THE FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVE

A STUDY OF RECENT NOVELISTIC NONFICTION

THESIS

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KEVIN JOHN CARLEAN

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ABSTRACT

Since Truman Capote's In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences was published in 1965, there have been many attempts to define and explain the phenomenon of the "non-fiction novel" as a unified narrative genre. Some of these attempts have been highly theoretical and scholarly, but most have been rather loose definitions referring to an extremely wide range of diverse factual narratives. Over the years, so many different works have been called "non-fiction novels" that it now seems as if the notion of such a unified genre is questionable. Surely it is not generically useful to say that such functionally distinct works as Oscar Lewis's La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty (1967) and Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream (1971) belong in the same narrative category.

The purpose of this study is to show that many of the works routinely referred to as "non-fiction novels" perform fundamentally different narrative functions and do not belong together in a unified genre. Roman Jakobson's model of communication and his notion of the "dominant function" are used to identify three functional categories into which the narratives discussed in the study logically fall: first, there are predominantly sociological works in which the referential function is the most important element of the communication; second, there are predominantly journalistic works in which the opinions of the writer or emotive function constitute the central narrative concern; and thirdly, we have works performing a dominant

novelistic or aesthetic function in the sense that the secondary meanings and themes implied are the most important elements communicated.

The thesis follows the following structure. In the introductory chapter, a critique of some of the major generic theories of the "non-fiction novel" as unified genre is offered. The purpose here is not to caricature what are sometimes extremely sophisticated studies. (Indeed, in my own analysis of texts, I am often indebted to the critical insights of the scholars whose theories I question in the introduction.) My purpose is merely to show that the corpus of works each writer refers to can be divided more logically between different dominant narrative functions. The introduction ends with a more detailed explanation of the adaptation of Jakobson's notion of "the dominant" and how it relates to the functional categories identified.

Chapter 2 offers analyses of a group of documentary narratives that perform a dominant sociological function but have often been referred to as "non-fiction novels." The chapter starts with an analysis of James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941), a text widely regarded as the first real American example of the "genre." This is followed by an examination of the anthropological works of Oscar Lewis: Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (1959), The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family (1964), Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and his Family (1964) and La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty. I conclude the chapter with an

analysis of the recent sociological works of Studs Terkel: Division Street: America (1968), Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression (1970) and Working: People talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do (1974).

In Chapter 3, the notion of subjective participation journalism is explained. This is followed by an analysis of three of the most famous and creative of the works that fall into this functional category: Hunter S. Thompson's Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of an Outlaw Motorcycle Gang (1966), Michael Herr's Vietnam classic, Dispatches (1977), and Norman Mailer's account of a famous protest march, The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History (1968).

Chapter 4 offers a discussion of three works that perform a dominant novelistic function in the realistic tradition of Dostoevski's Crime and Punishment. All three are based on actual murder cases, but the facts of the stories are subordinated to the novelistic themes the author wishes to abstract. They are: Meyer Levin's Compulsion (1957), Mailer's The Executioner's Song (1979) and Capote's In Cold Blood.

From this outline, it may appear as if the study is loaded in favour of the sociological works discussed in Chapter 2. This is intentional because, although many critics have referred to them as "non-fiction novels," very little systematic and detailed analysis of these works as a corpus has been forthcoming. This long chapter is an attempt to redress the balance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CRITICAL BACKGROUND

It is now more than twenty years since Truman Capote, on the publication of In Cold Blood, shocked the literary world with his claim to having invented a new narrative genre which he called the "non-fiction novel." Since then, writers and critics alike have remained deeply divided in their opinions and definitions of this concept. Some have scornfully rejected the idea as an unethical bastardisation of unrelated forms - fiction and journalism -[1] while others have hailed it as the saviour of realistic narrative art at a time when novelists seemed to have deserted realism for more abstract concerns as the subject of their work.[2]

The strongest and most frequent criticism has been that the use of novelistic techniques in nonfictional prose is not a new development at all. A predictable response to Capote's somewhat arrogant claim has been the zeal with which critics have cited hundreds of examples of novelistic nonfiction ranging historically from Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) to John Hersey's Hiroshima (1946).[3] This study is not concerned with the newness of novelistic nonfiction; such historical arguments need to be based on strict generic definitions if they are to be of any theoretical use, and capable efforts in this regard have already been made.[4] However, what cannot be denied as a recent literary development is the sudden proliferation of this kind of writing in the second half of this century and especially in America during the sixties and seventies.

One of the notable features of the critical commentary that has accompanied this development has been the high degree of generality with which these works have been explained and defined. It is understandable for this to have been the case, since any sudden literary development is likely to result in explanations and definitions of a totalising nature. Nevertheless, the sheer diversity of topic, method, context and stated purpose that has characterised modern novelistic nonfiction seems to indicate that there are a number of very different functions being performed for different reasons in the wide range of texts that have popularly been classified together. In this sense, attempts to make sense of modern novelistic nonfiction as a single unified genre have tended to be reductionist and simplistic. Readers read different kinds of literature with different expectations - a fact that much of the critical commentary on these works has failed to come to terms with - and the very hybrid nature of works that combine documentary accuracy with techniques usually associated with fiction would seem to indicate that these functions can easily vary from text to text.

Theoretical statements on modern novelistic nonfiction as a unified genre have broadly speaking been of two different sorts. Firstly, there have been formal definitions concentrating on the novelistic techniques used in this writing; and secondly, there have been sociological explanations based on the circumstances that supposedly gave rise to the sudden proliferation of this kind of writing. What follows is a critical analysis of some of the major studies from each of these schools.

1.1 Some Formal Theories of Modern Novelistic Nonfiction

The method behind the formalistic approach to classification is relatively simple. It involves defining the traditional novel in terms of a number of typical features, and then identifying these features in nonfictional works as evidence of the formal analogy. The most famous typology of this kind is Tom Wolfe's identification of scene by scene construction, realistic dialogue, the novelistic use of narrative situation or point of view and the recording of "status life details" in the works he calls "new journalism."[5] Wolfe sees these devices as the basic techniques of realism that have been deserted by modern novelists in their search for more abstract modes of expression.

John Hollowell, in Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel, has extended Wolfe's typology to include the modernist technique of interior monologue and the technique of "composite characterisation."[6] He then offers an analysis of Capote's In Cold Blood, Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night, Miami and the Siege of Chicago (1968) and Of a Fire on the Moon (1971), and Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test (1968) in terms of these six features. The basic assumption of his study is that these six devices enable the nonfiction writer to respond to the "cataclysmic tenor" of American life that has been avoided by modern novelists and at the same time to treat this reality with the mythic and thematic resonances which, he claims, are the proper function of fiction.

The striking differences between the works Hollowell

discusses shows that the definition of a genre purely in terms of formal features can be problematic. As Barbara Foley succinctly points out:

> The problem with characterising a literary type by means of an additive set of traits is that the definition which emerges is ultimately quantitative rather than qualitative and evades the question of generic identity.[7]

Hollowell's model fails to take account of the fact that the hybrid nature of novelistic nonfiction predictably results in a high degree of relativity with regard to formal characteristics. In this sense, Capote's sophisticated organisation of dramatic scenes and his cinematic organisation of plot make his book more "novelistic" in terms of this formal quality than those of the other two writers. Similarly, his use of dialogue for thematic effect and the thoroughly novelistic figural points of view are far more sophisticated than is the case with Mailer and Wolfe. Wolfe's use of the stream of consciousness technique in parts of The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test makes this work more novelistic than Mailer's in terms of narrative situation, while Mailer's use of himself as the persona of his three books enables him to offer a much more sophisticated composite characterisation than is found in Wolfe's work.

Thus it seems as if each of the writers Hollowell studies makes use of the devices he identifies in different degrees and for different purposes. The basic functional differences between the works are such that it is not generically helpful to classify them together under one label, be it "new journalism," the "non-fiction novel," or any other.

A more sophisticated formalist definition of what in this case is called the "novelistic documentary" is put forward by Nick Visser in his study of the same name. Visser sees the "novelistic documentary" as a development of the dynamic synthesis of narrative forms that Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg saw taking place in the development of the modern novel after Cervantes.[8] Seeing the novel as a synthesising of the various narrative forms which developed after the decline of the classical epic is regarded as a useful way of coming to terms with problematic structures like the biography, autobiography, chronicle and romance in novel form and also - by extension - with the "novelistic documentary":

> The novelistic documentary represents a new and closer assimilation of factual narrative into the novel synthesis, indicating that the synthesising process is continuing at the present time.[9]

Unlike Hollowell's rather loose application of Wolfe's "realistic techniques" to the works he discusses, Visser's study is concerned with coming to terms with the hybrid nature or "dual work premise" of the "novelistic documentary."[10] On the one hand, the works he identifies as "novelistic documentaries" adhere strictly to the novelistic structures identified in his formal definition while, on the other hand, they strongly assert a premise of factuality within their discursive language. In this sense, John Hersey's Hiroshima is not considered a "novelistic documentary" because none of the characters are endowed with interiority, while Ernest Hemingway's The Green Hills of Africa (1935) fails to qualify because the use of extensive dialogue

without indication of formal recording does not reinforce the non-fiction aspects of the work.[11]

While Visser's rigorous definition of the "novelistic documentary" does fulfill the important function of coming to terms with the essential generic characteristic of the form (its dual work premise), his formal model does not take account of the basic functional differences between the works in his corpus. Once again, formalistically speaking, these differences involve the problem of extent. Visser defines the "novelistic documentary" as a written, developmental, factual prose narrative which 1) projects a real and verifiable world wherein characters - some or all of whom are endowed with interiority - act in minutely discriminated time and space, and 2) places one or more of its structural elements in double or multiple perspective.[12] It is clear from Visser's own analysis of his corpus works that some of them are more novelistic than others in terms of this definition. All of them are written, developmental, factually verifiable prose narratives with characters, some of whom reflect interiority, operating in minutely discriminated time and space. But with regard to the extent of double or multiple perspective, the works differ greatly.

These differences emerge most clearly in Visser's analysis of the structural elements of the texts. Regarding narrative phases and arcs of tension, the meaning generated by chapter divisions, In Cold Blood and The Armies of the Night are more novelistic than Anatoli Kuznetzov's Babi Yar (1966) and Oscar Lewis's The Children of Sanchez. Similarly, in the development of their characters or figures, In Cold Blood, Armies and Sanchez are

more novelistic than Babi Yar. With respect to time treatment and tense, In Cold Blood and Armies remain far more sophisticated than Sanchez and Babi Yar, and Sanchez is, once again, less novelistic than the other three works in its treatment of the significance of place. Finally, with regard to unifying ideas or themes, In Cold Blood and Armies are seen to be much more coherently developed than Babi Yar and Sanchez.

From this brief description of the way in which structural elements operate in the works, it seems clear that In Cold Blood is the most consistently novelistic of the four, while The Children of Sanchez is the least. So while Visser's study is extremely valuable in narrowing down the field of inquiry through his appreciation of the dual work premises of the works, it does not come to terms with the problem of novelistic extent and the possibility that the dominant communicative functions performed by the works could differ to such an extent that they cannot logically fall into the same unified genre.

Two further formalistic typologies attempting to define a unified genre of modern novelistic nonfiction are Barbara Lounsberry's model of "Reception, Reflection, Recall and Medias Res,"[13] and Gerald Lareau's conception of a "narrative continuum" stretching from an objectivist-factual pole to a subjectivist-fictional pole.[14] The problem with Lounsberry's theory is that it suits some works (notably James Agee's Let us Now Praise Famous Men) more than others, begging once again the question of functional differences. Lareau's theory, on the other hand, emphasises the different relationships of fact to form in the

works he discusses, but fails to see these differences as indications of different communicative functions.

1.2 Some Sociological Theories of Modern Novelistic Nonfiction

The sociological explanations of the proliferation of novelistic nonfictional narratives during the sixties and seventies are usually even more problematic than the formalistic methods of classification. The generalisations behind this approach are based on the view put forward by Lionel Trilling in 1948 that the realistic novel, which was a product of nineteenth century bourgeois consciousness, had declined during the twentieth century because of the fragmentation of bourgeois society and because novelists had now turned to introspective rather than social themes as the subject of their fiction.[15] What has increasingly been seen as the inability of novelists to come to terms with the unfathomable unreality of a modern technocratic society is typified in this much quoted statement by novelist Philip Roth:

> The American Writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.[16]

Roth's statement has been taken to reflect a despair among novelists that modern social reality had somehow outgrown them. As a result of this explosion of an uncapturable technological

reality, novelists are said to have turned their backs on the physical world and concentrated instead on post-modernist themes like fabulation and metafiction.[17] This development has been lamented by the many critics of the novel who regard realism as the essential characteristic of the form. Marcus Klein, for example, sees post-modernism as an apocalyptic development marking the death of the traditional novel as a popular form:

> In the years since the end of World War II, the novel in America has been nihilistic, existential, apocalyptic, psychological; it has withdrawn from social considerations; it has been both radical and conservative. In form it has been contrived with a cunningness of technique virtually decadent, it has been purely self reflexive and responsive to its own development. And the novel has died.[18]

The post-modernist retreat from reality has been seen by the exponents of the new nonfiction to have left a literary gap which their work aspired to fill. With typical bravado, Tom Wolfe claims that the "new journalists" dethroned the novel as the number one genre in the sixties, and took over the techniques of realism for themselves.[19] While the arrogance of this claim evoked immediate and indignant denials from all quarters, there is some truth in the observation that many serious and ambitious novelists did turn away from realistic fiction in the sixties or did, in fact, start writing nonfiction themselves.[20] What is questionable, however, is the extent to which this fact can be used as a basis for classifying all of the novelistic nonfiction of the period in terms of a dominant social impulse.

Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, the most persuasive exponent of the sociological explanation of the sudden popularity of novelistic

nonfiction, does not see these works simply taking over where the realistic novel left off. Instead, he sees the "postwar American non-fiction novel" as part of the post-modernist response to what he describes as an ontologically altered American reality. So the function of the "nonfiction novel" as an example of what he terms "transfiction" was not to make sense of contemporary reality in the way the realistic novel attempted to; rather, it was to shun the inauthentic totalising nature of the traditional bourgeois novel and to draw attention to the ambivalence and "fictuality" of contemporary reality simply by describing it for what it was.[21]

In this sense, the "nonfiction novel" was one of two different opportunities for the modern writer to offer an authentic, nontotalising response to absurd modern reality. The other opportunity was the fictional approach of the writers of the various forms of transfiction - the "metafiction", "surfiction" and "science fiction":

> Lost in the funhouse of interpretations of the human situation, the fictionist is now trying to trace his way back out of the labyrinth of distorting commentaries. He is doing this either by an extravagent mimicking of interpretations of reality through a commentary on the comments [transfiction], or by circumventing the interpretations altogether and reaching back to the testable actualities [the nonfiction novel]. In either case, his narrative is nontotalising.[22]

The nontotalising impulse of transfiction and the nonfiction novel was not something unique to the apocalyptic consciousness of the sixties and seventies. Cultural crises throughout history had led to similar literary responses. Zavarzadeh refers to Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year as such a response from the

seventeenth century, and to George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia (1938), Studs Terkel's Hard Times and John Hersey's Hiroshima as examples from earlier this century. What distinguished these responses from the modern crisis was that these works were all based on single isolated events - a plague, a civil war, a depression or an atomic explosion - while in the contemporary situation, the cultural crisis of the surreal technotronic society had become pervasive.

Zavarzadeh sees this pervasive influence in terms of Roman Jakobson's concept of the "dominant" ("dominanta"), the focussing component which "rules, determines and transforms" the remaining components of a given literary system.[23] On the broader level of genre, Zavarzadeh argues, the sociological process of shifting dominant will bring about a state of affairs in which "genres which were originally secondary paths, subsidiary variants, now come to the fore, whereas canonical genres are pushed towards the rear."[24] It was, according to Zavarzadeh, through this change in the sociological dominant that the realistic bourgeois novel had declined as the leading form of narrative expression and been replaced by transfiction and the nonfiction novel.

The problem with Zavarzadeh's theory is not the sociological assumption behind it, but the dogmatism with which he imposes this assumption on individual texts. There is little doubt that certain modern writers have reacted to contemporary reality in the way Zavarzadeh claims, and it is likely that some writers of nonfiction have followed the nontotalising impulses he describes. But to analyse texts purely on the assumption that they are

responses to a pervasive social crisis is to subscribe to sociological aphorism at its most simplistic and to greatly impoverish the textual analysis.[25]

Zavarzadeh's sociological generalisation is based on a misinterpretation of Jakobson's concept of the dominant. In Jakobson's article, "dominant" is not a synonym for "only" or "exclusive"; it refers to a subtle process whereby certain forms of expression make headway against others, and not to the total displacement of forms implied by Zavarzadeh. In other words, the dominant is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive concept. It is based on the objective analysis of groups of works and the critical reception of works over time. It is not meant, in the way Zavarzadeh uses it, as a sociological yardstick against which all works should be defined and evaluated. (The concept of the dominant will be returned to later when the different functions of novelistic nonfictional narratives are defined more clearly.)

There is a link between Jakobson's view of the generic dominant and Claudio Guillen's idea of literary "currents" flowing through historical periods.[26] By "current" Guillen means a "critical concept that is applicable to a section of historical time and to its dominant structures and values." A section of historical time "should not be monistically understood as an undivided entity, a bloc, a unit, but as a plural number or cluster of temporal processes, currents, durations, rhythms or sequences."[27] In this sense, the socially dynamic period of the American sixties and seventies should be seen as having a number of different currents including the dominant one flowing through it, and the nonfictional writing of the period should be

explained, as should the fiction, in terms of this dynamic of currents.

The criticism levelled here against Zavarzadeh's theory is a critique of the high level of sociological generality his study employs rather than a critique of the sociological approach itself. What is required is an approach that recognises the multiplicity of social structures and values having a bearing on American society during this period, an approach that recognises that different kinds of hybrid texts can perform different central communicative functions.[28]

Zavarzadeh's insistence on the sociological approach to classification leads to some serious practical difficulties. In his efforts to explain the works he defines as nonfiction novels in terms of his view of the dominant nontotalising impulse in contemporary American literature, he offers analyses that are highly questionable. As Ronald Weber points out, Zavarzadeh is seriously mistaken in assuming that all of these works are anti-interpretive and that any act of selection or emphasis of factual detail is strictly medium imposed and without any totalising thematic significance.[29] To reduce the writers of such subtle narratives as In Cold Blood and The Armies of the Night to the status of mere reflectors or editors of the "fictual" nature of contemporary events is little less than an insult. The very titles of these works, as Barbara Foley points out, show that Capote and Mailer are concerned with serious moral issues.[30] These moral issues are developed purposefully and consistently throughout both works for pragmatic communicative effect.

Although their central communicative functions differ - Mailer's is journalistic and Capote's novelistic - there is no doubt that the material is structured with particular thematic statements in mind.

Zavarzadeh's insistence on the nontotalising reflection of reality as the central linking theme of "non-fiction novels" gives rise to a similar problem in his analysis of Oscar Lewis's La Vida. His definition of the book as a modern "parable of horror" from the lips of real people, completely without the mediation of the official author,[31] is totally at odds with Lewis's own prefatory remarks in which he offers the stories of the Rios family as models of the "culture of poverty", the central anthropological concern of the book. Contrary to Zavarzadeh's assumption that Lewis has simply reproduced in print the objective voices from a tape in order to reflect the hideous unreality of slum life, La Vida is probably the most carefully edited of all Lewis's works. In La Vida, he brings together the variety of ordering techniques he had experimented with in Pedro Martinez, Five Families and The Children of Sanchez in order to put forward a consistent and compelling body of documentary evidence for his anthropological thesis.

La Vida is divided into five parts, each devoted to one of the five women who are the major subjects of the study. Each part starts with an account of a carefully monitored day in the life of the character concerned and then goes on to give autobiographical accounts by the characters that are interspersed with complementary, and often contradictory, accounts by the characters (mostly husbands) who have an effect on their lives. Even a

cursory glance at the table of contents at the beginning of the book suggests many of the seventy-five odd traits of the culture of poverty that Lewis wishes to emphasise: fatalism, superstition, family loyalties, prostitution, bigamy, emotional longing, jealousy, political naivety, resignation and many other factors that make for a self-perpetuating slum way of life from which the characters are unable to escape. The central aim of Lewis's work is the democratisation of anthropological studies. By making his book as readable as fiction, he wishes to open up to his middle class readers an area of human experience they had always been deprived of. But despite this popularisation of the discipline, the work remains serious anthropology and is certainly not the simple unmediated reflection of fragmented reality Zavarzadeh takes it for.

In summary, Zavarzadeh's sociological explanation of the "nonfiction novel" is problematic on two basic levels. Firstly, many of the works he refers to do not adhere to his theory of the nontotalising impulse of post-modernist literature. Secondly, there are basic functional differences between the works he includes. In his effort to make sense of the wide range of works he discusses in terms of a sociological approach to genre, he fails to consider the possibility that readers approach different works for different communicative reasons. Anthropological texts like Oscar Lewis's La Vida are functionally distinct from event centered journalistic works like Mailer's The Armies of the Night which perform, in turn, a central function very different to more thematically novelistic works like Capote's In Cold Blood.

John Hellmann's Fables of Fact is another study that sees modern novelistic nonfiction as "a response to the dislocations of contemporary American reality."[32] But Hellmann disagrees with Zavarzadeh's typology of the "non-fiction novel" as a bi-referential mode which, unlike both fiction and conventional nonfiction, is "simultaneously self-referential and out-referential" making for a narrative form "through which the consciousness, engulfed in fabulous reality and overwhelmed by the naked actuality, articulates its experience of an extreme situation."[33]

Taking Northrop Frye's distinction between literary and assertive writing as his model, Hellmann argues that all writing is bi-referential in that it refers "both outside the text to a subject and inside to other elements within the text."[34] According to Frye, the difference between literary verbal structures and assertive verbal structures is that the final direction of all literary texts is inward, while assertive texts ultimately refer outward to their subject.[35] Hellmann sees what he calls the "new journalism" as ultimately an in-referential genre and says that the differences between narrative genres like the realistic novel, romance, fabulation, the historical novel and "new journalism" are based on "the different directions outside the text to which the text points (while ultimately pointing within to the fictional world the text creates through its aesthetic form)."[36]

While Frye's notion of "the final direction of meaning" is very useful in distinguishing between literary and non literary types and between various modes of literary expression, Hellmann

is mistaken in assuming that all the works he calls "new journalism" have a final inward direction and can consequently be read as fiction. Like Zavarzadeh's theory, Hellmann's generalisation fails to take account of the different communicative functions of the different works he discusses. Part of the problem arises from his rather loose and arbitrary application of the term "new journalism." He defines the concept in terms of a journalistic author-reader contract - "an assertion by the author and acceptance by the reader of the particular relation of the text to the external world, the direction in which it points"[37] - but never defines precisely what he means by "journalistic." The term "journalism" is usually taken to refer to a particular kind of expression that is more specific than a simple contract of factuality between author and reader. There are many kinds of factual discourse that imply such a contract, but not all of them perform a journalistic function.

The term "journalism," as it will be used in this study, refers to discourse that centers on contemporary events and issues with immediacy of expression as its dominant purpose. Truman Capote's In Cold Blood, for example, does assert a contract of factuality between writer and reader, but it is not "journalistic" in this narrower sense of the term. Since they took place several years earlier, the events Capote writes about had long lost their journalistic interest by the time the book was published. So the reader of In Cold Blood would respond very differently to Mailer's contemporary reader of The Armies of the Night, a work that does have an immediate and, arguably, a dominant journalistic interest.

It is not Hellmann's adoption of Frye's concept of the final direction of reference that is under question here, but the ways in which he imposes his interpretation of the final fictional direction on individual texts. After refuting the formalistic approach to genre, Hellmann goes on to define the final fictional direction of the works he discusses in what are essentially formalistic terms, "the whole range of concerns in our criticism of fiction": plot, character, narrative situation, symbolism, devices, styles, themes, etc.[38] The simple identification of these concerns in these works is not sufficient reason for calling them ultimately fictional in direction. Indeed, Hellmann's own distinction between In Cold Blood and The Armies of the Night emphasises the novelistic aspects of Capote's book and the journalistic aspects of Mailer's:

> In In Cold Blood, Capote sees facts as symbols and then portrays them as such; in The Armies of the Night, Mailer sees a fact, considers any number of symbolic values, and then portrays that seeing and consideration. Capote portrays life as significant; Mailer portrays his search for a significance in it. Capote presents actual objects which embody meaning; Mailer presents his attempt to elicit meaning from actual objects or to project meaning upon them.[39]

The basic difference between the two works to emerge from this comparison is one of different means and ends. Capote's emphasis on the meaning of facts operates as a means to what is ultimately a novelistic end, while Mailer's emphasis on a novelistic search for meaning in facts operates as a means to what is ultimately a journalistic end. Capote uses facts to write a novel; Mailer uses the novel form to capture the truth about facts.

Hellmann's erroneous emphasis on the final inward direction of The Armies of the Night is based on a misunderstanding of what Mailer means by his sub-title, "History as the Novel/The Novel as History." Simply because one of the main issues in the book is a self reflexive concern with the "problematic relationship between human experience and actual event,"[40] this does not mean that the work functions predominantly as a novel. On the contrary, the two-part structure of the book, the first concentrating on the epistemological problems of the event and the second on an objective summary of various secondary sources, represents an effort by Mailer to capture the essence of the event through a composition of two approaches: novelistic and historical. However subtle the novelistic devices may be, the central function of the work remains journalistic and the ultimate direction of meaning outward to the external event.

Michael Herr's Dispatches is another predominantly journalistic work upon which Hellmann attempts to impose his theory of the new fiction. Once again, the central novelistic characteristic behind his argument is the book's self-reflexive concern which he fails to recognize as a legitimate journalistic issue.[41] Hellmann correctly points out that Dispatches is as much a book about writing about war as it is a book about war, but he is mistaken in assuming that this automatically makes it a work of fiction. As is the case with Mailer, Herr's primary concern is with capturing the essence of an event that conventional journalism and official propaganda had mystified. In this sense, the self-reflexive style is a means to an end rather than a

novelistic end in itself. In fact, this is probably even more true of Dispatches than it is of The Armies of the Night. In Dispatches, the war, the central governing event, is pervasive. In contrast with The Armies of the Night, there are absolutely no autobiographical references to the author's past life or to the situation in which the book was written. There is no sense of a temporal vantage point from which the narrator tells his story. As Hellmann points out, "rather than displaying the author-hero foregrounded against an historical event, as in The Armies of the Night ..., we have in Dispatches a form and style embodying a virtual complete merger of authorial consciousness with experience."[42] But this merger does not reflect back to the novelistic construction of the work; it ultimately refers back to the event itself. So Herr is not saying, "look at all the trouble I had trying to write this book"; he is saying, "I was there and this is the best way I have of telling you what it was really like."

This may not be a conventional journalistic practice, but that does not mean that the work does not function as journalism. In fact, one of the dominant concerns running through the book is a dissatisfaction with the way conventional journalism had treated the event. After pointing out a number of incidents in which conventional news reports had actually distorted the facts for doctrinaire reasons, Herr says:

> Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it, all it could do was take the most profound event of the American decade and turn it into a communications pudding, taking its most obvious, undeniable history and making it into a secret history.[43]

Herr's dominant concern in Dispatches is to find an alternative journalistic means of capturing the essence of the event. So the self-reflexive concern running through the book makes it a work of "metajournalism" rather than metafiction. The difference is that metajournalism is concerned with the epistemological problems involved in capturing the truth about an extremely complex event. Metafiction, on the other hand, is usually concerned with problems of creative expression - the inability of human language to communicate meaningfully.

In this survey of some of the major critical and theoretical responses to modern novelistic nonfiction, I have argued that both the formalistic and sociological approaches to classification tend to over-generalise and fail to take account of the different communicative functions performed by different works. A narrative is, above all else, an act of communication - part of a communicative process involving a reader as well as an author and a text. The role played by the reader in the communicative process has been sadly neglected by most critics of recent American nonfiction. Readers read texts for a number of different communicative reasons and, especially with regard to hybrid works like novelistic nonfictional narratives, it is the dominant function of a text that constitutes the logical basis for its classification.

This does not mean that the formal construction of the text and the social context to which the writer responds should be ignored in defining reader response. Both factors inter-relate in a complex of ways to establish the basic communicative function

that texts can most logically be seen to perform. So a decision as to the dominant communicative function of a particular text should be based solidly on textual evidence as well as whatever extratextual evidence of the author's response may be available (forewords, introductions, statements of intent, etc.) In this sense, the total relativity of reader response proposed by the more radical theorists of reception like Stanley Fish is also not generically useful.[44] While it is true that literary texts often offer the possibility of different interpretations, it is possible to identify a basic communicative function on the strength of empirical textual and extratextual observation. The following section of this introduction offers a method of classifying narratives that does recognise the different communicative functions they can perform. This method is based on the notion of a "dominant" communicative function.

1.3 Identifying the Functions of narrative

Wolfgang Iser of the influential Constance school of Reception Aesthetics recognises that the reader's "concretisation" of the text is guided by certain "strategies" in the text and that the reader must be familiar with certain literary techniques and conventions in order to comprehend the basic codes of the text.[45] It is beyond the bounds of this study to go into the more intricate theoretical details of reception theory or the problems that Iser's approach entails.[46] Suffice it to say that most of these problems are related to hermeneutics, the problematic area of individual interpretations of texts, rather

than to the more basic idea of the "dominant" communicative function. The concern here is more with what the text does than with what it means, and Iser's idea of narrative strategies as "means of communication" is an extremely useful one for the identification of this function.

Nevertheless, one of the finer points of Iser's theory needs to be adapted if it is to be applicable to novelistic nonfiction. Iser correctly distinguishes between "literary and pragmatic language in terms of its functional application"; but he makes the mistake of equating "literary" with "fictional." Pragmatic language constitutes speech acts that take on their meaning through specific contexts, conventions and procedures, while with fictional language, the reader must "discover for himself the code underlying the text."[47] In this respect, Iser argues, "the fictional utterance seems to be made without any reference to any real situation, whereas the speech act presupposes a situation whose precise definition is essential to the success of that act."[48] Clearly this emphasis on "literary" as "fictional" precludes hybrid works combining the techniques of fiction with empirical factuality - works that depend for their functional identity on a measuring of the extent of literary over pragmatic effect. So for the purposes of identifying the different communicative functions being performed by different works of modern nonfiction, it is necessary to broaden Iser's concept of literary language to include the possibility of nonfiction narratives with a predominantly literary function. Capote's In Cold Blood, for example, operates from a real, verifiable context,

but also has a predominantly literary function in the extent to which it uses certain narrative strategies for what is essentially a novelistic end.

The fact that textual interpretations are subject to change over a period of time is another important idea to emerge from reception theory. The possibilities of an empirical study of reception over time are explained by Hans Robert Jauss, another member of the Constance school, who sees the idea of a "literary history of readers" as an essential part of literary history in general.[49] The reconstruction of what Jauss calls the "horizon of expectations" established by the reader's historical reality is central to the modification of the interpretation of literary texts over time.

The functional differences between works of modern nonfiction points to an important distinction between the ways in which interpretations of literary and pragmatic texts are subject to change over time. While the historically changing horizons of reader expectation lead to changing interpretations of literary texts, the basic function remains the same; that is, they are still read as literary texts from which the reader establishes the appropriate code through a reconsideration of textual strategies. With predominantly pragmatic texts, on the other hand, the communicative function at its most basic level is subject to change over time. A good example of such a change is the way in which letters between influential people (politicians, for example) may now be read as historical documents. The initial inter-personal communicative function has changed to an historical mass communicative function.

Two examples that more aptly illustrate this point with regard to modern nonfiction are the way in which Milton's Aereopagitica (1644), originally read as a work of persuasive journalism, is now studied in universities as an example of seventeenth century rhetorical prose, and the way in which Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1851), initially read by nineteenth century middle class readers as a sociological exposé of working class living standards, is now regarded as one of the most accurate and persuasive historical documents of economic hardship at that time. Similarly, it is likely that Oscar Lewis's anthropological works will be read some time in the future as historical documents although the "culture of poverty" theory is losing credibility at present. Michael Herr's Dispatches will also probably be read as history although the Vietnam War is gradually losing its immediate journalistic appeal. It is unlikely, on the other hand, that In Cold Blood will ever be read as anything other than a novel, even though future horizons of reader expectations are likely to result in interpretations and evaluations different from those expressed when the work was first published.

The model of communication that best explains the different communicative functions performed by texts is that put forward by the Russian Formalist, turned structuralist, Roman Jakobson. While Jakobson's model was designed with individual linguistic utterances in mind, it is possible to apply it to whole narrative texts without much conceptual difficulty.[50]

The model comprises six basic elements: the addresser, the

addressee, the message, the context in which the message is originally formulated and received, the code in which it is sent and the contact or physical channel between the addresser and addressee. Each of these six elements corresponds to a communicative function: the emotive or expressive function has an orientation towards the addresser, the referential or denotative function towards the context, the poetic or aesthetic function towards the message, the conative function towards the addressee, the phatic function towards the contact and the metalingual function towards the code. These relationships may be illustrated as follows.

CONTEXT

ADDRESSER MESSAGE ADDRESSEE

CONTACT

CODE

REFERENTIAL

EMOTIVE POETIC CONATIVE

PHATIC

METALINGUAL

The diversity of messages or texts "lies not in a monopoly of one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions."[51] In narratives, the hierarchical relationship between the expressive, referential and aesthetic functions will determine the the ultimate or dominant communicative function of the text. The functions of the other three elements apply to individual speech acts rather than

complete narratives. The phatic function refers to the physical contact between speakers, the metalingual function to aspects of code like language, tone and pitch, and the conative function "finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative."[52]

For narratives, the expressive function will be dominant in works where the attitudes of the author form the most important element of the communication (for example, didactic essays and works of rhetorical prose), the referential function will be dominant where the context or external reality to which the message refers is most important (for example, newspaper articles and sociological documents), and the aesthetic function will be dominant where the secondary meanings implied through the structure and organisation of the message form the most important feature (for example, poetry or narratives that are commonly recognised as literary rather than pragmatic). The notion of a dominant communicative function is based on the assumption that no work operates on the level of a single function. This, of course, is especially true of hybrid forms like novelistic nonfictional narratives which, by definition, combine a pragmatic with a literary purpose. Because of this, the dominant function of hybrid works is often very difficult to identify, a fact that has possibly contributed to the critical confusion surrounding the generic identities of modern nonfictional narratives.

Jakobson's concept of the dominant provides us with three functionally distinct groups of the modern novelistic nonfictional narratives that have usually been grouped together as a unified genre. Firstly, there are works of social reportage that perform

a predominantly sociological function. These are works which most readers read in order to learn something about the sociological backgrounds of people from other groups or classes. In such works, the sociological context is the most important element of communication along with its associated referential function. This is usually followed by the addresser with its related expressive function, since most of these works articulate personal attitudes to the issues they describe. The structure of the message with its related aesthetic function is the third most important element, since it is used as a means to the dominant sociological end of the work rather than as a novelistic end in itself. The works to be discussed in the following chapter under this heading are James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Oscar Lewis's Five Families, Pedro Martinez, The Children of Sanchez and La Vida, and Studs Terkel's Division Street, Hard Times and Working.

Secondly, there are predominantly journalistic works that can be distinguished from the sociological works in that they are based on events or controversial issues rising from what the mass media and public would consider to be newsworthy events. The term journalistic is used here in a descriptive and not a prescriptive sense. Many media critics have argued that the event-centered nature of modern journalism is based on an elitist bourgeois conception of news and that deeper social issues should be the proper material of journalism.[53] Certainly, journalism has performed a significant sociological function in the past, especially in the nineteenth century when writers like William

Cobbett, Charles Dickens and Henry Mayhew were more concerned with broad sociological critiques than with reporting individual events. But be this as it may, modern journalism is essentially event centered and the writers of recent literary journalism have, for the most part, concentrated on "newsworthy" events rather than broader sociological issues. Most of these writers have, however, departed from the ethos of objectivity surrounding conventional reporting to seek deeper meanings behind the events they describe. For this reason, the author's subjective attitude to the events or, in Jakobson's terms, the emotive/persuasive function plays a dominant role in these works. This is usually followed by the referential function with the aesthetic function once again operating as a means towards a pragmatic journalistic end. The predominantly journalistic works to be discussed in Chapter three are: Hunter S. Thompson's Hell's Angels, Michael Herr's Dispatches and Mailer's The Armies of the Night.

Thirdly, there are works that perform a dominant novelistic function in that the thematic significance of the events they portray is more important to the communication than the facts of the events themselves. Because the modernist explosion of the traditional novel form into a number of different modalities has made the term "novel" less generically specific than it was at the beginning of this century,[54] the Jamesian sense of thematic representation is regarded as a more suitable determinant of the novelistic function than a formal definition of the novel would be.[55] In works with a dominant novelistic function, the secondary meanings or literary themes suggested through the structure of the message or the aesthetic function are the most important elements

of the communication. The feelings of the addresser and expressive function are usually next important, since most of these works incorporate strong personal moral attitudes. And the factual context and referential function come lowest in the hierarchy because they are essentially means to the dominant novelistic end rather than a pragmatic end in themselves. Many of these works are concerned with crime and criminal psychology in the tradition of Dostoevski's Crime and Punishment indicating that these archetypal concerns continue to fascinate novelists and readers in the post-modernist age. Meyer Levin's Compulsion, Mailer's The Executioner's Song and Capote's In Cold Blood will be discussed in the fourth chapter in terms of their major function as realistic novels.

The best way of identifying the dominant communicative function performed by a text is through an examination of the relationship between its constituent elements. The two basic elements common to all novelistic nonfictional narratives are a factually verifiable subject matter and the employment, to greater or lesser extents, of narrative techniques that are usually associated with fiction. But this basic similarity is no sufficient criterion for a unified genre. In each of the three functional categories identified the relationship between the factual subject matter and the narrative strategies employed is different. In other words, the role played by narrative in relation to fact differs from group to group. Narrative strategies operate as means to different communicative functions, and the status of the factual material differs accordingly.

In works with a dominant sociological or anthropological function, the narrative strategies are geared mostly towards describing and explaining a relatively unknown or misunderstood social context to readers. In the works with a dominant journalistic function, the primary narrative concern is with achieving a greater reader understanding of single events that are largely familiar to readers, but that have been mystified by the mass media. Both the sociological and journalistic works are essentially pragmatic in nature in that their narrative reflects ultimately outwards to the factual material. That is, a greater understanding of external reality is the final end towards which the narrative means operate. In works with a dominant novelistic function, on the other hand, where the facts are less significant for what they are than for what they represent, the final direction of narrative is inward towards its own structure. In other words, the narrative is structured in such a way that the secondary meanings of the facts are the final end in the communicative process. This is not to say, of course, that the more novelistic works are not concerned with reflecting facts accurately for pragmatic purposes or that the more pragmatic works do not reflect secondary meanings in a literary way. The very fact that novelistic nonfictional narratives are hybrid structures implies that they perform mixed communicative functions. It is, however possible in terms of Jakobson's notion of the dominant to isolate the central communicative function readers will most likely respond to when decoding the narrative strategies of the texts.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC REALISM

The idea of defining genres in terms of the relationship between writer and reader is not a new one. Northrop Frye suggests it in his essay on genre in Anatomy of Criticism where he says that "the basis of generic criticism ... is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public."[1] This basic idea leads to the division of literature into four main genres based upon four different "radicals of presentation." In the classical epic, the poet speaks directly to his audience. In fiction, the writer and the reader are hidden from each other with the text mediating. In drama, the writer is also hidden from the audience and the characters on stage act as mediators. In lyric, the writer is still concealed from the reader, but the reader seems to overhear the writer's personal reflections. This mode of distinction is very useful as far as it goes, but Frye fails to develop it in order to distinguish between the different forms of each of the four genres he identifies.

Richard Ohmann takes Frye's initial point much further in his definition of one genre of nonfiction prose, what I have defined as the predominantly sociological group of modern nonfiction texts. Ohmann refers to works that "present to a reading audience the lives, and especially the spoken words, of someone other than the author or editor."[2] But Ohmann's genre is not fully dependent on the fact that the reader is presented with

the lives of people other than the author or editor. He draws a functional distinction between works which present the lives of famous people (for example, Boswell's Life of Johnson, 1791) and works presenting the lives of ordinary people who are "entirely unknown to the audience."[3] The former have a long pre-industrial history from at least as far back as the Platonic dialogues, while the latter seem to have developed as a genre along with the rise of capitalism. As Ohmann argues, there is a fundamental difference between the audience's relationship to Dr. Johnson and its relationship to unknown people. The public has a natural interest in famous people and this suggests that the plethora of biographies and personality profiles of famous people that have been published over the years would have, at least on initial publication, a dominant journalistic function that might change as time passes to a dominant historical function. Works that present the lives of unknown characters, on the other hand, perform a dominant sociological function. Even in the most technologically advanced countries, the bulk of the reading public belongs to the middle and upper classes of society and readers read such works in order to learn about the lives of people from different, usually economically less priveleged, classes and groups - a fact that supports Ohmann's contention that the anonymity of the subjects "comes close to being the cause of the work."[4]

The link Ohmann draws between works of this kind and the emergence of capitalism goes some way towards explaining the strong political function that most of these works perform. Under capitalism, the division of labour, urbanisation and the complication of social and economic relations serve to alienate

one class from the way that another lives. In such a situation, Ohmann argues, "it is easy for the privileged to be ignorant of the basis of their own affluence, or of how the oppressed live, or of what work is like for others."[5] Capitalism thus becomes the major raison dêtre for works presenting the lives of underdogs and, because of the democratic ideology that provides the reader with a reformist, or a guilty, or at least a voyeuristic interest in them, works of this kind have become increasingly popular in Europe and especially America during the nineteen-sixties and seventies.

The American works Ohmann lists as members of this sociological genre are Studs Terkel's Working, Theodore Rosengarten's All God's Dangers (1973), Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class (1973), Andrew Levison's Working Class Majority (1974), James Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, Robert Coles' Children of Crisis (1968), Paul Bullock's Watts: the Aftermath (1969) and Oscar Lewis's La Vida. While some of these works appear more politically neutral than others (Terkel and Rosengarten simply introduce the subjects' edited speech and then retreat into the background while the other writers use the material as evidence for arguments of their own), all of the works aspire to perform the political function of exposing to middle class readers the lives and words of characters from less priveleged groups. Written as they are in a dramatised novelistic form, these works effect a sense of immediacy appropriate to their pragmatic political function.

2.1 Not a Genre for the Diffident: James Agee and the failure of communication

James Agee, Oscar Lewis and Studs Terkel are the three writers from Ohmann's group most consistently referred to by critics wishing to identify a unified genre of modern nonfiction. Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is widely regarded as one of the most important antecedents of modern American nonfiction.[6] In fact some critics have gone so far as to attempt generic definitions and theories of literary nonfiction in terms of the narrative principles employed by Agee.[7] This seems strange when one considers that of all the works referred to in recent theories of modern nonfiction, Agee's must be the most difficult to classify. What is equally strange is the way in which modern critics tend to concentrate on the aesthetic or "formal" elements of the text in spite of the author's repeated insistence that its purpose is essentially pragmatic: "This is a book only by necessity. More seriously it is an effort in human actuality" (p. xvi); and "Above all else: in God's name don't think of it as art" (p. 15); and "I must say to you this is not a work of art or of entertainment" (p. 111); the experience is described as "an excitement whose nature seems to me ... beyond the power of art to convey" (p.228); and "I am in this piece of work illimitably more interested in life than in art" (p. 242); and finally, "Art, as all of you would understand if you had my advantages, has nothing to do with life" (p. 366).

It is beyond the scope of this study to enter the debate on the legitimacy of a consideration of authors' intentions in works

of criticism.[8] Nevertheless, it does seem reasonable to suggest that, on the level of generic function at least, the stated intentions of the author have some significance. A writer who sets out to write a lyric poem does not, as a rule, end up writing a verse tragedy instead by accident. Likewise, Agee, who by all accounts started the book as a pragmatic sociological study, cannot logically be seen to have turned out a new kind of novel.[9] But Let Us Now Praise Famous Men can also hardly be called a conventional documentary. In fact Agee seems to be as violently opposed to documentary (journalistic) convention as he is to conventional views of art (pp. 235, 237, 240, 242).

This kind of double denial poses a serious generic problem. If the text denies all artistic status and eschews the principles of the documentary, then what function does it perform? Because Agee only tells us what his book is not and not what it is, and because the relationship between the narrative strategies and the factual content of the book is so tortuous and vague, it is very difficult to find a conclusive answer to this question, hence the great generic confusion the book caused when it first appeared and continues to cause today. Samuel Hynes, for example, said on finding Let Us Now Praise Famous Men shelved with books on Alabama history in his college library that this was like classifying Moby Dick as a book about whales.[10] Nevertheless, an examination of the book's structural elements can go some way towards identifying the complex of basic communicative functions it attempts to perform. I say "attempts" because ultimately the sheer diversity of the functions causes it to fail as a coherent

work of narrative communication.

The best place to begin such an examination is with the rather complicated typology Agee himself identifies in the book:

> Very roughly I know that to get my own sort of truth from the experience I must handle it from four planes:
> That of recall; of reception, contemplation, in medias res:....
> "As it happened": the straight narrative at the prow as from the first to last day it cut unknown water.
> By recall and memory from the present: which is a part of the experience: and this includes imagination, which in the other planes I swear myself against.
> As I try to write it: problems of recording; which, too, are an organic part of the experience as a whole..
> These are, obviously, in strong conflict. So is any piece of human experience. So, then, inevitably, is any even partially accurate attempt to give any experience as a whole. (p. 243)

This rather convoluted description of the "four planes" of perspective from which the book is supposed to be written along with Agee's insistence that they are "in strong conflict" serves to emphasise the confusion surrounding the dominant generic function of the book. Barbara Lounsberry has attempted to appropriate and explain Agee's four planes as the formal typology in terms of which she defines a self-contained genre of nonfictional prose called "transfiction." While her association of works as diverse as Defoe's The Journal of the Plague Years and Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test with Let Us Now Praise Famous Men in terms of this typology is, to say the least, a bit forced, her interpretation of the functions of the four planes is valuable.[11]

The plane of reception is defined as the basic journalistic

plane: those elements of the work that concentrate on describing the lives of the subjects as objectively as possible. The most striking example of this basic pragmatic function is the series of photographs by Walker Evans that constitute the first book of the volume. But these are also supported by some passages of "pure reception" in the otherwise intensely subjective prose sections of the book. Most of these "documentary" passages come from the Part Two subsections, "Money," "Shelter," "Clothing," "Education," and "Work." Here is a good example from "Clothing":

> Saturday, Mrs Gudger:
> Face, hands, feet and legs are washed.
> The hair is done up more tightly than usual.
> Black or white cotton stockings.
> Black lowheeled slippers with strapped insteps and single buttons.
> A freshly laundered cotton print dress held together high at the throat with a ten-cent brooch.
> A short necklace of black glass beads.
> A hat.
> She has two pairs of stockings. She sometimes goes barelegged to Cookstown, on Saturdays, but always wears stockings on Sundays. (p. 258)

While this and similar passages of objective description come as close as anything to conventional documentary prose, they by no means constitute the bulk of the text and most of the objective documentary passages lapse into the plane of "contemplation" before very long.

The plane of "contemplation" (Lounsberry calls it "reflection" for the sake of mnemonic alliteration) consists of the essay elements of the book in which Agee attempts to explain the experience of his association with the share-croppers in deeply personal terms. Very often these entail the apparent

difficulty Agee had in writing the documentary passages with authority and confidence - the doubts he felt for the power of language to capture the experience accurately. This plane is well illustrated by one of the best known passages in the book:

> George Gudger is a man, etcetera. But obviously, in the effort to tell of him (by example) as truthfully as I can, I am limited. I know him only so far as I know him and only in those terms in which I know him; and all of that depends as fully on who I am as on who he is. (p. 239)

Such passages of personal contemplation appear throughout Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, but they seem to have a nucleus in the three open ended sections entitled "On the Porch." In these sections of extended contemplation, Agee muses over three main themes: his own role in the experience, the meaning and significance of the experience, and, most importantly, the most appropriate form for his account of the experience.

Lounsberry defines "Recall" as "the artistic or fictive plane" of the book, the way in which Agee "manipulates the order of events, condenses or extends time, and casts lights and associations in whichever way his imaginative vision suggests" (p. 14). Recall, in other words, is analagous to the aesthetic function of Jakobson's model. It differs from simple memory in the same way that the Russian Formalists distinguish between plot and story.[12] Recall is the ordering and arranging process whereby Agee explores the thematic resonances of the factual material of the plane of reception. Because of his distrust for art and imagination, Agee is usually at pains to inform the reader that he is indulging in artistic recall. For example, in the first section of "A Country Letter," he begins the passage on Emma with

an explanation:

> But here I'm going to shift ahead of where I'm writing, to a thing which is to happen, or which happened, the next morning. (p. 62)

And at another point he writes:

> I have decided ... to try to use my imagination a little, as carefully as I can. I warn you that the result is sure to be somewhat inaccurate. (p. 328)

The problem with this kind of apology is that it causes a great deal of tension between the planes. The relationship between the plane of reception (the documentary function), the plane of contemplation (the expressive function) and the plane of recall (the aesthetic organising of the material) is not a complementary one. Because it continually draws attention to itself, the aesthetic organising does not really make the factual material more interesting and meaningful for the reader. And because the documentary passages are continually interrupted by passages of personal contemplation and doubt, their documentary accuracy is always in doubt.

Lounsberry suggests that the fourth plane, In Medias Res, provides a way in which the author can "unify and traverse his other three planes" (p. 17). It can be argued to the contrary, however, that Agee's style of placing himself in the centre of both the writing process and the action serves to confuse the generic function of the book even further. Rather than enabling him to unify and traverse the documentary, essay and fictional planes, In Medias Res (the author in the middle of things) actually aligns itself more with the passages of contemplation than with the others.

The ambiguous nature of the relationship between the structural elements or planes of reference of the book makes the identification of a dominant generic function very difficult. In contrast to the sociological works of Oscar Lewis and Studs Terkel, the narrative strategies of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men do not make the documentary material more readable and exciting for the reader. Rather, the continual tension between the planes means that none of the communicative functions are performed adequately. Gerald Lareau makes the valid point that the problem of communication is the central concern of the book.[13] Firstly, there are Agee's urgent efforts to communicate meaningfully with the subjects in the book: with the negroes who are forced to sing for him by a southern landowner (p. 31), with the poor people from whom he asks directions (p. 37), with the young negro couple he frightens by calling out loudly to them for information (p. 42), and finally with the members of the three tenant families who are the main subjects of the book. There is a continual tension between Agee's desire for communication with these people and his reluctance to ask them anything because of the unease and guilt he feels for prying into their lives.

Tom Wolfe sees this diffidence as the main failing of the book,[14] but Ronald Weber makes the point that "this was as much a matter of writing the book as the reporting that went into it":

> In a sense, diffidence is the major aesthetic principle at work in the book, a stance that Agee adopts to his material from which the narrative voice, structure and emotional force of the book flow, and in a sense, too, the question of proper aesthetic principle becomes one of the major subjects of the book; the reader is asked to grapple, with Agee, over

> the question of how a work like this is to be written.[15]

This raises the second communicative problem in the book: how does a writer do justice to a human experience that is so simple yet so profound? This question relates to the difficulty of choosing appropriate forms of expression, a problem Agee never overcomes in the book.

The continual tension between the four planes of perspective in the book can be seen as a tension between different generic categories. Agee never quite makes up his mind and this is very confusing for the reader in the sense that, as Frye argues, genre is determined by the conditions established between the writer and his reader. In the more documentary passages of the plane of reception, Agee the writer simply tells the reader what kinds of conditions the sharecroppers live under. In other words, the communicative situation is basically a referential one between writer and reader. But then in the essay contemplation passages, as Lareau observes,[16] the prose takes on a musing lyrical quality that distances the reader from the writer and makes the communicative situation an intrapersonal poetic one between the speaker and himself or an interpersonal one between speaker and subjects. The former is graphically illustrated by the variety of poetic devices Agee uses: alliteration("somberly sleepy people in the soft smile of the light"), repetition ("right home, right earth, right blood") and the wealth of metaphorical comparisons in the book. The latter is aptly illustrated by the many occasions on which Agee addresses the sharecroppers directly in what Smart calls the use of second person narration:[17]

> I remember so well, the first night I spent under one of these roofs: we knew you already, a little, some of you, most of you .... And it was here that we saw most of you, scarcely knowing you by families apart: I can remember it so clearly, as if it were five minutes ago, and we were just drawn away from your company. (pp. 362-3)

The lyrical reflectiveness of these lines has an alienating effect on the reader. It is as if the reader is concealed from the writer and as it were overhears his personal colloquy with the subjects.

To confuse matters even further, the aesthetic organisation of the plane of recall establishes a third level of communication between writer and reader. In the more fictive or "novelistic" of the book's passages, even though Agee usually draws our attention to them first, the impression is that the reader and author are hidden from each other with the book mediating. In passages such as these, Agee the author distances himself from Agee the narrator and makes of him a character in the narrative:

> We lay on our backs about two feet apart in silence, our eyes open, listening. The land that was under us lay down all around us and its continuance was enormous as if we were chips or matches floating, holding their own by their very minuteness, at a great distance out upon the surface of a tenderly labouring sea. The sky was even larger. (p. 228)

Passages such as these draw attention to the novelistic difference between the experiencing self and the narrating self. In attempting to recall the essence of the experience, Agee needs to invoke a persona or narrative construct in the tradition of Conrad's narrator, Marlow. This would be all very well if the secondary thematic meanings of the experience were at the centre of the work. But this is not the case, and the stark contrast of

the novelistic passages, the straight forward descriptive narration of the documentary passages and personal lyrical reflections of the passages of contemplation is very confusing.

So the basic communicative problem with Let us Now Praise Famous Men is a problem of generic uncertainty on the part of the author. In trying to communicate the essence of the experience through a variety of different modes, Agee fails at all of them. Instead of complementing one another, as the structural elements of any narrative should, the different planes or modes of expression actually contradict one another. Lounsberry and Lareau agree that the book is ultimately about failure. The subjects are examples of human failure, the structure of the book fails, the planes fail in that they continually undercut each other, language fails the author, and the author fails in what he initially set out to do, viz. to write a series of magazine articles on tenant farming during the Depression. Lounsberry sees this pervading sense of failure as the ultimate value of the work:

> Agee's magnificent failed work is the perfect correlative for: 1) failure which is the essence of human existence and is so readily visible in the existence of the tenant farmers; 2) their resultant inability (failure) to even articulate their situation; 3) the outsider's related inability (failure) to ever really understand them - or any other human life (failure) for that matter; 4) the failure of art, journalism and even language itself to convey the truth (failure) of human existence.[18]

The evaluative tone of these remarks is quite misleading and the basic idea that the success of the work lies in its failure is impossibly paradoxical. This view is, in fact, analogous to the logical contradiction at the heart of much deconstruction theory.

If language and discourse are unable to communicate anything consistently meaningful, they must also be unable to communicate even this basic theme. Or, in other words, how is Lounsberry, or any other reader, able to glean this basic theme from the book if art, journalism and language fail to "convey the truth (failure) of human existence"?

However, if the book is so demonstrably a narrative failure, an important question remains unanswered: how did it succeed in generating so much critical interest? The point that needs to be made in this respect is that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men did not attract many readers when it was first published. Agee struggled for five years to publish his manuscript and only six hundred copies were sold in the initial press run by Houghton Mifflin of New York. It was only when the book was reissued in 1961 that the "non-fiction novel" debate sparked further critical interest. Much of this attention was generated by Diana Trilling who mentioned Let Us Now Praise Famous Men as an antecedent of Capote's In Cold Blood in a widely-read piece in Partisan Review. This interest, however, seems to have been of a highly theoretical nature, and although subsequent editions have been published, the book has attracted few readers outside academia.

The popular critical conception is that Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is really an early example of a post-modernist novel that anticipates the self-reflexive concern of so much later nonfiction. It is true that a major concern in the book is the self-reflexive theme of the inability of the writer to capture the essence of the experience. This is the reason why critics like

Smart say that "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a characteristic example of modernist prose."[20] But an examination of the relationship between the structural elements does not show that the self-reflexive theme on the plane of contemplation is the dominant function of the book. On the contrary, the tension between the elements undercuts each, allowing none of the functions of communication in Jakobson's model to play a noticeably dominant role. For this reason, it is necessary to return to the original pragmatic function Agee posits at the beginning of the book:

> this is a book about "sharecroppers," and is written for all those who have a place in their hearts for the laughter and tears inherent in poverty viewed at a distance, and especially those who can afford the retail price; in the hope that the reader will be edified, and may feel kindly disposed towards any well-thought-out liberal efforts to rectify the unpleasant situation down South. (p. 14)

A number of reasons - Agee's diffidence, his emphasis on himself rather than the sharecroppers, his almost paranoid distrust of art and language, the fact that the book was only published after the New Deal had already rectified much of the "situation down South" and a host of others - means that Agee did not succeed in this basic sociological purpose. The result of this is that we learn less about Agee's three families in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men than we do about the five Mexican families in Oscar Lewis's Five Families, a book of comparable length. Nevertheless, failure does not alter generic function. A poor poem is still a poem, a pulp novel remains a novel, and a sociological documentary does not become a post-modernist novel simply because it is not successful

as a documentary. To appropriate Agee's own phrase, "a cow [cannot be] blamed for not being a horse" (pp. 234-5).

2.2 Oscar Lewis and the Functions of Ethnographic Realism

If Agee failed in his purpose to reach a real audience with a pragmatic sociological problem, the same cannot be said for Oscar Lewis and Studs Terkel. Both of these writers (Lewis from a formal anthropological background and Terkel from a popular sociological background) have reached extremely wide audiences with each having at least two best-sellers. The basic narrative strategy employed by Lewis and Terkel is the technique of recording individual autobiographical accounts by the subjects chosen, editing these accounts and then organising them in such a way that a central sociological point or theory is illustrated.

The narrative form that emerges has often been used in novels,[21] but this does not mean that the works of Lewis and Terkel function predominantly as novels. What the exponents of a unified genre of modern nonfiction have often failed to recognize, is that the recorded autobiographical sketch has long been used as the basic material for serious sociological studies. Probably the best known early example of this technique is Henry Mayhew's massive study of nineteenth century English working class conditions, London Labour and the London Poor. Mayhew's purpose and the dominant function of his work were undeniably sociological. He describes his work as "curious as supplying information concerning a large body of persons, of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth -

the government population returns not even numbering them among the inhabitants of the kingdom."[22] This statement is remarkably similar to Lewis's comment on public apathy in his introduction to Five Families, his first work utilising the same technique:

> It is ironic that many Americans, thanks to anthropologists, know more about the culture of some isolated tribe of New Guinea, with a total population of 500 souls, than about the way of life of millions of villagers in India or Mexico and other underdeveloped nations which are destined to play so crucial a role in the international scene.[23]

The more obvious link between Mayhew and Lewis, a factor that also distinguishes their work functionally from traditional novels, is their shared concern with the problem of poverty. Although poverty has been a constant topic in western fiction since the earliest development of the novel, it has usually been subordinated as a counter or foil for the morals and actions of individual, usually middle class, characters. And even when the central figure of the novel is a member of the working class (as in Defoe's Moll Flanders (1722) or, more recently, the so-called proletarian novels of the thirties), poverty itself is usually oblique and the central moral values expounded are usually middle class. As Arthur Pfeffer puts it:

> Poverty ordinarily figures in literature as a metaphorical counter in the works of those writers who find some reason for utilising such a counter. We come up against a fundamental paradox: artists will depict poverty when they, and their audiences, find it aesthetically pleasing. Not many works which we are willing to consider important have treated poverty in anything like the detail displayed in such non-literary works as Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1861-2). Nor has recent fiction, despite our continuing concern for poverty as

> a nagging defect in our economy, dwelt upon poverty as has recent nonfiction.[24]

The crux here is "works which we are willing to consider important." This is as much a comment on the text-centered nature of modern aesthetics as it is a comment on recent fiction. But then we must remember that the novel as genre evolved, as Lionel Trilling observes, from the development of a nineteenth century bourgeois consciousness and its associated emphasis on romantic individualism.[25] It is logical that the development of critical approaches should follow literary developments rather than the other way round. But because a successful sociological treatment of poverty requires an emphasis on the collective rather than the individual, most serious novelists either avoid it or use it as an oblique "metaphorical counter" for their characters to respond to. As Richard Hogarth puts it, "even a writer as astringent and seemingly unromantic as Orwell never quite lost the habit of seeing working classes through the cozy fog of an Edwardian music hall."[26]

In the narratives of Mayhew, Lewis and Terkel, poverty is the central governing feature. Their major concern is, in Lewis's words, "to give a voice to people who are rarely heard, and to provide the reader with an inside view of life which is common in many of the deprived and marginal groups of our society but which is largely unknown, ignored or inaccessable to most middle class readers."[27] No single character in their narratives is so much more important than the others that he/she becomes a protagonist in a literary sense. Certainly, Lewis's use of the family unit for his studies dictates that the head of the household becomes

the most important character in an economic, sociological and psychological sense, but the question of poverty and the accounts of the other characters are never subordinated to the extent that they become mere foils against which the character of the parent figure is to be judged by readers. This is perhaps the most striking difference between predominantly sociological nonfiction narratives and predominantly novelistic nonfiction narratives. Because of their concern with broader sociological issues like poverty, the sociological narratives discussed in this chapter are obliged to privilege a collectivity and their characters or figures are therefore usually representative of a broader social grouping. In predominantly novelistic narratives which are generically tied to individual consciousness, on the other hand, individual characters are privileged and broader sociological issues like poverty are usually subordinated. Lewis was himself acutely aware of the reluctance of novelists to make poverty the central concern of their work. Lamenting the lack of interest shown by psychologists and psychiatrists in the problems of the poor, he writes:

> Nor have the novelists given us an adequate portrayal of the poor in the contemporary world. The slums have produced few great writers, and by the time they have become great writers, they generally look back over their early lives through middle class lenses and write within traditional literary forms so that the retrospective work lacks the immediacy of the original experience.[28]

To Lewis "this situation presents a unique opportunity to the social sciences and particularly to anthropology to step into the gap and develop a literature of its own."[29] In his contribution to this literature, Lewis consciously employs certain structural

techniques to make his work as readable as novels. His use of the single day as the unit of study and the nuclear family as the focus of the narrative are both acknowledged as common devices of the novelist,[30] but Lewis uses these devices primarily as means to an anthropological end:

> The study of days attempts to give some of the immediacy and wholeness to life which is portrayed by the novelist. Its major commitment, nevertheless, is to social science with all of its strengths and weaknesses. Any resemblance between these family portraits and fiction is purely accidental.[31]

Wim Toebosch points to a basic functional distinction between Lewis's concentration on the family unit and the typical role of the family as a central concern in fiction. Whereas the interaction of individual family members is the central thematic oncern in the works of Henry James and Lawrence Durrell, in Lewis, Toebosch argues, the family is a convenient bond through which the shared sociological essence of the characters' experiences can be illustrated.[32] So to Lewis, the family and the day are convenient sociological units rather than meaningful entities to be explored for their own sake. Literary critics attempting to emphasise the novelistic aspects of Lewis's works have largely failed to realize this. Nancy Sullivan, for example, sees a similarity between the day as a narrative unit in La Vida and the day of Joyce's Ulysses (1922).[33] In actual fact, no two uses of the same unit could be more dissimilar. In La Vida, a day or group of days in the life of each of the five subjects is used to introduce the section of the book dealing autobiographically with each character. The primary function of this unit is to give a

realistic context in the narrative present against which the recalled personal histories of the characters can be seen. The day is thus a simple unifying device and does not on its own contain the thematic resonances typical of fiction. In Ulysses, on the other hand, the twenty-four-hour period is an ironic metaphorical construct which, described in terms of Homer's twenty-four-part epic, points to the totally anti-epic nature of Leopold Bloom's life. This kind of secondary significance is surely not the function of Lewis's recorded days.

Sullivan lists point of view as another feature lending itself to the "fictional" quality of La Vida. Certainly, the alternating points of view are "vital to the structure of the whole book" allowing for a counterpointing of different perspectives,[34] but these perspectives operate predominantly towards a sociological end in La Vida. In fiction, alternating points of view are usually used to contrast the different moral values of characters, highlighting those of the central characters. While this is one function of the technique in Lewis's narratives, the dominant role of the dramatically contrasted "stories" is to broaden the social canvas displayed and to emphasise the similarities of the characters' values. Or in Jakobson's terms, the main purpose of this particular narrative strategy is the enhancement of the text's referential function. Take the examples of Ulysses and La Vida once again: in Ulysses, the function of the contrasted interior monologues of Stephen, Bloom and Molly is to present three different human responses and explore three different moral outlooks. In La Vida, the dominant function is to present different but complementary responses to

situations in order to emphasise the attitudes and values the characters have in common. In fiction, point of view is normally used to develop and explore the personalities of individual characters. In sociological works like the narratives of Lewis and Terkel, it is a descriptive device used to characterise the "personality" of a group.

Another important feature distinguishing the works of Lewis and Terkel from realistic novels is the way in which they end. While the traditional novel has long been characterised by a sense of resolution or thematic closure in ending, this is certainly not the case with sociological works that are concerned with portraying the ongoing, seemingly irresolvable experiences of real people. As Ohmann puts it, the genre of the sociological narratives he discusses "releases energies that resist such closure, and the repose or resignation that would go with it."[35] It is interesting that all of Lewis's works end with the characters looking to the future either with a sense of frustration and hopelessness or with an ironically hopeful yet unfulfilled wish to escape. Both Pedro Martinez and The Children of Sanchez end with the almost pathetic image of "an old man who has no energy left for other things."[36] A Death in the Sanchez Family ends with Consuelo returning to her quotidian existence after the death of her aunt had only polarised the members of her family even further. Five Families ends with the pathetic image of Isabel Castro trying to break with the "culture of poverty" and assume the bourgeois value of "keeping her figure."[37] And La Vida ends with Cruz, the youngest daughter, childishly looking forward

to a back operation that may heal an old injury and make her socially acceptable in her new home. In each case, the reader is left with a Breughelian sense that, in spite of the efforts of individuals to improve their lot, the life-style of the poor really goes on unchanged.

The open ended nature of Lewis's works brings them, as Mas'ud Zavarzadeh argues, closer to post-modernist novels than to traditional realistic novels. But in contrast to most post-modernist novels, the focus of Lewis's works is the practical situation of entire communities rather than the highly personal reflections of individuals. Although Lewis's characters are real individuals with real personal problems, the reader responds to them more as representatives of a community way of life than as individuals with unique personal dilemmas. Characterisation of individuals operates as a means towards a sociological generalisation and the expansion of the books' referential function.

The essence of the social experience Lewis's characters are supposed to represent is best explained by his notion of a "culture of poverty," a concept that

> describes in positive terms a subculture of western society with its own structure and rationale, a way of life handed on from generation to generation along family lines. The culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization, a term signifying the absence of something. It is a culture in the traditional anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a design for living, with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function.[38]

Although the finer details of the debate generated by Lewis's view

of poverty as a self-perpetuating way of life are beyond the ambit of this study, it is necessary to examine some of the issues in order to understand the end towards which narrative strategies operate in his books. Most of the anthropological responses to Lewis's books can be grouped under two headings:[39] firstly, critics felt that the methods of recording and editing were not sufficiently explained in the introductions to the books; secondly, the highly generalised notion of the culture of poverty was called into question. Both of these criticisms need to be seen in the light of Lewis's major intention: that his books "were intended for a wide audience."[40] Clearly long introductions with detailed technical explanations of research methods and complex anthropological concepts would not have been suitable for works aimed at educating a mass audience. The whole point about Lewis's narratives, and the reason they were so successful, was that they democratised anthropological studies by making the stories of the subjects as readable and accessible as novels. This ties in with Lewis's strong pragmatic purpose. He was more interested in getting a large number of people to understand the plight of the poor than with making complex theoretical statements. In fact, according to a personal friend, Douglas Butterworth, Lewis "thought the fuss generated by his notion of a culture of poverty was far out of proportion with the modest theoretical proposal he intended."[41] So while the notion of a culture of poverty is the central unifying theme of Lewis's narratives, it remains a relatively general and loose theoretical statement, a simple conceptual model through which the plight of the poor can be more easily understood by readers, and not a definitive sociological

and economic theory against which the anthropological success of the books should be judged.

Five Families is Lewis's first attempt to present the lifestyles of the poor through the use of novelistic narrative strategies. This book marks a significant move from a concern with the entire village community of his Life in a Mexican Village to the much narrower focus of the family portrait. Five Families is structured in the form of five "short stories" dealing with a day in the life of families from different social strata in the culture of poverty. The first section describes the Martinez family from a Mexican highland village Lewis calls Azteca, the second describes the Gomez family in transition from village to city life, the third deals with a representative of the lower level of urban poverty in the Gutierrez family, the fourth with the Sanchez family who combine working-class and lower middle-class traits, and the fifth with the Castro family who enjoy moderate middle-class comfort but have nevertheless failed to break with many of the norms and values of the other families, thus illustrating Lewis's point that the culture of poverty is more difficult to overcome than poverty itself.[42]

Each of these family sketches is written from the novelistic third person point of view of an outside observer. Although an interviewer was present during all of the scenes described, the questions have all been left out and the action is described as if the interviewer were absent. Each of the days is introduced with a detailed description of the setting of the household. This develops into an authorial description of the subjects' actions

and conversations. The authorial presentation of dialogue and unspoken thoughts which have been translated from spoken answers to questions is, according to Tom Wolfe, one of the central links between this kind of writing and realistic fiction.[43] But while there is quite a bit of recorded dialogue in Five Families, the authorial presentation of interiority is only occasional. The following passage from the Martinez sketch is an example:

> Yes, it was good to have the mill. But all the same it was expensive. The thirty-four centavos paid to the miller would have bought half enough corn to feed the whole family for a meal. Machrina should do more grinding at home, Esparanza thought as she knelt before the grinding stone.[44]

Nick Visser draws a comparison between Five Families and In Cold Blood based on Capote's similar use of this device:

> Dewey had imagined that with the deaths of Smith and Hickock he would have experienced a sense of climax, release of a design justly completed. Instead, he discovered himself recalling an incident of almost a year ago, a casual encounter in Valley View cemetery which, in retrospect, had somehow for him more or less ended the Clutter case.[45]

Besides the fact that this kind of device is far less frequent in Five Families than it is in In Cold Blood, it also performs a different narrative function. In Capote's book, the characters' thoughts are usually given to highlight the moral values and feelings of individuals. In this sense the device often performs an ironic contrasting function. In the passage cited by Visser, the dominant sense is a personal feeling of anticlimax, Dewey's feeling that the case that had literally taken up his life for years was simply one incident in a series of haphazard and unpredictable events. In other words, the thoughts of the

characters in In Cold Blood are presented to support the secondary thematic statements of the book. In this case, the novelistic theme being explored is the mythical notion of fate, the arbitrary force that Dewey (and Perry) see governing the course of events. So the execution of Perry reminds Dewey of an encounter he had while visiting the Holcomb cemetery at the end of the book - an encounter that also serves to entrench his belief in fate:

> After he had finished weeding, Dewey strolled along the quiet paths. He stopped at a tombstone marked with a recently carved name: Tate. Judge Tate had died of pneumonia the past November; wreaths, brown roses, and rain faded ribbons still lay upon the raw earth. Close by, fresher petals spilled across a newer mound - the grave of Bonnie Jean Ashida, the Ashidas' elder daughter, who while visiting Garden City had been killed in a car collision. Deaths, births, marriages - why, just the other day he'd heard that Nancy Clutter's boy friend, young Bobby Rupp, had gone and got married.[46]

The narrative function of Dewey's thoughts on remembering Perry's execution is to introduce the final sequence of the book which returns to the notion of fate and brings the deaths of Perry and Nancy into ironic juxtaposition. Both become victims of the same uncontrollable forces.

While the formalistic similarity between this kind of interiority and similar passages in Five Families is undeniable, Lewis's use of the device is far less subtle and overtly thematic. On the first level, it is a convenient condensing device, making what were probably long and detailed interviews easily accessible to the reader. On a second level, these passages are less concerned with exploring the thoughts of different individuals than with emphasising the characters' prevailing concern with

financial matters. So Esperanza's thoughts in the passage from Five Families are offered as evidence of the culture of poverty shared by the characters rather than as personal reflections that are thematically significant in themselves. Here is a similar passage from the sketch of the Gomez family:

> Ester was looking forward to her graduation and the long lazy days when she could sleep late. She also hoped to go to commercial school and learn to be a stenographer so that she could wear silk stockings and pretty dresses, but her father made no promises. (p. 71)

Once again the concerns here are materialistic, reflecting a longing for status and financial security that is typical of the subjects in all of Lewis's books. The emphasis is not on the abstraction of what we would normally consider to be literary themes; it is on giving the reader a glimpse of the system of values holding the poor together in a self perpetuating way of life. The novelistic point of view is one of the narrative means by which dramatic immediacy is sustained, thus enhancing the appeal of the referential material for the reader.

While the authorial detachment of Five Families enables Lewis to make his evaluations very economically and unambiguously,[47] the book seems to lack the vitality and immediacy of expression R.H.C. Crossman sees as the greatest strength of his later books, The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida.[48] The predominantly authorial mode of Five Families, the relative dearth of realistic interiority and the somewhat stilted and forced nature of the dialogue serve to emphasise Lewis's presence and flatten the personalities who are supposed to be the

heart and soul of the book. We are still left with an impression of the subjects' lives from without and, because of the prominence of the authorial presence, from above. One critic has gone so far as to suggest that the subjects of Five Families appear like "animals in a zoo" compared to the much more well rounded and articulate figures in Lewis's later books.[49] But the fact that both the Sanchez and Martinez families were part of Lewis's case study in Five Families indicates that this difference must be the result of different narrative techniques rather than different personality traits.

The Children of Sanchez is the first book in which Lewis uses the technique of multiple autobiographies "whereby each member of the family tells his own life story in his own words."[50] Taken as a whole, the book presents sets of personal responses to the family's problems that, although often factually contradictory, consistently emphasise the personality traits and attitudes Lewis sees as typical of the culture of poverty.

The basic material of The Children of Sanchez is the recorded language of the subjects. This begs the question of who should be regarded as the real author of the work. If one accepts the view of the New Critics, as most literary critics of the book have, that the text is an autonomous entity to be analysed purely on its own terms, then it can be argued that the real authors are the subjects whose words appear on the page. But such a view ignores the crucial role that the interviewer and editor Lewis plays in the communication process. What we have in the creation of The Children of Sanchez as text is a change in communicative function between two developmental phases.

The first phase is the research stage where Lewis interviews each of the characters at different times and in different situations. During this stage, the communication is of an inter-personal nature between Lewis and the characters. In the second phase, after Lewis eliminated his questions and "selected, arranged and organised the materials into coherent life stories" (p. xxi) for publication, the original situation changes from inter-personal to mass communication, from spoken to written communication. This new function depends purely on the work of the editor, making him the new addresser or author of the message. Without Lewis's questions, the stories would never have been told in the way they are. Without his editing and arranging, they would never have appeared in the medium in which they exist. And without his introductory comments, they would not carry the anthropological weight that they do.

It is important to make this point, since it means that Lewis's introductions become an integral part of his work - at least as important as authors' notes and prefaces in fiction - and should be read as authoritative guides to the edited material and not as detached subjective comments. Most literary critics who have written on Lewis's works have ignored the qualifications made in his introductions and have treated the edited material as if it were autonomous. The result of this is that critics have emphasised the "fictional" characteristics of the books while ignoring the pragmatic sociological end towards which these characteristics operate. The view that Lewis's works are part of the postmodernist response to extreme situations put forward by

Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, for example, is based entirely on an isolated reading of the edited material without any reference to the introductions in which Lewis states his intentions. While it may be true that literary works can carry secondary meanings unintended by the author (as the exponents of the "intentional fallacy" argument would have us believe), the basic generic function of texts (and especially pragmatic texts) must be subject to the author's intentions.

There is nothing objective about selection and emphasis. As A.J. Camigliano and R.A. Champagne argue, Lewis's documentary is literature with a function, a form of advocacy literature moving away from "the formal-aesthetic, fantastic-absurd, towards a socio-political realm in which literature is reality-oriented and to a large degree reality-determined."[51] In this type of literature, form constitutes a means to an end, moving "beyond the dictates of traditional aesthetics and the category of autonomy."[52] In moving beyond the autonomy of the text, Lewis's works concentrate on the sociological context being represented or the referential function of communication in Jakobson's terms. The form and structure of the narrative, all of the narrative strategies used, operate as means to a sociological end. As Gunther Wallroff said in an interview with Heinz Ludwig Arnold:

> One cannot fall in love with the form of the documentary to the degree that it becomes an end purpose. Form functions as a means of transmission. The content is the most important.[53]

In Lewis's works, this content is subjectively mediated, making him the basic author of the stories. Although they are presented in the characters' own words, they appear on the page in nothing like

their original dialogue form.

Lewis admits his subjective influence even at the initial interview stage:

> Many of my questions stimulated them to express themselves on subjects which they might otherwise never have thought of or volunteered information about. (p. xxi)

Although the answers are the subjects' own, the questions have been edited from the stories leaving the impression that they are spontaneous and unprompted. Read purely in these terms without reference to the introductions, they may not reflect the level of sociological generalisation Lewis hopes for. While the main purpose of Lewis's editing is to make the narratives coherent and easily readable for his middle-class audience, it is also intended to illustrate the sociological theory of the culture of poverty. In as much as the stories themselves emphasise the individualism of the narrators, they detract from the sense of representativeness that is at the heart of the sociological theory. It is, therefore, necessary to read the introductions in which Lewis explains his methods and intentions as part of the narratives proper.

Because of the striking contrasts between the subjects of The Children of Sanchez, this book is probably more dependent on Lewis's explanations than the others are. The narrative is divided into three main parts, each containing an autobiographical account of roughly the same period and set of events by each of the children in the family. These three parts are bracketed by a prologue and epilogue by the father, Jesus Sanchez. In fact the domineering character of Jesus is one of the central linking

features of the book. Besides having both the first and last sections to himself, large sections of the stories of the children deal with their relationship with him. To the reader unacquainted with the traits of the culture of poverty, the structure of the book and the emphasis on Jesus's character might result in a "novelistic" reading concentrating on Jesus as the major figure, the hero (or possibly the villain) of the text. But the reader who has read the introduction of the book as an authoritative guide to the edited material would quickly realize that Jesus's "strong predisposition to authoritarianism and great emphasis on family solidarity" (p. xxvi) are meant to be seen as traits of the culture of poverty making the situation of the individuals typical of a social context at large. Similarly, we learn from the introduction that the ongoing rebellion of the four children against Jesus's authority is meant to be seen as evidence that family solidarity is an ideal only rarely achieved in the culture of poverty.

Jesus's seemingly blind acceptance of capitalism and his continual striving for middle-class values are two other curious features that the introduction helps to explain as traits of the culture of poverty. In the closing section of his introduction, Lewis emphasises the increasing influence of the United States on Mexican life (p. xxviii). After the close cooperation between the two countries during World War Two, American investment in Mexico shot to almost a billion dollars by 1960. This was coupled with a drastically increased influx of United States tourists into Mexico, the annual migration of several hundred thousand Mexican

agricultural workers to America, the exchange of students, technicians and academics, the sponsoring of all major television programmes by American companies, the opening of American department stores in most large cities, the replacement of French by English as a second language in schools, and the growing monopolisation of American medicine (pp. xxviii-ix). In spite of the growing influence of the United States and the apparent prosperity, Lewis says, "the uneven distribution of the growing national wealth has made the disparity between the incomes of the rich and poor more striking than ever before" (p. xxix). Nevertheless, instead of leading Mexicans to question this disparity, American influence has led to certain materialistic values being accepted by the Mexican population from top to bottom.

The Children of Sanchez presents a picture of the way capitalism functions among the poor who accept its basic principles. Jesus Sanchez is a typical example of an individual in futile search for an abstract "American dream." He spends his entire working life as a food-purchaser for a restaurant (a tertiary capitalistic industry), working hard to support two families, neither of which seem to appreciate his industriousness. Berry Burgum sums up Jesus's ironic devotion to capitalism as follows:

> He conspicuously symbolises the worker as capitalism would like him to be and generally forces him to be. As blindly as his womenfolk accept the fantasy of God as a tranquiliser, Jesus accepts the compulsions capitalism imposes upon him and the neuroses of ill temper they have set up. As a slave of the system, he involuntarily follows its hypocritical assertion that we can secure

> freedom and self-fulfillment through individual enterprise .... His devotion to the protestant ethic (which knows no ecclesiastical bounds) is fervid to the point of saintliness. No matter that the ethic is violated when many men, socially better situated than he, rise into wealth. Jesus does not even recognize the existence of these methods of bypassing poverty.[54]

This view of the book as a critique of imperialism emphasises Lewis's own contention that "the culture of poverty flourishes and is endemic to the free-enterprise, pre-welfare-state stage of capitalism." But the behaviour of Jesus's two sons seems to fly in the face of such an easy generalisation.[55] Both seem to reject their father's authority and the values he adheres to. The eldest, Manuel, is certainly caught up in the American get rich dream with his various "fly-by-night" business ventures. But he is unable to hold down a regular job and becomes a <u>bracero</u> in the United States (a conscious image of the search for the "American dream"?). Roberto, the younger son, is quite different. He hardly seems to fit into the system at all and tries to escape by joining the army. By far the most passionate and violent of the characters, he ends up in jail, is savagely tortured, and is eventually released on a technicality to return to a life of rebellion. Burgum poses this interesting question:

> Are we to take this contrast as symbolic of a change of attitude on the part of the new generation? Does somewhere in them lurk the echo of the glorious Mexican Revolution and a dim awareness that it has been sold out as Mexico grows insidiously, despite its brave laws into a satelite of the United States.[56]

Lewis anticipates these questions at the end of his introduction. Commenting on the "great capacity for misery and suffering of the ordinary Mexican," by implication, Jesus Sanchez, he writes:

> But even the Mexican's capacity for suffering has its limits, and unless ways are found to achieve a more equitable distribution of the growing national wealth and a greater equality of sacrifice during the difficult period of industrialization, we may expect social upheavals sooner or later. (p. xxxi)

There is very little that is "aesthetic" about this disturbing prediction. Clearly Lewis's pragmatic purpose is to bring home the harsh realities of his subjects' poverty to his middle class readers. Whatever novelistic techniques he uses are simply narrative means to this essentially referential end.

Pedro Martinez, Lewis's second story of a Mexican family as told by its members, differs from The Children of Sanchez in a number of ways. Firstly, there is less theoretical talk of the culture of poverty and a greater emphasis on the basic sociological function of showing the reader "what it means to be a peasant in a nation undergoing rapid cultural change: how peasants feel, how they think and how they express themselves."[57] Secondly, there is less emphasis on the children of the family and a far more intense focus on the father figure. Thirdly, the Martinez story covers a much longer time span and concentrates for long sections on some of the significant events of Mexico's recent history, thus introducing a strong historical function as opposed to the largely contemporary interest of the Sanchez story.

These differences point to some interesting variations in communicative function between the two books. In the first place, the downplaying of the culture of poverty implies that the largely pre-capitalist peasant life of Pedro Martinez escapes many of the frustrations and restrictions characteristic of the culture of

poverty in Mexican slums. There is far greater family and social stability, more individual privacy, greater traditionalism and more opportunities for the fulfillment of personal ideals in spite of the abject poverty the family suffers. Compared to Jesus Sanchez, Pedro Martinez has led a relatively successful and fruitful life. But this does not mean that peasant life is meant to be seen as idyllic in any way. On the contrary, Pedro's life has been one long recurring pattern of hope followed by disillusionment. All of his ideals, his loyalty to the revolution, his catholicism, his later protestantism, his involvement in village politics, his dreams for his children are shattered by circumstances beyond his control. So although the book presents a way of life that is more traditional and stable and possibly preferable to urban slum life, it remains a study of a community in rapid and problematic transition.

The greater emphasis on the father in Pedro Martinez adds an element of psychological interest that, although not entirely absent from The Children of Sanchez, is played down in favour of the broader sociological issue of the culture of poverty. Both books are of roughly the same length, but where The Children of Sanchez tells five life stories, Pedro Martinez deals with only three, those of Pedro, his wife Esperanza and their oldest son Philipe. Of these three stories, Pedro's is by far the most comprehensive, taking up at least half of the narrative (Esperanza's takes up only about one eighth and Philipe's the remaining three eighths of the book). Furthermore, a large proportion of the stories of Esperanza and Philipe deal with their relationship with Pedro. All of this makes Pedro the most

comprehensively characterised figure in all of Lewis's books. This is hardly surprising, since Lewis knew Pedro far longer than any of his other subjects and grew to develop an intimate friendship with him. In his introduction to the book, Lewis enters a level of personal psychological speculation that is never found in any of his other books. Dealing with the very private matter of Pedro's conversion to Seventh Day Adventism, he writes:

> It may be that Pedro's psychological development was slow, in which case his conversion may have been symbolic of his ambivalent image of his mother, who was both a "good mother" and a "bad mother." One may also speculate that he viewed the church as his weak stepfather whom he tried to love but could not. By contrast, Seventh Day Adventism, with its austere and rigid moral code, represented the strong father figure he had never had and to whom he wished to submit, at least temporarily. (p. xxxviii)

This emphasis on the individual psyche may cause some confusion as to the real subject and purpose of the book. As was the case with The Children of Sanchez, some (although few literary critiques of the book have appeared) may see it as evidence of an increased "novelistic" concern on the part of Lewis. But such a reading would miss the basic anthropological function towards which Lewis is writing. The book is not primarily about Pedro the character; it is about peasant life in general.

The story of Pedro in Pedro's own words is the basic narrative strategy by which Lewis makes this generalisation. As he points out in his introduction, "the world view of Pedro Martinez and his family is less familiar and less accessible to most American readers than that of The Children of Sanchez" (p. xlix). To make this world view more familiar and more accessible

to his audience, Lewis finds it necessary to focus more intensely on an individual who would capture the average middle-class reader's sympathies more easily than would a large group of people. Pedro's character operates as a means to this end; he is not a "character," in the novelistic sense of the word, whose thoughts and actions should be judged in terms of the moral values of the book. Lewis even goes so far as to rationalise the less attractive aspects of Pedro's personality so as not to alienate his readers. Addressing the inconsistencies and contradictions in Pedro's story and his sometimes aggressive and cruel attitudes towards those around him, Lewis writes:

> By U.S. middle-class standards, Pedro may seem a loveless, selfish and dishonest man, perhaps even a scoundrel. However, his character and morality must be seen in the light of Mexican village culture. In this peasant society a man expresses love and affection by providing the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter for his family. Pedro was a hard worker for many years and never abandoned his wife and children; indeed, he was very much concerned about them. He has shown himself capable of real affection, kindness, self-sacrifice and, occasionally, even tenderness. (p. xxxvii)

This apology for Pedro on the basis of Mexican peasant culture perfectly illustrates Lewis's somewhat ambiguous purpose. He wishes to gain sympathy from middle class readers for a group of people they know nothing about. He does this through the medium of an individual's life story, a novelistic medium his readers would find more accessible than traditional anthropological monographs. When this individual displays characteristics that may make his readers unsympathetic, Lewis apologises for him on the basis of his culture - a neat logical sidestep that shifts

sympathy back from the individual to the community he represents.

The emphasis on the story of Pedro, who was seventy two years old when the book was published, broadens the communicative function of the book from its contemporary sociological interest to a strong historical function whereby the reader gets an account of some of the more significant events of recent Mexican history from the lips of one of the people who lived through them. In Pedro Martinez, we do not only get a view of what it is like to be a peasant in a rapidly industrialising third world nation; we also get a view of what it was like to live through and participate in the vibrant events that led to the present situation. But just as Lewis's anthropology is anthropology with a difference, the historical sections of Pedro Martinez are history with a difference. Like most conventional anthropologists, historians tend to view the past from the top down, concentrating on the role of major figures in the course of events rather than on the conditions and motivations that common people like Pedro respond to on a personal level. The personal response to history has largely been left to historical novelists. But in third world countries where, as Lewis says, few great novelists have emerged from the bottom strata of society to write of their past with "the immediacy of the original experience,"[58] this personal response to history has been sadly lacking. So the historical value of Pedro's story does not lie in the accuracy of his descriptions, but in the insights it offers into the kinds of political crises common people respond to and the kinds of events they recall as significant.

The first part of the book deals with Pedro's childhood and youth in pre-revolution rural Mexico. One of the important historical functions of this section is to dispel the idealistic myth that Mexican Indian villages prior to the Revolution of 1910 were "stable, well ordered, smoothly functioning communities" (p. xxxii). Pedro's story shows a great deal of social disorganisation and sharp class cleavages. An example of this kind of social stratification even at the peasant level is the way in which Pedro is severely victimised at school in Yautepec for speaking his native Nahuatl instead of Spanish (p. 16). On his return to Azteca, he is again victimised, this time for speaking Spanish instead of Nahuatl. Against this background of ethnic and language divisions, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 is seen as a strong unifying force with Spanish as the unifying language (p. 21)

In Part Two of the book, the long section dealing with the Revolution itself, the central historical function is to give the American middle-class reader a more sympathetic and understanding view of an event that has traditionally been maligned in the United States as a "dangerous, atheistic and even communist movement" (p. xxx). Lewis regards the section devoted to the Revolution as the most important and interesting in the book:

> The story of Pedro Martinez is of special interest because it gives us one of the few first-hand accounts of a great revolution as seen by a peasant who not only lived through it but actively participated and identified with its ideals. It is a tribute to the Mexican Revolution that it imbued poor and illiterate peasants like Pedro with ideals of social justice which gave meaning to their lives. (p. xxx)

Because the American Revolution has long since faded from popular memory, Lewis argues, it is important for Americans to learn to understand certain aspects of revolutionary thought in order to provide leadership for the "many countries that are now or that will soon be living through their revolutions" (p. xxx).

Some of the great achievements of the Mexican Revolution to emerge from Pedro's story are the abolition of the pawning of children and the beating of "peones," an increase in public education, and the breaking of the caciques' monopoly of land and local government. The last of these provided the opportunity for peasants like Pedro to become involved in local government at a reasonably high level. Pedro himself succeeded in becoming a community magistrate, a feat that would have been impossible for a peasant before the Revolution.

But Pedro's story also reveals some of the shortcomings of the Revolution. At one point in the narrative, he criticises the high level of legal corruption in the new system and looks back to the old days with more than just a touch of nostalgia. Recalling an incident before the Revolution when a hacienda administrator had been imprisoned for shooting a discontented peon, Pedro says:

> There was justice then! Not like now. This man Posada was rich and was an administrator and yet they did not let him go, not even for money. They kept him in jail and it wasn't until the Revolution came and the rebels opened the jail that he got free. (p. 75)

Pedro's inability to adapt to the middle class values of modern Mexico is another way in which the Revolution is shown to have failed. Although he worked hard throughout his life, he never managed to come to terms with the realities of the growing cash

economy. In fact he probably embodied the ostensible values of the Revolution more closely than did the Revolution itself. He dedicated himself to local government at the expense of his family life, he was honest by Mexican standards and hated large-scale corruption, he worked consistently hard to support his family and he was universally regarded as an upright man and a good citizen. The only criticism of Pedro Lewis ever heard in the years he knew him "was that he was a fool not to have taken greater advantage of his years in politics to enrich himself" (p. xxxvii).

Structurally, Pedro Martinez is a less complex book than The Children of Sanchez. It focusses on only three characters as opposed to five and predominantly on one, and the characters reflect smaller varieties of mood. But functionally it is probably more complex. In addition to the sociological functions of offering middle class readers an intimate glimpse of the lives of people from another culture and of illustrating the culture of poverty, it also has a strong psychological and historical function. In both cases, the dominant function remains sociological. The narrative techniques employed are geared towards a referential sociological generalisation and not towards the aesthetic function that is dominant in works we would normally regard as novels.

Lewis's most popular major family study is La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty. It is not difficult to see why La Vida became the most widely-read of Lewis's works. In the first place, it incorporates the device used in Five Families of the observed day described in the third person as well as the

device of the first person autobiographical sketch. Secondly, the Puerto Rican subjects are probably more easy for the American middle-class reader to identify with than are the more isolated Mexicans of Lewis's other books. And thirdly, the concentration on a family of prostitutes, with their outspoken views on sex and violence, would probably be regarded as "more interesting" than the lives of the relatively reserved subjects of the other books. However, these factors do not negate the dominant sociological function the book performs. As Lewis explains, La Vida was prompted by suggestions from some of his Mexican subjects that he should turn his attention to poverty in his own country, the United States. As a satellite of the United States and a possible future state, Puerto Rico seemed like a logical place to begin such a study.[59]

Given the high rate of prostitution in Puerto Rican slums, the Rios family, all the women members of which have been prostitutes at some time in their lives, also seemed like a logical place to start this study. But given Lewis's anthropological intentions, viz. to offer evidence of a way of life applicable to the poor in general, this focus on a particular way of life was severely criticised by some anthropologists. In fact, of all Lewis's works, La Vida is the one whose social representativeness and scientific validity has been most seriously questioned. What these critics have largely failed to recognize, however, is that La Vida was never intended to be seen as representative of Puerto Rican poverty in general:

> ... the Rios family is presented here not as a typical Puerto Rican family but rather as representative of one style of life in a

> Puerto Rican slum. The frequency distribution of this style of life cannot be determined until we have made comparable studies from other slums in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.[60]

Since La Vida was meant to be "the first in a series of volumes based upon a study of 100 Puerto Rican families from four slums,"[61] it is clear that Lewis intended to offer a much broader canvas of Puerto Rican life as evidence of his sociological generalisation. Unfortunately, his untimely death in 1970 denied us the opportunity of the comparative studies he intended and we are left with a single study of one aspect of Puerto Rican slum life rather than a volume in a corpus of works offering a more comprehensive view.

This, however, does not detract from the book's anthropological value or make it function predominantly as anything other than anthropology. In his introduction to La Vida, Lewis puts forward a much more comprehensive definition of the culture of poverty and the conditions that give rise to it than is found in the rather tentative theoretical statements of his other works. Here he defines it as

> a subculture with its own structure and rationale, as a way of life passed down from generation to generation along family lines. This view directs attention to the fact that the culture of poverty in modern nations is not only a matter of economic deprivation, of disorganisation or of the absence of something. It is also something positive and provides some rewards without which the poor could not carry on. (p. xliii)

As a way of life, the culture of poverty is "both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalist society" (p. xliv). But this sense of personal adaptation and reaction is only part of

it, since the culture of poverty is itself an organic entity. Once it comes about, "it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on the children" (p. xlv).

In his earlier books, Lewis suggested that the culture of poverty initially developed when socially and economically stratified societies were in a period of transition. In La Vida he identifies an actual set of conditions he considers necessary for a culture of poverty to exist and flourish:

> (1) a cash economy, wage labour and production for profit; (2) a persistently high rate of unemployment and underemployment for unskilled labour; (3) low wages; (4) the failure to provide social, political and economic organization, either on a voluntary basis or by government imposition, for the low-income population; (5) the existence of a bilateral kinship system rather than a unilateral one; and finally, (6) the existence of a set of values in the dominant class which stresses the accumulation of wealth and property, the possibility of upward mobility and thrift, and explains low economic status as the result of personal inadequacy or inferiority. (pp. xliii-iv)

All of these conditions are represented in the story of the Rios family and several direct references to each could be cited. What the middle class reader Lewis is addressing would find more interesting, however, are the interrelated social, economic and psychological traits that these conditions give rise to. Lewis mentions some seventy of these traits, the number and relationship between which "may vary from society to society and from family to family" (p. xliv).

The traits that are most strikingly manifest in the lives of the Rios family are: the absence of childhood as a prolonged and

protected stage in an individual's life, an early initiation into sex, free unions or consensual marriages, a high incidence of the abandonment of wives and children, a trend towards mother-centered families, a strong predisposition towards authoritarianism, lack of privacy, sibling rivalry, a strong feeling of marginality, helplessness, dependence and inferiority, a high incidence of maternal deprivation, a lack of impulse control, a strong present time orientation, a sense of resignation and fatalism, an absence of class-consciousness and political awareness, a high incidence of alcoholism, frequent resort to violence to settle problems and raise children, a belief in male superiority, and a corresponding martyr complex among women.[62]

It is not the purpose here to debate whether these traits in La Vida are conclusive proof of Lewis's theory or not. Suffice it to say that the narrative strategies of the book, the ways in which it is edited and presented, serve to emphasise certain traits in order to make a sociological point. Lewis lists fatalism and a low level of aspiration as one of the key traits of the culture of poverty in La Vida (p. li). A prevailing tone of fatalism is set right at the beginning of Fernanda's story with the popular Puerto Rican proverb, "you can't cover up the sky with your hand" (p. 26), literally, "you cannot escape what you are." This proverb is later repeated by Soledad: "I'm not going to try to cover the sky with my hand because it can't be done" (p. 211). The sense of resignation implied here is sustained by the quoting of fatalistic sayings throughout the book: "What the eyes don't see, the heart doesn't feel" (p. 98) and "the turns of the world are great, and rolling stones are apt to collide" (p. 110) from

Fernanda; "you have to face whatever life brings" (p. 137) and "after I'm dead, the hell with it, let them dump me in a hole in the ground" (p. 267) from Soledad; "If you spit upwards the spit falls on you" (p. 221) and "where six can eat, so can seven, and where seven can eat eight can eat" (p. 234) from Benedicto; "I'm proud to be poor" (p. 446) from Simplicio; and "I'll carry that cross for Simplicio until I die" (p. 530) from Flora.

The strong sense of fatalism these sayings embody is enhanced by the strange blend of Catholicism and spiritualism the characters subscribe to. Lewis seems to emphasise the importance of religious beliefs in the Rios family in a number of ways. Catholic relics like the pictures of saints are mentioned in most of the recorded days, and most of the characters seem to be at pains to emphasise their fatalistic religious beliefs: "I'm bringing up my two daughters now and I realize that if they are to turn out bad they will, even if I set them up on an altar" (p. 76) from Erasmo; "I believe in God because he was the one who threw us into this world and only he can cure" (p. 106) from Fernanda; "I believe in God and respect the church" (p. 116) from Junior; "I think it was divine providence that guided me that time" (p. 183) from Soledad; "I never had luck with women. Maybe it is because our Lord hasn't given me my mate for life yet" (p. 335) from Edmundo; "When I need something, I'd rather pray. I ask God for what I need and pray an Our Father or a Hail Mary" (p. 371) from Felicita; and "I believe that the dead can help the living" (p. 612) from Cruz. None of the subjects express views that could be considered agnostic or atheistic.

The implication of the way in which statements such as these are edited is that there is a connection between the religious fatalism of the subjects and their political naivety. While there is a strong critical attitude towards some of the basic institutions of the dominant classes which gives the culture of poverty a high potential for protest, Lewis points out that "there is very little revolutionary spirit or radical ideology among the low-income Puerto Ricans" (p. 1). Most of the families he studied were politically conservative and about half of them supported the Republican Statehood Party. In La Vida, very few of the characters show any real sense of political awareness. In fact, in contrast to the post-revolutionary rural world of Pedro Martinez, not one of the members of the Rios family is a member of a labour union or political party. The observed day with Fernanda takes place at the height of an election campaign which is not even mentioned in the recorded conversations. And Erasmo tries to defend his political apathy by arguing that elections are irrelevant to his life style:

> If I don't work, I don't eat. I don't cast my vote for anybody. When anybody asks me, "Which is your party?" I say, "I don't belong to any, because no matter who is in power, if I don't work I don't eat." (p. 84)

Similar sentiments are expressed somewhat more violently by Felicita:

> I hate Nationalists, Independentistas and Communists. They are all the same. I never talk with any of them. I can't. I don't get along with the Governor, Munoz Marin, either, and I don't like his Popular Party. A lot of people around San Juan are saying that some of the big shots in the Popular Party, Munoz Marin himself, and even the mayoress, Felisa, are half Communist. (p. 361)

The only character in the book who shows any violent class resentments, or what sociologists may refer to as a "conflict" view of society, is Soledad. Her outburst, "the rich are sons of a great whore and they take plenty away from us" (p. 191), shows a measure of focussed resentment and bitterness that would seem to entail the possibility of real protest. But even this view is undercut by a strong Catholic belief in divine retribution:

> God is just. The world's justice won't do anything but you can always count on God's justice. If I should harm someone, for instance, that person shouldn't do anything. He should just say, "Never mind, I'll leave that in God's hands." And in time, you may be sure, I'll pay for it. God punishes without sticks or whips. Early or late, no matter how much time has passed or how safe the evildoer feels, a person who does a wrong always has to pay. (p. 193)

The obvious link here between political apathy and religious determinism perfectly captures the sense of Marx's oft-quoted generalisation, "religion is the opiate of the masses." Lewis's conscious emphasis on the fatalism of his characters in juxtaposition with their political naivety is designed to provide the reader with a view of a group totally caught up in a self-perpetuating way of life from which there is no escape unless certain basic ideological conditions are changed. The culture of poverty, says Lewis, is endemic to capitalist societies with "a cash economy, wage labour and production for profit" (p. xliii). All of the subjects in La Vida aspire to middle class values which, because of the conditions of the culture of poverty, are impossible to achieve. In contrast to this, Lewis found that in socialist countries like Cuba basic ideological aspirations had

been changed with the result that there was "far less of the despair, apathy and hopelessness which are so diagnostic of the urban slums in the culture of poverty" (p. xlix). While the people Lewis encountered on a visit to Cuba after the revolution were still desperately poor, they had been instilled with a sense of national pride and "a doctrine which glorified the lower class as the hope of humanity" (p. xlix). The members of the Rios family express very little national pride and tend to regard their poverty as a kind of personal disgrace. They tend to see their poverty as a form of divine retribution for their inability to live up to the middle-class values and ethics the capitalist system has imposed on them. So the traits Lewis emphasises through his editing are not only meant to be seen as evidence of his sociological thesis; they are presented in such a way that the reader may also understand the reasons for the characters' beliefs and actions.

Both theoretically and structurally, La Vida is Lewis's most ambitious work. He articulates his sociological theory more clearly and definitely than in his previous works and he makes use of a much more elaborate system of organisation and editing. He explains this system as follows:

> Perhaps the most important methodological innovation of this volume as compared to my other studies is the much broader canvas of the family portrait [the extended rather than the immediate nuclear family], the intensification of the technique whereby individuals and incidents are seen from multiple points of view [there are a great many more personal sketches than in the earlier works], and the combination of multiple biographies with observed days [the technique of Five Families with the technique of The Children of Sanchez].[63]

This more complex system of editing can best be explained in terms of the ordering technique of montage, the cinematic technique whereby the juxtaposition of scenes generates certain meanings and suggestions beyond those of the individual scenes. As the principle methodology in La Vida, the technique of montage allows for a structured perception of fact that is intentionally interpretive and not the arbitrary presentation of a "fictual reality" Zavarzadeh argues for. Speaking of Lewis's use of montage in La Vida, Camigliano and Champagne write:

> Without violating the principle of the documentary, the writer can interrupt the work at will through the montage of documents or other viewpoints that can function as complementary or contrastive elements. This serves the purpose of increasing the reader's radius of knowledge beyond that of the initial sources in the narrative. In this way social forces and structures relevant to the condition or situation depicted can be called to the attention of the reader. The breaks occasioned through the structural principle of montage are not disruptive but organizational .... The chosen event or view is not selected for its individual merit but because it is a typical occurrence of a social pattern. Through the careful and skillful compilation of additional sources the original event loses its significance as a singular incident and functions as an exemplar of social conditions.[64]

The technique of montage allows Lewis to offer a view of the structure of reality that draws attention to the multilayered nature of events, the underlying social contradictions that are the structural determinants of the culture of poverty. The stories are contrasted in such a way that the significance of the individual segments decreases with respect to the work as a whole. This alienating of the material leads to a distancing effect that allows for a greater reader involvement in the process of

interpretation. It also allows the writer to comment in an indirect way. This notion of indirect commentary is vital in that it maintains the appearance of noninvolvement and, therefore, the scientific integrity of this method. Camigliano and Champagne call this a "dialectical method of argumentation" through which Lewis produces a text that is not simply the sum of its individual elements but "the dialectical product of a new and specific nexus of meaning."[65]

The new nexus of meaning is embodied in the theory of the culture of poverty. This means that the function of cinematic scene shifts in La Vida differs from the novelistic function of such shifts in books like Capote's In Cold Blood. In this novel, the cinematic form of narration is used not to articulate a pragmatic sociological theory, but to enhance the thematic and mythical resonances of the author's novelistic philosophy. Thus, the essential difference between the two books is that La Vida performs a dominant referential or pragmatic function while In Cold Blood performs a dominant aesthetic or literary function.

The two-phase structure of the communicative process of The Children of Sanchez and Pedro Martinez is complicated in La Vida by the presence of Rosa, Lewis's chief interviewer and translator. Lewis as editor, Rosa as interviewer/translator and the autobiographical narrators provide three levels of variance as opposed to the two levels of the earlier works. Contrary to Zavarzadeh's contention that Rosa "is not an active participant and exercises no power to shape the course of events or to influence thoughts,"[66] it is quite clear that the presence of a

third party in the communication process must have an effect on the final structure of the work. The observed days are narrated from Rosa's point of view and it is clear, although her contribution to the conversations is edited, that she played an active part in guiding the dialogue through her own questions and suggestions. Her presence also has an important practical effect on the subjects' lives in that she escorts people to hospitals and welfare offices, teaches English to the children and serves as a friend and confidante of the parents (p. 427). Rosa is actually a player in the drama of the Rios family life. She participates in the daily routine of the family and is included in many of the autobiographies. As Camigliano and Champagne put it, the persona of Rosa becomes the "first semiotic unit" in the narrative.[67] The second unit is the tape-recorded autobiographical material that Lewis, the editor and primary sender of the message, organised into the third unit, the montage of La Vida as text. He edited the interviews for the pragmatic purpose of convincing his readers of an anthropological "truth": that there is a culture of poverty. In contrast, the role played by Capote in the organisation and editing of the material for In Cold Blood is submerged by the omniscient style of narration. Whereas Lewis calls attention to his sociological theory by explaining the editing process as an integral part of the finished message, Capote's novelistic function requires a form of figural narration where secondary meanings are suggested more obliquely.

The most striking picture to emerge from the contrasted stories of La Vida is one of a very loosely structured fragmented family. The narrative starts with Fernanda's one-sided description

of her life and family. This is immediately undercut by the stories of her lovers and detractors, and then by her children and their lovers in descending order. As Camigliano and Champagne put it, "the whirling narrative blurs the initial view of the whole family originally presented by the mother Fernanda."[68]

There seem to be two basic reasons for this loose family structure. Firstly, the only legal source of income for the illiterate males of the community is working on the docks when ships come in. Secondly, since the port is usually teeming with merchants and naval sailors, it is relatively easy for women to secure a dependable income from prostitution. Indeed, the lifestyle the Rios family is said to represent seems to be virtually based on sex, hence the dual reference of the book's title (La Vida, "the life"). Sex in La Vida is more than a source of income. As Berry Burgum puts it, it becomes an obsession which is only restrained by the generic love of children, but an obsession that seems to permeate all personal contacts.[69] Mothers intoxicate their children with sexual fantasies and seem proud of the early sexual maturity this results in.

The emphasis on sex in La Vida has led to a great deal of critical interest with some deeply divided views. One critic has gone so far as to say that the book is only made readable by its large component of pornography,[70] while Zavarzadeh regards the sexual passages as among the most evocative and "erotic" in fiction.[71] Both of these views ignore the role played by prostitution in the slum community and the culture of poverty. The first is jaded by middle class values and stereotypes. Quite

a few of the sexual descriptions in the book, especially those by Soledad, are certainly very graphic and, in terms of middle class aesthetics, possibly pornographic. It is also true that some of the book's success may ironically have been the result of this very feature. But to say that the book's only appeal is pornographic is to miss the point Lewis is making. As he puts it himself, "the description of the most intimate sexual scenes is so matter-of-fact that it soon loses the quality of obscenity, and one comes to accept it as an intrinsic part of their everyday life."[72] So the way of life described in La Vida is not meant to be appealing to the middle class reader it is directed at. The world of the book is repeatedly described as a world of violence, hopelessness, jealousy, resentment and uncontrolled rage in which characters operate as helpers or opponents in a sexual game, a game that is a desperate release from the tensions of slum life.

As readers, we are meant to sympathise and, if possible, empathise with the characters in La Vida on the basis of Lewis's sociological premises. We are not meant to judge their actions and responses as we would the characters in a novel. This is why Lewis emphasises that it is important to distinguish between what the characters say and what they do. Because of the culture of poverty they live in, the traditional values of familial love and loyalty they say they subscribe to are seldom demonstrated by their actions. Sex and prostitution in La Vida function as examples of the ways in which people caught up in the self-perpetuating way of life of the poor vainly try to escape. The sexual act becomes symbolic of a search for love, a metaphysical way out; the profession of prostitute is seen as an economic

alternative. At times, the two inevitably become interrelated, indicating the confusion of means typical of the characters' will to escape.

Zavarzadeh's argument that the sexual scenes in La Vida are evidence of the post-modernist novelistic impulse of the book is also at odds with Lewis's view of the role of sex in the culture of poverty. There is something perverse about the contention that Molly Bloom's description of Boylan's penis in Ulysses "lacks vigour in comparison with Soledad's felt expression of Benedicto's prick as big as a water pipe."[73] In the context of Soledad's story, this line is part of a description of a sexual violation and is certainly not an erotic fantasy. Establishing of the correct context justifies the length of this quote:

> I haven't left Benedicto yet because I have to get even with him first for all he's done to me and because I don't want him to have the apartment and the furniture. I'm defending my rights. As long as I live with him he has to support me. But Benedicto is a man who mounts a woman and then wants to do it again and again. I don't like that. Once a week is enough for me. Having intercourse too often makes a person go blind and weakens his brain. After working hard all day, I must have him on top of me all night long? Let him find another woman, since he can't go three days without screwing. I know him through and through. Look at the way we've practically killed each other and yet he's always on top of me. The man is too passionate and his prick is as big as a waterpipe. If he didn't wear a jock it would hang down to the floor. That's why so many women are crazy about him. But if he had his way he'd pierce me clear through. (p. 216-7)

Contrary to Zavarzadeh's view, sex in La Vida is not meant to be seen as "erotic." In fact the whole idea of eroticism is a middle class phenomenon that the members of the Rios family would

probably find totally alien. They do not talk of their sexual encounters in terms we would normally consider to be erotic, and as readers we are not meant to respond to their stories as if they were erotic. The function of the erotic in literature is usually to appeal to the sexual sensitivities of the reader so that he or she can offer a judgement based on the norms and values the writer wishes to endorse. In La Vida, the prevailing attitude towards sex functions as a characteristic of the culture of poverty. Lewis is not interested in putting forward a system of norms and values according to which the characters should be judged. He is simply concerned with allowing the subjects to describe their attitudes, letting the facts speak for themselves, and suggesting that these attitudes are characteristic of a self contained way of life.

Of all the features of the culture of poverty, attitudes towards sex probably make for the most interesting comparison with middle-class values. Lewis's readers might find it difficult to relate to such traits as the high degree of fatalism or the political naivety of the subjects. But with sex, a physiological reality common to all human culture, there is common ground that would easily evoke the interest of readers from any class or group. The basic function of the sexual descriptions of La Vida is to enable the reader to compare the basic role played by sex in a slum community with the role of sex in middle class life. Lewis assumes that the two are functionally distinct. If, however, the average middle-class reader could be seen to read the sexual passages voyeuristically as erotic or even pornographic, it would

say as much about the paradoxes of many middle-class values as the book does about the hopelessness and frustration of the Rios family's situation.

A comparison between some of the anthropological and literary critical evaluations of Lewis's books reveals divergent views on their generic function. Most of the adverse anthropological critiques have focussed on the methods used: the use of families and individuals as representative types, the single day as a unit of sociological analysis, the eschewing of complex statistical data, the presentation of the stories in the subjects own words in order to make a sociological generalisation, and all the other devices that make the narratives as readable as novels.

Most of the adverse literary critiques, on the other hand, have concentrated on the more scientific elements of the books: the conscious repetition of certain points for the purpose of emphasis, the insistence that the characters are representative of a broader social situation, and the presentation of the stories as a body of field data for a sociological theory. The repetitiveness of much of the action in the book is the main criticism of V.S. Pritchett who sees La Vida as "a dreary report of fornication, prostitution, wife beatings, razor slashings and kitchen life":

> The whole should have been boiled down but, like many sociologists, reporters and fact fetishists, Mr Lewis is liable to a superstitious regard for the totality of human utterance. The claim is often made that such books as his replace the novel; but any intelligent novelist would have had powers of selection and discrimination which Mr Lewis uses very little.[74]

A review in The Times Literary Supplement also criticises La Vida for the absence of truly novelistic characterisation. It laments that "in the old days, when the truth was supposed to need imagination, the life of the poor was left to the novelist to convey." What we get from La Vida, according to this reviewer,

> is not a full-blooded individual in the flush of life but a garrulous caricature providing us with a good deal of gossip .... One misses the imaginative translation of a Dickens or a Dostoyevsky; what one is sometimes left with is too great a sense of accumulated "field data" rather than life really caught in the act.[75]

The two opposing perspectives, the one seeing the works as too novelistic and the other seeing them as too scientific, both fail to come to terms with the hybrid nature of the works and their dominant communicative function. Lewis employs certain novelistic narrative techniques, not for their own aesthetic sake, but as means to render his sociological material and theory more accessible to middle class readers. At the time the books were published, this approach was unusual for anthropological texts and it led to a great deal of adverse criticism. Whether this criticism is scientifically legitimate or not is besides the question. The point is that Lewis's style of presentation does not make his works function predominantly as novels or, for that matter, as anything other than anthropology. He uses an alternative means of expression, but the end remains predominantly scientific and, in Jakobson's terms, referential. That is, the dominant function of the text is not aesthetic in the sense that secondary novelistic meanings are the ultimate end in the communication process; the aesthetic ordering and editing of the

facts is the narrative strategy by which the dominant pragmatic or sociological effect is reached. While the Times Literary Supplement reviewer is unfair in his own application of literary standards of evaluation to La Vida, he is right in concluding that the large literary claims for the book are not really functionally justified:

> If only it could be left as a well-done and worthwhile anthropological study, far more readable than most, with many interesting facts of Puerto Rican life.[76]

This is all Lewis intended his books to be and this is predominantly what they function as.

1.3 Studs Terkel: The Function of Popular Sociological Realism

In contrast to Lewis's anthropological studies, Studs Terkel's three major oral studies of American life never generated much theoretical debate. This may be because Terkel refrains from making any theoretical statements himself, and it may have something to do with the relative simplicity of his technical approach. Nevertheless, Division Street, Hard Times and Working each had a major impact on the American reading public and several critics have mentioned them in the context of a unified genre of modern nonfiction.[77]

There is a technical functional difference between the works of Lewis and Terkel in the sense that Terkel's present the words of Americans to his mainly American readers, while Lewis's present the stories of people from cultures outside America. For this reason, Terkel's works are referred to here as "Sociological

Realism" and Lewis's works as "Ethnographic Realism." Nevertheless, the links between the two writers are clear both in terms of form and content and the relationship between the two. Both writers use the techniques of editing recorded conversations into narrative units in order to communicate to readers the thoughts and feelings of people from other social groups.

Interestingly enough, the root of Division Street, Terkel's first book, is anthropological. He says it started off as a response to a challenge to write an American version of Jan Myrdal's Report from a Chinese Village (1965), an anthropological study, in the Lewis tradition, of the inhabitants of a rural village in The People's Republic of China.[78] Since this was the original prompt behind Terkel's brand of sociology, it seems logical that Myrdal's book might offer a clue as to the generic function of Division Street.

There are, of course, several differences between Terkel's book and Myrdal's, perhaps the most obvious being the different settings: the city of Chicago and the village of Liu Ling. The average American reader in the mid sixties could hardly be expected to react to the stories of people from Chicago - a city with a wealth of mythological associations - in the same way as he would to the stories of people from a rural village in a country that was at that stage still culturally isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, Myrdal's study was one of the first of its kind since the Chinese Revolution to be permitted by the Chinese authorities. But perhaps these obvious differences are suggestive of Terkel's purpose in Division Street. The stated purpose of Report from a Chinese Village, and its dominant function on

publication, was to communicate to western readers something of the lifestyles of a group of people about whom they knew very little. Associated with this was a strong desire to let the villagers speak for themselves, a desire echoed by Terkel who excludes clergymen, college professors, journalists and writers of any kind because "their articulateness and literacy offered them other forums."[79] But there is more than just a suggestion from Terkel that his readers were probably just as ignorant of the real thoughts and opinions of their own countrymen as they were of the lifestyles of people from a totally different culture.

This suggestion is more strongly asserted in various ways throughout the book. For example, by far the greater majority of Terkel's interviewees (about 45 out of a total of 68) could be described as members of the lower-middle or working class, not many of whom could logically be assumed to have been part of the book's readership. This suggests that the majority of Terkel's readers would be reading about the lives and values of people from social strata about which they knew relatively little. So the most basic function of Division Street is to communicate to readers the various attitudes and values of people other than the readers themselves.

There are several basic issues that seem to link the interviewees' narratives together. The basic unifying idea is the community of Chicago, but the others include the issue of race relations (bussing, integration, etc.), local politics (for example, attitudes towards Mayor Daly), religious issues, and the attitudes of the interviewees to current political figures and

events: Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, the prospect of Nuclear War and several others. The way in which Terkel draws his readers' attention to these various ideas is similar to Lewis's technique of montage: the contrasting of the stories for dramatic effect. While he does not articulate a sociological theory as sophisticated as Lewis's culture of poverty, his editing is every bit as subtle and suggestive. But this does not mean that the work is primarily artistic in terms of traditional western conceptions of aesthetics. As was the case with Lewis's books, Terkel uses editing strategies as means to what is essentially a pragmatic sociological end, viz. to tell his readers something about the real lives, values and attitudes of others through an accessible medium. In contrast, a book like Truman Capote's In Cold Blood makes use of scenic divisions and contrasts for what is essentially a novelistic purpose: dramatic irony, the heightening of dramatic suspense and the extension of the meaning of the facts beyond the pragmatic concerns of sociology to the articulation of a novelistic world view.

Division Street is divided into twenty-one parts, a total possibly suggesting a theme of maturation. Each part deals with a particular theme, social issue or community group and together they present a very broad picture of Chicago society. The twenty-one parts of the book are bracketed by a prologue narrated by a middle-aged social worker and an epilogue by a ninety-year-old ex-social worker. The link between these two women is that they worked together to resist a municipal decision to demolish an old settlement house and its surrounding community to make way for a new university. Florence Scala's prologue describes their futile

efforts to stop the demolition which eventually took place in 1965, and Jessie Binford's epilogue reflects a great sense of loss and her disgust for modern values. Both narratives reflect a longing for the healthy community values of their past and a sense of disappointment in the selfish materialism of the present. Florence Scala's lament, "I don't believe so much in people as I used to" (p. 31), sets the tone of much of the rest of the book.

Most of the characters in the book express negative sentiments about the broader Chicago community, but Terkel is at pains to draw our attention to the odd exceptions. The first part entitled "The Feeling Tone" immediately juxtaposes the lives of a poor, unhappy black woman and a happy-go-lucky barman. The story of a fairly well off magazine editor is followed by that of a struggling widow, and the story of a lonely old man who is apathetic about both Vietnam and the bomb by that of a politically active school teacher who is campaigning for clemency for a condemned prisoner. The lives of these ordinary people from several different walks of life are then dramatically contrasted with the stories of a syndicate racketeer and a homosexual actor in the second part, "On the Town." The former expresses hedonistic values that border on sheer anarchism, while the latter is shy and reserved and lives with his mother. Almost as if in answer to the racketeer's anarchism, the third part, "Did you see Lord Jim?" presents a character who is almost an exact model of Conrad's character, Marlow. He is a conservative John-Bircher who believes that a strict code of personal conduct is the only hope of survival in the jungle of Chicago.

Part four, "Two Landladies a Cop and the Stranger," presents one landlady who is very fair on her tenants, another who is unduly hard, a "good cop" who protects minority rights and a Puerto Rican emigre who tells how he was savagely beaten up by police on his way back from work one night. But perhaps the most glaring contrast in the book is between Parts eight and nine. The first, "Noblesse Oblige," presents a rich woman socialite who loves Chicago except for the ugliness of all the change, is hopelessly romantic about politics, supports the civil rights movement as an "American Experiment" but is disgusted by the bad taste of demonstrators, and goes through life in a "general state of euphoria" (p. 188). Part nine, "Ex-Domestic," presents the account of an out-of-work black woman who hates Chicago and all it stands for. She calls it a "lost town," "more of a Southern city than many cities in the South." She is also highly politically aware and expresses almost violent feminist views: "There is more hatred between men than between women. Males naturally are beasts" (p. 191). She says life has made her grow bitter, but has enough faith in the future not to wish the same for her granddaughter.

The dramatic contrast between these two accounts reflects the essence of Terkel's method in all his books. He has interviewed a large number of people, selected those interviews he thinks reflect the essence of the broader community, and then edited and organised them into brief coherent accounts in such a way that the subjects' attitudes to a wide range of topics and issues are contrasted. The result is a social document that succeeds in capturing the great variety and complexity of an

entire city in the form of a volume of very readable first person short stories. Nevertheless, the dominant function of the book remains referential in the sociological sense and it cannot logically be seen as a novel.

Terkel's second book, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression, differs from his other works in that it deals with a past event. In this sense, like parts of Lewis's Pedro Martinez, it can be said to perform a dominant historical function. But in the same way that Terkel's other books are not conventional sociology, Hard Times is very different to conventional history. Unlike most modern histories dealing with the Depression, Hard Times does not concern itself with the causes of the phenomenon or with the political and economic strategies that brought about its end. Instead it deals with the personal memories of a wide range of the people whose lives were affected by it.

On an informal level, part of the interest of Hard Times is anecdotal. We are reminded, for example, that Joseph Kennedy, the founder of America's "first family" of today, made the bulk of his fortune during the Depression through the misfortune of others. We also learn from a man who took part in the Bonus March on Washington in 1932 that the officers in charge of the military unit that attacked the marchers, killing several, were Generals Patton and Macarthur and Major Dwight Eisenhower, three men who were to go on to become international heroes during World War Two and one of whom was to become President of the United States. But such interesting stories notwithstanding, the real historical

function of Hard Times is more social than personal.

The issues the book addresses most often are the opposing attitudes of the respondents to Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt, the hunger marches, the New Deal and the strikes that took place during the Depression. And as was the case with Division Street, Terkel's editing draws attention to the differences between the views of the interviewees on these issues. Those who were not badly affected or who actually got rich during the Depression tended to support Hoover, criticised the New Deal and were generally unsympathetic towards hunger marchers and strikers. Those subjects who were financially ruined, on the other hand, supported Roosevelt and the New Deal, and sympathised with the hunger marchers and strikers.

Many of the subjects are acutely aware of the historical value of their memories. Cesar Chavez, a Mexican worker, says of his experiences:

> This I remember. Some people forget it. I don't. I don't want to forget. I don't want it to take the best of me, but I want to be there because this is what happened.[80] This is the truth, you know. History.

These sentiments are strongly echoed by Jimmy McPharland, a jazz musician. On remembering his experiences during the Depression, he says: "It's like studying history. It's like being a part of history" (p. 72).

There is also a strong concern for setting the historical record straight in the book. The subjects often draw attention to the fact that they are contradicting official or widely accepted views of what happened. The accounts of the hunger strikers are

one example. Another is mentioned by Dr. Lewis Andreas who recalls seeing a newspaper picture of a policeman beating up a striker under the caption, "Striker beats up Police at Republic Steel Riot": "a few of us said this will be called historical fact some time unless we do something about it" (p. 142).

Part of the historical function of Hard Times is to "do something about it" - to present the reader with a series of first hand accounts of the Depression from the bottom up in order to dispel some widely accepted views of what it was like. But this is not the only function the book performs. Twenty-five of the interviewees were either not yet born when the Depression took place, or were too young at the time to have any meaningful recollections. A recurring feature of these narratives is that the subjects have very little knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding the Depression and the economic conditions people lived through, and very little understanding of the attitudes of their parents to modern values. A young girl from Detroit comments:

> To me, the Depression is just like a story told. Just like World War Two. To me it means nothing, except I'd hate to experience it. I'm not used to low-class living. (p. 416)

Sometimes this kind of apathy grows into an almost bitter resentment by children for the moralistic materialism of their parents. The twenty-one-year-old draft-dodger son of a wealthy businessman complains about his father's continual reminders of the hard times of the past:

> My father talks about the Depression didactically. He tries to draw little lessons from it. He has an anecdote every time the subject comes up. It's a sort of heroic thing

for him. It makes him an extremist. (p. 343)

The apathy and resentment of the young is often matched by a cynicism on the part of parents for the romanticism of their children. In fact, in the very last narrative of the book, under the subtitle "A Touch of Rue," a mother comments bitterly on the "decadence" of the Bohemian lifestyle of her children:

> The young today are just play-acting in courting poverty. It's all right to wear jeans and eat hamburgers. But it's entirely different from not having any hamburger to eat and no jeans to wear. (p. 461)

The many contrasts between the attitudes of parents and those of their children in Hard Times suggests that the book is more than a simple oral history. Time and again the reader is made aware that the Depression continues to influence peoples' lives, especially in the breakdown of communication between parents and children. The parents who lived through the Depression regard it as a disaster that should be forgotten. Consequently, while they do their best to ensure the same does not happen to their children, they do not, as a rule, make a habit of talking about it. This means that children remain ignorant of the past misfortunes and suffering of their parents and this, in turn, causes parents to be critical of the ideals and values their children express. In short, Hard Times shows that the Depression has had an extremely adverse effect on the contemporary American generation gap.

The historical value of Hard Times is varied. On one level the book serves to inform readers of the memories and thoughts of a wide range of people on the biggest economic disaster in the country's history. On another level it informs parents of some of

the positive values of their children, and children of some of the reasons for their parents' values. So Hard Times is more than a simple oral account of a period of American history; it is a serious attempt to improve communication between generations. While the structure of the book may be similar to that of some novels, this is merely the narrative means by which these essentially referential functions are achieved.

Working, Terkel's third book, differs from Division Street in its focus on one element of its subjects' lives - their jobs - and its broader nation-wide focus, and from Hard Times in its predominantly contemporary sociological focus. The book consists of 133 interviews dealing with individuals' descriptions of their jobs and, more importantly, with their attitudes towards their jobs. The dominant function of Working is to dispel a well established myth surrounding American attitudes towards work. This myth is what has come to be called the "Protestant work ethic," the feeling white Americans are supposed to have inherited from their Puritan forefathers to the effect that work is good in and of itself. As Peter McGrath explains in his review of Working:

> By distorting Puritan theology Americans taught themselves to use work as a way of scoring points with the Heavenly Father. And after they ceased to believe wholeheartedly in Him, Americans moved work itself up a notch in the pantheon.[81]

The majority of the interviews in Working suggest that if this was ever true, it certainly is not any longer. In fact, even most of the white collar workers and executives interviewed express a

sense of despair and frustration with the apparent meaninglessness of their jobs. And as for the blue collar workers, the book serves to debunk one of the most popular radical staples of the sixties - Herbert Marcuse's notion that "the American working class has been nonradical because it has been bought off by a high standard of living."[82] While blue-collar workers may, in many cases, earn more than white-collar workers, they very seldom give the impression that they are satisfied with their jobs. "I'm a machine," says a spot-welder. "A mule, an old mule, that's the way I feel," a steel worker says. The point Terkel makes in Working is that work is, for good or bad, the most important influence on the average person's quality of life. But for most of his interviewees, instead of work improving the quality of life, it actually lowers the quality.

Because Working is based on a representative sample taken from the American public, there are, of course, those who love their work: a stonemason who looks at the permanence of his work and sees that it is good,[83] a piano tuner who delights in the sounds he creates (p. 273), the car hiker who takes pride in his expertise (p. 200), the fireman who "saves a piece of life" (p. 468), and the radio executive who loves his seven-day-a-week job too much to retire (p. 326). But as Terkel says in his introduction, "these satisfactions, like Jude's hunger for knowledge, tell us more about the person than about his task" (p. 1).

For the most part, the subjects of Working find their jobs "impersonal, mechanistic, boring, mentally brutal where it is not physically so."[84] Marx's term "alienation" is the concept that

comes closest to explaining this feeling in socio-economic terms:

> What constitutes the alienation of labour? Firstly, the fact that labour is external to the worker, ie. does not belong to his essential being; that he therefore does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and pains his mind .... His labour is not voluntary but forced .... It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself. Its alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists it is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification.[85]

While Terkel does not confuse his reader with complex sociological theories, this does serve as an accurate description of the attitudes towards work of most ot the subjects in Working. In fact it is almost as if Working was the case study upon which Marx based his sociological generalisation. Terkel offers his interpretation of the concept "alienation" in an explanatory article on the book, "Work Without Meaning":

> Working is about a search ... for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.[86]

In their search for meaning in their jobs, Terkel's interviewees fall back on a number of psychological strategies. Some play games: the switchboard operator late at night calls out the name of a motel other than the one she works for (p. 62). And the gas-meter reader follows a young suburban housewife upstairs so that he can look up her short skirt "just to pass the time of the day" (p. 239). Others tend to fantasise about their jobs: the

waitress takes meticulous care over what she does because she imagines she is a ballet dancer ("Maybe that's the reason I always stayed slim" p. 252). And the interstate truck driver fantasises about women because he feels he has been deprived of his "chance to play around" (p. 189). Still others try to lend a sense of dignity to their mundane jobs by using euphemistic titles. It is not necessarily because they are ashamed of their jobs, but because they feel society looks down on them as "lesser species."[87] The janitor is a "building engineer" (p. 120), the grave digger is a "caretaker" (p. 415), the garbage collector is a "sanitary engineer" (p. 407), and the company spy calls himself an "industrial investigator" (p. 137). However, whatever strategies these workers employ to make their day more meaningful, work remains a series of debasements and indignities.

On considering the generic function of Terkel's Working, it is interesting to compare the views of literary critics with those of social scientists. As was the case with Lewis's anthropological studies, literary critics have tended to appreciate the relative paucity of theoretical abstraction and analysis while social scientists have questioned the validity of Terkel's data on these grounds. A reviewer in Social Science Quarterly "would like for Terkel to have devoted more space to the analysis of his reports,"[88] while a reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement sees this as the great strength of the book:

> What makes Working such an extraordinary document is perhaps the fact that Mr. Terkel was not collating data for a sociological study, nor polling people in order to accumulate attitudes, nor listening for psychoneuroses, nor planning large scale

> analytical models to be constructed when his "subjects" had finished talking. He was listening to them, letting them evoke in him the feelings and opinions about work that he too had experienced.[89]

Both of these views reflect misinterpretations of the relationship between the narrative strategies and the subject material of the book. Working may not bore us with reams of statistical analysis of the data, but this does not mean it does not perform a serious sociological function. And Terkel may be a great conversationalist and editor, but this does not make Working a literary colloquy as The Times Literary Supplement reviewer implies. Terkel's purpose in all of his books is to communicate to his audience, in as interesting and readable a fashion possible, the lifestyles and values of people other than the readers themselves. His conversational ability, his subjects' responses and his subtle editing all operate as means to this ultimately referential or sociological end.

The function of modern technological devices (like the tape-recorder) in works like Terkel's and Lewis's is another issue on which literary and sociological critics seem to disagree. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh regards the use of "devices produced by an advanced technology" in works of this kind as the essential characteristic of the non-totalising postmodernist impulse that "has paradoxically taken narrative art to its primitive origins, rediscovering in the form of the notational nonfiction novel the lost oral-aural dimensions":

> Prose narrative seems to have come full circle: from the oral yarns of the tribal hunters to the spoken urban sagas of the denizens of the megalopolis. Narrative once

> more becomes not so much an expression of the totalization of experience by an individual writer as the articulation of the deep, dark, and unmediated forces which agitate the consciousness of the group.[90]

This rather strange analogy seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the functions of both oral narratives and modern sociological tape-recorded narratives. The oral sagas we have inherited from pre-literate communities are not the spontaneous outbursts of "tribal hunters." During the long process of their composition, they usually perform the important social function of recording the historical background and developing the myths and legends of non-literate societies. At the time these narratives are first written down, as was the case with Homer's epics, the mythological development is arrested and the basic communicative situation changes from an inter-personal oral tradition to a text-mediated written tradition. The written versions of narratives like The Odyssey and the Sundiata epic do not perform the same function as the original oral versions did. Oral epics are continually changed and modified depending on the needs of the community. Written epics reflect the mythologies and aesthetics of communities at a fixed point in time.

The functional differences between pre-literate oral narratives and works like La Vida and Working are three-fold. Firstly, the narrators of oral narratives are usually the official bards or criers of their groups while the narrators of modern sociological tape-recorded oral narratives are common people who do not usually have the opportunity to express themselves to a wide audience. Secondly, while oral narratives are not originally composed to be written down, texts like Working and La Vida only

exist as such because they were recorded and edited for a sociological purpose by their compilers. And thirdly, the function of works like Working and La Vida is not to educate people as to their historical and mythological heritage, but to communicate to readers something about the lives and values of the narrators. To return to Richard Ohmann's development of Frye's theory of genre, "in epos, the poet recites directly to the audience," while sociological works like Working and La Vida "present to a reading audience the lives, and especially the spoken words of someone other than the author or editor."[91]

The role played by modern technological devices like tape-recorders must be seen in terms of this basic function. Contrary to Zavarzadeh's assertion that the new technological devices have "liberated the artist in exile" from the mediating power of the author or editor, the function of the tape-recorder in the works of Lewis and Terkel is to provide the editor with the opportunity of mediating between narrator and reader. The tape-recorder is the editor's device and not the narrator's. It provides the editor with the raw material from which a coherent well organised statement of the essence of the subjects' accounts can be edited. All of the works Zavarzadeh refers to as "notational nonfiction novels" make use of the editing/mediating process to some extent. Terkel, Lewis and Theodore Rosengarten (All God's Dangers) draw attention to their roles as editors, and even a work as spontaneous and unabridged as Andy Warhol's a (1968) had to be edited to some extent for the sake of coherency. There is no such thing as an unmediated tape-recording; the very act of recording

sound is a process of mediation. In the sociological works of Lewis and Terkel, the tape-recorder is simply a technological tool for the collection of data. The taped material does not constitute the work. The sociological message depends on the editing and organisation of the author. However, this editing and organisation, however skilfully undertaken, does not make these works function as novels. To return to Jakobson's model of communication and his notion of the dominant function, it is clear that Lewis and Terkel are less interested in the aesthetic philosophical concerns of the novelist than in the pragmatic referential concerns of the sociologist.

We now move to a group of works whose authors make use of novelistic techniques to offer their subjective impressions and interpretations of journalistic events that have been mystified by other media. While social scientists like Lewis and Terkel maintain an impression of objectivity by keeping themselves outside the action of their works, Hunter S. Thompson, Michael Herr and Norman Mailer are the self-proclaimed protagonists of their stories and the communication of their personal views is the central purpose. This is why, in Jakobson's terms, the dominant impulse of this kind of journalism is the persuasive or emotive function with the referential concerns of all journalism being next important in the hierarchical relationship of functions.

CHAPTER 3

SOME SORT OF ARTISTIC EXCITEMENT IN JOURNALISM

No student of modern nonfiction literature can avoid considering the term "new journalism." Few critics approve of it, but most continue to use it without careful consideration of its various implications. There is no doubt that the term, when used to describe the use of literary techniques in nonfiction reportage, is a sad misnomer. Daniel Defoe used a form of novelistic narrative in A Journal of the Plague Year as early as 1722 and one could probably cite several examples preceding this. But the most troublesome aspect of the term is the way critics use it in a very general way to describe a wide range of texts that perform, in effect, very different narrative functions. In fact, at least four of the leading exponents of modern nonfiction as a unified literary genre use the term "New Journalism" to describe the corpora of works they try, rather tenuously, to group together in terms of loose theoretical abstractions.[1] And the generic problem here lies less in the adjective "new" than in the use of the word "journalism."

Few theorists of modern nonfiction seem to appreciate that the word "journalism" is not generally seen to be synonymous with "documentary" or "nonfiction." Journalism is but one of many genres of documentary expression that is divided, in practical and professional circumstances, into a variety of species within the genus. And a great deal of the sometimes vitriolic criticism levelled by both antagonists and protagonists at the troublesome

concept, "new journalism," seems to be based, respectively, on a misunderstanding of the narrative possibilities and restrictions of journalistic writing. The contention of Tom Wolfe, one of the form's most outspoken exponents, that the "New Journalism" in the sixties was in the process of "dethroning the novel as the number one literary genre"[2] is perhaps the most famous example of a misconception of the narrative restrictions of journalistic writing. Different forms of human discourse perform different communicative functions that require different structures or narrative strategies. But although the writer of one form may use certain structures usually associated with another to make a certain point, this does not mean that the writing should necessarily perform a different function. The most important decision facing any person wishing to communicate in writing is to choose the form most appropriate to the chosen communicative function of the message. And in recent years with journalists facing an increasingly complex reality to report and interpret, there has been a proliferation of experimental reportage aimed at overcoming some of the limitations of conventional news coverage. So just as the "cataclysmic tenor"[3] of modern times is said to have resulted in an explosion of the novel form into a variety of different modalities, the same cause may be at the root of the increasingly wide range of journalistic narrative experiments. The journalist using unusual narrative techniques to describe a complex social event should not necessarily be seen to have produced another post-modern novel. The ultimate status of the work would depend on the end to which the narrative strategies

operate.

The many critics of journalism who eschew the use of certain narrative devices for reporting because "elegance ... is not a characteristic of journalism"[4] seem to miss the rather obvious point that, just as there are many different kinds of novels, poems and plays, there is a variety of different kinds of journalistic writing performing subtly different narrative functions. From the earliest development of the newspaper, writers have experimented with different forms of discourse to communicate different attitudes, interpretations and descriptions of events and social issues to their readers.[5] Throughout the history of printing, readers have expected journalists to perform a number of different tasks, and even a cursory glance at the form of a newspaper in a modern western society shows that these different functions are now taken for granted.

The various forms recognised in conventional western journalism may be loosely divided between news and feature-based articles, although this distinction is by no means absolute. In the news pages of a newspaper we may expect to find what reporters refer to as "hard news" or "spot news" stories concentrating on very recent events that are likely to generate immediate public interest. Because of space limitations and the reading habits of newspaper readers, the hard news story is written in a simple, declarative, unadorned style, usually in the active voice, with a paucity of descriptive adjectives and creative methods of attribution and quoting. The most important or "newsworthy" facts are isolated high up in the introductory paragraph of the story and the rest are arranged downwards, in a kind of inverted pyramid

structure, in descending order of significance.

Associated with hard news stories are what reporters refer to as "human interest" or "colour" stories. These usually accompany hard news stories in the form of sidebars or captions and focus on the unusual aspects of human behaviour associated with events. While the structure of news stories is not as rigidly applied to colour stories, the same principles of economy of expression are endorsed.

In addition to these two different types of news stories, most journalists distinguish between "roundup stories" that bring together series of loosely related events or trends, "follow-up" or "reaction" stories that are written in the immediate aftermath of news events to update or analyse consequences, "backgrounder" stories that put hard news reports in their social context, and "investigative" stories in which the reporter becomes an active agent in the newsgathering process.

Features differ from news stories in two important respects: timeousness and authorial stance. Every news story hangs on a "peg" - an event that has just taken place. Feature stories are not necessarily current in this respect, but perform a supportive function in providing background to and personal interpretations or explanations of events. While in a news story the authorial stance is distant or impartial, in most features the writer offers personal comments and analyses. These are usually strikingly evident in the most basic feature-type stories in newspapers: literary, artistic or entertainment reviews, personal columns, editorials and leaders. One reads these types of reports

precisely to establish the writer's feelings about the subject. However, the feature is not restricted to newspaper journalism; it appears most frequently in magazine journalism, and it is here, in publications like Esquire, New Yorker, Harper's Weekly and the metropolitan supplements of the various major American newspapers, that many of the writers now regarded as the "new journalists" received their first hearing.

It is chiefly the intensely personal and involved authorial stance of these writers that has led to their disciples hailing them as saviours of the novel on the one hand and their critics labelling them frauds or "parajournalists"[6] on the other. Tom Wolfe regards the personal involvement of these writers in their stories as one of their most important and exciting attributes:

> They were moving beyond the conventional limits of journalism, but not merely in terms of technique. The kind of reporting they were doing struck them as far more ambitious too. It was more intense, more detailed, and certainly more time-consuming than anything that newspaper or magazine reporters, including investigative reporters, were accustomed to. They developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days at a time, weeks in some cases. They had to gather all the material the conventional journalist was after - and then keep going. It seemed all important to **be there** when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment.[7]

The actual participation of the writers Wolfe refers to as "new journalists" is indeed the most striking attribute of their writing. But Wolfe is mistaken in assuming that this gives their work the function of realistic novels and separates them from the practice of journalism. Personal involvement and a literary flair for expression have long been characteristic of some of the most

popular and effective journalism in history. When John Sack talked the American army into letting him join an infantry company at Fort Dix, train with them, then go into battle in Vietnam with them and write his book, M (1967), he did not invent a new journalistic or literary practice. In Victorian England, journalists made a habit of stripping away sociological myths by becoming personally involved in issues and events and reporting on their experiences. Dickens's reports on visits to work houses, the witnessing of public executions and being mugged in London are among the most powerful examples of participation journalism in English;[8] and a sadly under-rated journalist called James Greenwood actually anticipated Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London (1933) by dressing up as a tramp just so that he could get into workhouses and write about the atrocious conditions there from his own point of view.[9] The personal involvement of journalists in their stories was also a feature of American reporting from a very early stage. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the so-called "Muckrakers" like Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, Jack London and Theodore Dreiser became deeply involved in personal attacks on high-profile issues like railroad monopolies, the conditions in meat-packing plants and child prostitution.[10] And even under the stringent press restrictions in South Africa, the black writers of Drum magazine in the fifties went to great lengths at considerable personal risk to infiltrate certain Apartheid institutions and write of their own experiences.[11]

There is, however, little doubt, that this type of reporting

did experience a marked increase in America during the sixties and seventies, and this fact, along with the stylistic verve of many of the practitioners, may be the reason for the many claims that a new literary genre called the "new journalism" or "nonfiction novel" had come into being. Issues which were clouded over and mystified by official media, and in which the reporter could become personally involved in order to expose them, abounded during the nineteen-sixties. And the personal courage demanded by some of the books that emerged is without question. The three texts to be examined in this chapter are probably the most striking examples of this kind of authorial involvement: Hunter S. Thompson's Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of an Outlaw Motorcycle gang, Michael Herr's Dispatches and Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night. All of these works are commonly referred to alongside texts like In Cold Blood and La Vida by critics wishing to define a unified genre of modern nonfiction literature.[12] However, a close examination of their narrative strategies shows, in terms of Jakobson's communication model, that they perform a dominant journalistic function in contrast to the novelistic function of Capote's In Cold Blood and the sociological function of the works of Lewis and Terkel.

In each of these works, the ultimate end in the communicative process is outward to the media event or issue being exposed. Each book employs certain stylistic devices often associated with fiction, but these devices are subordinated as means towards the dominant journalistic end. And in each of these works, the personality of the writer as a reader's guide through the complexity of the events and issues is a dominant narrative

device. This does not mean that the narrators are characterised in a novelistic sense. Having read at times of their most intimate thoughts, we are not meant to judge them as we would the characters of a novel in terms of the moral themes of the text. Intimacy with the narrator in these journalistic works allows the reader to view the central events from a different and more trustworthy perspective. A greater understanding of reality through the consciousness of the author is always the dominant end. As Tom Wolfe aptly concludes, it is "a style befitting the times and tastes."[13]

2.1 A Journalist's Journey Into an Urban "Heart of Darkness": Hunter S. Thompson and the Hell's Angels

From February 1965 to a little later in 1966, journalist Hunter S. Thompson, on assignment from a Washington newspaper, became accepted by and rode with the Oakland "chapter" of a California motorcycle gang called "Hell's Angels." The gang had recently risen to world-wide notoriety after an alleged gang rape and the subsequent well-publicised report of the California Attorney General on the criminal activities of motorcycle outlaws. Thompson was one of many journalists to research the activities of the "Angels" after their recent leap to fame, but one of very few to obtain a modicum of acceptance by the gang. Throughout the year, he filed news reports to various newspapers from within the ranks and wrote the book under discussion after leaving the

outlaws in mid 1966.

At first glance, the book reads like a loosely assempled amalgam of interpretive reflection, edited interviews, personally-witnessed accounts and official reactions to a series of high-profile events. It is written in a casual flowing style designed to involve the reader in the profane jargon and shady underworld activities of one of the many frightening subcultures of modern western society. And this is one of the main functions the book performs: to offer the reader a realistic sense of a baffling social phenomenon from the inside that the restrictive structure and language of conventional news reports could not hope to achieve. But a closer reading of the book reveals a sophisticated combination of narrative strategies that performs a more complex journalistic function. Thompson found the reality of the "Angels" experience very disturbing, but vastly different from the view put forward by the news media. More disturbingly, he found that, in addition to distorting much of what actually happened, the shallow sensationalism of conventional news reports actually revived and made a legend of an organisation that was in the process of quietly disbanding and, through the impetus of massive publicity, created a self-fulfilling prophecy of hooliganism, assault, rape, terror and mayhem.

The act of journalistic reporting is as much the subject of Thompson's story as is the gang. This does not mean that the work functions as an example of modernist fiction, as critics like Zavarzadeh maintain.[14] The dominant direction of its meaning is always outward towards the reality of the subject and the distorted picture of the subject painted by the conventional news

media. So rather than working as a work of metafiction, Hell's Angels, along with the journalistic writings of Herr and Mailer, operates as a work of "metajournalism" - journalism about the inadequacies of other forms of journalism.

The book is divided into four sections, but these are not arranged chronologically or in the descending order of factual importance of the news story. The first part is a logical introduction to Thompson's concern with the treatment of the gang by the media in that it focusses on the event that gave rise to the sudden media interest in the group. The second deals with the process by which the declining subculture was made into one of the hottest news stories of the decade by an out-of-touch media. It examines the historical background to the group's formation, its codes and principles, and how it was constituted at the time of the writer's involvement. The third part describes, from the writer's personal involvement, in vivid detail, the event that attracted most media attention during Thompson's stay, emphasising once again how the press seemed to get the story hopelessly wrong. And the final section focusses, for the most part, on some of the issues raised by the gang's actions: its involvement in the drug subculture of California, its political outlook and philosophy (if any), the public paranoia and conspiracy theories the reporting of its actions evoked, and the equally sudden drop in public fascination as the always-capricious media turned their attention to other sensational issues of American life - the escalating war in Vietnam, country-wide riots in 1966 and 1967, a Presidential election, and the space race.

The four parts vary greatly in length and do not follow a strict narrative pattern. There is, however, a recognisable trend in the book that is emulated by the later efforts of Herr and Mailer. Novelistic narrative descriptions alternate with extracts from newspapers and official reports of events, edited interviews with witnesses and participants to give a more balanced impression of events, passages of sociological explanation and interpretation by the author, and the citing of personal anecdotes and examples to support the author's conclusions.

Part one, "Roll em, boys," concentrates on the event that was to prompt the official report that made the "Angels" famous - the Monterey Run on Labour Day, 1964. The passage starts with an impressionistic description of the outlaws hogging the highways out of Oakland on their way to terrorise a small town north of Big Sur for their biggest annual function. The impression is surrealistic, but Thompson makes his basic journalistic purpose evident right from the start with a subtle allusion:

> The Menace is loose again, the Hell's Angels, the hundred carat headline, running fast and loud on the early morning freeway, low in the saddle, nobody smiles, jamming crazy through traffic at ninety miles an hour down the centre stripe, missing by inches ... like Genghis Khan on an iron horse, a monster steed with fiery anus, flat out through the eye of a beer can and up your daughter's leg with no quarter asked and none given. (emphasis added)[15]

This oblique reference to the "Angels" as a media creation is supported straight away with quotations from The Man's Magazine, a jailer from the San Francisco City Prison, a newspaper crime reporter and a Hell's Angel speaking for the record on the very next page. The description of the events that follow is carefully

attributed in a typical feature-writing style with clauses like "he explained," "he recalls," "he insists," and many others. This description of the Monterey Run is given from the perspective of one of the riders who was there. And Thompson is at pains to lend credibility to his source by offering a kind of personality profile as supporting background:

> Scraggs, a thirty-seven-year-old ex-pug who once fought Bobo Olson, was the oldest Angel then riding, with a wife and two children of his own. But when Terry came down from Sacramento that summer to look for a job in the Bay Area, Scraggs offered bed and board. The wives got along, the kids meshed, and Terry found a job on the assembly line at a nearby General Motors plant - in itself a tribute to whatever human flexibility remains at the shop level in the American labour movement for Terry at a glance lookes hopelessly unemployable, like a cross between Joe Palooka and the Wandering Jew. (p. 16)

This extract illustrates two important features of Thompson's investigation: firstly, he gives a sociological context to the gang's behaviour more comprehensive than any offered by the news stories he has just quoted. Yet secondly, he does not pull his punches when giving personal evaluations.

When it comes to describing the physical appearances and uniform of the gang, Thompson falls back on the Attorney General's report which was to spring from the coming event, conceding that the "compact description of rancid, criminal sleeziness is substantially correct" (p. 18). What is not correct, however, is the distortion and misrepresentation of the event by the press who gave it the publicity that demanded an official legal investigation. Thompson describes this sensationalism as follows:

> Weird as it seems, as this gang of costumed

> hoodlums converged on Monterey that morning they were on the verge of "making it big", as the showbiz people say, and they would owe most of their success to a curious rape mania that rides on the shoulders of American journalism like some jeering, masturbating raven. Nothing grabs an editor's eye like a good rape. (p. 23)

Thompson does not attempt to apologise for the "Angels" if they were indeed guilty of the gang rape of which they were accused. Later on in the book he comments on the violation of rape in the most unsympathetic and vitriolic language. However, with respect to the event that shot the gang into the limelight, he takes issue with the version given by the media. No newspaper mentioned the fact that all charges against gang members were dropped; no paper investigated the possibility that the charges were based on malicious revenge (which Thompson believes they were); and no paper bothered to place the story in its broadest context (which Thompson takes pains to do). While the newspaper stories focussed almost exclusively on statements by the two alleged victims of the rape and official comments from the police, Thompson concentrates his investigation on the testimony of the "Angels", thus:

> No family newspaper saw fit to quote the Angel version, but six months later, playing pool in a San Francisco Bar, Frenchy remembered it this way: .... (p. 26)

Whatever the facts of the matter may have been, and whatever the outcome of the court case, "the presses were already rolling and the eight-column headline said: HELL'S ANGELS GANG RAPE" (p. 28). The result was an investigation of the activities of the gang by the Attorney General and the report that emerged from this investigation catapulted the "Angels" into even greater notoriety.

Part two of the book, "The Making of the Menace, 1965," is a

long critique of the conclusions of the Lynch Report interspersed with personal reflections and descriptions of "Angel" activities by the author. The purpose of this section, despite the novelistic point of view, is clearly a journalistic one: to point to the inaccuracies of the report and how the press sensationalised events long past to elevate the gang to the status of modern Robin Hoods. The idea of the press as the actual makers of the "menace" is suggested by a longish quotation from the existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, at the beginning of the section:

> The daily press is the evil principle of the modern world, and time will only serve to disclose this fact with greater and greater clearness. The capacity of the newspaper for degeneration is sophistically without limit, since it can always sink lower and lower in its choice of readers. At last it will stir up all those dregs of humanity which no state or government can control. (p. 31)

Thompson analyses several of the claims made by the report and subsequent news stories on the report, and debunks them in terms of his own personal observations. The report was based, for the most part on events that had happened several months previously and had been missed by the media, and it was written at a time when the "Angels" were struggling to stay together in the face of strong police control. Several newspapers misquoted the report or quoted it selectively, leaving out such important details as the outcome of the trial on the Monterey "rape". And statistics cited by the report were hopelessly inaccurate (for example, the claim that the "Angels" had a membership of at least 463 when Thompson was aware that there were barely 100).

Besides obvious inaccuracies in the report and related news stories, Thompson also discovered a serious disparity in emphasis and context between various sources. The difference between a page-one lead and an inside filler in a newspaper can be a few gripping adjectives. For example, the "Angels" were said to "take over the whole town" when they merely clogged up the main street; or they would "wreck a pool room, making it look like a tornado has hit it" when Thompson had witnessed a few chairs and bottles being broken.

After his analysis of the report and media coverage of the events, in which he finds that the Hell's Angels accounted for only a tiny fraction of violent crime in California in spite of their great prominence, Thompson comes to the following conclusion, a generalisation that is at the centre of the book's generic function:

> If the "Hell's Angels Saga" proved any one thing, it was the awesome power of the New York Press establishment. The Hell's Angels as they exist today were virtually created by Time, Newsweek and The New York Times. The Times is the heavyweight champion of American journalism. On nine stories out of ten the paper lives up to its reputation. Yet the editors make no claims to infallibility, and now and then they will blow the whole duke. It would be useless to try to list these failures, and besides that the purpose of this harangue is not to nail any one newspaper or magazine - but to point out the potentially massive effect of any story whose basic structure is endorsed and disseminated not only by Time and Newsweek, but by the hyper-prestigious New York Times. They took the Lynch report at face value and simply reprinted it in very condensed form. (p. 43)

It is important to note that Thompson's critique of the press treatment of the "Angels" is not a sweeping condemnation of

conventional reporting in general. He acknowledges that the Times lives up to its reputation in nine out of ten stories, but with certain issues, the conventional style tends to distort rather than inform. The Hell's Angels issue, like so many others in contemporary American life, was one of these and the best way of exposing the truth about it was through the actual involvement of the author in the issue.

After explaining that the press not only distorted much of what the gang was all about, but also went some way towards creating the menace, Thompson proceeds to set the record straight by describing his own involvement and experiences with the group (p. 52). The general pattern of the narrative in this part of the book is the recalling of a personal experience followed by a personal interpretation of its significance which is, in turn, followed by an anecdote or description of an event in support of the writer's conclusions. The personalised style makes for gripping reading and is wholly appropriate to the subject at hand. The description of "a bucket of shit and urine" being "poured over the newcomer's head in a solemn baptismal" during an initiation witnessed by Thompson (p. 54) is a fine example of the gripping starkly realistic style which contrasts the euphemistic language of the official report and the flat unadorned style of the news story.

During this section of the book, Thompson analyses several factors of the gang's lifestyle to offer some kind of sociological explanation for the phenomenon. He dispels the popular view of the motorcycle as a kind of Freudian phallic extension, concluding that it is, in fact, a practical weapon designed to have a

disturbing psychological effect on enemies (p. 93). He contradicts the newspaper view that the group emerged suddenly as an outlet for urban bourgeois frustration by offering an historical analysis of its origins in the late nineteen-forties. The group, he concludes, is only one of a number of motorcycle outlaw gangs that started when returning working class soldiers found it impossible to break back into the institutions of society after the war and sought institutional outlets to their anger and frustrations. The concept of a motorcycle outlaw was a uniquely American thing. Just as the end of the American Civil War spawned a mob of violent malcontents who immortalised the "Wild West" in American mythology, the "Angels" also erupted from a situation of chaos as "a kind of half-breed anachronism, a human hangover from the era of the Wild West" (p. 75). It is from this historical perspective that Thompson explains certain predilections like the gang's belief in "total retaliation" for any offence or insult. The readiness to resort to violence was not a kind of collective psychosis, as official reports and newspapers made out, but a defence mechanism of a misplaced subculture fighting for survival. And, ironically enough, it was exactly the misrepresentation the gang suffered at the hands of the media that gave it the impetus it needed to survive and flourish at a time it was just about to collapse. Another myth dispelled by Thompson from the authority of personal observation in this section of the book is the belief that most gang members were latent homosexuals. This quotation (but for the rather poor grammar of the first sentence) is a good example of the subtle method of argumentation used throughout the

book:

> To whatever extent the Hell's Angels may or may not be latent sado-masochists or repressed homosexuals is to me - after nearly a year in the constant company of outlaw motorcyclists - almost entirely irrelevant.
>
> There are literary critics who insist that Ernest Hemingway was a tortured queer and that Mark Twain was haunted to the end of his days by a penchant for inter-racial buggery. It is a good way to stir up a tempest in the academic quarterlies, but it won't change a word of what either man wrote, nor alter the impact of their work on the world or what they were writing about.... For the same reason, the behaviour of the Hell's Angels would not be changed or subdued for a moment if every newspaper in the land denounced them as brutal homosexuals - even if they were. Significantly, I have never heard anyone who had any personal dealings with them endorse the Freudian viewpoint - probably because anyone who spends any time with the Angels knows the difference between outlaw motorcyclists and homosexual leather cults. (p. 93)

The implication here is clearly that Thompson regards personal involvement (particularly his own) as the only legitimate journalistic authority for drawing psychological or sociological conclusions.

The third section of the book, "The Hoodlum Circus and The Statutory Rape of Bass Lake," is a simple first person journalistic account of the major event Thompson witnessed during his year with the gang - the annual Labour Day run - and nothing much needs to be said about it.[16] Once again, personal observations are contrasted with inaccurate news reports and interspersed with long passages of sociological interpretation and explanation. And once again, these conclusions are supported by anecdotes or recollections of prior events. The 1965 Labour Day run to the holiday resort of Bass Lake was an anti-climactic

affair. Coming shortly after the Lynch Report, newspapers made it one of the stories of the year. Rape, carnage, and wanton violence were predicted, and several communities on the route were said to be braced for invasion. As it turned out, with the strong leadership of the "Angels" chieftain and the diplomacy of the Bass Lake sheriff, the event passed with a newspaper photographer being the only person arrested - a fact Thompson reports with no small amount of smug pleasure (p. 212). He goes on to emphasise just how wrong newspaper predictions of the event were by quoting the headlines that appeared nation-wide the following week:

> Monday morning's newspapers were full of riot stories. The Los Angeles Times ran a king-size, eight-column headline:
> HOLIDAY RIOTING - TEAR GAS, TROOPS QUELL YOUTHS - FOUR RESORTS IN MIDWEST DISRUPTED BY BATTLES OF CROWDS AND POLICE.
> A front-page story in The New York Times said:
> YOUTH RIOTS ERUPT IN THREE STATES; 25 HURT 325 HELD - OVERNIGHT OUTBREAKS ENGULF FOUR RESORTS, 200 SEIZED IN LAKE GEORGE TURMOIL.
> It seemed like the only people who hadn't erupted on the Fourth of July were the Hell's Angels. (p. 214)

The fourth section of the book, "The Dope Cabala and a Wall of Fire," is not tied to any single event or series of events; it discusses various issues related to the Hell's Angels' way of life: their involvement in the drug subculture of California, the social stigma they suffered at the hands of an irresponsible media, their political and philosophical views, and the rather surprising intense gang loyalties they display. Once again, Thompson contrasts his personal observations with the versions of newspapers and makes sociological generalisations to explain phenomena. He cites examples from his past experiences to enforce

his conclusions and offers the reader, in a style designed for the purpose, observations and interpretations left largely unreported by conventional journalists. He concludes that the "Angels" are "dope fiends" to a large extent, but are not responsible in any big way for trafficking in drugs as was claimed by official sources. Once again, this extract illustrates Thompson's method of making a point and then backing it up with witty observations and arguments:

> The Angels are too obvious for serious drug traffic. They don't even have enough capital to function as middlemen, so they end up buying most of their stuff in small lots at high prices. Three or four of them will nurse a joint until it is so short they have to hold it with alligator clips - which many outlaws carry for exactly this purpose. People with real access to marijuana can afford to smoke it in big pipes and hookahs ... and if they have a serious commercial interest in the stuff they rarely smoke it at all except behind locked doors. A taste for pot is not part of the formula for success in a profit-oriented society. If Horatio Alger had been born near a field of locoweed his story might have been a lot different. He would have gone on unemployment and spent most of his time just standing around smiling at things, brushing off the protests of his friends and benefactors, saying: "Don't bug me, baby - you'll never know." (p. 220-1)

In his discussion of the "Angels" involvement in politics, Thompson once again debunks the view propogated in newspapers that they are bourgeois malcontents at odds with all established order. If they had a coherent philosophy at all, it would be closer to Fascism than Communism. The gang's hierarchy was extremely rigid and, in spite of the chaos caused in society at large, very efficient. Thompson describes an incident when a group of "Angels" went so far as to break up an anti-Vietnam peace

demonstration because it was "un-American" and quotes a letter from the Oakland leader to the American President offering support in the war:

> PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON
> 1600 Penn Ave.
> Washington D.C.
>
> Dear Mr President:
> On behalf of myself and my associates I volunteer a group of loyal americans for behind the lines duty in Viet Nam. We feel that a crack group of trained gorrillas (sic) would demoralise the Viet Cong and advance the cause of freedom. We are available for training and duty immediately. (p. 264)

The intense group loyalties of the gang are explained in terms of the pressure of outside institutions and structures. As a subculture, Thompson sees the "Angels" in a fight for survival. Unlike the Berkeley radicals they scorn so deeply, the "Angels" are the sons of poor men and drifters, losers and the sons of losers. They come from ordinary backgrounds like millions of other people. But in their collective identity they have a peculiar fascination that the press distorted with cynicism by its "slavish dedication to the public appetite" (p. 272). But unlike other rebels, the "Angels" do not believe that society is going to change for them. They have no agenda for a better world like Socialists do and they see themselves merely fighting for survival against a society that does not understand them. Thompson sees this as the root of their intense loyalty:

> There is no talk among the Angels of "building a better world", yet their reactions to the world they live in are rooted in the same kind of anarchic, para-legal sense of conviction that brought the armed wrath of the Establishment crashing down on the Wobblies. There is the same kind of suicidal loyalty, the same kind of in-group rituals and

> nicknames, and above all the same feeling of constant warfare with an unjust world. The Wobblies were losers, and so are the Angels ... and if every loser in this country today rode a motorcycle the whole highway system would have to be modified. (p. 273)

At the time Thompson left the Hell's Angels, the gang was once again in decline. The year and a half of world-wide notoriety had been created by the press, and Thompson's purpose was to correct a distorted picture. Hell's Angels operates as a work of involved sociological journalism. The writer focussed on an event he believed had been mystified by other media and tried to describe and explain it using some of the narrative techniques of the testimonial novel. But the book is not a novel. It is, in fact, quite surprising that some critics have insisted on this function, since its form is clearly less novelistic than that of most other works routinely referred to as "non-fiction novels." Thompson is not interested in a coherent novelistic plot and the material is simply organised to enhance his rather scattered and impressionistic interpretation of the experience. And although he is individualised to a large extent, this is not meant to be taken as novelistic characterisation; it is the simple intention that familiarity with the author will convince the reader of the credibility of the story. Furthermore, other common novelistic techniques like realistic dialogue and meaningful descriptions of setting are used sparsely and for obvious referential effect. But if Hell's Angels does not function as a novel, it is also not a work of sociology in the way those of Lewis and Terkel are. Its interpretations may be sociological, but it is based on a news issue. In this sense, it is a long journalistic feature, a

feature written in a style unlike that associated with most magazines, but a feature nevertheless.

While Thompson's journalism is generally sympathetic to his subject in the sense that he tries to understand rather than condemn, he is never the spokesman or publicity lackey of the gang. His involvement was mostly uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous. And while a reading of Hell's Angels leaves one with a sense of greater understanding for a strange social phenomenon, Thompson's parting from the gang was individually painful. He was savagely beaten up by several members over a minor disagreement, the description of which he leaves us in the Postscript of the book.

> It had been a bad trip ... fast and wild in some moments, slow and dirty in others, but on balance it looked like a bummer. On my way back to San Francisco, I tried to compose a fitting epitaph. I wanted something original, but there was no escaping the echo of Mistah Kurtz's comment from the heart of the darkness: "The horror! The horror! ... Exterminate the brutes!" It seemed appropriate, if not entirely just ... but after getting such a concentrated jolt of reality I was not much concerned about justice. (p. 284)

3.2 DATELINE - KHE SANH: Michael Herr in Vietnam

Of all the media events that contributed to the popularisation of a highly personalised journalism in the sixties and seventies, the Vietnam War probably had the most profound effect on American culture. And of all the books written about this cataclysmic event, Michael Herr's Dispatches is, perhaps, the most famous. And with good reason. For Dispatches is a war report like few others, capturing from the author's own perspective what the essence of the experience was for the common fighting soldier: the terror of combat. It is, however, possibly because of this virtue that the basic narrative function of the book has so often been misunderstood. Given the somewhat elitist predilections of modern views on the hierarchical status of genres, few critics would be seen to have labelled a book as gripping and powerful as Dispatches mere "journalism". But this, as has been mentioned, is because of a popular misconception in literary circles of the scope of journalistic writing. When the book was first published, Raymond Sokolov called Herr a novelist in the post-Hemingway tradition, "cutting his sentences very close to the bone."[17] Praise for the book's "literary" methods has been just about unbounded, and theorists attempting to define a unified genre of modern nonfiction have snapped up Dispatches as an example of this new "postmodernist form."[18]

Whatever the "literary" merits of the work, and doubtless these are manifold, it remains a book not about war in general, but about a particular war at a very special time receiving media attention like no other war before or since. And it is in this

context - the Vietnam War as an already well-established media event - that the real journalistic function of Dispatches should be defined. Like Thompson's report on the Hell's Angel's, the major function of Herr's Dispatches is to set the record straight - to dispel the popular view of the war experience as purveyed by the conventional media by reporting in a highly impressionistic style the personal experiences and reflections of the author. Unlike the writer of the conventional news report, Herr is less concerned with the isolated newsworthy facts of the situation than with the harsh reality of the experience for the common fighting soldier. In fact, one of Herr's major criticisms of the conventional news coverage of the war is that it tended to hide the essence of the experience behind a wave of nebulous facts and data written in the highly euphemistic jargon of official news releases. Towards the end of the book, in a section devoted to analysing the role of the media in Vietnam, Herr takes issue with what he calls elsewhere the "communications pudding" of conventional journalism and offers his manifesto on the role of the reporter in war:

> Somewhere on the periphery of that total Vietnam issue whose daily reports made the morning paper too heavy to bear, lost in the surreal contexts of television, there was a story that was as simple as it had always been, men hunting men, a hideous war and all kinds of victims. But there was also a Command that didn't feel this, that rode us into attrition traps on the back of fictional kill ratios, and an Administration that believed the Command, a cross-fertilization of ignorance, and a press whose tradition of objectivity and fairness (not to mention self interest) saw that all of it got space. It was inevitable that once the media took the diversions seriously enough to report them,

> they also legitimized them. The spokesman spoke in words that had no currency left as words, sentences with no hope of meaning in the sane world, and if much of it was sharply queried by the press, all of it got quoted. The press got all the facts (more or less), it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was really what it was all about.[19]

Herr's answer to the bland, faceless, euphemistic reporting of the mainstream newspapers is a personalised account that makes the horror of death in combat its major subject. The book is narrated by Herr himself in a crisp, earthy, epigrammatic style designed to capture, in the parlance of the great sufferers in the war, what they felt, how they expressed their feelings and how they endured it. In the end, the reader is left with the impression that the whole book has been a response to the tortured plea or threat to the author by an exhausted Marine as Herr is about to catch a plane out of Vietnam. It is one of the most memorable descriptions in the book and sums up perfectly Herr's journalistic role as witness for the common soldier:

> And always, they would ask you with an emotion whose intensity would shock you to please tell it, because they really did have the feeling that it wasn't being told for them, that they were going through all of this and that somehow no one back in the World knew about it. They may have been a bunch of dumb, brutal killer kids (a lot of correspondents privately felt that), but they were smart enough to know that much. There was a Marine in Hue who had come after me as I walked towards the truck that would take me to the airstrip, he'd been locked in that horror for nearly two weeks while I'd shuttled in and out for two or three days at a time. We knew each other by now, and when he caught up with me he grabbed my sleeve so violently that I thought he was going to accuse me or, worse, try to stop me from going. His face was blank with exhaustion, but he had enough feeling left to say, "Okay, man, you go on, you go on out of

> here you cocksucker, but I mean it, you tell it! You tell it man. If you don't tell it ..." (p. 167)

Like Thompson's experience with the Hell's Angels, the best way Herr has of "telling it", indeed the only way he can tell it with any measure of authenticity and credibility, is to live the experience himself and then try to get the reader to relive it through the colloquial, evocative language of the troops.

By describing the experience from the point of view of the men in the field, Herr follows consciously in a well-established tradition of war literature that was pioneered by Stephen Crane in The Red Badge of Courage (1895) and reached fruition with the novelists of the First World War (Henri Barbusse's Under Fire, 1916, and Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, 1929). A concern for "telling it" from the point of view of the soldiers was close to the hearts of these writers, and one of the most striking features of their work is its gripping naturalism. However, in so much as they were novelists, their primary concern was not so much with describing the action for what it was as with using the factual material to suggest thematic moral abstractions that go beyond the particular wars to human conflict in general. Thus in Crane's case, for example, the dominant function of the novel is to explore the complex psychological themes of self-deception. He is not describing the American Civil War primarily in a journalistic sense to tell his readers what the fighting was like. Realistic descriptions are used for the secondary meanings they carry.

Another war novel frequently mentioned in association with Dispatches is Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-five (1969). However, although the books share a self-reflexive concern for the

difficulty of writing meaningfully about surrealistic experiences, Vonnegut tries to overcome this difficulty through recourse to fable. Slaughterhouse-five is only ostensibly a novel about war; more particularly it is a novel about the affirmation of human dignity in the face of absurdity. The fire-bombing of Dresden is certainly the main experience upon which the action is based, but there is very little documentary description of the event in a journalistic sense. In the case of Dispatches the techniques of self-reflexive fiction are employed for what is primarily a journalistic end. Herr's ultimate aim is not to explore the thematic moral resonances of the Vietnam experience; it is simply to debunk official versions of events with more authentic first-person observations.

One of the most common linguistic devices in Dispatches, a device that characterises much of the personal novelistic journalism of the period, is the frequent use of the second person vocative "you" as a clear signal to the reader that the pragmatic function of the writing is to try to share the essence of the experience. Long sections of Dispatches are written as direct addresses to the reader that belie critical suggestions that the book is supposed to be a modern fantasy or horror story, a post-modernist novel that goes beyond the actual experience of the Vietnam War. The harsh reality of the experience, and the need to communicate this reality to readers, is a central concern that is emphasised throughout the book:

> Talk about impersonating an identity, about locking into a role about irony: I went to cover the war and the war covered me; an old story, unless of course you've never heard it.

> I went there behind the crude but serious belief that you had to be able to look at anything, serious because I acted on it and went, crude because I didn't know, it took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes. Time and information, rock and roll, life itself, the information isn't frozen. (p. 24)

Grammatically the word "you" may be seen here as the generic "you" whereby the reporter is actually referring to himself or "one." However, the first mention of the word, "an old story, unless you've never heard it" (emphasis added), can easily be read as a direct address to the reader emhasising the co-opting effect the generic "you" performs in any case. This feeling is enhanced by the frequency of the first-person "I" in passages like this. On many other occasions in the book, Herr does address the reader directly with the second-person vocative "you." In this passage he talks of the few reporter colleagues whose journalistic ethics he admires:

> If you ever saw stories written by Peter Kann, William Touhy, Tom Buckley, Bernie Weinraub, Peter Arnett, Lee Lescaze, Peter Braestrup, Charles Mohr, Ward Just or a few others, you'd know that most of what the Mission wanted to say to the American public was a psychotic vaudeville; that Pacification, for example, was hardly anything more than a swollen computerised tit being forced upon an already violated population, a costly, valueless programme that worked only in press conferences. (p. 173)

The use of this kind of second person vocative address, which corresponds with Jakobson's notion of the conative function of communication, is a clear index of the book's dominant pragmatic

and journalistic function. In the same way that James Agee tries to elicit compassion from his readers for the plight of the tenant farmers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, so Herr's purpose is to get his readers to empathise with the troops by making them feel part of the terrifying experience. While this device may be at odds with the credo of objectivity and impartiality of modern western news writing, this does not mean that the work does not function as journalism. Rather than operating as an alternative fiction, Dispatches is an alternative work of journalism seeking to demystify an event that had been obscured in the "communications pudding" of facts and figures put out by the conventional media.

Probably the most persuasive argument in favour of the book being regarded, because of its concern with the metalinguistic problems of accurate description, as a postmodernist novel or modern fable is John Hellmann's chapter on Dispatches in his study, Fables of Fact. Hellmann regards Dispatches as a metafiction "self-reflexively presented as the journey of its author through his own consciousness". In this sense, the book owed much to the fabulist experiments of the likes of Kosinski and Barthelme, and succeeded in avoiding the limitations of both realistic fiction and conventional journalism through its "emblematic exploration of the images that reside in his consciousness long after the actual events have passed."[20] The true subject of Dispatches, according to Hellmann, is "the necessity of exploring and ordering the events in Vietnam" rather than the events themselves. Certainly, Herr does present the war as a cataclysmic event that took on surrealistic qualities in its

mystification by official media, but Hellmann is mistaken in assuming that the dominant function of the book is literary and that its ultimate direction of meaning is, in Frye's terms, inward towards its novelistic structure. In fact Hellmann's insistence on the "metafictional" characteristics of the book is a response typical of critics of modern documentary literature who fail to acknowledge the wide scope and range of modern journalistic writing.

This interpretation of the book as a surrealistic postmodernist fable is based largely on a view of its seemingly disjointed structure:

> Dispatches consists of a series of fragments, ranging from the briefest snapshots to fully dramatized episodes, arranged in nonchronological order. These fragments are subsumed within the larger structure of Herr's mediating consciousness as he probes for the essential meaning of his Vietnam experience.[21]

However, a close reading of the book from a journalistic perspective reveals a structure far more tightly knit and organised than the self-reflexive reading would admit to. Hellmann's definition of Dispatches is based on a confusion of narrative means and ends. The loose colloquial stream-of-consciousness style employed occasionally throughout the book is not meant as a novelistic end in itself; it is meant to operate as a journalistic counter to the bland euphemistic style characteristic of conventional news reports from the war. And the seemingly fragmented structure of the book is not supposed to be a novel postmodernist narrative experiment; it is the best narrative means at the writer's command to capture the real sense of the

experience. If the experience is fragmented and surrealistic, then the best way to report the experience is to employ a structure and style that reflects this sense. This does not make Dispatches a postmodernist novel. It simply means the journalist has employed a style appropriate to his difficult subject.

"Information" is a term that recurs throughout the book, emphasising the writer's journalistic concern for the accuracy of his report. But "information" to Herr is more than the "communications pudding" of facts and statistics released by the army's information services with a view towards obfuscating the essence of the experience. To Herr information is experience and his journalistic response to the traditional journalism of the time was to eschew facts and statistics for personal reflections and feelings. An unusual journalistic practice perhaps; but a very effective one nonetheless.

Dispatches is divided into six major sections that correspond loosely to the long impressionistic articles Herr filed while in Vietnam on assignment for magazines like Esquire, Rolling Stone and New American Review. However, much of the material was reworked and reorganised into a coherent whole making a particular journalistic point.

The first part, "Breathing In," is a long series of vignettes describing Herr's earlier impressions of Vietnam during his first tour in 1967. The narrative style alternates between introspective impressionistic interpretations and straightforward first-person journalistic accounts of military actions, and this pattern is sustained throughout the book. Like so many other books about war, Dispatches follows a process from innocence to

experience, and the first part describes how quickly Herr graduates from his innocence at the beginning to an experienced cynicism almost immediately after first experiencing the horror of combat. There is, however, very little specific information in the first part of Dispatches. The dominant function of this kind of journalism is not to bog the reader down in countless verifiable facts; it is to give the reader a very real sense of what it was like to be there.

One of the central journalistic functions of Dispatches is to offer a critique of the conventional journalism and official propaganda that had succeeded in masking the horror of the experience behind faceless data, statistics and a euphemistic military terminology. The first image described by Herr is an old inaccurate map of Vietnam on his wall in Saigon that becomes emblematic of the distortive information churned out by the official media:

> It was late '67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much any more; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war. (p. 11)

The war is described as pervasive. But it is its very pervasiveness that makes it so difficult to report. One of the most important points raised in the book is that the Vietnam War was much more than an event that could be documented coherently like other media events. The thing about this war was that it was a surrealistic experience requiring a particular kind of

journalistic involvement to capture. This involvement meant getting the story from first-hand experience and from the mouths of the soldiers doing the fighting. In this context, Herr takes issue with those reporters who ignored the testimony of the troops and relied on the official work for their stories:

> Some journalists talked about no-story operations, but I never went on one. Even when an operation never got off the ground, there was always the strip. Those were the same journalists who would ask us what the fuck we ever found to talk to grunts about, who said they never heard a grunt talk about anything except cars, football and chone. But they all had a story, and in the war they were driven to tell it. (p. 31)

Herr's main purpose in Dispatches is to act as chronicler for the grunts: to tell their stories as he heard them or to describe his own thoughts and feelings as he shared their lives. Either way, the book operates as a journal for the normal soldier and in this sense the human experience is more significant than any facts, figures or euphemisms thrown up by the official information officers:

> Sometimes the stories were so fresh that the teller was in shock, sometimes they were long and complex, sometimes the whole thing was contained in a few words on a helmet or a wall, and sometimes they were hardly stories at all but sounds and gestures packed with so much urgency that they became more dramatic than a novel, men talking in short violent bursts as though they were afraid they might not get to finish ... (p. 31-2)

However, whatever the nature of the stories Herr records, all of them have a special significance in that all of them, true or not, say much about the nature of the experience. One of the first of the many accounts recorded in the book relates a story of just a few words, the profundity of which escaped even the journalist for

a long time:

> "Didn't you ever meet a reporter before?" I asked him.
>
> "Tits on a bull," he said. "Nothing personal."
>
> But what a story he told me, as one-pointed and resonant as any war story I ever heard, it took me a year to understand it:
>
> "Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell us what happened."
>
> I waited for the rest, but it seemed not to be that kind of story; when I asked him what had happened he just looked like he felt sorry for me, fucked if he'd waste time telling stories to anyone dumb as I was. (pp. 13-14)

The facts in the stories Herr records and in his personal recollections in the first part of Dispatches are seldom specific. Most of the accounts are prefixed by rather random introductions like "One day..." or "There was this grunt..." or "It seemed as if..." or any number of different general non-specific utterances. But as far as Herr is concerned, these seemingly arbitrary, unverifiable reflections come far closer to capturing the essence of the Vietnam experience than did the official press releases from military headquaters in Saigon:

> In Saigon it never mattered what they told you, even less when they actually seemed to believe it. Maps, charts, figures, projections, fly fantasies, names of places, of operations, of commanders, of weapons; memories, guesses, second guesses, experiences (new, old, real, imagined, stolen); histories, attitudes - you could let it go, let it all go. If you wanted some war news in Saigon you had to hear it in stories brought from the field by friends, see it in the lost watchful eyes of the Saigonese, or do it like Trashmen, reading the cracks in the sidewalk. (p. 41)

The second part of the book, "Hell Sucks," is a shorter section that describes in a more straightforward feature style

Herr's experiences in the battle for Hue City during the first weeks of the Tet Offensive. Here, in contrast to the loose, fragmented, unspecific style of the first section, Herr tells the story of his involvement in a specific battle at a particular time and place. The use of a more conventional journalistic style in this section is a clear indication that Herr appreciates the wide scope of documentary discourse and recognises that different styles may be appropriate to the description of different kinds of experience. In this section, the narrator often describes the action in a simple third-person style typical of war reporting from any previous era:

> By the end of the week the wall had cost the Marines roughly one casualty for every metre taken, a quarter of them KIA. 1/5, which came to be known as the Citadel Batallion, had been through every tough battle the Marines had had in the past six months, they'd even fought the same NVA units a few weeks before between Hai Vanh Pass and Phu Loc, and now three of its companies were below platoon strength. (p. 70)

This kind of reportage reads like something William Howard Russel may have dispatched from the Crimea. The narrative is made up of the narrator's own experiences and observations, not those of the soldiers as told by them, and in these circumstances the conventional feature style is appropriate. Here Herr accepts the accuracy and significance of specific factual details like casualty statistics, place names, the actions of particular units and, most importantly in the conventional journalistic sense, the exact place in chronological time when these experiences took place.

But although Herr <u>does</u> resort to a more conventional style in this section, he does not abandon the media critique that is at

the heart of the book's pragmatic function. In a cynical little "aside" during his description of a victory celebration after the battle, Herr distinguishes between his observations and the stories in the Saigon newspapers:

> There were two official ceremonies marking the expulsion of the NVA, both flag-raisings. On the south bank of the Perfume River, 200 refugees from one of the camps were recruited to stand, sullen and silent in the rain, and watch the GVN flag being run up. But the rope snapped, and the crowd, thinking the VC had shot it down, broke up in panic. (There was no rain in the stories that the Saigon papers ran, no trouble with the rope, and the cheering crowd numbered thousands.) As for the other ceremony, the Citadel was thought by most people to be insecure, and when the flag finally went up there was no one to watch it except for a handful of Vietnamese troops. (p. 72)

The third section, "Khe Sanh," describes, once again in alternating passages of conventional reportage, introspective reflection and the recording of stories told by the troops, the history of one of the American bases that was given a great deal of publicity in the conventional media. The consensus in military intelligence was that Khe Sanh was earmarked for a Vietcong offensive on such a scale that the French debacle at Dien Bien-Phu in 1954 could well have been repeated. In the event, no such offensive transpired, but the central concern in this part is with the paranoia the uncertainty caused in the command structure and among the troops at the base. This section is by far the longest in the book and deals extensively with its main journalistic concern: the fear of being killed in combat.

"Khe Sanh" starts with a chilling story about a young marine, about to finish his tour of duty, who cannot bring himself

to board the aircraft out of the base for terror of being shot down. His superstition that, having survived as long as he had, he was due for a dose of bad luck and did not want to risk a flight so close to his return home reflects a peculiar "Catch twenty-two" attitude that was common among soldiers nearing the end of their tours. Herr's purpose in introducing the section with this anecdote is to remind readers of the way the official media tried to avoid the harsh realities of this kind of experience through technical euphemism:

> In this war they called it "acute environmental reaction", but Vietnam has spawned a jargon of such delicate locutions that it's often impossible to know even remotely the thing being described. Most Americans would rather be told that their son is undergoing acute environmental reaction than to hear that he is suffering from shell shock, because they could no more cope with the fact of shell shock than they could with the reality of what had happened to this boy during his first five months at Khe Sanh. (p. 78)

Once again, the dominant journalistic function of Dispatches is illustrated by the focus on official distortions of what happened, and the use of the present-tense "has" emphasises the immediacy of this concern. Immediately after this introduction, which reads like a powerful short story in its own right, Herr launches another attack on the conventional journalism that blindly accepted the bizarre set of official references that ignored some of the most obvious geographical distinctions because "it made for clear information". The biggest problem with the official military language in the war was that "clear information" became an end in itself that obscured what was really happening:

> All briefings, at whatever level, came to

> sound like a Naming of the Parts, and the language was used as a cosmetic, but one that diminished beauty. Since most of the journalism from the war was framed in that language or proceeded from the view of the war which those terms implied, it would be as impossible to know what Vietnam looked like from reading most newspaper stories as it would be to know how it smelled. (p. 79)

From this critique, Herr moves to an impressionistic background description of the situation at Khe Sanh focussing on the vagueness of the countryside and the military difficulties involved in controlling it. From the point of view of the troops, the experience was a surrealistic nightmare: almost nightly bombardments (the heaviest of the entire war, making them the heaviest in the world since the Second World War), followed by patrols out into the "spooky" mountains surrounding the base that, as often as not, ended up in the annihilation of entire companies, followed by hours of boredom during the days on standby. In this situation of uncertainty, rumours abounded concerning the future of the base. There were rumours that the Vietcong were planning a massive offensive, rumours that the Americans were expecting this and had a massive backup force on standby, and contradicting rumours that the base was soon to be evacuated and everyone sent home early. Ultimately for the troops on the ground, rumour became indistinguishable from accurate information and no one seemed to know what was going on. This sense of uncertainty is captured graphically by Herr's narrative that switches from conventional factual reportage to the recording of stories by the soldiers to introspective reflection and back again throughout this section of the book.

The following passage is a good example of the kind of

dramatic shifting of perspective that gives the book its novelistic readability while at the same time enhancing Herr's journalistic purpose:

> At the same time that Langvei was being overrun, Khe Sanh received the most brutal artillery barrage of the war: 1,500 rounds that night, six rounds a minute for more minutes than anyone could bear to count.
>
> The Marines at Khe Sanh saw the Langvei survivors come in. They saw them and heard about them up in their Special Forces compound, holding off all visitors at rifle point, saw their faces and their unfocused stares, and they talked quietly among themselves about it. Jesus, they had tanks. Tanks! After Langvei, how could you look out of your perimeter at night without hearing the treads coming ....
>
> Some strange things would happen. One morning, at the height of the monsoons, the sun came up brightly at dawn and shone all day. (pp. 95-6)

The section on Khe Sanh is an important example of Herr's alternative journalism because this was one of the few place names in Vietnam that received enough media coverage to become recognized by the American public. However, this public was never really told what was happening at the base, let alone what it was like for those who were stationed there, and all that happened was that it became mythologised to the extent that the public regarded it as a second Alamo. To the American public, Herr writes,

> Khe Sanh said "siege", it said "encircled Marines" and "heroic defenders". It could be understood by newspaper readers quickly, it breathed Glory and War and Honoured Dead. It seemed to make sense. It was good stuff. One can only imagine the anxiety which the Commander in Chief suffered over it. Lyndon Johnson said it straight out, he did not want "any damn Dinbinfoo", and he did something unprecedented in the history of warfare. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were summoned and made to sign a statement "for the public

> assurance", asserting that Khe Sanh could and would be held at all costs. (Apparently, Coriolanus had never been required reading at the Point.) (p. 88)

The media treatment of Khe Sanh as a heroic defence was worse than a simple journalistic distortion; such was the power of the press establishment that the image created actually determined official policy. And since official policy was itself something quite nebulous, distortion bred distortion creating a "cross-fertilisation of ignorance" until nobody seemed to know exactly what was going on.

The section on Khe Sanh ends with a short postscript in which the point about epistemological uncertainty is repeated in Herr's inability to find out from two Marines whether a soldier he had befriended at the base had survived the ordeal. The fourth section, graphically entitled "Illumination Rounds," consists of a series of impressionistic vignettes in which Herr's personal experiences in other parts of Vietnam are documented. Once again, the narrative shifts from one perspective to another, illustrating the point that it was a surrealistic experience difficult to capture in written discourse. The point, however, is to try, and Herr's effort comes closer to reflecting the essentials than most of the conventional reports with all their documented facts and statistics.

In the fifth part of the book, "Colleagues," Herr moves from a concern for the plight of the fighting men in the war to an analysis of the media treatment of the war by the Vietnam Press Corps. The Vietnam War is the human conflict that received more media coverage than any other in history. However, one of the

central functions of Dispatches is to argue that this coverage did not necessarily make for a greater public appreciation of the essence of the experience. In this section of the book, the readers are again reminded that it is as much a book about writing about war as a book about the war itself. The two concerns, of course, are inextricably linked in that Herr's solution to the problem about writing about the bizarre event is to live the life of the participants (with the exception of not bearing arms) and write about it from their point of view.

The colleagues Herr describes in this section form an extremely mixed bag. There are those whose journalistic ethics he admires deeply (Sean Flynn, Dana Stone, Lengle and the "crazy photographer" Page), but for most he feels little more than pity for the way they blindly lapped up the official propaganda and churned it out in the formulaic newswriting style (p. 173).

While the main function of this section is to offer a critique of the conventional reporting of the war, it also serves to legitimise the alternative journalism Herr has been experimenting with throughout the book. The bulk of the section is comprised of anecdotes about the bizarre experiences of the author and his reporter friends in their efforts to get stories from the troops. It is written chiefly in an introspective personal narrative style which, through the regular use of the second-person "you," obliges the reader to empathise with the reporter on the difficulties of recording an experience this bizarre.

The section ends with a moving account of how the colleagues Herr worked with came to suffer social hardships almost as great

as those of the troops once they returned to the United States and tried to lead normal professional lives again. As journalist-participants in the event, Herr and his more worthy colleagues were subjected to much the same kind of tension, boredom and fear experienced by the common fighting soldier, and it is in the recording of these emotions that Dispatches performs its major journalistic function. For Herr, it is not enough simply to criticise; he also offers an alternative form that is supposed to reflect the most important human aspect of the war - the trauma experienced by the troops. For Herr, the American public had read enough "news" about the war and now needed to read about the "nuance" behind the experience (to use Norman Mailer's term describing this kind of journalism)[21] to find out exactly what it was like to be there in the thick of things.

At the end of the book the reporter goes still further to offer a kind of psychological explanation for America's involvement in the bizarre event. While visiting his "crazy" friend Page, who was recovering in hospital after being hit in the head by a large piece of schrapnel, the two reporters start talking about a book Page had been asked to write in which the British publishers want him to "take the glamour out of the war" (p. 198). Herr's shell-shocked friend finds this concept incredibly funny and breaks down in hysterics:

> "Take the glamour out of war! I mean, how the bloody hell can you do that? .... Ohhhh, war is good for you, you can't take the glamour out of that. It's like trying to take the glamour out of sex, trying to take the glamour out of the Rolling Stones." He was really speechless, working his hands up and down to emphasisze the sheer insanity of it.

> "I mean, you know that, it just can't be done!" We both shrugged and laughed, and Page looked very thoughtful for a moment. "The very idea!" he said. "Ohhh, what a laugh! Take the bloody glamour out of bloody war!" (p. 199)

It is at this point in the narrative that the reporter's chilling explanation becomes clear to the reader. In spite of all the death and suffering, wars like the one in Vietnam will continue to take place for no better reason than the simple one that enough men still love war. And the reason so many men still find war so glamourous is because that great socialising institution, the mass media, has made it so by mystifying the concept in countless movies and war stories. This implied explanation at the end of the book recalls one of Herr's earlier reflections that aptly sums up his attitude to the media and the basis of the book's pragmatic journalistic function:

> I keep thinking about all the kids who got wiped out by seventeen years of war movies before coming to Vietnam to get wiped out for good. You don't know what a media freak is until you've seen the way a few of those grunts would run around during a fight when they knew that there was a television crew nearby; they were actually making war movies in their heads, doing little guts-and-glory Leatherneck tap dances under fire, getting their pimples shot off for the networks. They were insane, but the war hadn't done that to them. (p. 169)

Part of the reason why the Vietnam experience seemed like a fantasy was because it had been made into one by the media. War films like "The Green Berets" had legitimised the conflict for Americans in the early days and the news media had taken over in much the same kind of official jargon. The reality, however, was a fantasy of an altogether different kind, and it is this kind of nightmarish experience that Herr wishes to communicate to his

readers through the use of more provocative narrative techniques. It is interesting to note that Herr has taken issue with the first generation of Vietnam films by writing the screenplay for two of the most realistic of the spate of such films to emerge in the nineteen-eighties: Francis Ford Copola's "Apocalypse Now" and Stanley Kubrick's "Full Metal Jacket."

Conventional journalism is criticised throughout the book, but its style is never condemned as irrelevant. By resorting to typical reporting techniques for certain occasions, Herr acknowledges that this style does tell some of the story. The central point of the book, however, is that it can never succeed in telling the entire story; and to Herr, the most important part of this story is not the historical fact as documented in official reports, but the experiences of the troops on the ground. So the bulk of the book is concerned with two related pragmatic functions. The first is to record the terror of the experience as it was lived by the soldiers in the field. It soon becomes apparent, however, that this experience is of such a surrealistic nature that it moves beyond the possibilities of conventional documentary narrative. The second function, therefore, is to describe the experience in such a way that the difficulty of writing about it also becomes evident to the reader. This is why Herr shifts from self-reflexive monologues on his own experiences, and the problems he experienced in recording them, to the recording of the experiences of the troops from their perspective and back again. And on those occasions where more conventional documentary language will suffice, it is used. In each case, the

style chosen suits the journalistic or, in Jakobson's terms, the emotive and referential purposes of the narrative. These narrative strategies have often been cited as evidence of the book's status as a novel or work of literature that goes beyond the specific experience being described. However, to argue against the ultimate status of Dispatches as journalism is to confuse narrative means and ends and to miss much of the book's power as a startling document of one of the most confusing and violent experiences of modern times.

3.3 History as Nuance: The Journalism of Norman Mailer

The problem with a study of Norman Mailer's narrative, an obvious problem that has been largely missed by critics of modern nonfiction, is that he has worked throughout his long and prolific career in a variety of traditional and experimental forms. His early masterpiece, The Naked and the Dead (1948), has the bulk, concern for detail and leisurely pace of nineteenth-century realistic fiction; Barbary Shore (1951) and The Deer Park (1955) have the texture and social concern of 1930's realistic fiction in the tradition of Dos Passos and Dreiser; The American Dream (1965) has the existential trappings of the philosophical fiction of the sixties; Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967) reads like introspective Joyce; The Executioner's Song is actually, despite all the talk about nonfiction novels and New Journalism, an historical crime novel with some strong metafictional concerns; Tough Guys Don't Dance (1984) is like a surrealistic and better-written James Hadley Chase thriller; and his recent epic, Ancient Evenings

(1983), is a sprawling allegorical historical fantasy. Given this wide range of fictional experimentation, it is hardly surprising that Mailer, for a long period in the sixties and seventies, concentrated most of his narrative energies on personal journalism. This was a period of intense journalistic experimenting by writers from a variety of literary backgrounds, and Mailer, as a prolific commentator on the American social scene in any case, seems to have turned his back on fiction for most of this period to try to make sense of the turbulent years through a novel form of journalism.

What is surprising given Mailer's wide narrative interests, however, is the reluctance of so many critics to acknowledge that his nonfiction writing at this time functions predominantly as journalism and not as some new mutation of post-modernist fiction. As was the case with Thompson and Herr, the difficulty critics have in coming to terms with this journalism seems to be based on a confusion of narrative means and ends.

Mailer's reports from this period, and particularly The Armies of the Night, have probably been cited more than any other works as part of the corpus constituting what critics regard as a unified genre of literary nonfiction. And, once again, most of these critics have attempted to explain and define the book as essentially a work of fiction with only secondary journalistic concerns. Ronald Weber says the book stems from a "surface concern with media inaccuracy," but is ultimately a novel;[22] both Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and John Hellmann define the book as a postmodernist metafiction which, as Hellmann puts it, presents the

great events and issues of a world "in which even the concept of reality has been doubtful."[23] There is no doubt that the self-reflexive concern for the difficulty of documenting complex events is an important theme of Armies. But to say this gives the book the same function as obvious fictions like Why Are We in Vietnam? is to miss the important functional distinctions between the different forms of discourse Mailer experiments with.

One interesting attempt to fictionalise Armies is Kenneth Seib's insistence that the book is a novel that employs "in one way or another all the features of the traditional epic."[24] As the historical antecedent of most narrative types, the epic is a form that has been consciously emulated throughout the history of the novel and continues to be used today. Seib identifies the following traits in Armies:

> In the conventional epic, narrative plot is simple, generally involving one central incident of major importance. The incident itself, with its setting, has significance for a race or nation. Warfare is the dominant theme. Towering above all characters is the epic hero, who exemplifies certain cultural traits and is a figure of national importance. The style of the literary epic is objective, lofty, elaborate in imagery, elevated in tone. Often the supernatural plays an important part in the outcome of events; gods, angels, and demons are common.[25]

In addition to these features, Armies also employs a number of extended similes, starts in medias res, fills in preceding events through flashback and describes a Homeric journey into the underworld in Mailer's arrest and imprisonment. Mailer, as Seib notes, probably makes these associations intentionally, but the critic is mistaken in believing that this makes the book a "modern epic" that in a Miltonic way tries "to justify the ways of America

to whatever gods that be."[26] Mailer's concern in using these devices is essentially pragmatic and the insistence by critics that they serve to fictionalise the text reflects, once again, a confusion of narrative means and ends. In fact Seib fails to observe that Milton's "epics" were narrative experiments and not examples of the form as it originally functioned. The classical epic, in its original expression, was not a predominantly aesthetic form at all, but a pragmatic mode concerned with the historical education of populations living in oral cultures. When Homer came to write down the stories of Ulysses, it is quite conceivable that the essential narrative traits already existed in the oral form. Mailer's use of similar techniques, whether intentional or not, does not mean that he is trying to emulate Homer the way Milton consciously did, but rather that he recognises that the stylistic features of the epic lend themselves, now as then, to a pragmatic journalistic or historical function.

While Mailer does use narrative techniques usually associated with fiction in Armies and, indeed, draws attention to his use of these like few other practitioners of this kind of writing, the ultimate function of the book remains emotive and its generic status that of journalism. It is precisely this self-conscious parading of techniques that has caused most critics to emphasise the novelistic aspects of the book while playing down the basic journalistic function. But a careful reading of the narrative strategies employed shows that the techniques used operate as means to what is an essentially journalistic end.

Symbol and metaphor are used extravagantly by Mailer in his effort to make sense of the complex event of the 1967 protest march on the Pentagon, and many critics have argued that such creative and imaginative stylistic devices are not the proper medium for pragmatic writing.[27] However, a broader understanding of the scope of historical or journalistic narrative provides the critic with an approach to this problem. David Levin offers this suggestion:

> Another important misconception is that which deplores all contrivance in history -- contrivance with regard to materials, people, and ideas chosen to represent larger groups. The choice of symbols or of typical kinds of character in narrative history seems to me as inescapable as generalization. The process of selection virtually requires that something be taken to represent something larger. Our question as readers and critics must always be: how accurate is this contrivance (this choice) for the materials it is supposed to represent? and then (in a judgment more relative, more generous), how appropriate was it for the historian to see these symbols in a certain way, given his premises -- that is, those standards of his that may well differ from our own.[28]

All history is narrative, and the use of certain literary abstractions is commonplace in a tradition stretching from Thucydides through Gibbon to A.J.P. Taylor. The use of symbols, metaphors and other novelistic structures in Armies does not make the work function primarily as anything other than journalism; it simply means that Mailer, like Thompson and Herr, is making use of an unusual and provocative type of journalism. Debates on the viability of this kind of journalism are, to a large measure, irrelevant. The point is that Mailer uses these devices, the narrative strategies of the text indicate that they are novelistic means to a pragmatic end, and the evaluations of the reader should

be based, as Levin suggests, on a judgment of the appropriateness of the symbols for an explanation of the documented experience.

Robert Merrill offers a useful distinction between the functions of Mailer's "subjective history," as he calls it, and of novels in his persuasive discussion of the generic identity of Armies:

> These forms differ in their basic ends. As I have suggested, the historian wishes to discover the meaning of the event which is his subject. If his method is subjective he may render his own impressions of the event, or the impressions of others; he may even dramatise the entire event as he experienced it. But he will do so for the reason Mailer offers: to illumine the event itself. Most fictions are structured toward a very different end. I take this end to be the creation of emotional effects - tragic, comic, etc. - appropriate to the particular fictional action. The characters in a fiction exist for the sake of such effects, then, and not to "explain" an external phenomenon (the March on the Pentagon, say).[29]

Mailer's personal narrative is developed novelistically precisely so that we may finally understand the March on the Pentagon, while the stories in fictions are usually presented for the secondary meanings they embody. In this sense, the crucial thing about Armies is that it does not end with Book One as a novel on the same subject might have. The second book is important because Armies is subjective journalism - because its formal end is to "interpret an historical event rather than dramatise its hero's spiritual growth."[30] Mailer's journalistic intentions, advertised throughout the first book, lead the reader to expect that his highly personal account will be backed up by a more general impression of the event as a whole. When this in fact occurs in Book Two, as Merrill observes, "we should realize that Armies is

not organized as a novel."[31]

Book One, "History as a novel: The Steps of the Pentagon," is a personal narrative detailing Mailer's activities, thoughts, reactions and acquaintances before, during and after the march. Book Two, "The Novel as History: The Battle of the Pentagon," presents a more objective and larger perspective of the same event, filling in the broader news material which would have been unavailable to any individual participant in the march. The basic documentary function of the book is illustrated by a simple inset right at the start: a map of the Pentagon's Washington grounds, detailing all the access roads, parking lots and every other geographic location which will figure in the book. Pointing to the pragmatic communicative function of Armies, Ria Vanderauwera observes that the first book has almost been framed within two quotations from the mass media: Time on a provocative performance by Mailer at a meeting on the Thursday night before the march, and The Washington Post on his cryptic speech after his release from prison on the Sunday morning. Both quotations are considered as misreportings and the first book manifests itself to the reader as "a rehabilitation of Mailer, the protagonist, against the distorted comments in the papers."[32] After presenting the unflattering Time article in full at the start of the book, Mailer writes: "Now we may leave Time in order to find out what happened."[33] Thus, the very first thing the reader is confronted with is a critique of the way the conventional media handled the event. Mailer, like Thompson and Herr, offers a style of journalism designed to set the record straight. Starting with his

reluctant agreement to become part of the protest march and ending with his eventual arrest, imprisonment and release, the rest of the book proceeds to tell us what really happened. So, as was the case with Hell's Angels and Dispatches, a central function of Armies is to offer a version of events that readers would not have found in the pages of the conventional tabloids.

More conspicuously than Herr and Thompson, Mailer uses the narrative strategies of the novel as the primary means by which this "truer" version of what happened is communicated to his readers. Throughout the first book, he refers to himself, the central figure, alternatively in the third person as "The Historian" (p. 24) and "The Novelist" (p. 37). And later he assumes the provocative labels of "The Beast" (p. 43), "The Existentialist" (p.53), "General Mailer" (p. 133) and, most significantly, "The Participant" (p. 152). Each title appears after he has just described his thoughts ("Existentialist"), or referred to the manner in which people often characterize him ("Beast"), or just as he defines or explains his role as narrator in the book ("Historian," "Novelist," or "Participant"). But whatever the title used, the important thing to emerge from this preoccupation with personal labels is Mailer's Protean role both in the event and in the shaping of the event for the book. As Robert Smart has observed, by clearly identifying himself as the author, narrator and main character of the book, Mailer "decreases the traditional distance between the text and the author."[34] This familiarisation of narrator and reader is crucial to the journalistic function of Armies. To Mailer, the event of the protest march was a surrealistic and baffling experience that had

been seriously misreported by the so-called objectivity of conventional newspaper reports. So the logical alternative is to write a subjective history in which all the central character's personal feelings and observations are recorded dispassionately. As Mailer puts it early in the book: "Once History inhabits a crazy house, egotism may be the last tool left to History" (p. 68).

Mailer has often been criticised for asserting his ego and "making such a spectacle of himself."[35] But this is precisely the point of the narrative. One of the main reasons why conventional reports could not hope to capture the essence of the event was, according to Mailer, because they were written from the outside. To write a persuasive personal history, therefore, he is obliged to become the central character and describe what happened from within the ranks of the protesters:

> To write an intimate history of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event, is to inspire immediate questions about the competence of the historian. Or, indeed, his honorable motive. (p. 67)

Mailer proceeds to inform us in Book One of his "honorable motive" or, at least, his personal integrity by describing in a cynical and detached way the details (some of them personally embarrassing) of his involvement with the protesters, the preparations for the march, the march itself and finally his arrest, imprisonment and release. This section moves back and forth between descriptive passages and flights of philosophical reflection, the one spinning out from the other as Mailer searches for the essence of the experience. But such reflections are not meant to function as

novelistic explorations of character; they are essentially the novelistic means by which the journalistic end is achieved. Mailer draws attention to this relationship between technique and function throughout the book, but one example is most striking. After describing how he made a fool of himself at the protest meeting at the Ambassador Theatre the night before the march, Mailer sends his drunk protagonist back to his room at the Hay Adams Hotel and ends the first section of Book One with this remark:

> Of course if this were a novel, Mailer would spend the rest of the night with a lady. But it is history, and so the Novelist is for once blissfully removed from any description of the hump-your-backs of sex. Rather he can leave such matters to the happy or unhappy imagination of the reader. (p. 66)

Suspicion of the way the conventional media handled the event is a continual concern in Book One. In addition to the bracketing of the entire section by two inaccurate reports, Mailer also refers to other examples of shoddy reporting or media inaccuracy as the narrative proceeds. Sometimes these references come in the form of cryptic "asides" in the middle of descriptive passages:

> Lowell recuperating from the crack he had given his head, was a dreamy figure of peace in the corner of the proscenium, a reclining shepherd contemplating his flute, although a Washington newspaper was to condemn him on Saturday in company with Mailer for "slobbish behavior" at this unseemly lounging. (p. 55)

At other times Mailer makes more serious accusations and generalises about the lack of professionalism in American reporting:

> One could not communicate the horror to anyone who did not write well. The papers distorted one's actions, and that was painful enough, but they wrenched and garbled and twisted and broke one's words and sentences until a good author always sounded like an incoherent overcharged idiot in newsprint. (p. 80)

On still other occasions, he seems to be continuing what is described as a lifelong private war against journalism. After almost getting into a fight with a right-wing prisoner in the police van when he was arrested, Mailer speculates on the probable media response:

> If the Nazi started trouble, and there was a fight, the newspaper accounts would doubtless state that Norman Mailer had gotten into an altercation five minutes after his arrest. (Of course, they would not say with whom.) This is all doubtless most paranoid of Mailer, but then he had had nearly twenty years of misreporting about himself, and the seed of paranoia is the arrival of the conviction that the truth about oneself is never told. (p. 161)

Since media inaccuracy is clearly such a central concern in the book, it seems logical to suggest that the book itself is meant to function as a viable alternative: a subjective history in which the reader is given to trusting the personal descriptions, interpretations and judgments of the narrator because of the narrator's honesty and integrity as an artist. The novelistic clearly operates as the narrative means by which the pragmatic is realised.

In Book Two, "The novel as History: The Battle of the Pentagon," Mailer changes his narrative style and offers a broader, less personal perspective of the event from the point of view of a number of secondary sources including, ironically enough, several references to newspaper reports (although he seems

to grant more credibility to the "alternative" press than to the mainstream commercial papers). At the start of this section, he offers a detailed metaphorical explanation of the way in which the previous novelistic section has served a journalistic function. It is a long and complex description, but its significance as an explanation of the true generic function of Armies justifies the length of this quotation. In his typically Delphic style, Mailer writes:

> The Novelist has come to decide that if you would see the horizon from a forest, you must build a tower. If the horizon will reveal most of what is significant, an hour of examination can yet do the job - it is the tower which takes months to build. So the Novelist working in secret collaboration with the Historian has perhaps tried to build with his novel a tower fully equipped with telescopes to study - at greatest advantage - our own horizon. Of course, the tower is crooked, and the telescopes warped, but the instruments of all sciences - history so much as physics - are always constructed in small or large error; what supports the use of them now is that our intimacy with the telescopes (yes even the machinist of the barrels) has given some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower. May that be claimed of many histories? In fact, how many novels can be put so quickly to use? ....
>
> The method is then exposed. The mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian; our novel has provided us with the possibility, no, even the instrument to view our facts and conceivably study them in that field of light a labor of lens-grinding has produced. (p. 245-6)

Some explanation may be required: the novel form employed in Book One is the narrative tower by which the reader may move beyond the "forest of inaccuracy" created by the media and achieve a truer glimpse of the event (the march) on the horizon. And while this

narrative machinery does lead to its own distortions of reality at least our understanding of the form and our familiarity with the quirks and predilections of the narrator (the emotive or persuasive functions of communication) prepare us for this. Unlike the ethos of false objectivity that masks the inaccuracies of conventional journalism, Mailer's subjective history draws attention to his personal involvement and narrative manipulations in order to offer a more reliable and honest impression of what happened.

From this rather lyrical explanation of the narrative strategies of Armies, Book Two moves into a more conventional feature-type account of the event from a number of different perspectives. It traces the genesis and execution of the event focussing on its major figures, the antiwar leaders and their counterparts in the government, the students and soldiers who confronted each other at the Pentagon. This section still offers interpretation, but here it is interpretation based not on personal nuance but on the documented observations of others. The most impressive part of this section, some twenty pages that Merrill regards as Mailer's best writing,[36] is where the journalist turns to the events of the Saturday night after most of the demonstrators have departed and only the most dedicated are left alone with the soldiers (pp. 272-293). The writing is for the most part crisp, simple and descriptive, painting a disturbing picture of violence and brutality. But in the tradition of impartiality, Mailer refrains from choosing sides; rather, he offers opposing perspectives of the same events quoting

at length from different sources. The account of James Breslin from The New York Times which condemns the marchers, for example, is contrasted with Gerald Long's sympathetic report in the National Guardian (289-290).

Half way through Book Two, Mailer informs us that "the conceit one is writing a history must be relinquished" (p. 283). He then offers another explanation of the book's dualistic structure concluding that an explanation of the mystery of the events cannot be developed by the methods of history alone:

> The reasons are several, but reduce to one. Forget that the journalistic information received from both sides is so incoherent, inaccurate, contradictory, malicious, even based on error that no accurate history is conceivable. More than one historian has found a way through chains of false fact. No, the difficulty is that the history is interior - no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historic inquiry. (p. 284)

In order, then, to offer his final metaphoric explanation of the march, Mailer once again draws attention to the fact that he is using the techniques of fiction. To Mailer, the March epitomises a conflict in society on the scale of a civil war between working-class right-wing America (the marshals) and middle-class liberal America (the protesters). Ultimately neither force is seen to offer a viable alternative and the ironic nature of the title The Armies of the Night becomes evident. Merrill offers this succinct appraisal:

> Mailer's purpose in Armies is to discover the meaning of one episode in this second Civil

> War. Though he is drawn to the demonstrators, his title implies that he must deal with armies equally ignorant. (The title comes, of course, from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach": "And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/ Where ignorant armies clash by night.") In a sense, both armies should be seen as "villains." Indeed, Mailer fears that "nihilism might be the only answer to totalitarianism." Thus we see that Mailer's ignorant armies - nihilism and totalitarianism, respectively - embody very unattractive alternatives. Mailer adds that his "final allegiance" is with the villains who are hippies, but his reading of the embattled armies inspires no enthusiasm for his choice.[37]

Mailer's metaphorical conclusion which borrows from another poem (this time W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming") has attracted some very mixed responses with its vision of America heavy with child about to give birth to a "fearsome totalitarianism" or a "new world brave and tender, artful and wild" (p. 320). Warner Berthoff, who suggests a novelistic reading of the book, feels the metaphors have the "heart-sinking beauty of an entire fitness to this fearful, intimately American occasion; it is hard not to feel that they form a climax which has been fully earned."[38] On the other hand, that hard-nosed media critic, Connor Cruise O'Brien, who supports a journalistic reading, has suggested that this is one of the weakest parts of the book: "'The Metaphor Delivered' ... reads like the reverie of a patriotic adman, on reading of Yeats's 'The Second Coming'."[39] Whatever one's feelings about the quality of the writing, there can be little doubt that the metaphor-laden ending is an appropriately lyrical conclusion to a journalistic account that has relied for its essential power on Mailer's persuasive presence and his Delphic novelistic style.

Since Armies was published in 1968, Mailer has continued to experiment with subjective literary journalism. Miami and the Siege of Chicago (1968) and Of a Fire on the Moon (1970) are two other subjective histories of confusing media events (the Republican and Democratic parties' national conventions and the Apollo 11 moon shot) that are now regarded, along with Armies as forming a natural corpus of nonfiction after which the novelist returned to his preferred trade. Both books are more commonly accepted essentially as journalism rather than as novels, but there are critics, like Zavarzadeh and Hellmann, who insist on post-modernist readings. Certainly, both books retain the concern with the difficulty of making sense of profoundly confusing events, but both also make efforts to transcend this difficulty through the use of novelistic narrative strategies towards a pragmatic journalistic end.

Miami and the Siege of Chicago is a moderately successful, if unambitious, personal commentary on the striking differences between the candidates and political atmospheres at the two conventions. Here Mailer assumes the less personal persona of "The Reporter," concentrating more on the events and less on his own reactions to them than did "Mailer" in Armies. There are, however, some memorable metaphoric departures like the way in which Chicago, venue of the Democratic convention, takes on the beastliness of its famous stockyards:

> A great city, a strange city with faces tough as leather hide and pavement, it was also a city where the faces took on the broad beastliness of ears which were dull enough to ignore the bleatings of the doomed, noses blattered enough to smell no more the stench of every unhappy end, mouths - fat mouths or

> slit mouths - ready to taste the gravies which were the reward of every massacre, and eyes, simple pig eyes, which could look the pig truth in the face. In any other city, they would have found technologies to silence the beasts with needles, quarter them with machines... But in Chicago, they did it straight, they cut the animals right out of their hearts - which is why it was the last of the great American cities, and people had great faces, carnal as blood, greedy, direct, too impatient for hypocrisy, in love with honest plunder.[40]

Several critics have pointed out the inaccuracy here. By 1968 Chicago's abattoirs had been modified and were hardly the scenes of the primitive butchery Mailer describes. Nevertheless, the metaphor is appropriate in that it prepares readers for the political carnage the streets of the city will soon experience as the establishment comes down hard on demonstrators. When Mailer does describe the attack on the protesters, he resorts to a crisp, detached, conventional journalistic style with few novelistic pretensions.

The assignment to cover the moonshot for Life magazine presented new dificulties which caused Mailer to alter his journalistic point of view. Part of the success of Armies was due to the fact that his ego was on permanent display as he tried to come to terms with events in which he played a crucial part. Miami and the Siege of Chicago was a more conventional documentary account because Mailer was obliged to assume the secondary position of the observing reporter. Witnessing the moonshot he feels even more detached, sometimes even bored with the official technical jargon that clouds any clear understanding of the event.

The persona in Of a Fire on the Moon is not the self-opinionated "Mailer" of Armies nor the straight journalistic

"Reporter" of Miami and the Siege of Chicago, but the more mystical "Aquarius" after Mailer's star sign and the hippy culture's sign of a new age. The book is divided into three sections in which the narrative structure of Armies is loosely followed.[41] In the first and third sections, "Aquarius" and "The Age of Aquarius," Mailer describes the event from the point of view of Aquarius the narrator, offering his own explanations, interpretations, feelings and judgments. The second section, "Apollo," corresponds in function to the second book of Armies in that a more detached and impersonal view, laden with cumbersome engineering and scientific explanations, is given. While Of a Fire on the Moon offers some fascinating philosophical interpretations of the significance of the moonshot for American culture, Mailer's forced detachment causes a brooding cynicism that makes the book lack the force and vitality of Armies.

Since 1970 Mailer has continued experimenting with nonfiction and has published many successful works of subjective journalism.[42] However, none have had the critical acclaim or generated the theoretical debate of Armies It was with his personal document of the protest march that Mailer made his biggest impact on American writing since The Naked and the Dead was published in 1948. It seems, then, that the works of personal novelistic journalism that are most successful are those, like Hell's Angels, Dispatches and Armies, telling the story of narrators deeply involved as participants in events. In this sense, Jakobson's idea of the emotive or persuasive function of communication plays a dominant role in these narratives.

CHAPTER 4

FACTS IN FICTION: NONFICTION NARRATIVES AS NOVELS

"There is no more fiction or nonfiction now," said E.L. Doctorow on accepting the National Book Critics Circle award in 1975 for Ragtime. "There is only narrative."[1] This famous generalisation is certainly a useful suggestion for a reading of Doctorow's novels and many of the other modern texts that lend themselves to contemporary views of epistemological rupture, but it cannot be taken too seriously as a manifesto for all modern narratives when most readers and critics still insist on the functional distinction between novels and pragmatic texts.[2] However, the recent proliferation of nonfiction novelistic narratives has generated a great deal of debate on the principle upon which this distinction should be based. Why does the Library of Congress catalogue Dispatches as nonfiction while Mailer's The Executioner's Song appears on the fiction shelves? It is hardly fair to rate the one above the other in terms of a formal definition of literature or the novel. And it is even less appropriate to suggest that the subject matter of Herr's book is inherently more factual or journalistic than Mailer's. Clearly the distinction between a dominant pragmatic and a dominant novelistic function needs to be based on the relationship of form to content. In Wolfgang Iser's terms, narrative strategies operate as means towards a communicative end that is best identified through Jakobson's notion of the dominant.

There are, of course, many different kinds of novels. The

genre supposedly developed out of a synthesis of various narrative forms after Cervantes' Don Quixote into the variety of different modalities with us today. However, when Truman Capote gleefully announced his invention of a new form, the "nonfiction novel," he had not, as numerous critics have pointed out, done anything startlingly new. Capote's novel is not, as he claims, "immaculately factual." There are significant alterations that can only have been made for the purposes of thematic extension, making In Cold Blood no different generically from the hundreds, if not thousands, of novels that have used documented fact for its dramatic or thematic appeal. All novels, indeed all works of art, have to be rooted in human experience if they are to communicate anything at all. And the genre has demonstrated its flexibility over the years in spanning the gap between the most surrealistic fantasies and meticulously accurate historical stories, all of which are based on "fact" in its widest sense as human imaginative experience.

The way in which fact functions in the various kinds of novel is well illustrated through a simple adaptation of Gerald Lareau's theory in "The New Journalism as Narrative Art." Noting the crucial differences between many of the works routinely referred to as "new journalism" or "nonfiction novels," Lareau identifies a narrative continuum stretching from an imaginary point of referential openness to one of referential closure, "from an objectivist-factual pole to a subjectivist fictional pole."[3] Lareau sees the "new journalism" as occupying an area on this continuum in between, and often overlapping, that of history and the novel. Of the five writers studied, Lareau erroneously places

Capote's In Cold Blood closest to the objectivist-factual pole while Hunter Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is seen as closest to the subjectivist-fictional pole. Wolfe's The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test and Mailer's The Armies of the Night fall somewhere in between with Agee's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men operating on various levels that span the area of the narrative continuum occupied by the "new journalism."

Lareau's continuum is inadequate as a theory of the new journalism as a unified genre of narrative because it fails to identify any essential characteristics and because he fails to come to terms with the dominant narrative function of works which clearly overlap with novels on the one end of the continuum or histories on the other. Nevertheless, as a device for identifying the status of documented fact and the role played by fact in novels, the idea of a factual-fictional continuum is a good one. Throughout the history of the novel, fact has always played an important part. Indeed, even the most impressionistic of works are often tied to reality more closely than is immediately evident: it is said that Joyce's Ulysses can be used as a reasonably accurate guide through some of the streets of Dublin. And even those science fiction fantasies that seem totally removed from documented fact often refer to reality in thinly disguised allegorical form: the animal fantasies of Frank Herbert and William Horwood are in part clearly allegorical efforts to recapture the romantic tradition in an age when these themes have seemed increasingly inappropriate.

Close to the imaginary point of referential openness on the

narrative continuum, then, one may place works of fantasy and fabulation like the novels of Mervyn Peake, Frank Herbert, J.R.R. Tolkien and the like. These works contain very little documented fact, but their allegorical relevance to the real world is brought home to the reader through subtle suggestions. Progressively closer to the factual-objective pole, would logically be listed the post-modernist absurdist novels (Vonnegut and Barth), the modernist novels of ideas (Joyce and Beckett), romantic or Gothic novels (from Walpole through Hawthorne to Poe), novels that consciously parody reality (a tradition stretching from Swift to Doctorow and Coover), realistic, historical and naturalistic novels that make free use of documented fact for thematic purposes (Crime and Punishment, A Tale of Two Cities (1859) and Remembrances of Things Past (1927)), and novels that purport to be based exclusively on documented fact (Levin's Compulsion, Capote's In Cold Blood and Mailer's The Executioner's Song. This final group does not function as history or journalism simply because the greater part of the action is historically verifiable. Narrative strategies operate in such a way that the aesthetic function, as opposed to the referential or emotive functions, dominates in much the same way as in conventional realistic novels.

However, the function of fact in relation to narrative can be slightly different in different kinds of novel. By basing Crime and Punishment on an actual case, Dostoevski was operating in a well established convention of realism and mimesis. The action needed to be as real or believable as possible in order to make credible to the reader the psychological themes abstracted from

the story. The factuality of the story, as far as it goes, is really secondary to the deeper novelistic or philosophical function. However, in an historical novel like James Michener's The Covenant (1980), historically documented fact plays a more central role. Here the reader responds to the fictional plot as if it was true in the context of the historical story. The knowledge that the material is governed closely by such current and interesting historical fact is probably the major reason for the book's success. Nevertheless, The Covenant is not meant to be read as an historical document. Fact is used by the author (an historical parasite) as a sales pitch that makes the fictional plot more gripping and relevant to readers. In pseudo-factual novels like Doctorow's Ragtime or Coover's The Public Burning (1977), carefully documented fact and fiction are blended cynically in order to undercut the traditional view that reality is an objective phenomenon that can be represented accurately in human discourse.[4] One of the governing ideas of Ragtime, according to Doctorow, "is that facts are as much an illusion as anything else."[5] The function of historical fact in novels like this is to call into question naive positivistic views of epistemological certainty in the modern world. Here, once again, fact is subordinated to the dominant novelistic end. Finally, novelists like Capote and Levin in In Cold Blood and Compulsion seek to recapture the realistic tradition of Stendhal and Dostoevski in crime novels that are based almost exclusively on documented fact. In what may be seen as a reaction against the fabulous excesses of post-modernism, these writers have sought

once again to make novelistic sense of contemporary reality by identifying events that lend themselves to the themes of interest to them and by grafting novelistic plots on to the historically documented stories.

In so much as they are social documents, all novels perform a referential or pragmatic function to a certain extent. However, the facts on which they are based are not the ultimate end in the communication process. As William Wiegand says in a review of In Cold Blood, the function of the novel is not to inform the reader about a particular event, but to suggest and extend beyond the facts to the secondary meanings they may embody.[6] In this sense, the principle by which the factual material is organised in these books is such that the referential function is subordinated to the central aesthetic or novelistic function which is the dominant end in the communicative process. The reader of In Cold Blood does not come away from the novel with the view that its purpose was to describe the details of the Clutter murder case. Rather, the central function of the book is to articulate Capote's novelistic philosophy through the medium of a true story.[7] As the author himself put it, the book is a reflection on American life: "this collision between the desperate, ruthless, wandering, savage part of American life, and the other, which is insular and safe."[8]

4.1 Crime and Punishment in Chicago: Meyer Levin's Compulsion

In Cold Blood is not sui generis as some, including Capote, have claimed.[9] It functions as a realistic novel that has its antecedents in the realistic tradition represented by Stendhal and

Dostoevski who were also fascinated by the timeless psychological theme of murder. However, there is an American novel closer to Capote's in terms of history, topic and adherence to documented fact. Meyer Levin's Compulsion is the true story, thinly disguised as a roman 'a clef, of the 1924 abduction, murder and mutilation of Bobby Franks, the twelve-year-old son of a Chicago millionaire, by two brilliant college students, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb. The two young men were themselves sons of millionaires, and their crime seemed utterly without motive, without the mitigating circumstances of anger or hatred or envy or even malice. It was, by their own description, an act of "pure" criminality, a kind of Nietzschean demonstration of their freedom from "the ordinary moral restraints of ordinary men."[10]

Levin was an acquaintance of the two men and covered the crime, arrest and sensational trial as a reporter for one of the city's major dailies. In the novel, he is represented by the first-person narrator Sid Silver. The murdered boy is called Paulie Kessler, Loeb and Leopold are Artie Straus and Judd Steiner, and Clarrence Darrow, the famous defence attorney, is called Jonathan Wilk. The novel is narrated in alternating sections by Sid, a peripheral narrator like Conrad's Marlow searching for the deeper significance of the events, and through a third-person omniscient narrative of the figural kind in which the action is seen from the perspective of the two killers, the investigators or Ruth, the girl Judd fell in love with just before being arrested.

A pragmatic purpose behind the book is claimed by Sid the

narrator in the opening section. Supposedly writing some 30 years after the crime, he says that the text has been commissioned for an inquiry into a parole application by the surviving murderer, Judd Steiner. It is important to note, however, that this claim is made not by Levin the novelist, but by Sid his first person peripheral narrator. This pragmatic concern was not really the central purpose of Levin's book. It is simply the traditional claim of veracity and relevance by the narrator of a realistic novel. The proper function of Compulsion is not pragmatic. It is essentially novelistic in the author's quest to answer the anguished philosophical questions of motive and causation. In this sense, the role played by the first person narrator is crucial. Some have seen this personal intrusion as a "serious distraction."[11] However, the insistent search for deeper meanings is essential to the final novelistic statement of the book. Levin the novelist may be more sophisticated than the newspaper cub who stumbled on one important clue after another, but it is through the psychological agonising of Sid that the dominant themes of the book are expressed. In spite of the complexity of the narrator-novelist duality, fiction and fact flow easily, combining to form a coherent novelistic statement on a classical literary theme.

The dominant novelistic function of Compulsion is accepted by most early reviewers of the book. Both critics who like and dislike the book based their judgments on what are essentially literary/novelistic criteria. "The writing shows the hand of a master," writes that perceptive critic, Erle Stanley Gardner:

> Despite the fact that the reader who is

> familiar with the history of the case knows the outcome, Mr. Levin manages to fill this book with sustained suspense. This is a masterly achievement in literary craftsmanship.[12]

Charles Shapiro, who does not admire the book, had very different things to say about it, but in the same kind of literary parlance:

> Choosing the crime of our time does not mean that you have written the novel of our time. Levin has slapped together a strong indictment of our ignorance, our malice, our inhumanity; but he has done so in what is often painfully awkward, stumbling prose.[13]

And a Times Literary Supplement reviewer who had ambivalent feelings for the book also writes about them without disputing the work's novelistic function:

> Compulsion has obvious faults. It is too long (the second part, dealing with the legal defence of Steiner and Straus, is much less interesting than the first, which describes the events leading to their arrest), it is slackly written in places and at times over-weighted with psychoanalytical language: yet the book achieves a real catharsis of pity and terror. The nature of the crime, the circumstances surrounding it, the fact that both victim and killers were rich Jews, all these things take on an extraordinary symbolic value in the book.[14]

Levin says in a foreword to the text that he follows consciously in the "great tradition" of Stendhal in Scarlet and Black, of Dostoevski in Crime and Punishment and of Dreiser in An American Tragedy.[15] And an analysis of the narrative strategies of Compulsion shows a very similar usage of fact in relation to narrative structure. Crime and Punishment is probably Levin's closest analogue in terms of the psychological themes this novel pursues, and it also follows a similar narrative pattern: a soul-searching examination of a senseless crime, detailed

explanation of the motives and feelings involved, and the arrest, trial and conviction of the ambiguous hero/villain with serious reservations expressed for the appropriateness of the sentence.

The association with Crime and Punishment is also emphasised on more than one occasion in the action of the novel. Right at the start of the book the omniscient narrator has Judd Steiner arriving late for a law class the day after the murder. The lecture is, appropriately enough, about retribution and punishment in legal systems and Judd interrupts to suggest that in terms of the philosophy of Nietzsche, the Übermensch may be considered above the law. The lecturer makes the point that throughout history, the great commanding personalities have been forced to yield to "the general concept of right and wrong, of crime and punishment" (p. 15). Another student enters the discussion, and the following altercation identifies the primary concerns of Compulsion as being similar to those of Dostoevski's novel, but also moving beyond to more complex psychological concerns:

> "In fact that's a case in point -- Crime and Punishment. The hero considered himself a kind of superman, and yet he broke down and yielded to the law," parroted Milt Lewis, always ready to switch sides.
>
> "But that's no superman! That's not the conception!" Judd cried. What was Raskolnikov after all but a weak sentimentalist, full of moral and religious drivel? What was his crime but a petty attempt at theft, motivated by abysmal poverty? Where was the superman conception? Raskolnikov's was only a crime with a motive -- his need for money. All he had done was to rationalize the murder by declaring that his need was greater than that of the miserly old female pawnbroker's. To be above, beyond mundane conception, a crime had to be without need, without any of the emotional human drives of lust, hatred, greed. It had to be like some force beyond the reach of gravity

> itself. Then it became a pure action, the action of an absolutely free being -- a superman. (p. 15)

Much later in the book, a few days before the boys are arrested, Judd again discusses Crime and Punishment, this time with Ruth, in an intense conversation about religion, good and evil (p. 165). These references are not simply mentioned as part of a complete documentary of the case. They were carefully selected from the huge mass of research material to perform an important function in hinting at the kinds of thematic issues Levin is concerned with. As with Capote's research for In Cold Blood, the primary material on which Compulsion is based numbered thousands of pages in interview notes, court records and the like. The final product is a very carefully structured text in which the factual material has been edited and organised in order to emphasise the literary themes being explored. In his foreword, Levin places these themes in social and historical perspective:

> Certain crimes seem to epitomize the thinking of their era. Thus Crime and Punishment had to arise out of the feverish soul-searching of the Russia of Dostoevski's period, and An American Tragedy had to arise from the sociological thinking of Dreiser's time in America. In our time, the psychoanalytical point of view has come to the fore. (p. 7)

The concern for psychological explanation is one of the major themes of Compulsion and the facts are selected and organised to give credence to the Freudian interpretations reached by some of the psychiatrists called in to analyse the two boys. As the Times Literary Supplement reviewer observes, the account of the homosexual bond between them and its part in fulfilling their fantasies of supremacy and slavery is "wonderfully convincing," as

is the explanation of the taped chisel chosen as a murder weapon and the choice of a culvert as a tomb for the dead boy's body.[16] However, the book goes beyond the level of a psychological case study to a search for deeper philosophical explanations of how these dark motives may manifest themselves in all of us, and it is in this sense that the book comes close to articulating the philosophy of Conrad in Heart of Darkness (1902) and many of his other novels.

Throughout Compulsion the alternating narrative points of view suggest that the crime has a far wider thematic significance than the known facts might indicate. The agonising speculations of Sid which repeatedly recall Marlow's quest for meaning in Heart of Darkness are usually backed up in the omniscient sections with some complex figural analysis of the characters' (especially Judd's) psychological motivations. These motivations are then debated in what are sometimes quite clumsy inarticulate terms by Sid in the first person sections, once again recalling Marlow's expressive difficulties in Conrad's book. In both Book One, "The Crime of the Century," and Book Two, "The Trial of the Century," this basic narrative pattern, reminiscent of that followed in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim (1900), is followed. Passages of objective descriptive narrative are followed by efforts to explain or make some kind of sense of the bizarre events just described.

The crime itself seemed inexplicable, but the actions of Artie Straus during the course of the investigation verged on the ludicrous. After describing how Artie all but took charge of the police and newspaper investigations into the murder he had comitted, Sid speculates on the possible psychological motivation:

> Later on, we could ask ourselves whether it was a compulsion to bring down punishment on himself that drove Artie to reach closer and closer to the fire; for if Judd had been the one to leave a trail of clues during the crime, it was Artie who persisted in the days immediately afterward in taunting fate, pushing in among us, the reporters, and even among the police, like some perversely teasing, transgressing child being bad and being bad until he brings the slap of anger down upon him. (p. 137)

It is this kind of psychological incongruity, prodigious intelligence countered by almost suicidal recklessness, that suggests deeper philosophical issues that Sid feels need to be explored:

> The city seemed to stand transfixed by the murder. The case had seized the public imagination as a crime beyond other crimes. Perhaps it was because of the wealth of the boy's family. But perhaps, I was to think as the story developed, because by some uncanny process people sensed from the beginning that this crime had meanings that would project far into our time. (p. 138)

It is, therefore, clearly not the crime itself that appeals to Levin in a journalistic sense, but the deeper meanings whose exploration is the province of the novel. So while the surface investigation of the book is into the psychological states of the two protagonists, there is a deeper concern for the implications of their act for the narrator's perceptions of human nature in general. Like Marlow, Sid is interested in discovering the truth about the monstrous acts he is investigating, but also like Marlow, he is more concerned about what these acts might tell him of his own moral perspective and the morality of those around him. In the end, the psychoanalytical theory is insufficient as an explanation of the true significance of the crime. What Sid is

more interested in discovering is what the crime suggests about the state of humanity in his world.

Written in 1957 about pre-war events in 1924, the reference to "meanings that would project far into our time" takes on an obvious significance. Artie and Judd carried out a senseless and motiveless murder as a kind of test case for a bizarre interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy of man and superman - the same interpretation that was to lead to the decimation of Europe's Jewish population barely a decade later. The most ironic thing about this association (an irony that Levin as a leading student of American Jewish literature could scarcely not have been aware of) is that the same philosophical rationale used by two Jewish boys to murder another Jewish boy was later to be used by the Nazis in the horrific "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." Seen in the context of the holocaust, and it is quite obvious that the book is meant to be seen in these terms, the real subject of Compulsion becomes the timeless theme of man's inhumanity to man or, in Conrad's terms, the darkness in the heart of every one of us. Pondering the complex philosophical rationales in Judd's confession after he was arrested, Sid says:

> It was hard to believe that within their very appearance of living under the same rules as the rest of us, they had their own contrary rules. It was hard to take their own words and believe them, just as it was too hard, only a decade later in our lives, to believe that an entire nation could seriously subscribe to this superman code. (p. 249)

Conrad's Hobbesian philosophy of innate human savagery is suggested on several other occasions during Compulsion. The police investigation after the crime was disrupted by thousands of

hoax letters to the victim's parents demanding ransom money and threatening more harm to the family. Because of these letters, the police thought the murder must have been an act of revenge against the victim's businessman father and wasted thousands of hours conducting their investigation accordingly. To the modern reader who has been exposed all too frequently to this kind of sick humour, this fact hardly seems extraordinary, but to the narrator the "released flood of evil" is an important index of the crime's "deeper meaning":

> What weird, filthy, primordial imaginings were revealed, carried around behind unidentifiable city faces, walking around in coats and pants of ordinary men, in dresses of ordinary women! The police passed around to us a number of their scrawls, the obscene symbols, the daggers and mystic suns and moons, and the religious quotations and admonitions! Surely so ghastly a punishment, they wrote, was a visitation for some ghastly sin. (p. 171)

A closer literal similarity to Heart of Darkness occurs at the beginning of Book Two, the description of the trial. From the confessions, it emerged that one of the murderers, like Conrad's Mr. Kurtz, also had a momentary insight into the horror of his crime:

> For several minutes, Artie said, Judd had lost his nerve, crying, "Oh, this is terrible, terrible!" And Artie had had to talk fast, make wisecracks, until Judd got hold of himself.
>
> "This is terrible, terrible," echoed to me. It was no extenuation. But what did it mean, there at that moment? That the reality broke in, for one of them at least? (p. 278-9)

When seen alongside its obvious counterpart in Heart of Darkness, this passage becomes a clear indication of Levin's ultimately novelistic vision in the book:

> Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath -
> "The horror! The horror!"[17]

The reader has no reason to suspect Levin has made up Judd's cry of despair. It is probably lifted verbatim from the confessions of the real murderers or the court records. However, placed as it is in the context of the narrator's quest for deeper meanings, the facts take on a secondary meaning that elevates them beyond the pragmatic or referential function of journalism to what Jakobson calls the aesthetic function of the novel.

The final indication that the murders were an index of a profound truth about human actions in general occurs at the end of the novel when Sid describes an incident during the Second World War when he himself came close to submitting himself to what Conrad calls the "destructive element." Describing the incident as the one in which "the Steiner-Straus case came finally home to me," Sid tells how he and a photographer friend played a game "almost all men at war have played" by imagining they had taken over a German village for a day, had commanded the mayor to bring them two virgins to rape, and how the townsfolk had finally conceded (p. 474). In the event, Sid and his friend one day found themselves with the opportunity of committing the classic wartime rape with impunity:

> Then one day we found the ideal situation. It came as we were drawing near the Elbe. Frank and I went a little farther forward than the others had gone. It was a nice open road, and Germans could be seen working in the fields here and there, as though there had never been

> a war. As we rounded a bend, we saw a felled tree across the road. We pulled up. And there was a fräulein. She was walking along a field, carrying a lunch basket. She was everything we had specified in our game: young, perhaps seventeen, and very pretty. (p. 475)

The two soldiers plan to rape the young girl at gunpoint and Frank is about to do exactly this when Sid manages to pull himself together and put an end to it:

> I felt parched. All these weeks we had been building ourselves to this. Surely we had meant it. Surely I had meant it too.
>
> And at the same time I felt terrified of Frank. He'd do it and then shoot her. I had shared it all the way, goaded him on; I had wanted it, too. And if I stopped him I was a quitter, a coward.
>
> I laughed, a forced laugh. "Can it, Frank. The hell with her," I said.
>
> He gave me a wild look, as though he would slam me one. The whole thing could just as well have gone the other way. "It isn't worth it," I said. "The war's over." (p. 476)

At this point, like Jim standing on the deck of the Patna in Conrad's Lord Jim, Sid comes within a hair's-breadth of nihilistic compulsion. Jim betrays his seaman's ethic and jumps; Sid manages to hold onto his civilised standards and declines. The significance of this incident at the end of the novel is that it is the final clear indication that the facts of the murder case have a thematic resonance that goes much further than the event itself to an articulation of a coherent novelistic vision: Conrad's modern Hobbesian philosophy of man's natural nihilism. Throughout the book, the facts are organised in a sophisticated rhetoric considering numerous theories and explanations, but finally concluding that the savagery of Judd Steiner and Artie Straus, that only needed a childish intellectual game to release, is probably present in every one of us. And like Marlow, Sid's quest

for meaning in the case is not only a search for reasons why they did it (he never quite accepts the psychoanalytical theories); he is more interested in what their act might tell him about human nature in general. And also like Marlow, in order to make final sense of the act, Sid has to peep "over the edge" himself and draw back his "hesitating foot."[18]

4.3 Crime and Punishment in Utah: Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song

If Compulsion is the clearest American antecedent of In Cold Blood, the most famous novel following in this tradition is Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song. This thousand-page account of the life amd death of Gary Gilmore marks a remarkable shift in Mailer's nonfiction writing that represents an obvious change in narrative function. When the book was published, scarcely a reviewer failed to express suprise that Mailer was neither narrator nor central character, and that the complex Baroque style of the earlier journalistic works had been abandoned for the spare prose reminiscent of his early novels in which he consciously imitated Hemingway.

The key to the change in narrative function lies not with The Armies of the Night or any of the other journalistic accounts of the period, but with the more obviously novelistic "biography," Marilyn (1973). As Robert Smart has pointed out, Mailer does not construct this text from factual information. Rather, he "manipulates and structures a set of preconceived interpretations which he will build around public record."[19] The fictional nature

of this account of the life of Marilyn Monroe is made clear throughout the text by authorial intrusions like the following description of the movie studio's reaction to the news that Monroe had posed naked for a photographer:

> Now when Twentieth learns from her lips that she has, yes, posed in the nude, a novelist has the right to invent the following dialogue.[20]

Like The Executioner's Song and unlike the journalistic works, Marilyn was written by a novelist who had no personal contact with the central characters. Both books were contracted by the entrepreneur, Lawrence Schiller, who bought the rights to the stories and hired Mailer to write novels based on his research.

While Mailer does not draw attention to his fictionalising in the text of The Executioner's Song, he does admit to it in an afterword.[21] However, even without this admission, it is clear from the length of the book and the wide variety of figural points of view that historical accuracy was an impossibility. Indeed, one of Mailer's major arguments in The Armies of the Night was that a trustworthy history can only be written from the subjective perspective of the narrator. If we are to take this seriously, Mailer's absence from the action and narration of The Executioner's Song must mean that he is not writing a history through the use of novelistic techniques, but simply, as he put it, a "true life novel." Throughout the text, fact is subordinated to the literary themes Mailer explores through the subtle novelistic organisation of the material. As was the case with Compulsion, most of the material went unused (the interviews alone exceeded fifteen thousand typed pages)[22]

indicating a highly advanced level of selection and organisation.

There are two significant alterations of fact that Mailer admits to in the afterword. The book is bracketed by a poem that Mailer indicates is an "old prison rhyme":

> Deep in my dungeon
> I welcome you here
> Deep in my dungeon
> I worship your fear
> Deep in my dungeon
> I dwell.
> I do not know
> if I wish you well.

These lines form an important hint at the irony of the book's title (the executioner is Gilmore himself) as well as an indication of one of Mailer's central themes - a concern with the corrupting nature of power which is explored through Gilmore's pathological concern for existential control of his destiny and Nicole's life. He admits to his fabrication in the afterword:

> Finally, one would confess one's creations. The old prison rhyme at the beginning and end of the book is not, alas, an ancient ditty but a new one, and was written by this author ten years ago for his movie Maidstone. (p. 1052)

The second alteration occurs at a crucial stage in the novel when Mailer has Dr. Woods trying to ascertain the possible role the administration of the drug Prolixin might have played in the commission of the murders. On numerous occasions, the novel suggests that overdoses of the depressive drug were a major cause of Gilmore's psychopathy in much the same way that Capote explains Perry Smith's crime in terms of a "momentary schizophrenia." In fact, the inquiry into the effects of Prolixin was not conducted by Dr. Woods at all:

> Also, the cross-examination that John Woods

> makes of a psychiatrist who administers Prolixin comes in fact from an actual interview by Lawrence Schiller and myself a couple of years later and has been placed in Dr. Woods's mind with his kind permission. (p. 1052)

As Robert Smart argues, the fact that this material has been altered throws much of the "factual material" of the book into a dubious light.[23] However, the mere fact of authorial distortion does not make a novel; it is the thematic function of such manipulation that leads to The Executioner's Song performing a dominant aesthetic function like Compulsion and In Cold Blood.

The parallels between these three crime novels go beyond the fact that they all concern celebrated murders, the trials and sentences of the killers. Like Compulsion and In Cold Blood, The Executioner's Song is narrated from an omniscient point of view of the figural kind in which perspective shifts frequently from one centre of consciousness to another in order to give the reader different and sometimes contradictory impressions of the events. This form of narration is clearly not appropriate to a journalistic function where historical accuracy would be at a premium. Like Compulsion, Mailer's novel follows a two-book structure, the first describing the background to the crimes and the second their consequences.

Entitled "Western Voices," the first book describes the life of Gary Gilmore in the nine months after his parole from prison before he entered prison again for the last time for the murder of two men. Gilmore was paroled to his cousin in the town of Provo, Utah, but moved out after about a month when he got a full-time job. He then met Nicole Barrett and moved in with her when they

became lovers. The relationship was a turbulent one characterised by alcohol and drug-induced abuse, and it broke apart quite violently eight months later after Gilmore had re-embarked on his life of petty crime. The ostensible result of this break-up was the murder of two men and the first book ends with Gilmore's capture.

Book Two, "Eastern Voices" describes the emergence of the execution controversy, the role played by Lawrence Schiller who acquired the rights to the story, and later developments in the lives of Nicole and Gilmore's mother. Finding death more appealing than a life in prison, Gilmore refused to make use of his right to appeal against the death sentence and gave every assistance to the Utah state attorneys in the protracted legal battle with human rights lawyers who were trying to put a stop to capital punishment. After four years of legal wrangling, he was executed by firing squad. The second half of the novel describes a very different relationship between Gary and Nicole through their letters and the numerous interviews conducted by Schiller. However, as was the case with Compulsion, the recording process is seldom represented and we are given the details of the relationship through the thoroughly novelistic figural points of view. The relationship is now more intensely intellectual with Gilmore establishing full psychological control over Nicole's life - something he had consistently failed to do outside prison - and leading her through an unsuccessful double suicide attempt which she only narrowly survived.

As is the case with Capote's book, the most striking narrative strategy employed in The Executioner's Song is the use

of frequent scenic shifts. These scenes are narrated from several different points of view in which the narrator adopts the language of the character from whose perspective the story is being told. The major function of this form of narration is to create a highly impressionistic view of the events that enhances the idea of epistemological uncertainty which is at the heart of the novel. Mailer used the working title "American Virtue" for the book because he felt that most of the characters were obsessed with "doing the right thing" although this entailed numerous contradictory possibilities.[24] This idea of a moral or ethical relativity is suggested throughout the text, one of the most obvious occasions being the shift from the perspective of Judy Wolbach, the angry attorney from the American Civil Liberties Union who speaks out against the Mormon justice she believes to be responsible for the original crimes as well as Gilmore's death:

> Yessir, satisfy your blood lust, and tell yourself you were good to the victim because blood atonement remitted the sin. You gave the fellow a chance to get to the hereafter, after all. This business of living for eternity certainly contributed to capital punishment, brutality and war. Why, Brigham Young with his countless wives pining on the vine had the gall to state that if you discovered one of your women in adultery, it would behoove you as a good and Christian act to hold her on your lap and run a knife through her breast. That way she'd have her whack in the hereafter. Wouldn't be relegated to the outer darkness. Judy made a noise of disgust. Primitive Christianity! She was glad she'd gone to Berkeley. (p. 953)

From the thoughts of Judy Wolbach, Mailer moves to the perspective of Earl Dorius, Utah's Assistant Attorney General, whose efforts to see Mormon justice done and to protect Gilmore's freedom of

choice are also treated quite sympathetically throughout the novel. His view of biblical justice and providence is expressed in more subtle and less angry terms than those used by his opponent:

> After Ms. Wolbach stopped asking questions, Earl went over portions of his oral argument, then tried to get a little sleep. But it was a dark night and a bumpy flight. ...
>
> Earl was terrified. The sound was the most violent caterwauling of wing and motor, and the turbulence had to be the worst he had ever flown through. The thought passed through his head. Boy, if I go down and Gilmore lives - wouldn't that be something!
>
> Earl didn't see God as rewarding people for righteousness or punishing them for misconduct. In fact, it might even be the reverse. Religion didn't make you safe that way. (pp. 953-954)

Ultimately, Mailer does not offer any final verdicts on the many moral points of view in the novel. The single value that is supported through to the end is the individual's freedom of choice. In the same way that Gilmore's existential decision to die is defended throughout by self-proclaimed existentialist Mailer, so is the reader's freedom to choose and judge for himself. The novelist described this strong epistemological concern in a television interview shortly after the book was published:

> This material made me look at ten or 20 serious questions in an altogether new fashion, and it made me humble in that I just didn't know the answers. I mean, I've had the habit for years of feeling that I could dominate any question pretty quickly - it's been my vanity. And it was an exceptional experience to spend all these months and find that gently but inevitably, I was finding myself in more profound - not confusion - but doubt about my ability to ... give definitive answers to these questions. But what I had instead is that I was collecting materials that I would think about for the rest of my life. In other words, I was getting new

> experience. I thought it might be very nice for once just to write a book which doesn't have answers, but poses delicate questions with a great deal of evidence and a great deal of material and let people argue over it. I feel there are any number of areas in this book where there are people who have better answers to give than I have.[25]

This shift in emphasis from journalistic interpretation to novelistic mimesis suggests the realistic tradition of the great social and political novels of Dreiser and Dos Passos. The major difference, however, is that Mailer goes beyond mimetic organisation for the sake of articulating a coherent novelistic philosophy to the more modernist concerns of metafiction. As John Hellmann puts it:

> While The Executioner's Song belongs, in its subject, to the tradition of the social and political novels of the realists and naturalists, Mailer is now too far removed from the philosophical premises of those works to merely organize new material according to their forms and themes. ... The metafictional aspects of The Executioner's Song ... exist to avoid the positivist assumptions and deny the explanatory theories of its most obvious predecessors.[26]

The book is organised as novelistically as Levin's Compulsion, but with a subtly different philosophical vision in mind. Here Mailer eschews what Zavarzadeh calls the "totalising" impulses of the realistic novel and writes a metafiction celebrating the hero's right to his existential choices and the reader's privilege to reach his own conclusions from the multiple perspectives provided by the authorial consciousness. In this sense the novel is, as Hellmann describes it, a "fable of fact" moving beyond the premises of realism to the more modernist themes of fabulation. Its central function, however, remains literary in the

subordination of the factual content to the novelistic idea of epistemological uncertainty. Unlike The Armies of the Night and the other journalistic works of the period, The Executioner's Song is less concerned with the accuracy of the facts than with their symbolic and mythic significance. As David Lodge aptly concludes in his review, "the abiding impression this book leaves ... is of the remarkably literary quality of so many of its source materials, both major and minor."[27]

4.3 Crime and Punishment in Kansas: Truman Capote's In Cold Blood

While the dominant concern in Mailer's The Executioner's Song is with the existential themes of choice and responsibility, Capote's novelistic vision in In Cold Blood is consistent with what has been described as his "Gothic" view of the archetypal conflicts in American society.[28] The facts of the murder of the Clutter family on their Kansas farm by outlaws Richard Hickock and Perry Smith are used by Capote to create a powerful novel based on what he sees as the eternal conflicts between success and failure in a world governed by malicious and sometimes contradictory forces of destiny and fortune. This theme, reminiscent of the world described in the novels of Thomas Hardy, is explored through a wide range of novelistic techniques of which the cinematic use of scenic shifts is probably the most striking.

Capote's book is divided into eighty-five individual scenes or narrative arcs of tension which are carefully selected and organised from his "six thousand pages of notes and an accumulation of boxed and filed documents bulky enough to fill a

small room."[29] These scenes are grouped, in turn, into four major sections forming a structure similar to the act and scene divisions of traditional drama. In section one, "The Last to See Them Alive," Capote describes the Clutters and their stature in the community on the day before the murders from the point of view of the Holcomb townspeople. In the second section, "Persons Unknown," the hysteria caused by the seemingly motiveless crime among friends and associates of the family is explored. Section three, "The Answer," is given mainly from the perspective of chief detective Alvin Dewey, the confused investigator relentlessly chasing down dead-end clues until, in a move most characteristic of Capote, an act of almost arbitrary good fortune leads fortuitously to the identification of the criminals. And in the final section, "The Corner" (named after the Kansas Prison's death row), the killers are described through their personal recollections and conversations with other condemned men.

In every sense, Capote's book reads like a conventional realistic novel based closely on documented fact. The reason it has been so central to the debate on the "new journalism" and the "nonfiction novel" is probably because of Capote's own extravagant claims for the book and the massive publicity campaign that preceded publication. One reviewer notes rather cynically that the book "makes its appearance with all the rockets, whistles and fireboat fanfare usually reserved for the welcome of a brand new ocean liner on its maiden voyage."[30] But if this was a snide reference to the Titanic, the reviewer was sadly mistaken because the book was an immediate success, topping best sellers lists for

months and yielding a critical handbook within three years (a feat usually achieved only by recognised classics after about 100 years).

Capote's argument for a "new art form" is based on four main features: firstly, the timelessness of the theme; secondly, the symbolic or archetypal nature of the setting; thirdly, the large cast of characters that would allow him to tell the story from a variety of points of view; and fourthly, meticulous adherence to documented fact.[31] As was the case with Compulsion, most early reviews of In Cold Blood recognised the artistic function of the book. However, few were impressed by the argument that a new genre, the "nonfiction novel," had been invented. Hamish Hamilton in the Times Literary Supplement, for example, saw little new about the form, but praised the book as a well written novel:

> He has written about real life to make it seem like a novel: is that what the grandiloquent claims amount to? ... The form is not new or remarkable, but it is handled here with the narrative skill of delicate sensibility that make this re-telling of a gruesome murder into a work of art.[32]

The novelistic form of the book - the timeless theme, archetypal setting and multiple narrative perspectives - speaks for itself. The claim that the book is immaculately factual, on the other hand, is a different question that has left many critics suspicious. Tony Tanner sums up these objections most succinctly when he writes:

> The illusion is of art laying down its tools as helpless and irrelevant in front of the horrors and mysteries of life itself. But I find something just a shade suspicious in this maintained illusion of objective factual

> presentation. Certainly it is in the American grain - "pleads for itself the fact," said Emerson. But facts do not "sing themselves," as Emerson maintained. Facts are silent, as Conrad said, and any singing they do depends on their orchestration by a human arranger.[33]

It is, of course, true that all factual discourses depend for their ultimate meaning on the selections of a human arranger. Newspaper journalists select and emphasise facts in their stories for the sake of newsworthiness. And sociologists select and emphasise in order to articulate theories or views about the particular societies under study. But this is not the kind of orchestration Tanner is talking about. In a realistic novel, the author will select facts and arrange them in a narrative structure that reflects the thematic resonances of his novelistic vision. The primary function of In Cold Blood is not journalistic in the sense that the reader would expect to be told all the newsworthy facts. By Capote's own admission, more than eighty per cent of the research he did went unused.[34] And this on its own is an indication of the extent of aesthetic selection, summary and organisation typical of this kind of novel. It is doubtful that any journalistic feature or social documentary could afford to be selective to quite this extent without abrogating its pragmatic function.

The question of the book's factuality goes further than novelistic selection and organisation. Most early critics accepted Capote's claim that "one does not spend almost six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions."[35] However, with the passing of time, more detailed research has shown that there are significant

departures from documented fact in the book. In a detailed comparison between the version of In Cold Blood serialised in The New Yorker and the Random House publication, Jack De Bellis has identified nearly five-thousand changes, "ranging from crucial matters of fact to the placement of a comma":

> Careful analysis of The New Yorker and the Random House edition reveals that a great many doubts lingered in the author's mind after he had committed his six year work to print. Many of the changes seem so personal that they are incomprehensible. The impression persists that he could not resist re-examining his research and his style. And since many of the things changed in the Random House edition originally appeared in "official records" and numerous interviews conducted entirely without aid of recorders or pencils, it is all the more surprising that they might be subject to revision.[36]

The mere fact that Capote may have distorted or changed primary material in the book does not on its own mean that there is no pragmatic or journalistic function. A newspaper story does not cease to be a newspaper story and become something else just because the reporter has lied. It remains a newspaper story, albeit a very bad one by the objective standards of most western media systems. What makes the factual distortions in In Cold Blood significant is their role in enhancing the impression of Capote's novelistic world view.

Some cautious reviewers suggested that verification was required before Capote's claim to total accuracy could be accepted. F.W. Dupee maintained that "to praise without proof is foolish."[37] And Robert E. Kuehn wondered why the novelist made such a pretense of holding to the facts in a book that would be read for its literary value in any case.[38] The first close

examination of Capote's source material was Philip Tompkins' "In Cold Fact." Using the research techniques of a conventional reporter, Tompkins found several discrepancies that can only have been included for the thematic force they gave the book.

For example, the sale of Nancy Clutter's horse, Babe, is presented inaccurately for the sake of pathos rather than realism. Babe was not consigned to a life of hard labour in front of a farmer's plough for a miserly seventy-five dollars. She was sold for more than double that amount because she was in foal and ended up being used by the Y.M.C.A. to teach children to ride. Nancy's boyfriend, Bobby Rupp, also told how Capote mischaracterised him as the archetypal all-American school sport star when he was, in fact, quite ordinary at the few sports he played. These changes might seem insignificant in the wider context of the narrative, but it is clear that they were made with the intention of novelistic extension.

However, more serious discrepancies in terms of journalistic ethics relate to Capote's portrayal of Perry Smith. Throughout the book, Perry is characterised, like several of Capote's other protagonists, as the archetypal American underdog, a physically deformed half-breed who functions as the dramatic counterpart of Herb Clutter, the embodiment of the Great American Dream. Tompkins cites several examples where Capote misrepresents Perry's character by distorting either the documentary evidence or the accounts of his interviewees. In the novel, the wife of undersheriff Meier says that she often heard Perry cry in his prison cell and on one occasion say: "I am embraced by shame."[39] Mrs Meier denied this ever happened when Tompkins questioned her

insisting that she never "told such things to Capote."[40] A more significant inaccuracy is Capote's version of the execution scene where he gives Perry a moving soliloquy ending with an apology for what he did. None of the other journalists present as witnesses recorded this and detective Dewey, from whose perspective the scene is witnessed, told Tompkins he was not sure of Perry's last words and that Capote had moved away and was out of earshot.[41] Tompkins also details how Capote reconstructed the confession scene for dramatic effect, once again casting Perry in a favourable light that is not supported by the records:

> And so were the facts transformed. Perry Smith, who could hardly utter a grammatical sentence while dictating his confession, becomes le poete maudit, corrects the grammar in newspaper articles about him. To judge from his confession, Perry Smith was an obscene, semiliterate and cold-blooded killer.[42]

This harsh indictment comes from a newsman whose primary purpose is to uncover the literal truth insofar as it can be attributed. However, as Gerald Lareau has pointed out, such concern is really irrelevant to the average reader who rarely has the knowledge to judge the factual accuracy of such a work and simply expects the incidents to be true because the author has said they were and because there is little in the text to suggest otherwise.[43] The inaccuracies identified by Tompkins are, almost without exception, clearly geared towards the preconceptions of the novelist who transforms otherwise unrelated occurrences into thematically relevant fictional material. If the work was to be judged as journalism, these conclusions, especially those relating to the novelistic characterisation of Perry, would prove most damning.

However, even Tompkins concedes in the end that the work functions primarily as fiction:

> Capote has, in short, achieved a work of art. He has told exceedingly well a tale of high terror in his own way. But despite the brilliance of his self-publicising efforts, he has made both a tactical and a moral error that will hurt him in the short run. By insisting that "every word" of his book is true he has made himself vulnerable to those readers who are prepared to examine seriously such a sweeping claim. In the long run, however, Capote's presumption will be forgotten. ... Future literary historians and scholars will undoubtedly place Capote's discrepancies of fact as well as his pretensions and rationalizations in perspective, and they will join with the present and future public in enjoying the work for its own sake.[44]

It can now be seen retrospectively that Tompkins was quite correct. The Clutter case has long since lost its journalistic appeal, and readers have continued to read In Cold Blood as a novel long after the critical furore over the book's accuracy died down. More important than complete accuracy is the question of novelistic formulation of facts and the author's role in such manipulation. Perhaps Capote's surface concern with facts and verification is one reason why the accuracy question has dominated so much of the debate on the novel. At times the narrative flow is disrupted by his calling attention to his source through typically journalistic forms of attribution. The text abounds with phrases like: "Perry felt starved, as he later told about it ..." (p. 214), and "Bobby Rupp described his last visit to the Clutter home ..." (p. 50), and "said Susan in a statement made at a later date" (p. 59). But despite this kind of insistence on objectivity, the author's hand can readily be seen in the

construction of plot, structure, narrative situation, imagery and characterisation throughout the novel.

William Wiegand has suggested that the real strength of Capote's book lies in the way he employs "a whole battery of novelistic techniques which enforce the structure and hence the meaning of the Clutter case."[45] However, as has been argued throughout this study, the simple presence of formal narrative characteristics in a text is not sufficient for the identification of a dominant function. It is in the way the factual material is organised through the use of these techniques that the final meaning of the novel is achieved. As Monroe Beardsly has pointed out, meaning in literature is conveyed through implication, suggestion and connotation.[46]

Much of such connotation in In Cold Blood is achieved through the organisation of the plot. In the first section of the book, Capote recounts what happens to the killers and their victims on the day of the murders, but postpones the description of the killings themselves until much later in order to save the suspense for his real climax. It is not so much the fact of the murders as the psychological condition of the killers at the time that is his main interest, so the actual description is left to Perry's confession at the end - a description that has, as we have seen, been altered by Capote to enhance his novelistic theme. Throughout the opening section, Capote creates a strong sense of irony by alternating scenes between the killers and their victims. Numerous details, carefully juxtaposed for thematic effect, unite the two parties, thus helping create the impression of an event in which fate rather than independent human action plays the most

important part. Neither Perry nor Mr. Clutter drinks coffee (p. 25) and both Dick and Nancy were "satisfied with their morning's work" (p. 35). But perhaps the most pointed ironic detail included by the author in the opening section is in a conversation between Mr. Clutter and a neighbour followed directly by a description of the killers on their way to the farm:

> "... Just nothing scares you," she said, commenting upon a generally recognised quality of Mr. Clutter's: a fearless self-assurance that set him apart, and while it created respect, also limited the affections of others a little. "I can't imagine you afraid. No matter what happened, you'd talk your way out of it."
>
> By mid-afternoon the black Chevrolet had reached Emporia, Kansas ... (p. 47)

This impression of unavoidable destiny is supported by more direct references to fate in the opening section. Perry, Capote would have us believe, is a serious believer in destiny:

> The compulsively superstitious person is also very often a serious believer in fate; that was the case with Perry. He was here, and embarked on the present errand, not because he wished to be but because fate had arranged the matter, he could <u>prove</u> it. (p. 53)

As it turns out, it seems as if Perry <u>was</u> embarked on his bloody quest with Dick as a result of an unlucky accident. He had come to Kansas (in violation of his parole) not to see Dick, but to meet Willie-Jay, the cellmate who was his closest friend and confidante. But he had been unable to advise Willie-Jay of his arrival and his friend had already left town only five hours earlier from the same terminal at which Perry arrived:

> If he had not missed Willie-Jay, if they could have been together for even an hour, Perry was quite convinced - just "Knew" - that he would

> not now be loitering outside a hospital waiting for Dick to emerge ... (p. 57)

These repeated references to chance prepare us for the thematic climax of the novel in section three, "The Answer," when Perry gives his account of the murders to chief inspector Dewey during the car trip back to Garden City after his arrest. This was another occasion, according to Tompkins, where Capote altered aspects of the official record for thematic effect:

> Sorrow and profound fatigue are at the heart of Dewey's silence. It had been his ambition to learn "exactly what happened in that house that night". Twice now he'd been told, and the two versions were very much alike, the only serious discrepancy being that Hickock attributed all four deaths to Smith, while Smith contended that Hickock had killed the two women. But the confessions, though they answered questions of how and why, failed to satisfy his sense of meaningful design. The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightning. Except for one thing: they had experienced prolonged terror, they had suffered. And Dewey could not forget their sufferings. Nonetheless, he found it possible to look at the man beside him without anger - with, rather, a measure of sympathy - for Perry Smith's life had been no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely progress towards one mirage and then another. (p. 248)

Part two of the novel, "Persons Unknown," traces the wanderings of Perry and Dick after the crime, the police investigation and the fears and paranoia of the townspeople. Once again, Capote manages to unite the killers and the Holcomb community by way of ironic contrast. The central images contrasting the two are the open road and the small town community, the one a traditional image of freedom yet insecurity, the other an image of constraint yet security. Throughout the novel, and especially in this section, Perry and Dick are

consistently associated with the highway and the motor car. In American fiction, escape from communal constraints and the open road have traditionally come to represent freedom and romantic adventure. A tradition stretching from The Scarlet Letter (1850) through Huckleberry Finn (1876) to Catch Twenty-two (1961) has established the theme of escape as a powerful motif in American literature. However, as David Galloway has pointed out, the theme of escape across the frontier and the myth of the open road are inverted in In Cold Blood. Smith and Hickock's odyssey of thousands of miles across the United States into Mexico and back again was characterised by fear, mistrust, no romantic adventure (in spite of Perry's wild daydreams), very little freedom and only a temporary escape.[47]

In contrast, the community of Holcomb, Kansas, represents the epitome of the great American dream. It is a cosmopolitan community of German, Irish, Norwegian, Mexican and Japanese people (p. 16), and is located in the centre of the country. Strict adherence to the work ethic has led to prosperity in spite of the arid climate. The community is closely knit, interdependent, and tied to the land, quite the antithesis of the two criminals. The title of this section also takes on an ironic quality in terms of this contrast. Perry and Dick are the "Persons Unknown," but to the paranoid townspeople, the murderers could have been anyone in the community.

The second section ends with the first part of one of the most subtle and telling parallels that brings the killers and the community into ironic contrast. In a dream, Dewey's wife, Marie,

meets the murdered Bonnie Clutter who cannot talk to her, but shakes her head and wrings her hands crying: "To be murdered. To be murdered. No. No. There's nothing worse. Nothing worse than that. Nothing" (p. 160). Later on in the final section, this dream is brought into perspective when Dick Hickock's father, in an interview with a reporter, has this to say:

> "How it is, the way folks feel, he don't stand a chance. They'll hang them both. And," he added, fatigue and defeat glazing his eyes, "having your boy hang, knowing he will, nothing worse can happen to a man." (p. 260)

The third part, "Answer," deals with the events leading to the capture of the two criminals and Perry's climactic account of the murders themselves. By delaying this description until late in the action of the novel, Capote has succeeded in sustaining the suspense; the reader does not yet know the circumstances of the murders and exactly who was responsible. But the account placed here also provides an answer to the more searching question of exact motivation, and the answer is an uncanny twist of fate, a "psychological accident."

Another example of the role of fate in Capote's novelistic vision is given in his account of the return of the two men from Mexico to the United States. While trying to thumb a lift across the Nevada Desert, they worked out a plan to murder the first person to pick them up, rob him and steal his car. They eventually got a lift with an ideal victim, a sales representative who was travelling on his own. Perry sat on the back seat with a heavy rock in his hand and waited for a pre-arranged signal from Dick, a request for a match to light a cigarette. But Dick delayed the signal by trading dirty jokes with the driver while

Perry sat sweating behind him trying to attract his attention:

> And yet when Dick next spoke, it was only to launch another joke. "Here's a riddle. The riddle is: What's the similarity between a trip to the bathroom and a trip to the cemetery?" He grinned. "Give up?"
>
> "Give up."
>
> "When you gotta go, you gotta go!"
>
> Mr Bell barked.
>
> "Hey Perry, pass me a match."
>
> But just as Perry raised his hand, the rock was on the verge of descent, something extraordinary occurred - what Perry later called "a goddamn miracle". The miracle was the sudden appearance of a third hitchhiker, a Negro soldier, for whom the charitable salesman stopped. "Say, that's pretty cute," he said as his saviour ran towards the car. "When you gotta go, you gotta go." (p. 177)

It is the inclusion of selected events such as these from the vast body of research material Capote had - eighty per cent of which he never used - that confirms the predominantly novelistic function of the book.

In part four, "The Corner," the trial, imprisonment and execution are narrated. While the first three sections formed a unit focussing on the murders and their immediate social consequences, the final section concentrates on the characters of the two criminals, largely from their own points of view. It is in this section that the two main events of the book, the murders and executions, are brought into ironic contrast. Early on in the first part, the omniscient narrator speaks about the four shotgun blasts that "ended six human lives" (p. 17), but only the most perceptive of readers would be likely to recall this link through the violent action that follows. In the description of the court case, the link is re-established through a conversation between two journalists after the prosecuting attorney's appeal to the

jury to impose the death penalty:

> After the jury retired to discuss the verdict ... a young reporter from Oklahoma, exchanged sharp words with another newsman, Richard Parr of the Kansas City Star. To the Oklahoman, Green's address had seemed "rabble-rousing, brutal".
>
> "He was just telling the truth," Parr said. "The truth can be brutal. To coin a phrase."
>
> "But he didn't have to hit that hard. It's unfair."
>
> "What's unfair?"
>
> "The whole trial. These guys don't stand a chance."
>
> "Fat chance they gave Nancy Clutter."
>
> "Perry Smith. My God. He's had such a rotten life - "
>
> Parr said, "Many a man can match sob stories with that little bastard. Me included. Maybe I drink too much, but I sure as hell never killed four people in cold blood."
>
> "Yeah, and how about hanging the bastard? That's pretty damn cold-blooded too." (p. 306)

At this point the title of the book takes on its ironic second meaning. In terms of the world of the novel - not necessarily the real world, as Tompkins has pointed out - just as the Clutters are victims of a fate or destiny beyond their control, Dick and Perry are also victims of circumstance. And in the end, the cold-blooded killing of the Clutters is reciprocated by the cold-blooded killing of Dick and Perry by the state.

The four part structure provides a coherent unity for the various plot elements of the novel through the many ironic and suspenseful narrative shifts. Plot, as the Russian formalists have pointed out, constitutes the literary or artistic element of novels, since it is here that the author's basic organisation of the story occurs. However, as Lareau points out in his incisive analysis of In Cold Blood, while plot structure provides the

framework for a novel, "images help fill that framework."[48]

Probably the most striking pattern of imagery in the book is that related to gardens. "How fortunate Capote is in the matter of names," writes George Creeger. "That he should have at his disposal a city, and a county seat, named Garden City is superbly apposite to his purposes."[49] The town clearly represents the myth of the American dream and an attempt to recapture Paradise that is reinforced by the several smaller gardens created by characters in the book. The most important of these is Mr. Clutter's magnificent fruit garden in reference to which he himself says early in the book: "An inch more of rain and this country would be paradise - Eden on Earth." The garden stands, significantly enough, on the banks of a river and consists mainly of cherry, peach, pear and apple trees. It is his attempt to create "a patch of paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden he envisioned" (p. 24). Mr. Clutter's wife, Bonnie, also has her garden, "a treasured patch of dishevelled foliage that grew beneath her bedroom window" (p. 51).

But the Clutters are not the only people in the novel who tend gardens representing the dream of success. Perry Smith's father tries to foster a more coarse kind of Eden in the bitter cold of Alaska with his Trapper's Den Lodge, complete with Garden of Memories and a Wishing Well (p. 143). And Perry's married sister, a woman called Mrs. Johnson, also tries to cultivate a garden in the shale behind her ranch house in San Francisco - a garden that (like the Clutter's) also seems theatened by her criminal brother after a visit by police investigators:

> The detectives had found her; why shouldn't Perry? He need not expect her to help him. She wouldn't even let him in. The front door was locked but not the door to the garden. The garden was white with sea-fog; it might have been an assembly of spirits: Mama and Jimmy and Fern. When Mrs Johnson bolted the door, she had in mind the dead as well as the living. (p. 190)

Yet another dream garden threatened by the criminal invaders is the one Dewey hopes to grow when he retires to his plot several miles from Garden City: "He was very certain that some day his own oasis of oaks and elms would stand upon those shadeless plains. Some day, God willing" (p. 113). However, his dream is destroyed when his wife decides she can no longer move out of town after the murders:

> That was the dream, but it was one his wife had lately warned him she no longer shared; she had told him that never now would she consider living all alone "way out there in the country". Dewey knew that even if he were to snare the murderers the next day, Marie would not change her mind - for once an awful fate had befallen friends who lived in a lonely country house. (p. 156)

As the archetypal outsider, Capote's version of Joe Christmas, Perry lives exiled from the myth of the Garden. But this does not stop him from dreaming of happiness in the same kind of pastoral images. An avid reader of romances, dreamer of exotic places and collector of maps, Perry fantasises about a place where he can reach true happiness. One such recurring dream starts like a nightmare where he finds himself in an African jungle trying to steal a bushel of diamonds from a tree guarded by a monstrous snake in what is clearly a psychological perversion of the Eden myth. The snake catches him in the act and starts devouring him, but he is saved by a "towering bird" or "yellow sort of parrot"

that comes to his rescue.

> Thus, the snake, that custodian of the diamond-bearing tree, never finished devouring him but was itself always devoured. And afterwards the blessed ascent! Ascension to a paradise that in one version was merely "a feeling", a sense of power, of unassailable superiority - sensations that in another version were transposed into "a real place. Like out of a movie. Maybe that's where I Did see it - remembered it from a movie. Because where else would I have seen a garden like that? With white marble steps? Fountains? And away down below, if you go to the edge of the garden, you can see the ocean. Terrific! Like around Carmel, California. (p. 101)

In the end, all the gardens in the novel bar one are violated - the real ones either directly or indirectly by the horrible crime, the ones in Perry's dreams by the hangman's noose. The one that transcends human failure is the garden that only exists to accommodate human death - Valley View:

> The pioneers who founded Garden City were necessarily a Spartan people, but when the time came to establish a formal cemetery, they were determined, despite arid soil and the troubles of transporting water, to create a rich contrast to the dusty streets, the austere plains. The result, which they named Valley View, is situated above the town on a plateau of modest altitude. Seen today, it is a dark island lapped by the undulating surf of surrounding wheat fields - a good refuge from a hot day, for there are many cool paths unbrokenly shaded by trees planted generations ago. (p. 341)

The dramatic counter to the myth of the Garden, and the book's second major pattern of images, is the wide range of animal imagery with which the criminals are constantly associated. From Dewey's point of view during the execution scene at the end of the novel we have a description of Perry posessing the "aura of an exiled animal, a creature walking wounded" (p. 341). This final

image brings into focus much of what Capote has been saying about the relationship between criminal and community through the novel's use of images related to animals and hunters.

The book's first mention of hunted animals occurs just after we are introduced to the "master" of River Valley Farm. He has just eaten an apple and fed its core to Babe, the fat work horse, and is walking through his orchard with Teddy, his son's dog who is, significantly, gun-shy, when he meets a party of pheasant hunters from Oklahoma:

> The pheasant season in Kansas, a famed November event, lures hordes of sportsmen from adjoining states, and during the past week plaid-hatted regiments had paraded across the autumnal expanses, flushing and felling with rounds of buckshot great coppery flights of the grain-fattened birds. By custom, the hunters, if they are not invited guests, are supposed to pay the landowner a fee for letting them pursue their quarry on his premises, but when The Oklahomans offered to hire hunting rights, Mr Clutter was amused. "I'm not as poor as I look. Go ahead, get all you can," he said. Then, touching the brim of his cap, he headed for home and the day's work, unaware that it would be his last. (p. 25)

Thus, right at the start of the book, Capote brings the violent image of the hunted animal and the hunters into contact with the tranquil image of the fruit garden soon to be violated by a different kind of animal seeking a different quarry. But before this angle is explored, there are a few more ironic references to pheasants in the novel that bear mention. For example, Capote has Mr. Clutter's insurance agent hearing the news of the murder just as he was "plunging a knife into the roast pheasant" (p. 81). And when he describes the murder weapon, it is a 12-guage Savage shotgun on whose stock was a "delicately etched scene of pheasants

in flight" (p. 173, cf. p. 33).

The dog and the horse are traditionally considered to be friendly to man. And, even though hunted for the pot, the pheasant holds few unpleasant associations. But there are animals (coyotes and rattlesnakes) that are hunted in the novel for different reasons, and the indomitable spokesman for the Holcomb community, Mrs Hartman, identifies the murderers as being of this breed when she pronounces them "varmints" (p. 232).

Mr Clutter is not presented as a hunter, but his son Kenyon certainly is. As a boy, he and a friend had often conducted "rabbit roundups," killing as many as "half a hundred rabbits" for the processing plant that paid ten cents a head for the animals "which were then quick-frozen and shipped to mink growers." Duck hunting was also popular with the young boys, for it provided the pride in "swaggering homeward with a dozen duck dinners swinging from their belts" (p. 50). However, first-mentioned of Kenyon's hunting exploits is coyote hunting, in which the varmints are chased by the eleven-year-old boy in an old truck he bought with money made raising sheep - "the Coyote Wagon, he and Bob called it":

> Not far from River Valley Farm there is a mysterious stretch of countryside known as the Sand Hills; it is like a beach without an ocean, and at night coyotes slink among the dunes, assembling in hordes to howl. On moonlit evenings the boys would descend upon them, set them running, and try to outrace them in the wagon; they seldom did, for the scrawniest coyote can hit fifty miles an hour, whereas the wagon's top speed was thirty-five, but it was a wild and beautiful kind of fun, the wagon skidding across the sand, and fleeing coyotes framed against the moon - as Bob said, it sure made your heart hurry. (p. 50)

In the novel, varmints like coyotes are not only pursued by excited young boys; they are also shot by ranchers as pests. On the drive from Las Vegas to Garden City, the small caravan transporting the captured criminal-animals, passes through desolate country where the manacled Perry can do little but "read Burma-Shave doggerel, and count the carcasses of shotgunned coyotes festooning ranch fences" (p. 234).

All of this attention paid to real animals is, of course, part of Capote's narrative strategy. As George Creeger explains, by detailing the attitudes assumed toward animals and the violence done them by his characters, he prepares us for understanding the novel's conception of the relationship between the criminal and the community:

> Put discursively, this relationship may be defined as follows: in denominating the criminal an animal, the community effectively separates him from its own conscious self-image - that of a group of human beings. The category then permits the community to think of the criminal-animal in rather hermetic ways and to use action against him for which there would otherwise be fewer sanctions. The criminal becomes the quarry in a hunt; or, to change the metaphor, an animal in exile - whether that of flight, hiding, incarceration, or ultimately of death. By the kind of grim logic permitted by the category, the principle of violence is violently repressed. Thereupon the rational consciousness of the community may congratulate itself on its triumph and return to the feeling it cherishes so much - that of security.[50]

Through his ironic contrasts, Capote points out that there is much more linking criminal and community than meets the eye. One of the central ideas of the novel is that under different circumstances, roles could very easily have been inverted in a

world governed by fate and fortune. The major sustained parallel in the book is the one Capote establishes between Mr. Clutter and Perry's father, Tex "Lone Wolf" Smith (nicknamed after a hunted animal). While Mr. Smith is financially unsuccessful, he shares Mr. Clutter's talent for building and baking, but cannot evoke the love of his children. Both men have a strong sense of their absolute authority and both sons are killers, albeit on different levels. Lone Wolf taught Perry how to trap and Mr. Clutter taught Kenyon how to shoot. Is it going to far to suggest that Kenyon dies before his capacity for killing develops towards victims more serious than rabbits, ducks and coyotes? He is described in the beginning as a young boy in whom the devil lurked (p. 29) and who, like Perry, "lives in a world of his own" (p. 51). And his destructive capabilities have been demonstrated by the killing of something he loved, his horse Skeeter:

> A beautiful horse, a strawberry stallion he had raised from a foal. How that Skeeter could take a fence! "You use a horse too hard," his father had cautioned him. "One day you'll ride the life out of Skeeter." And he had; while Skeeter was streaking down a road with his master astride him, his heart failed, and he stumbled and was dead. (p. 52)

A more obvious Doppelgänger for Kenyon than Perry makes his appearance on death row towards the end of the novel. Like the Clutter boy, the eighteen-year-old Lowell Lee Andrews is a loner, intelligent, myopic, badly coordinated and estranged, but generally regarded as "exceptionally gentle and sweet-natured" (p. 312) One winter night, the secretive Lowell Lee locked himself in his bedroom to read the last chapter of The Brothers Karamazov, and emerged to kill his sister, mother and father with a rifle and

revolver. Capote's detailed description of the case and the psychological interest it evoked (pp. 311-317) forces one to reconsider Kenyon, in whom the devil lurked, and the possibility that he too may have graduated to killing more than varmints.

Probably the most memorable association of the murderers with animals is given in the description of a pair of wild tomcats who stalk the streets of Garden City:

> Among Garden City's animals are two grey tomcats who are always together - thin dirty strays with strange and clever habits. The chief ceremony of their day is performed at twilight. First they trot the length of Main Street, stopping to scrutinize the engine grilles of parked automobiles, particularly those stationed in front of the two hotels, the Windsor and Warren, for these cars, usually the property of travellers from afar, often yield what the bony, methodical creatures are hunting: slaughtered birds - crows, chickadees, and sparrows foolhardy enough to have flown into the path of oncoming motorists. Using their paws as though they are surgical instruments, the cats extract from the grilles every feathery particle. (p. 249)

On this particular day, the square outside the courthouse provides a promising hunting ground for the two scavangers because the area was "swarmed with Finney County vehicles that had brought to town part of the crowd populating the square" (p. 249). Because the interest of the crowd is now on a more interesting pair of animals, the cats go largely unnoticed. Taking advantage, they go about their macabre business, extracting the dead birds that have been slaughtered by cars travelling to Garden City and probably the trial. If this description of the cats has not been sufficient to make the association obvious, Capote describes Perry's response when he catches sight of them from his prison window during the trial:

> As the weeks passed by he had become familiar with life on Courthouse Square, its habitués and their habits. The cats, for example: the two thin grey toms who appeared with every twilight and prowled the Square, stooping to examine the cars parked around its periphery - behaviour puzzling to him until Mrs Meier explained that the cats were hunting for dead birds caught in the vehicles' engine grilles. Thereafter it pained him to watch their manoeuvres: "Because most of my life I've done what they're doing. The equivalent." (p. 265)

The repeated image of the cats living off the dead birds enhances the impression of violence begetting violence in American society. The killers, represented by both the automobiles and the cats, commit a crime almost as motiveless as the killing of the birds. Perry in particular has led a life which has seemed destined to have him branded "varmint," hunted down and killed for a hopeless psychological accident. Whether the recorded facts supported the novelistic conclusions Capote draws is really beside the question of the book's dominant function. It is clear, since the text of In Cold Blood represents less than twenty per cent of the material the author would have used in a "complete" documentary of the crime, that its primary communicative function must have been novelistic. It has been said that the facts resonate with the violence of an entire decade of American life.[51] But as Tanner reminds us, the facts depend for their meaning on the "orchestration of a human arranger," and this arranging is performed to articulate a coherent novelistic philosophy.

This philosophy, as the carefully structured narrative suggests, relates to the intimate relationship between the criminal and his so-called "brothers in humanity." For the book's

epigraph, Capote uses four lines from Francois Villon's French poem, "Ballade des pendus." Creeger offers this telling analysis that comes close to reflecting the book's dominant novelistic message:

> The lines, which are an explicit plea not to harden our hearts against the wretched, but rather to show pity, address us directly as "Frères humains." The expression, although difficult to translate, may be rendered as "brothers in humanity," and it insists on the intimacy of the relationship between us who may die peacefully in our beds and those "poor ones" about to be hanged. We are in fact, the hanged men's brothers, and we partake, or so the poem and the novel insists, of their humanity.[52]

By using (and often abusing) the facts of the Clutter case to explore this essentially literary theme, it is clear that Capote has not elevated journalism to the level of a new art form as he claims to have done.[53] His intention, as he says, was "altogether literary" and the result is not "superior" journalism, but a conventional realistic novel articulating very typical American novelistic themes and performing, in Jakobson's terms, a dominant aesthetic function.

CONCLUSION

Nonfiction narratives employing techniques usually associated with fiction have continued to enjoy widespread popularity up to the present time. However, possibly because books like In Cold Blood entail so much difficult research, there have not been many predominantly novelistic works claiming meticulous adherence to documented fact since The Executioner's Song was published in 1979. Nonetheless, given the fluctuating nature of literary fashion, there is little doubt that novels of this kind will again make an impact in the future. Truman Capote was planning to revive his flagging literary reputation by undertaking just such a project before his untimely death in 1984.

Meanwhile, in a world of ever-increasing media coverage, factual accounts of interesting events continue to compete with novels for bestseller status. Most of these, like John Hersey's The Algiers Motel Incident (1977), All the President's Men (1974) by Woodward and Bernstein, and Richard Rashke's The Killing of Karen Silkwood (1981) clearly perform dominant journalistic functions and cannot logically be called novels.

A more recent factual account that uses novelistic devices more freely is Joan Didion's Salvador (1983). But once again, as was the case with Hell's Angels, Dispatches and The Armies of the Night, an analysis of the narrative strategies of this book indicates that the dominant function is a journalistic exploration of a complex media event through the personality of the author.

One writer who has continued to delight a wide readership

with his factual police and crime novels is Joseph Wambaugh. Lines and Shadow's (1984) follows his successful The Onion Field (1974) in the novelistic nonfiction tradition. But while The Onion Field is an ambitious novel worthy of its frequent comparison with In Cold Blood, Lines and Shadows is a less serious novelistic attempt with the entertainment function of a modern wild west story.

The purpose of this study has been to point out that nonfiction narratives can perform a number of different communicative functions and that the sudden proliferation of this kind of writing in the nineteen-sixties did not really mark the emergence of a new unified genre. Roman Jakobson's model of communication and his notion of a dominant function seemed like a good theoretical springboard for a re-examination of a group of texts that have routinely been referred to as belonging to this new "genre." My intention has not, however, been to unpack these works purely in terms of the six elements of the model; it is, after all, a linguistic model designed for the analysis of individual speech acts. Nevertheless, the flexibility of the model has been aptly demonstrated by John Fiske and John Hartley who use its terms for the semiotic analysis of photographps and television productions.

Three of the functions identified by Jakobson suggested themselves as appropriate for a functional classification of modern novelistic nonfiction: the referential function with its orientation towards the factual context is dominant in the sociological works of Lewis and Terkel; the persuasive function

with its orientation towards the emotions and interpretations of the author is dominant in the subjective journalistic works of Thompson, Mailer and Herr; and the aesthetic function with its orientation towards the structure of the text and the secondary meanings suggested is dominant in the novels discussed in the final chapter. Identifying the dominant function in each category depended on an examination of the relationship of form to content: that is, the role of fact in relation to narrative and vice-versa.

By dividing my corpus into three categories, I do not suggest that these are the only functions performed by these works. The very fact that they are hybrid narrative structures suggests that they perform mixed narrative functions. However, in terms of Jakobson's notion of the dominant, it is possible to suggest the essential communicative function readers will probably respond to. I have also not suggested that all nonfiction narratives need fall into one or another of the categories identified. These simply seemed most appropriate to the corpus chosen and further study may indicate that other novelistic nonfiction narratives perform functions not discussed in this study in any detail. It may well be, for example, that Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream falls into the postmodernist tradition of fabulation along with the novels of Barthe and Pynchon. It is certainly not a journalistic account like Hell's Angels.

Finally, it must be mentioned that discussion of the literary value of the corpus works has been avoided intentionally. Above all, I do not mean to suggest that the texts defined as

predominantly novelistic in function are "superior" literature to the works performing a dominant sociological or journalistic function. The very fact that readers would approach these works for different communicative purposes indicates that they should be judged essentially on their own terms. Given the rather elitist tone of much of our critical vocabulary, it may well seem that certain statements in this study are, in fact, evaluations. If so, this sense was not intended. Whatever the dominant function of the corpus works, they are all significant literary documents worthy of serious consideration by students of modern narrative. The distinction between the narrative functions suggested in this study is simply an effort to resolve some of the confusion surrounding the debate on the generic identity of modern novelistic nonfiction narratives.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

[1] See, for example, Dwight Macdonald, "Parajournalism or Tom Wolfe and his Magic Writing Machine," in The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), pp. 223-33.

[2] See Tom Wolfe, The New Journalism, (London: Picador, 1975), pp. 37-51.

[3] See Lester Markel, "So What's New?" in Weber, The Reporter as Artist, pp. 255-9, and George A. Hough, "How New?" in New Journalism, ed. Marshall Fishwick (n.p.: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975) pp. 114-21.

[4] N.W. Visser, "The Novelistic Documentary: A Study of the Non-fiction Novel," Diss. Rhodes University 1972, pp.68-88.

[5] Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 46.

[6] John Hollowell, Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

[7] Barbara Foley, "Fact, Fiction and Reality," Contemporary Literature, 20 (1979), p. 394.

[8] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 15.

[9] Visser, "The Novelistic Documentary," p. 9.

[10] Visser, "The Novelistic Documentary," p. 25.

[11] Visser, "The Novelistic Documentary," p. 28.

[12] This is an adaptation of the formal definition of the fictional novel in Visser, "The Novelistic Documentary," p. 11.

[13] Barbara Lounsberry, "Transfiction: Factual Fiction from Defoe to Mailer," Diss. University of Iowa, 1978.

[14] Gerald Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," Diss. Purdue University, 1978.

[15] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" (1947) in The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951) pp. 205-22, cited in Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 43.

[16] Philip Roth, "Writing American Fiction," Commentary, 31 (1961), p. 224.

[17] One of the better full length studies of this development is Robert Scholes's Fabulation and Metafiction (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

[18] Marcus Klein, ed. The American Novel since World War Two (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1969), p. 9.

[19] Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 15.

[20] Norman Mailer and Truman Capote are the two most obvious examples.

[21] Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

[22] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, pp. 37-8.

[23] Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist views, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1972), p.

83. For the original usage of the concept of "dominant," see Victor Erlich, Russian Formalism (The Hague: Mouton, 1955), p. 199.

[24] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 36.

[25] Foley, p. 397.

[26] Claudio Guillen, Literature as System (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 453.

[27] Guillen, Literature as System, p. 464.

[28] James Mellard, in The Exploded Form: The Modernist Novel in America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 185, sees a more logical contradiction at the heart of Zavarzadeh's thesis:

> He posits a form that avoids totalization, but that form is itself necessarily predicated upon a total view of reality - the view held by various modernist or existential commentators who habitually have regarded social chaos and moral entropy as all inclusive of the world.

[29] Ronald Weber, The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980), p. 176.

[30] Foley, p. 397.

[31] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 211.

[32] John Hellmann, Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as new Fiction (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), p. 176.

[33] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 56.

[34] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 23.

[35] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 73-4.

[36] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 27.

[37] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 27.

[38] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, pp. 29-30.

[39] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, pp. 42-3.

[40] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 38.

[41] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 128.

[42] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 132.

[43] Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) p. 175.

[44] See, for example, Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[45] See Wolfgang Iser, "Narrative Strategies as a Means of Communication" in Interpretation of Narrative, ed. Mario Valdes and Owen Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 100-117. Iser presents a more detailed explanation of this theory in The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[46] In Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 84, for example, Terry Eagleton argues:

> If one considers the "text in itself" as a kind of skeleton, a set of "schemata" waiting to be concretized in various ways by various readers, how can one discuss these schemata at all without having already concretized them?

[47] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature," New Literary History, 7 (1975), p. 13.

[48] Iser, "The Reality of Fiction," p. 16.

[49] Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" in New Directions in Literary History, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 21.

[50] The flexibility of Jakobson's model is illustrated by its use by certain semiologists for the analysis of pictures and films. See John Fiske, Introduction to Communication Studies (London: Methuen, 1982).

[51] Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics" in Style in Language, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), p. 353.

[52] Jakobson, p. 355.

[53] More detailed and better expressed versions of this argument are presented by Stuart Hall et al. in Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), chapters 3 and 4, and in The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media, ed. Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (London: Constable, 1973).

[54] For more detailed discussions of the relativity of the term "novel" see Mellard, The Exploded Form, and Gustavo Perez Firmat, "The Novel as Genres," Genre, XII, No. 3 (1979).

[55] James's view of thematic representation is well explained by Robert C. Post in "A Theory of Genre: Romance, Realism and Moral Reality," American Quarterly, 33 (1981), p.382.

[1] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 247.

[2] Richard Ohmann, "Politics and Genre in Nonfiction Prose," MLA Convention, 1976, p. 2.

[3] Ohmann, p. 3.

[4] Ohmann, p. 3.

[5] Ohmann, p. 4.

[6] James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, (1941, Rpt. London: Peter Owen, 1965). Further references to this work appear in the text.

[7] See, for example, Barbara Lounsberry, "Transfiction: Factual Fiction from Defoe to Mailer," Gerald Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," and Robert Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel: James Agee, Victor Shklovsky, and Norman Mailer," Diss. University of Utah, 1981.

[8] For the basic issues of the "intentional fallacy" debate, see W.K. Wimsatt, "Genesis: A Fallacy Revisited," in The Discipline of Criticism, ed. Peter Demetz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 193-225, and S.D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[9] This is the basic premise of Lounsberry's "Transfiction."

[10] Samuel Hynes, "James Agee: Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," in Landmarks of American Writing, ed. Hennig Cohen (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 328.

[11] Lounsberry, "Transfiction," pp. 9-18.

[12] For the Russian Formalists' distinction between plot and story, see Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematics," in Russian Formalist Criticism trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 67.

[13] Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," pp. 21-9.

[14] Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 44.

[15] Weber, The Literature of Fact, p. 60.

[16] Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," p. 46.

[17] Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel," p. 90.

[18] Lounsberry, "Transfiction," p. 22.

[19] Diana Trilling, "Capote's Crime and Punishment," Partisan Review 33 (Spring 1966), p. 253.

[20] Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel," p. 94.

[21] William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying is a good example of this.

[22] Henry Mayhew's Preface to London Labour and the London Poor (1851) in Mayhew's Characters ed. Peter Quennell (London: William Kimber, 1951), p. xvii.

[23] Oscar Lewis, Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 1.

[24] Arthur Pfeffer, "Literature and Poverty," Intellect, October 1974, p. 60.

[25] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals and the Novel."

[26] Richard Hogarth, The Uses of Literacy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p. 17.

[27] Lewis, La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan and New York (London: Secker and Warburg, 1967), p. xii.

[28] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida." A Current Anthropology review with fifteen contributors, Current Anthropology, 8 (1967), p.480.

[29] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 480.

[30] Lewis, Five Families, p. 4.

[31] Lewis, Five Families, p. 5.

[32] Wim Toebosch, "Recente Amerikaanse Literatuur: Truman Capote en Oscar Lewis," De Vlaamse Gids, 40 (1966) p. 404.

[33] Nancy Sullivan, rev. of La Vida, by Oscar Lewis, Novel, 1 (1967), p. 92.

[34] Sullivan, p. 92.

[35] Ohmann, p. 9.

[36] Lewis, Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and his Family (London: Panther, 1967), p. 484.

[37] Lewis, Five Families, p. 350

[38] Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," in The Human Way: Readings in Anthropology, ed. H.R. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 164.

[39] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 498.

[40] Lewis, rev. of Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals, by Charles A. Valentine, Current Anthropology, 10 (1969), p. 189.

[41] Douglas Butterworth, Obituary for Oscar Lewis, American Anthropologist, 74 (1972), p. 750.

[42] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 480.

[43] Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 46.

[44] Lewis, Five Families, p. 25. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[45] Truman Capote, In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) p. 126.

[46] Capote, In Cold Blood, p. 342.

[47] Berry Burgum, "The Sociology of Oscar Lewis as a Critique of Imperialism," Science and Society, 31 (1967), p. 323.

[48] R.H.S. Crossman, "De Profundis," New Statesman, 20 April, 1962, p. 562.

[49] Toebosch, p. 404.

[50] Lewis, The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. xi. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[51] A.J. Camigliano and R.A. Champagne, "The Semiotics of Documentary Prose: In Between the Lines of La Vida," Sphinx, 4 (1982), p. 127.

[52] Camigliano and Champagne, p. 127.

[53] This interview is cited in Camigliano and Champagne, p. 128.

[54] Burgum, p. 329.

[55] Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," p. 169.

[56] Burgum, p. 329.

[57] Lewis, Pedro Martinez, p. xxix. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[58] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 480.

[59] Lewis, La Vida, p. xi. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[60] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 482.

[61] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 482.

[62] Lewis emphasises these traits as typical of the culture of poverty in The Children of Sanchez, p. xxvi, and in La Vida, p. xlviii.

[63] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 482.

[64] Camigliano and Champagne, p. 129.

[65] Camigliano and Champagne, p. 130.

[66] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 213.

[67] Camigliano and Champagne, p. 132.

[68] Camigliano and Champagne, p. 133.

[69] Burgum, p. 333.

[70] Theodore Caplow, rev. of La Vida by Oscar Lewis, Current Anthropology, 8 (1967), p. 486.

[71] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, pp. 217-8

[72] Lewis, "The Children of Sanchez, Pedro Martinez and La Vida," p. 483.

[73] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 217.

[74] V.S. Pritchett, "Spilling the Beans," New Statesman, 29 September 1967, p. 404.

[75] "Prying into Poverty," rev. of La Vida by Oscar Lewis, Times Literary Supplement, 21 September 1967, p. 830.

[76] "Prying into Poverty," p. 830.

[77] See, for example, Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, pp. 208-9.

[78] Jan Myrdal, Report From a Chinese Village (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).

[79] Studs Terkel, Division Street: America (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 19. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[80] Terkel, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 56. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[81] Peter McGrath, "Too Tired," rev. of Working by Studs Terkel, New Statesman, 90 (1975), p. 283.

[82] Nicolaus Mills, "Work and the System," rev. of Working by Studs Terkel, The Yale Review, 63 (1974), p. 567.

[83] Terkel, Working: People talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do (1975, Rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 29. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[84] McGrath, p. 283.

[85] Karl Marx, from Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844), reprinted in Early Writings (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 3.

[86] Terkel, "Work Without Meaning," Business and Society Review, 9 (1974), p. 15.

[87] Terkel, "Work Without Meaning," p. 19.

[88] Jess R. Lord, rev. of Working by Studs Terkel, Social Science Quarterly, 55 (1974), p. 821.

[89] Thomas Cottle, "Experts on the Job," rev. of Working by Studs Terkel, The Times Literary Supplement, 19 December 1975, p. 1523.

[90] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 178-9.

[91] Ohmann, p. 2.

CHAPTER 3

[1] The term "new journalism" is used by Wolfe, Hellmann, Hollowell and Lareau among others. It is not known who first coined the phrase, but it was used as early as the eighteen-nineties to describe the campaign journalism of W.T. Stead.

[2] Wolfe, The New Journalism, pp. 37-51.

[3] Hollowell, Fact and Fiction, p. 3.

[4] Ward Just, "Newspaper Days," The Atlantic, September 1979, p. 66.

[5] These developments are described well in Anthony Smith, The Newspaper: An International History (London: Thomas and Hudson, 1979).

[6] See Dwight Macdonald, "Parajournalism or Tom Wolfe and his Magic Writing Machine," in The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), p. 223.

[7] Wolfe, The New Journalism, pp. 34-5.

[8] These pieces by Dickens are reprinted in Sketches by Boz (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) and The Uncommercial Traveler (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

[9] James Greenwood, "A Night in a Workhouse," in Into Unknown England, ed. Peter Keating (Glasgow: Collins and Sons, 1976).

[10] See, for example, Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (1906; rpt. Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1975) for an exposé of the American meat-canning industry.

[11] See, for example, Henry Nxumalo, "Mr. Drum Goes to Jail," in Drum: A Venture Into the New Africa, ed. Anthony Sampson (London: Collings, 1956), pp. 185-97.

[12] See, for example, Wolfe, The New Journalism and Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality.

[13] Wolfe, The New Journalism, p. 36.

[14] Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality, p. 221.

[15] Hunter S. Thompson, Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of an Outlaw Motorcycle Gang (1966; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 13. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[16] Thompson's attitude towards rape is well illustrated in descriptions from this section.

[17] Raymond Sokolov, rev. of Dispatches, by Michael Herr. Newsweek, 21 November 1977, p. 52.

[18] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, pp. 127-39.

[19] Michael Herr, Dispatches (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 173. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[20] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 128.

[21] Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the American Political Conventions of 1968 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 6.

[22] Weber, The Literature of Fact, p. 81.

[23] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 38

[24] Kenneth A. Seib, "Mailer's March: The Epic Structure of The Armies of the Night," Essays in Literature, 1 (1974), p. 38.

[25] Seib, p. 90

[26] Seib, p. 90

[27] See, for example, Wilfred Sheed, "A Fun House Mirror," in Weber, ed. The Reporter as Artist, p. 294.

[28] David Levin, In Defence of Historical Literature (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), pp. 7-8.

[29] Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 117.

[30] Merrill, Norman Mailer, p. 117.

[31] Merrill, Norman Mailer, p. 117.

[32] Ria Vanderauwera, "A Study of Norman Mailer's Narrative," in Functional Studies in Language and Literature, ed. Frank Coppieters (Antwerp: E. Story-Scientia P.V.B.A. 1978), p. 18.

[33] Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 14. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[34] Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel," p. 125.

[35] Donald Fishman, "Norman Mailer," in Fishwick, ed. New Journalism, p. 174.

[36] Merrill, Norman Mailer, p. 127.

[37] Merrill, Norman Mailer, p. 126.

[38] Warner Berthoff, "Witness and Testament: Two Contemporary Classics," New Literary History, 2 (1971), p. 327.

[39] Connor Cruise O'Brien, rev. of The Armies of the Night, by Norman Mailer, New York Review of Books, 20 June 1968, p. 67.

[40] Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago, p. 90.

[41] Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon (New York: New American Library, 1970).

[42] Works of interpretive journalism by Norman Mailer since 1970 include The Prisoner of Sex (1971), St. George and the Godfather (1972) and The Fight (1975).

CHAPTER 4

[1] E.L. Doctorow, cited in Walter Clemmons, "Houdini, Meet Ferdinand," Newsweek, 14 July 1975, pp. 73-6.

[2] Phyllis Frus McCord, "The Ideology of Form: The Nonfiction Novel," Genre, 19 (1986), p. 59

[3] Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," p. iv.

[4] Writing from a Marxist perspective, Barbara Foley has slammed what she calls the pretensions of this kind of "textual radicalism" in "The Pseudo-Politics of Epistemological Rupture: The Ideology of Textual Radicalism," MLA Convention, 1983.

[5] E.L. Doctorow, quoted in Kenneth L. Donelson, Teaching Guide to E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime (New York, 1976) p. 22.

[6] William Wiegand, "The Non-fiction Novel," New Mexico Quarterly, 37 (1967), p. 243.

[7] The notion that serious fiction should perform a philosophical function is put forward by D.W. Theobald in "Philosophy and Fiction: The Novel as Eloquent Philosophy," British Journal of Aesthetics, 14 (1974), pp. 17-25.

[8] George Plimpton, "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel: An Interview With Truman Capote," The New York Times Book Review, 16 January 1966, p. 43.

[9] Plimpton, p. 2.

[10] David Karp, "In Search of a Motive," rev. of Compulsion by Meyer Levin, Saturday Review, 27 October 1956, p. 16.

[11] Karp, p. 16.

[12] Erle Stanley Gardner, "Killers for Kicks," rev. of Compulsion by Meyer Levin, New York Times Book Review, 28 October 1956, p. 7.

[13] Charles Shapiro, "The Crime of Our Age," rev. of Compulsion by Meyer Levin, The Nation, December 1956, p. 484.

[14] "At Odds With Society," rev. of Compulsion by Meyer Levin, Times Literary Supplement, 12 July 1957, p. 425.

[15] Meyer Levin, Compulsion (1957; rpt. London: Corgi, 1959), p. 7. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[16] "At Odds With Society," p. 425.

[17] Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 111.

[18] Conrad, Heart of Darkness, p. 113.

[19] Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel," p. 135.

[20] Norman Mailer, Marilyn (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1973), p. 92.

[21] Norman Mailer, The Executioner's Song (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), p. 1051.

[22] Mailer, The Executioner's Song, p. 1051. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[23] Smart, "An Examination of the Nonfiction Novel," p. 144.

[24] "Crime and Punishment: Gary Gilmore," Firing Line, hosted by William F. Buckley, PBS, 4 November 1979.

[25] Firing Line, 4 November 1979.

[26] Hellmann, Fables of Fact, p. 59.

[27] David Lodge, "From a View to a Death," rev. of The Executioner's Song by Norman Mailer. Times Literary Supplement, 11 January 1980, p. 28.

[28] Sol Yurick, "Sob-Sister Gothic," rev. of In Cold Blood by Truman Capote, The Nation, 7 February 1966, pp. 158-160.

[29] William Nance, The Worlds of Truman Capote (New York: Stein and Day, 1970), p. 176.

[30] George Garrett, "Crime and Punishment in Kansas: Truman Capote's In Cold Blood," The Hollins Critic, 3 (1966), p. 1.

[31] Plimpton, p. 3.

[32] Hamish Hamilton, "Stranger than Fiction," rev. of In Cold Blood by Truman Capote, Times Literary Supplement, 17 March 1966, p. 215.

[33] Tony Tanner, "Death in Kansas," rev. of In Cold Blood by Truman Capote, The Spectator, 18 March 1966, p. 331.

[34] Plimpton, p. 3.

[35] Plimpton, p. 41.

[36] Jack De Bellis "Visions and Revisions: Truman Capote's In Cold Blood," Journal of Modern Literature, 7 (1979), p. 520.

[37] F.W. Dupee, "Truman Capote's Score," rev. of In Cold Blood, The New York Review of Books, 3 February 1966, p. 3.

[38] Robert E. Kuehn, "The Novel Now: Some Anxieties and Prescriptions," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, 7 (1966), p. 127.

[39] Truman Capote, In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences (1966; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 308. Further references to this work appear in the text.

[40] Phillip K. Tompkins, "In Cold Fact," Esquire, June 1966, p. 168.

[41] Tompkins, p. 170.

[42] Tompkins, p. 171.

[43] Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," p. 59.

[44] Tompkins, p. 171.

[45] Wiegand, p. 247.

[46] Monroe Beardsley, Aesthetics (New York: Harcourt, 1958), p. 126.

[47] David Galloway, "Why the Chickens Came Home to Roost in Holcomb, Kansas: Truman Capote's In Cold Blood," in Truman Capote's In Cold Blood: A Critical Handbook, ed. Irving Malin (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1968), p. 160.

[48] Lareau, "The New Journalism as Narrative Art," p. 65.

[49] George R. Creeger, "Animals in Exile: Criminal and Community in Capote's In Cold Blood," Jahrbuch Fur Amerikastudien, 14 (1969), p. 101.

[50] Creeger, p. 97.

[51] Hollowell, Fact and Fiction, p. 86.

[52] Creeger, p. 95.

[53] Plimpton, p. 2.

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