Osmond's talk about how "one ought to make one's life a work of art" appeals to Isabel's romance of self. Choosing him as her husband, then, reflects her belief that integrity of self is found by remaining aloof from the melodramatic conflict of good and evil, by viewing life "from high places." In her conception of Osmond, he is a man with social identity; in her words to Goodwood, she is "marrying a nonentity." Isabel explains to Ralph that Osmond is completely unlike Lord Warburton, who represents organized society and responsibilities to it. Chase says, "She rejects Lord Warburton at the behest of her puritan spirituality, which leads her to flee from the mere physical and social realities of life as these would be should she marry him."<sup>38</sup> For her Osmond has:

No property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands nor positions, nor reputation, nor brilliant belonging of any sort. It is the total absence of these things that pleases me. Mr. Osmond is simply a man—he is not a proprietor.

Madame Merle, Osmond's discarded mistress and mother of his daughter, Fanny, connives with Osmond to rob Isabel of her freedom. Literally Osmond needs money to continue his way of life, and Madame Merle is willing to assist in making Isabel his wife to insure her daughter's future.<sup>39</sup> Madame Merle, impeccable in manner and dress, is a figure of the well-informed woman of the world which Isabel strives to become. Isabel cannot see

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<sup>38</sup>Chase, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>39</sup>Canby, op. cit., 155.

that she is morally evil, but for Isabel if she had a

. . . fault, it was. . . that her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much smoothed. She had become too flexible, too supple; she was too finished, too civilized. She was, in a word, too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be.

The great moral wrongs of which Madame Merle is capable--hiding the guilt of Pansy's birth and leading Isabel into a marriage which she knows will be tragic for Isabel--are a result of the society into which she fits so smoothly.<sup>40</sup> Deference to the contemporary social code has made Madame Merle's nature and molded her personality.

Isabel is saved from becoming the "perfect social animal" that she sees in her ideal, Madame Merle, only by her own inner morality. Her fall from innocence through her marriage to Osmond is, indeed, a felix culpa, for she learns that her proud, independent, aloofness from life could only make her as hollow and evil as Madame Merle and Osmond have become. Neither of them is capable now of compassion, but Isabel can still feel compassion; thus she returns to keep the promise that she had made to Pansy before leaving for her cousin's deathbed. This act on Isabel's part symbolizes her moral maturity just as sharply as Huck's decision to "go to Hell" for helping Jim to freedom.

Gilbert Osmond does not actually try to deceive Isabel, for he tells her before their marriage that his life is "convention" and "a matter of forms and calculated attitudes." She does not realize that Osmond's heart is "cut in the manner of a sixteenth century portrait,"

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<sup>40</sup> Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James, (New Haven, Connecticut, 1956), p. 60.



that his aesthetic judgment has become a thing of evil, that his daughter is another ornament to him, or that she herself is something to add to his collection of choice objects.<sup>41</sup> Osmond is a cold and calculating character, maneuvering and using others to his own ends; he lacks love or sympathy for those who are intimate with him.<sup>42</sup> He is perfectly capable of analyzing Isabel's responses to life and of presenting himself as an aesthete so as to gain her favor.

More than anyone else in the story Osmond represents the impersonal values of society, the complexities of tradition and convention which Isabel in her love for freedom, her independence, and her self development seeks to avoid. Yet through her innocence she sees Osmond as the personification of the way of life she desires. When Isabel learns the truth about her husband--that his supposed superiority to normal human desires is a lie--, "She found herself confronted . . . with the conviction that the man whom she had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer, for her money."

Madame Merle too is a slave to propriety and in adopting the world's values she has made herself a hollow pawn of society. The two, then, have sacrificed their American heritage, their right to be free and independent, in order to "participate in the ambiguous glory of Europe."<sup>43</sup> Isabel, who has been striving to maintain her own values, is caught and must find a way to preserve her morality in contemporary European society.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>42</sup>Ward, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>43</sup>Ward, op. cit., p. 55.

Ralph Touchett dies shortly after he sees that Isabel fails to gain the freedom which he has tried to insure for her by seeing that she has money to act independently. On his first visit to Rome after her marriage he finds that:

. . . if she wore a mask, it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted upon it; this was not an expression, Ralph said,--it was a representation, . . . Her light step drew a mass of drapery behind her; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament. The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was a fine lady who was supposed to represent something.

On a second visit some months later just before Ralph and Isabel's American friend Henrietta Stackpole are about to leave, Isabel asks to be left alone without spectators:

"I want to be alone," said Isabel.

"You won't be that so long as you have got so much company at home."

"Ah, they are part of the comedy. You others are spectators."

"Do you call it a comedy, Isabel Archer?" Henrietta inquired severely.

"The tragedy, then, if you like. You are all looking at me; it makes me uncomfortable."

Henrietta then escorted the failing Ralph back to Gardencourt. Despite the changes in Isabel, Ralph wants to hold on to life so that he can witness the end of her drama:

What kept Ralph alive was simply the fact that he had not yet seen enough of his cousin; he was not yet satisfied. There was more to come; he wouldn't make up his mind to lose that. He wished to see what she would make of her husband--or what he would make of her. The earlier visit was only the first act of the drama, and he was determined to sit out the performance.

With Ralph's death Isabel ceases to live in the imagination of freedom. His death reverses the situation between them, for it is Ralph

who becomes in death an image of freedom for Isabel.<sup>44</sup> It is only here that Isabel can admit that Ralph (her freedom) has been everything and that with his death, all is lost. His last words are a ray of hope, a clue to the way by which Isabel can continue to tolerate her hopeless life with Osmond:

You won't lose me—you will keep me. Keep me in your heart; I shall be nearer to you than I have ever been. Dear Isabel, life is better; for in life there is love. Death is good—but there is no love.

Isabel's moral growth is completed as she learns the truth about her imagined superiority. Because of her native intelligence, her innocence, her built-in sense of right and wrong, her freedom of movement she has been tricked by Osmond's pretense of intellectual and cultural refinement.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Osmond's intellectual and cultural refinement is what she thought she wanted from life and that through him she learns what such a way of life actually becomes. She is, as Ralph points out, "ground in the very mill of the conventional." But the growth of her awareness of evil and the acceptance of its consequences lead her to an Eden with a more "pensive beauty." Here is the freedom not from but of responsibility; thus Osmond's home is not so much her prison as it is the place where she can exercise her freedom.<sup>46</sup> The acceptance of her obligation to her promise is the

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<sup>44</sup>Richard Poirer, The Comic Sense of Henry James, (London, 1960), p. 241.

<sup>45</sup>Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, (Dallas, 1958,) p. 69.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 69.



first really free choice Isabel has made in the novel. Mrs. Touchett had decided that she should leave her Albany home to live in England; Ralph had decided that she should have a fortune to insure her independence; Madame Merle and Osmond had decided that she could be Osmond's wife. But it is Isabel's own inner morality which leads her to feel obliged to return to Rome; this choice is free.

In part the relationship between The Portrait of a Lady and Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is effectively made by Mr. Canby:<sup>47</sup>

No two books could seem more dissimilar at first thought than The Portrait of a Lady and Huckleberry Finn, upon which Mark was working or meditating through much the same years when James was writing. Yet Mark, like Henry, might have got his formula from the great Russian Turgenev, who was contemporary with both. All three selected the situations most likely to express the central figure of a story--which is more valuable in the kind of stories all three wrote than a plot. And as backgrounds, both Henry and Mark used the richest: Henry, the soft lawns of an English country house and its pictured corridors, and Rome; Mark, the incalculable Mississippi. More cogently, both for Isabel, the would-be intellectual from the Hudson Valley, and Huck from the new West, the theme words were always, freedom, liberty, and independence. Huck was wiser for himself. The Widow and convention were always on his trail, but he knew how to escape, while, as Ralph said, Isabel was ground in the very walls of the conventions. Most important in the comparison, however, is this: Isabel and Ralph have a warmth of life that makes you care deeply what happens to them in the course of the story, and what happens to Isabel afterward. They, like Huck, are the products of "felt emotion" and they produce it--which is by no means true of most of James' great gallery of characters, who stir the mind more than the heart and are remembered by their brilliant characterizations more often than by their personalities, or even by their names.

Canby fails to note, however, that Huck and Isabel are alike in an even more important way. Both of them represent the configuration of the

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<sup>47</sup>Canby, op. cit., p. 169.

conceptualized American; one works out his destiny and reaches moral maturity as he moves down the Mississippi on a raft; the other "affronts her destiny" and reaches moral maturity as she comes face to face with her moral obligation.

### CONCLUSION

The conceptualized American as an Adamic figure who possesses heroic innocence, unlimited possibilities, and freedom to do with his life what he will, is not simply the result of the works of Cooper, Hawthorne, Twain, and James. The configuration of the American as an Adamic figure is the crystallization of the ideas of most of the intellectuals of the early nineteenth century--the novelists, poets, essayists, critics, historians, and clergymen.<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly there were other factors, but of primary and immediate influence upon the development of the American Adamic figure are the Manichean world view held by the Puritans, the belief in original sin which presupposes the belief in original innocence, and, of course, the frontier. Thus the American novelists seeking to express the American experience understandably saw their protagonists as Adamic figures. It was Emerson who expressed the notion literally when he said, "Here's for the plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world."<sup>49</sup>

Cooper's presentation of Natty Bumppo is a straightforward treatment of the character who seems to spring from nowhere and who, set in

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<sup>48</sup>Lewis, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>Lewis, op. cit., p. 6.

the quasi-historical background of America, does stand alone in the presence of God and Nature. It is in this context, the American wilderness, that Natty Bumppo works out his moral destiny. As the complexity of our society increased, writers like Hawthorne, Twain, and James, as well as others not mentioned, saw the tragedy in the loss of Adamic innocence. Hawthorne, then, expressed the American experience in the mythical mode; his characters represented allegorically the total experience of man. In this framework of allegory Donatello works out his moral destiny. For Mark Twain, who came after the middle of the nineteenth century when the frontier was rapidly disappearing and the complexities of society were rapidly increasing, the American experience was best expressed in the story of a youth searching for a way through the contemporary American scene. Thus Huckleberry Finn works out his moral destiny on a raft on the Mississippi. For Henry James, the struggle of American innocence was best expressed as the innocent American (young, of course,) faced the complexities either of a tradition-bound American society or a European society--a society which in either case represents the collective experience of the past. Here Isabel Archer works out her moral destiny.

The moral position of Adam as the archetypal man was prior to experience; in his very newness lay his innocence.<sup>50</sup> As American history began to unfold before the Adamic figure, as the growth of society brought new experience, the survival of the Adamic figure meant the loss of innocence. Even Natty Bumppo had to kill his fellow man to survive; Donatello had to sin before he could enter the stream of life; Huck Finn had to face

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<sup>50</sup>Lewis, op. cit., p. 5.



all of the evils of contemporary society and make his own moral choice; and Isabel Archer had to abandon the romance of self, to come down from the high places from which she viewed life, and to face her obligation if she were to be morally whole.

With the twentieth century the conceptualized American as Adam has faded away and with it has gone the excitement of unlimited possibility, for America has grown beyond the innocence of youth and real experience has proved to be something quite different from the dream of Adamic innocence. If the conceptualized American of the nineteenth century was only a dream, it was, nonetheless, a valuable dream--valuable to both culture and literature.

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THE CONCEPTUALIZED AMERICAN IN SELECTED NINETEENTH  
CENTURY AMERICAN NOVELS

by

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A. B., Soc. Sc., Pittsburg State College, 1937

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

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Department of English

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In his book, The American Adam, R. W. B. Lewis has defined the character traits of the prototypical American as Adamic and has examined the work of Cooper and Hawthorne in which the American Adam emerges against extremely different backgrounds. The purpose of this report is to discuss four fictional characters as conceptualized Americans in selected nineteenth century American novels, namely: The Deerslayer by James Fenimore Cooper, whose central figure is set against a quasi-historical background; The Marble Faun by Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose protagonist is portrayed in a mythical setting; Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, whose hero is developed in contemporary American society; The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, whose focal character is delineated in contemporary European society.

The main objective of this report is to explore the characteristics that the principal literary agents display through the context of the story in which they appear. The norms of a story within which a given character is manipulated determine in a large measure the quality of the personality that is evoked for the reader. This report, then, in part is concerned with demonstrating four major contexts used by the selected nineteenth century American writers. It becomes clear in the course of the study that in spite of the differentiated contexts presented by different American novelists, the same characteristics of hero and heroine curiously and consistently emerge.

Given the physical fact of the frontier and the Manichean world view perpetuated by Puritanism, American novelists of the nineteenth century seeking to express the American experience understandably saw their protagonists as Adamic figures. The greatest Puritan trope was the belief in original sin, and the Fall and Redemption of man became the principal trope

by which the American was identified. The struggle between good and evil appealed to the imagination of the American; thus the prototypical form of expression became melodrama.

Cooper's presentation of Natty Bumppo is a straight forward treatment of the character who seems to spring from nowhere and who, set in the quasi-historical background of America, does stand alone in the presence of God and Nature. This report concludes that, as the complexities of our society increased, writers like Hawthorne, Twain, and James, as well as others, saw the tragedy in the loss of Adamic innocence. As American history began to unfold before the Adamic figure, as the growth of society brought new experience, the survival of the Adamic figure meant the loss of innocence. But these authors of the nineteenth century saw the loss of innocence as a felix culpa--a loss which would lead man to an Eden of more "pensive beauty." With the twentieth century the conceptualized American as Adam has disappeared and with it has gone the excitement of unlimited possibility, for America has grown beyond the innocence of youth. If the conceptualized American of the nineteenth century was only a dream, it was, nonetheless, a valuable dream--valuable to both culture and literature.