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**Naturalism, the new journalism, and the tradition of the  
modern American fact-based homicide novel**

Whited, Lana Ann, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1993

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NATURALISM, THE NEW JOURNALISM, AND THE TRADITION  
OF THE MODERN AMERICAN FACT-BASED  
HOMICIDE NOVEL

by

Lana Ann Whited

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
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Greensboro  
1993

Approved by



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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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"Listen to the story of anyone who has gone to prison,  
and see if he ever had a chance to go anywhere else."

--Clarence Darrow

"Reporters love murders."

--Calvin Trillin

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With the 1965 publication of In Cold Blood, Truman Capote announced the creation of a new literary genre: the "nonfiction novel." Because Capote's book inspired a succession of "copycats," many critics have traced a genre from it. But Capote's book is the culmination, not the commencement, of using fictional techniques to write about real murder cases. Capote's deterministic treatment of the protagonist, his use of reporting techniques, and his focus on the murderers (rather than the victims, police, or plot) reveal the book's Naturalistic roots.

In Cold Blood's earliest ancestors in American literature are Frank Norris's McTeague and Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy. American Naturalists such as Norris and Dreiser were directly influenced by Emile Zola and the natural philosophy of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. For generations, Naturalism influenced authors of fact-based homicide novels, among them William Faulkner (Light in August), James M. Cain (The Postman Always Rings Twice), Richard Wright (Native Son), and Meyer Levin (Compulsion). The writer of the fact-based homicide novel characterizes the killer in such a way that the reader understands the circumstances which led to the crime and sympathizes with the protagonist.

After In Cold Blood, the naturalistic influence on the fact-based homicide novel becomes diffused. Many recent books lack the deterministic orientation and are consequently journalistic or documentary. Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song is the most notable example. Other recent books influenced by the fact-based homicide novel tradition are Judith Rossner's Looking for Mr. Goodbar, Joseph Wambaugh's The Onion Field, Gerold Frank's The Boston Strangler, John Hersey's The Algiers Motel Incident, Calvin Trillin's Killings, Vincent Bugliosi's Helter Skelter, Joe McGinniss's Fatal Vision, and Alec Wilkinson's A Violent Act.

## CHAPTER I

## THE MODERN FACT-BASED HOMICIDE NOVEL: AN INTRODUCTION

"I truly don't believe anything like [In Cold Blood]  
exists in the history of journalism."

Truman Capote

With the 1965 publication of In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences, Truman Capote announced the arrival of a new literary form--the nonfiction novel. The story of the murder of four members of a Kansas family and the subsequent pursuit, trial, and execution of the two murderers, In Cold Blood treats material accumulated through journalistic methods (reporting the "facts") using the narrative techniques of the novel. Shortly before his death in 1985, Capote reiterated his claim for the novel's importance:

I wanted to write what I called a nonfiction novel--a book that would read exactly like a novel except that every word of it would be absolutely true. I had written a book that was like that called The Muses Are Heard. It was a short book about Russia and every word of it was true and it reads like a short novel, but I wanted to do it on a grand scale. I had two sort of dry runs with subjects that just turned out not to have enough material in them to do what I wanted to do and finally I settled on this obscure crime in this remote part of Kansas because I felt, if I followed this from beginning to end it would provide me with the material to really accomplish what was a technical feat. It was a literary experiment. (Gobel 116)

Asked by interviewer Lawrence Grobel, "So there's no doubt in your mind that you achieved literary history with that book?" Capote replied, "Yes, I did. Just look at the multitude of copycats" (116). He told Shana Alexander of Life, "the book will be a classic."

Initially serialized in The New Yorker, the novel was an immediate success. In The New York Review of Books, F. W. Dupee called it "the best documentary account of an American crime ever written" (3). George Garrett said that it was "a frank bid for greatness" (3) and "a work of art, the work of an artist" (12). And Newsweek described Capote's decision to write this story as "one of the most inspired hunches in literary history" ("The Fabulist" 58). Almost immediately after the book's publication, Capote secured a movie contract (and when the film was promoted in 1967, the author appeared on the cover of Life along with Scott Wilson and Robert Blake, who played Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, respectively). He did the talk-show circuit and gave interviews to countless magazines. Asked years later to confirm a rumor that he made over three million dollars directly or indirectly from In Cold Blood, Capote replied, "I made more than that" (Grobel 207). He was, in the words of Esquire interviewer Barbara Long, "the Author of the Year" (124).

Despite the popular attention paid his book, Capote

was disappointed in its critical reception; it received very positive reviews but was not heralded as the literary landmark that he thought it was. When the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award committees passed over In Cold Blood in favor of other works,<sup>1</sup> Capote clearly felt cheated. His biographer, Gerald Clarke, says that the author "felt like a war hero who has hobbled home, expecting a parade, only to discover that others, who have never even seen the enemy up close, have picked up all the medals" (398).

Capote became particularly bitter two years later when one of the "copycats," Norman Mailer, won both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award for The Armies of the Night, his account of his own participation in Vietnam War protests. Mailer subtitled his book "History as a Novel, the Novel as History," and Capote felt, according to Clarke, that he should have added "Variations on a Theme by Capote" (399). Mailer won the Pulitzer again in 1980 for a book which resembled In Cold Blood even more closely: The Executioner's Song, the story of Gary Gilmore, whose death at the hands of a Utah firing squad was the first execution in the United States after the Supreme Court's 1977 reinstatement of capital punishment. It was, Capote told Grobel, a book which could not have been written without In Cold Blood (113).

Perhaps part of the reason for the mixed critical

reception of Capote's "nonfiction novel" is that it raised so many questions. Some were strictly mundane, such as where to place it on bookstore and library shelves. Others were more sophisticated, including critical questions about how much a nonfiction writer can fictionalize his or her material and still call it nonfiction. The book also raised the fundamental issue of what makes a novel a novel in the first place. Attempts to answer these questions sparked a flurry of scholarship about nonfiction and the nonfiction novel. A glance at the Annual Bibliography of the Modern Language Association reveals a sudden sharp increase in interest in nonfiction--particularly the nonfiction novel--beginning in the late 1960s.

In 1973, Tom Wolfe began to use the phrase "the new journalism" to describe the attempt "to write journalism that would . . . read like a novel"; Wolfe says in The New Journalism that this attempt began "in the early 1960s" with journalists who realized that "the novelist was the reigning literary artist" and who wanted not to actually "quit the popular press and try to get into the big league" by becoming novelists but merely to have "the privilege of dressing up like" them ("Feature Game" 8-9).

It is worth noting that Wolfe did not coin this term; he also confesses that he does not know who did. He says that he borrowed it from a friend, Seymour Krim, who first

heard it in the late 1950s when Pete Hamill was looking for someone to do a story about journalists such as Jimmy Breslin and Gay Talese. Wolfe also admits that he does not like the term. He is suspicious of "new" anything--New Criticism, the New Deal, New Humanism, the New Frontier. He points out that "the new journalism" "was no 'movement.' There were no manifestoes, clubs, salons, cliques, not even a saloon where the faithful gathered, since there was no faith and no creed" ("Seizing" 23). Nevertheless, the term stuck and is generally credited to Wolfe. And the techniques of the writing stuck, too; in fact, Wolfe contends that "the new journalism" written after the model of the traditional novel eventually replaced the novel as "literature's main event" ("Feature Game" 9). Despite Wolfe's introduction of what has become a widely used catch-phrase, the questions about form and method raised by Capote's "nonfiction novel" obviously remained unanswered nearly fifteen years later, when The Executioner's Song won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, although the Pulitzer committee recognizes achievement in categories such as "general nonfiction" and "explanatory journalism."

In the twenty-eight years since the publication of In Cold Blood, many "nonfiction novels" have been written, the most notable of them by John Hersey, Michael Herr, Joan Didion, and Mailer. Perhaps the most common subject

of these nonfiction writers is violence. Herr's Dispatches is an account of the author's experiences in Vietnam as a war correspondent. Mailer examines his own involvement in Vietnam war protests in The Armies of the Night. Didion's book Salvador is a description of the political, economic, and social conditions that the author observed in revolution-scarred El Salvador during a 1982 visit. One critic, Chris Anderson, has explained the nonfiction writers' preoccupation with violence as a verbal attempt to explain a fundamentally nonverbal phenomenon. Violence, Anderson says, can be perceived as the breakdown or failure of language; thus, writers such as Mailer and Didion attempt to restore some order to human experience through communicating the "truth" of the experience (Lecture). If traditional journalism satisfies "the public's right to know," "the new journalism" goes one step further in attempting to satisfy the public's need to understand.

Many of the recent nonfiction books have dealt with a particular kind of violence--homicide. Aside from The Executioner's Song and In Cold Blood, the best examples of this genre are Hersey's The Algiers Motel Incident, the story of the shooting of three black men by police officers during the Detroit race riots of 1967; Joseph Wambaugh's The Onion Field, an account based on the killing of a California police officer in 1963; and Calvin Trillin's

Killings, a collection of short factual pieces originally written for The New Yorker, all involving homicides and their effects on the communities in which they occur.

There has also been a proliferation of more commercial (what Capote would have called "copycat") books about high-profile murder cases. The subjects of these books include Ted Bundy, serial rapist and murderer of teen-age girls; Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi, the "Hillside Stranglers"; Richard Ramirez, the "Night Stalker"; David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" killer; Jean Harris, convicted murderer of "the Scarsdale diet doctor," Herman Tarnower; Jeffrey MacDonald, the Green Beret doctor convicted of killing his wife and two small daughters at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina; Richard Herrin, boyfriend and murderer of Yale student Bonnie Garland; Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler"; Robert Chambers, the "preppie" murderer; Joe Hunt, founder of the "Billionaire Boys' Club"; Charles Stuart, killer of his pregnant wife in Boston; and the Manson gang. Many of these cases have led to more than one book, the implication being, presumably, that there is more than one version of any "true" story.<sup>2</sup>

Some method of describing this writing in critical terms and of placing it within the context of twentieth-century American literature seems to me desirable as a means of both separating the good from the bad and

identifying the expectations which may be fairly imposed upon it. Although "the New Journalism" has proven to be a useful term, I believe that Tom Wolfe is right to mistrust the accuracy of the term "new."

Tony Tanner has said of In Cold Blood that "Capote worked on the valid assumption that a fact is simply a moment in an ongoing sequence, that it ramifies in all directions, and that to appreciate the full import of any incident you must see as much of the sequence and as many of the ramifications as possible" (345). In the introductory section of the novel, Capote writes of "four shotgun blasts that, all told, ended six human lives" (15); in the remainder of the novel, he is essentially describing the "ramifications" of those "four shotgun blasts"; most importantly, he is trying to make the point that those "ramifications" affected many more people than Herbert, Bonnie, Nancy, and Kenyon Clutter. Capote's primary purpose in In Cold Blood is to show that all of the principals in the story were victims. The Clutters, obviously, were victims of Dick Hickock and Perry Smith (and, in a larger sense, of fate). Close family friends such as Rupp (Nancy's boyfriend) and Susan Kidwell (Nancy's friend) were more indirectly victimized by the murderers. Alvin Dewey and the other law enforcement officers were victims of a long, loathsome case.

Capote sees even Hickock and Smith as victims: Dick Hickock was a victim of his own lack of conscience and, consequently, of the justice system. Perry Smith, was, like Hickock, a victim of the justice system; he was a victim of a lonely, unhappy childhood, like Truman Capote; like Nancy Clutter, he was a thwarted artist who, had not circumstances intervened, might have traded the unpleasantness of life for art, as Nancy Clutter's friend Susan Kidwell has done in the end of In Cold Blood, and as Capote himself did. Capote's characterization of Perry Smith is so skillful that "critics have generally agreed that Smith is the protagonist of the book and that one of Capote's central aims is indicated by the intended irony of the title: it is Smith rather than the Clutter family who is killed 'in cold blood'" (Heyne 481-82; I would substitute "in addition to" for "rather than").

Supporters of capital punishment would probably have a hard time seeing how Smith and Hickock were victimized by the justice system and how Capote can feel sympathy for them. But Truman Capote was not a supporter of the death penalty; he called the executions of Smith and Hickock "the most emotional experience of my creative life" (Grobel 117). In a Life interview with Shana Alexander in February of 1966, Capote responded to a question about his position on the death penalty, "essentially I'm on the side of the

victim, not the murderer"; a close reader of In Cold Blood realizes that this slippery statement might be read as an indictment, not an endorsement, of capital punishment. Asked point-blank by Lawrence Grobel to state his position, Capote tersely replied, "I'm very much against capital punishment" (118). And he chose for the book's epigraph the first stanza of fifteenth-century French poet François Villon's "Ballade des pendus" ("Ballad of the Hanged"):

Frères humains qui après nous vivez,  
N'ayez les cuers contre nous endurcis,  
Car, se pitié de nous povres avez,  
Dieu en aura plus tost de vous mercis.

Villon's poem translates as an appeal for mercy from both subsequent generations and God.

Capote's primary interest is in mediating a reader's contempt for Perry Smith by describing the kind of society which produced him, from the abuse and neglect which Smith has suffered at the hands of and, often, due to the absence of, his parents, to the attitudes of average people in an average town like Holcomb, Kansas. He feels that human beings are ultimately at the mercy of forces beyond their control. This and many other books about homicide, fictional and nonfictional, raise repeatedly the question of whether chance is an operative force in our lives or whether our acts are predetermined. The role of chance is often underscored by symbolism; cats, for example,

frequently cross people's paths, and characters win lotteries and play cards. A reader's answer to the question about how much control a person like Perry Smith exercises over his own life is, of course, directly proportional to the amount of sympathy that reader can be brought to feel for him.

There was, long before Tom Wolfe was born, a standard perspective in literary criticism from which to discuss Capote's strategy of detailing in a realistic way the story of a person acting out the dictates of a deterministic environment. It is Naturalism, and its application to the nonfiction novel about homicide necessitates looking backward, not forward, from 1966 in order to appreciate the significance of Capote's book.

Although we think of the Naturalistic period in American literature as eventually giving way to a more experimental, symbolistic mode, novels exploring the criminal behavior of human beings acting out "drama[s] of determinism" continued to be written: William Faulkner's Light in August (1932), James M. Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934), Richard Wright's Native Son (1940), and Meyer Levin's Compulsion (1956), all based to some degree on actual murders. Thus, characters such as Clyde Griffiths, McTeague, and Joe Christmas are the prototypes for Perry Smith.

I believe that it is possible to demonstrate a clear progression from the novels of Dreiser and Norris to the "nonfiction novel" of Truman Capote by tracing the development in certain late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American novels of three factors: (1) the notion of determinism; (2) the techniques of the journalist; and (3) Thomas DeQuincey's contention in "On the Knocking at the Gate in 'Macbeth'" that the "poet" writing about murder "must throw the interest on the murderer" (733). Viewed from these perspectives, any true assessment of the modern American fact-based homicide novel must trace its roots in the tradition of literary Naturalism. In Cold Blood stands as the culmination of that tradition, the climax, with all the subsequent works serving merely as extended denouement.

## CHAPTER II

## THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN LITERARY NATURALISM

"[N]aturalism is not a school,  
as it is not embodied in the genius of one man . . .  
in naturalism there [are] neither innovators nor leaders;  
there are simply workmen, some more skillful than others."

Emile Zola, Le roman expérimental

To a student of Naturalism, Emile Zola's declaration in 1880 that "Naturalism is not a school . . . as it is not embodied in the genius of one man" ("Novel" 285) seems as ludicrous as Charles Darwin's announcing in 1859 that evolution theory was the product of a committee. Reference guides to literature now routinely acknowledge the Frenchman as the father of literary Naturalism and the author of "the most influential statement ever made of the theory" (Holman 302). Certainly the work of such writers as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser suggests that, at least in the United States, Naturalism might be accurately viewed as a "school." But it is also accurate to say that Naturalism does not depend for its life on the "genius" of Emile Zola; in fact, it might be more accurate to say that Zola was Naturalism's midwife rather than its mother. And the prevalence of American Naturalistic works in the 1890s and early 1900s is, finally,

a testament not to the influence of these writers on each other but to the impact of certain scientific and philosophical theories on them all.

In its most basic sense, Naturalism is an application of the principle of scientific and philosophical determinism to literature, generally demonstrated in the novel. The Naturalist period in literature began in France in the early 1870s and was taken up in the United States in the early 1890s. It affected Russian and English novelists as well. Determinism, at least as it has been applied to literature, has many facets, attributable to the rather large number of influential scientists and philosophers working in the second half of the nineteenth century. The two most important of these were Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, from whose work Naturalism acquired the overtones of biological determinism and two crucial metaphors: the notions of the world as a "lawless jungle" and of life as a competitive struggle which only the "fittest" survive.

If the Naturalistic writers may be accurately referred to as "workmen," then much of their raw material must be attributed to Charles Darwin, whose On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, the first thoroughgoing statement of the principles of evolution and natural selection, appeared in 1859. In Free Will and Determinism

in American Literature, Perry Westbrook declares Darwin "the strongest single influence on literary Naturalism from its beginning down to the present" (100). Donald Pizer, the most prolific and probably the best-known critic on the subject of American literary Naturalism, devotes two chapters in his book Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature to a discussion of how evolution theory is reflected in late nineteenth-century literary criticism. Darwin's work is so significant that it alone would almost certainly have prompted the Naturalistic response in literature, even without any of the other influential theorists.

Darwin's theory of natural selection resulted from a notion put into his head by an experience in the Galapagos Islands in 1832, while he was serving as naturalist aboard HMS Beagle. Darwin noticed that the native giant tortoises varied from individual to individual in details such as shell contour: those who lived on islands where vegetation was not within easy reach had developed carapaces whose notched, domed fronts permitted them to stretch their necks and reach food, while those who lived where grasses were within easy reach had smooth-fronted shells. The British vice-governor told Darwin that natives could even tell which islands tortoises had grown up on from such distinguishing characteristics. The Galapagos trip led

Darwin to the conclusion that "species were not fixed for ever. Perhaps one could [even] change into another [over thousands of years]" (Attenborough 13). For nearly twenty-seven years, Darwin continued to gather evidence to support his theory that some members of a species are genetically predisposed to develop characteristics (such as longer necks or differently shaped shells) which render them more successful in their environments, and therefore more likely to survive, than members of the same species without those characteristics. Thus, over generations of the same species, the characteristics which foster survival will be "selected" and those which do not will be abandoned. Darwin wrote that

variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving, for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection. (385)

Darwin argues that natural selection is "truer" than man-made selection because man tends to be self-serving, whereas nature selects in the best interest of the species. In breeding animals, for example, man "does not allow the

most vigorous males to struggle for the females" (388); instead, he selects the male whose characteristics appear the most desirable or beneficial to him. Ultimately, Darwin says, "Nature's productions . . . plainly bear the stamp of far higher workmanship" (388).

By far, the most earth-shattering of Darwin's ideas, particularly for non-scientists, was his theory that homo sapiens constituted just another branch on the evolutionary tree. Darwin wrote that all life forms have so much in common, particularly in terms of reproductive processes, that

it does not seem incredible that, from some low and intermediate form, both animals and plants may have been developed; and, if we admit this, we must likewise admit that all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth may be descended from some one primordial form . . . . (389)

In a world where human beings had occupied a distinctive position--as superior creatures who were, according to many religions, specially fitted by a divine creator with spiritual capacity which distinguished them from all other organisms--the idea that man and other creatures might be descended from a "low and intermediate" ancestor was not well received. Darwin's conclusion that the variations among different species and among members of the same species resulted not from the ordination of a divine creator but from "the struggle for life" (385) led the Naturalistic

writers to look to the natural (rather than the spiritual) world, specifically, to such factors as genetics and environment, in their attempts to analyze human behavior. The influence of natural science shows up even in their imagery and figurative language. The numerous dogs, wolves, and other animals in Jack London's works are a good example).

The theories of Charles Darwin were dependent, as Darwin himself graciously acknowledged, on the philosophy of Englishman Herbert Spencer. In On the Origin of Species, Darwin wrote that Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest" was "more accurate" than the term "natural selection" in describing the process of preserving genetically determined advantageous characteristics which he sought to explain (385). Herbert Spencer had discussed evolution in print at least four years before Darwin's first public discussion of the theory. Darwin and naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (who had been conducting independent research in Brazil remarkably similar to Darwin's) presented papers on evolution before an English scientific society in 1858, and Darwin subsequently published On The Origin of Species in 1859. But Spencer had used the terms "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" in an essay called "The Theory of Population" and had discussed the principle of evolution in "The Development Hypothesis," as early

as 1852.

As an evolution theorist, Herbert Spencer is both more and less important than Charles Darwin. He is less important than Darwin primarily because he did not have the evidence on which to base his theories, and Darwin, from his travels and studies, did. Spencer was not a scientist; in fact, he was not even formally educated. As involved as he was in the evolution mania of his time, Spencer did not read On The Origin of Species upon its 1859 publication or, apparently, at any time later (Durant 269). He was not much of a reader at all and freely admitted that he was "a bad observer of humanity in the concrete, being too much given to wandering into the abstract" (Autobiography, ii, 461). In general, he liked to articulate theories and leave others to their examination and verification; he worked deductively, while Darwin worked inductively, and the inductive method makes for sounder science.

But as an influence on late nineteenth-century literature, Spencer is more important than Darwin, largely because he conceived the theory as operating on a much larger scale than the strictly biological. In 1858, while collecting and revising his earlier essays for publication, Spencer realized, according to historian Will Durant, that

the theory of evolution might be applied in every

science as well as in biology; that it could explain not only species and genera but planets and strata, social and political history, [and] moral and esthetic conceptions. (272-73)

He subsequently undertook an attempt at synthesizing evolution theory with every discipline of human knowledge. The codification of that attempt, Synthetic Philosophy, occupied ten volumes and took nearly forty years. Along the way, he founded the modern science of sociology, a discipline whose perspectives are integral to Naturalism.

Spencer's prominence in late nineteenth-century philosophy stems from the comprehensiveness and clarity of his ideas. Will Durant has called him "the clearest expositor of complex subjects that modern history can show; he wrote of difficult problems in terms so lucid that for a generation all the world was interested in philosophy" (271). A good example is his definition of evolution: in First Principles, Spencer identifies evolution as the process whereby "matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity" (367). Just as America was named for Amerigo Vespucci because Vespucci made a map showing territories whose discovery was claimed by others, Spencer came to be regarded as the leading philosopher of his age because he was able to clarify and synthesize the ideas of important naturalists and scientists working at the time (Durant

268). In Durant's words, Spencer "summed up his age as no man had ever summed up any age since Dante" (299).

The natural science of Darwin and the philosophy of Spencer were the strongest influences on literary Naturalism but certainly not the only ones. From Spencer and Isaac Newton's work in physics, the concept of determinism acquired mechanical implications. Philosopher and historian Hippolyte Taine theorized that hereditary, environmental, and historical factors could account for the artistic products not only of an individual but of an entire culture, thus turning determinism in a decidedly literary direction. Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer pronounced the notion of free will an illusion, concluding that the human will is subject to the unconscious forces of the natural world, while Sigmund Freud (closer to the turn of the century) suggested that man's will is driven by his own subconscious. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' work contributed questions about economic inevitabilities which influenced the naturalists' preoccupation with socioeconomic status. The work of all these men formed the scientific, philosophical, historical, psychological, and economic underpinnings of literary Naturalism; each writer worked by his own recipe, but the ingredients varied little.

In 1880, Emile Zola attempted to graft the dominant scientific and philosophical ideas of his age onto the

writing of fiction; he published "the most influential statement ever made of the theory of Naturalism" (Holman 302), Le roman expérimental. Zola claimed that he could substitute "novelist" for "scientist" in Claude Bernard's "Introduction à l'Etude de la Médecine Expérimentale" and thus produce a theory of the novelist's method. Like the scientist, Zola says, the novelist puts an experimental subject (a character) into a situation in which certain forces are brought to bear upon him or her and then observes the effects of those forces; Zola called this process "provoked observation" ("Novel" 271). According to Zola, the forces in question are beyond the control of the subject: he wrote that "Determinism dominates everything; . . . there is an absolute determinism for all human phenomena" ("Novel" 277). Finally, he defined "the experimental novelist" as

one who accepts proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled, and who tries to test, as much as he can, this personal sentiment . . . by observation and experiment. ("Novel" 288-89)

Zola's earliest attempt to put that method into practice is the novel Thérèse Raquin (1867). Zola called his principle work, Les Rougon-Macquart, twenty volumes written between 1871 and 1893, the "natural and social

history of a family under the second Empire" ("Rougon-Macquart" 161). His interest in the scientific method led him to insist on the accuracy of what Tom Wolfe would later call "status details," adding a documentary-like quality to such works as Germinal (a novel about the French mining community, which Zola researched through first-hand experience). The Frenchman's fundamental notion was that the Naturalist "strives to be objective, even documentary, in his presentation of material" (Ellmann 304).

In practice, Zola tended to draw his "material" from the working and lower classes. In Les Rougon-Macquart, he attempted to present a panoramic view of working-class life in nineteenth-century France. The twenty volumes of the series documented the lives of various members of that culture: miners (Germinal, 1885), farmers (La Terre, 1887), merchants (La Ventre de Paris, 1873), tavern keepers and patrons (L'Assommoir, 1877), and soldiers (La Débâcle, 1892), just to name a few. Zola described his purpose in L'Assommoir as "to depict the inevitable downfall of a working-class family in the polluted atmosphere of our urban areas" (21). In his preliminary notes for Germinal, he described the problem he sought to address:

I must start with all the woes and fatalities which weigh down on the miners. . . . The miner must be shown crushed, starving, a victim of ignorance, suffering with his children in a hell on earth . . . ; he is simply overwhelmed by the social situation

as it exists. . . . The worker is the victim of the facts of existence--capital, competition, industrial crimes." (qtd. in Tancock 5-6)

Zola's sense of his own presence at the headwaters of a literary stream is clear; he wrote that "it [is] necessary, above all things else, to inspire [young writers] with the scientific spirit, and to initiate them into the ideas and the tendencies of modern science" ("Novel" 284-85). He called his prescription "Naturalism" and viewed it as "not a personal fantasy, but . . . the intellectual movement of the century" ("Novel" 285).

An important influence on Naturalism's tendency to focus on the working and lower classes--and on Zola--was the work of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, who, in their preface to the novel Germinie Lacerteux (1864), wrote that the Naturalistic writer "sees the novel as a clinic specializing in the diseased conditions of the lower classes" (qtd. in Ellmann and Feidelson 231). They considered many of their works as much social documents as literature.

The brothers de Goncourt also had a rhetorical agenda: they wanted not only to describe accurately the lives of the lower classes but also to arouse sympathy for them. They explained Germinie Lacerteux and Soeur Philomene as experiments intended to show whether "the tears that are shed in low life have the same power to cause tears to

flow as the tears shed in high life" (qtd. in Ellmann and Feidelson 270). The purpose of the novel in general, they felt, was

to disclose misery and suffering which it is not well for the fortunate people of Paris to forget, and to show to people of fashion what the Sisters of Charity have the courage to see for themselves, what the queens of old compelled their children to touch with their eyes in the hospitals: the visible, palpitating human suffering that teaches charity; to confirm the novel in the practice of that religion which the last century called by the vast and far-reaching name, Humanity. (qtd. in Ellmann and Feidelson 270, emphasis theirs)

A fourth Frenchman to exercise a powerful influence on Naturalistic principles (and on Theodore Dreiser in particular) was Honore de Balzac. Balzac's ninety-one work series La comédie humaine (1827-47) proposed to examine late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century French life from several perspectives, one of which was analytical (Etudes analytiques). Balzac thought of the works in the Comédie humaine series as studies, and social improvement was very much a part of his program. His interest in the effect of environmental forces on the individual established a foundation for the fuller treatment of that effect by subsequent writers.

Although the Naturalism of Zola and his contemporaries shows up in the work of a few late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German and Russian writers, its influence spread predominantly westward. The Anglo-Irish novelist

George Moore became interested in the work of Zola, Balzac, and the brothers de Goncourt when, as a young man, he studied painting in Paris. When he returned to England in the early 1880's, he embarked on an attempt to transplant the English novel from a Victorian to a Naturalistic universe. His novel A Mummer's Wife (1885) is often called the first Naturalistic work in English. The two most prominent late nineteenth-century English novelists, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, were also sympathetic to the Naturalistic orientation; Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), with its ill-fated protagonist, is perhaps the best known example of Naturalism in the English novel.

But the contagion of Naturalism moved farther westward, ultimately having a widespread influence on four late nineteenth-century Americans: Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. Crane's novella Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (privately issued 1893; published 1896), the story of a young girl driven to prostitution and, eventually, suicide by the social and economic forces which oppress her, is generally considered the first expression of Naturalism in American literature. London's explorations of man's struggle to conquer the forces of the natural world include The Call of the Wild (1903), The Sea-Wolf (1904), and White Fang (1906).

Norris's McTeague: A Story of San Francisco (1899) and Dreiser's An American Tragedy (1925)--both considered to be among their authors' best novels--both feature a central homicide. McTeague is the story of one man's inability to cope with the forces of capitalism. McTeague, a dentist through training rather than education and a big lummoX of a man ("his mind was as his body, heavy, slow to act, sluggish" 2), marries and eventually murders a woman whose inability to spend her lottery winnings ruins them both. (The Erich von Stroheim film based on the novel is appropriately entitled Greed.) Dreiser's novel is the story of Clyde Griffiths, a young man from the lower social stratum whose desire for wealth and status propels him uncontrollably toward death--his girlfriend's and his own. The struggles of Griffiths and of Dreiser's earlier characters Caroline Meeber and George Hurstwood (Sister Carrie, 1900) effectively illustrate that "survival of the fittest" applies to man as well as the other species.

Because the United States was founded on the notion of individual liberties and freedom from the control of exterior forces, some critics have tended to see Naturalism as "foreign to American values and interests" (Pizer, Nineteenth 41). But the scientific and philosophical developments of the late nineteenth century are actually quite compatible with the social and economic changes taking

place in the United States at the turn of the century. In History of English Literature, Hippolyte Taine identified three factors which "shape" the artist: "his race, with its inherited characteristics; the milieu in which he lives; and the moment of history when he appears" (Ellmann and Feidelson 230). It is worth noting that two of Taine's three factors are environmental.

The environment in which the early American Naturalists worked was characterized by flux and extremes. Change and expansion dominated: as large metropolitan areas became commercial centers, hundreds of thousands of Americans and immigrants hurried to them in search of economic improvement; when they arrived, they found the streets lit by electric lamps and populated by automobiles; they could eat food grown halfway across the country and shipped in on refrigerated boxcars via the transcontinental railroad; and if they missed the folks back home, they could send a telegram or use one of the 1,356,000 telephones available by the turn of the century (McMichael, "Age" 2). Economic growth was phenomenal. The federal government had become more powerful during the Civil War; it instituted a draft, issued national paper currency, and levied an income tax. It also encouraged capitalistic enterprises, and by 1900, the national income had quadrupled and there were more than four thousand American millionaires

(McMichael, "Age" 4). Industrialization had indeed revolutionized the United States.

But Mark Twain's appellation for the period--"the Gilded Age"--is a reminder that the opulence of the new millionaires was merely a facade propped up by the toil of countless Americans who were not nearly as affluent as the "captains of industry" whose empires they were building with their own sweat. For every Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, or Carnegie, there were thousands of Caroline Meebers and Roberta Aldens hard at work in his factories and thousands of young men like Clyde Griffiths eager to shine his shoes. Between 1870 and 1890, the U.S. population doubled, but while the nation enjoyed prosperity, the people prospered disproportionately. The four thousand millionaires constituted only about six one-thousandths of one percent (.006 %) of the total population (about 70 million). Despite the Horatio Alger stereotype popular in the late nineteenth century, many Americans made the urban migration only to discover stiff competition for the most mundane jobs, which were increasingly being phased out by machines. For those who did not see their place in a more mechanical world, the outlook was bleak: in this increasingly industrialized world, Edwin Arlington Robinson's miller commits suicide, prompted by his awareness that "There are no millers anymore" ("The Mill" 5).

The population of large metropolitan areas became increasingly stratified; families like that of Clyde Griffiths' uncle or Clyde's object of desire, Sondra Finchley, might have seemed a different species from the Johnson family of Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. The socioeconomic circumstances which Crane described in Maggie and in his Bowery sketches existed in every large city; panhandling and prostitution rose even as the stock market surged, and large-scale urban poverty became a reality. Not surprisingly, the age of American social reform began. The Salvation Army established a base in the U.S. in 1880, and Jane Addams established Hull House in Chicago in 1889 to assist the city's impoverished residents.

In "Naturalism and the Languages of Determinism," Lee Clark Mitchell claims that during the Industrial Revolution, American society "displayed practices fully at odds with its republican ideals" (526-27). Indeed, it is easy to see how the nation's late nineteenth-century socioeconomic complexion could be more aptly described by Spencerian principles than by Jeffersonian ideals. Perry Westbrook explains the American fascination with scientific theories based on struggle and dominance:

The vogue of Spencer was immense, especially in America. This nation was then not yet beyond the frontier stage. Huge fortunes were to be had and

were struggled for in a multitude of areas from politics to the production of oil, and political and economic freedoms were highly touted national institutions. This nation delightedly accepted a philosophy that saw competition as fundamental to social progress. Individualism was the password of the times. (104-5)

For the "captains of industry," evolutionary theory was a great moral convenience; if capitalism exploited those on the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, Darwinian science permitted entrepreneurs to rationalize that their dominance was in the interest of the greater general good. The "selection" process had favored them, and the species as a whole would profit. Andrew Carnegie wrote in The Gospel of Wealth that the competition principle "is sometimes hard for the individual, [but] it is best for the race, because it insures survival of the fittest . . ." (qtd. in Mitchell 528). "Survival of the fittest" became, for many, a religion; Westbrook observes that "To the financier who ruthlessly beat down all competitors in his own rise to the top, Darwin had more comforting words to say than did Jesus" (116).

Against this backdrop, the American literary Naturalists emerged. Applying the scientific method advocated by Zola to the lives of average characters caught in Darwinian struggles, the Naturalists turned American literature in a new and sometimes disturbing direction.

## CHAPTER III

THE JOURNALISTIC, FORMAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND  
OF THE FACT-BASED HOMICIDE NOVEL

"Environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory, one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people."

Stephen Crane, note in Hamlin Garland's copy of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets

The American Naturalistic writers were all young men during "the Gilded Age." When Zola published Le roman expérimental in 1880, Frank Norris was ten years old, Theodore Dreiser and Stephen Crane were both nine, and Jack London was only four. Biographically, these four men might seem to have little in common. Crane was an Easterner, born in New Jersey; Dreiser, born in Indiana, was a Midwesterner; and London and Norris were both Westerners (though Norris was born in Chicago).

But the economic separation was larger than the geographic: Dreiser and London were born to families so poor that the boys were probably lucky to survive childhood, while Norris, whose father was a resourceful businessman (a jeweler) was raised in an atmosphere of affluence and culture. Crane, whose father was a Methodist minister,

grew up in a family with social standing but little money.

Norris was the most traditional student of the group, studying art in Paris as a teen-ager, creative writing at Harvard, and literature (particularly French) at the University of California. Dreiser, who had completed only one year of high school, went to Indiana University through the generosity of a benefactor but left after one extremely average year because he was too anxious about not being accepted by girls and fraternities. Crane, bright enough as a boy to go from first to third grade in about six weeks, was unsuccessful--due to lack of motivation, not ability--at a series of private schools. For one year, he attended Syracuse University, where he seems to have majored in girls, fraternities, and baseball. And London, who dropped out of grammar school at fourteen to support his family after his adoptive father was injured and who wanted to go to college probably more than Norris, Dreiser, and Crane combined, entered the University of California as a non-traditional student at nineteen but had to quit at the end of one semester, again to support his family.

All four men were well acquainted with the prevailing scientific and philosophical thought of the time, having largely educated themselves through reading. But their primary influences were very different. Dreiser was most profoundly influenced by Spencer; he said of reading the

First Principles that it "nearly killed me . . . took every shred of belief away from me; showed me that I was a chemical atom in a whirl of unknown forces" (qtd. in Swanberg 60). W. A. Swanberg says that Dreiser "never entirely outlived [the] dismay" he experienced in the face of Spencer's theories (61). His most important literary influence was Honore de Balzac, whose novels Dreiser began to read as a young newspaperman in St. Louis after an editor spoke favorably of the Frenchman. He found in Balzac's novels "social implications that echoed his own fumbling observations" (Swanberg 56). Much later, Dreiser said he learned early in his career as a reporter "that he could hastily fake a harmless 'human interest' story, which was what his editors wanted, and could spend the valuable hours of the day in the public library, going through Balzac and Darwin" (Shapiro vi).

Norris was primarily influenced by Zola, whose work he studied at the University of California, where he was remembered by classmates "as often carrying copies of French editions of Zola's novels and always willing to give a passionate defense of that leading Naturalist" (Collins x). He would later present to his wife a copy of one of his novels inscribed "from the boy Zola" (Frohock, Norris 12). Norris was more heavily indebted to Zola than any other American Naturalist, and is thus generally considered

to be "the link between our local Naturalism and one of the great exponents of the French variety" (Frohock, Norris 9). Norris was also affected by romantic influences, predominantly Kipling and the medieval romancers whom he read as a student in Paris (where he was busy writing romances of his own).

Perhaps because of his own impoverished background, London was taken by the ideas of Darwin and Spencer; as Charles Child Walcutt has suggested, London saw the "struggle for existence" as a powerful factor in his own life. The poverty of his first two decades also drew London to the economic theories of Karl Marx, and several critics have suggested that London's success in overcoming the poverty of his youth must have seemed to him a confirmation not only of Spencer's notion of "survival of the fittest" but also of Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the Superman (Walcutt, London 5-6).

Crane claimed that he read nothing (Mitchell 525), a statement which is almost certainly an exaggeration, as Crane's work bears the definite stamp of late nineteenth-century science and philosophy. Nevertheless, Crane remains the most individual of the four, in his thought as in his art. Edwin Cady has noted that, surrounded by the turn-of-the-century conglomeration of ideas, Crane was "more fluid than any scheme could show

. . . ; [he] was fated to be a Seeker after the secret of his own vision" (79).

Confronted with these differences, a reader might begin to feel that the four writers' historical synchronicity was their only common denominator, an observation which Mitchell has described:

Unlike their counterparts abroad . . . [the American Naturalists] lacked any sense of common purpose that might have made them a self-conscious "school." Few of them knew each other's work[;] none persevered in the mode throughout his career, and those who theorized, did so badly. On first glance, in fact, the American [N]aturalists seem to have had little more in common than their historical context. (525)

But the tendency to see these writers as linked primarily by the chance of having been born in the same decade, or even by the philosophy that their epoch so conveniently illustrated, is a drastic oversimplification, one which denies Naturalistic fiction any aesthetic or formal dimensions and ultimately reduces it to nothing more than literature written during roughly the same historical period.

Despite their disparate backgrounds, the Naturalistic writers created works which are similar in three important aspects: journalistic, formal, and philosophical. The journalistic element represents a borrowing from and enhancing upon the Realistic tradition's insistence on accuracy of detail and verisimilitude; in the Naturalistic

novel, this accuracy often borders on the documentary and may even be the result of actual research. The formal similarity concerns the protagonist of the novel. The Naturalistic novelist selects for his Zolaesque "experiment" a "subject" who is common or average. This represents a departure from the Realistic tradition, wherein protagonists may be "common" (Huck Finn) but are more likely middle or upper-middle class (Isabel Archer, Silas Lapham, or Daisy Miller). Characters in Realistic fiction may also change their socioeconomic status (as Silas Lapham does), a change which seldom, if ever, occurs in Naturalistic fiction (Carrie's rise to some status and comfort in Sister Carrie is rather radical for the mode). Finally, Naturalism is also characterized by the deterministic philosophy which is often seen as its sole defining characteristic. This is a second movement away from the Realistic tradition, as Realistic characters generally have control over their actions and destinies. (For example, Daisy Miller has control over her decision to flaunt the social codes of Europe; Isabel Archer is bound by her affection for Pansy but not by any forces beyond her control in her decision to return to Gilbert Osmond, and Silas Lapham makes a conscious choice in his refusal to sell his business to an English syndicate). These three aspects continue to be present in works of

the "second round" of writers influenced by Naturalism, and, particularly as they are demonstrated in Norris's McTeague and Dreiser's An American Tragedy, they constitute the base of the branch along which the contemporary nonfiction homicide novel later grew.

"Contributing as well to the emergence of Naturalism was the curious vocational fact that neither before nor since have so many American authors been journalists first" (Mitchell 528-9). While one might pause to test the "neither before nor since" part of Mitchell's proclamation against other literary periods, it is undeniable that a very high percentage of the Naturalistic writers either began as journalists or had extensive experience as reporters and editors.

Crane worked about five years in the 1890s as a freelance journalist in New York City (largely for the New York Herald), during which time he wrote many sketches of Bowery and slum life. For those sketches, he actually studied the habits and attitudes of New York's downtrodden, on one occasion actually impersonating a wino for twenty-four hours to gain a better understanding of how the more fortunate residents of the city interacted with the less fortunate (the result of that twenty-four hour experience was "An Experiment in Misery"). Crane's observations of the Bowery and its residents also figured

prominently in Maggie and George's Mother. He also did some reporting from the American Southwest and Cuba (including the experience which inspired "The Open Boat"), and, even though he had no previous war experience, after the publication of The Red Badge of Courage, he was sent to Greece to cover its war with Turkey in 1897 and to Mexico to cover the Spanish-American War in 1898 for Joseph Pulitzer's newspapers. Crane, whose brother Townley managed a New Jersey news bureau, got an early start in journalism, writing his first news releases at sixteen, and continued in it off and on throughout his life.

Early in his career, Dreiser worked as a journalist at the St. Louis Globe-Democrat and Republic, the Chicago Daily Globe (for which he covered the 1892 Democratic national convention), the Pittsburgh Dispatch, and the New York World and Daily News. His experience as a reporter included all the basic "beats"--meetings, fires, courts, accidents, social gatherings, etc. After the 1900 publication of Sister Carrie, Dreiser worked as an editor at several publications, including some of the "ladies'" magazines. He worked fairly continuously in journalism until about 1911, when the publication of Jennie Gerhardt was successful enough that he did not need another source of income. Even after that, he worked sporadically as a writer and editor; most notably, he was a founding editor

of The American Spectator and a continued close association with H. L. Mencken, whom Dreiser considered his mentor. Donald Pizer has estimated that the "full record of Dreiser's newspaper stories would make a work exceeding 2,300 pages" (Nineteenth 151).

London's forays into newspaper writing took the form of what would now be called feature writing. He wrote sketches based on his own adventures and travels, including a serialized account in the Hearst newspapers of his 1894 journey on foot from Oakland to Washington, D.C., with about two thousand out-of-work men to protest unemployment. The book which resulted from that serialization, The Road, has been called "the first major work on tramping in American literature" (Sinclair 20). Like Crane, London had experience as a war correspondent; in 1904, he accepted an offer from the Hearst organization to report the conflict developing in Korea between Russia and Japan (he had offers from three other news agencies as well, Sinclair 102), and he covered the Mexican Revolution for Collier's magazine in 1911. Also like Crane, London studied slum life, and his fact-gathering methods also included "undercover" work. In 1902, in London on his way to South Africa to cover the Boer War for the Associated Press, the writer learned that the war had ended and turned his attention instead to the London slums. In addition to countless interviews

and guided tours with slum residents, London spent two nights in a Whitechapel workhouse and stood in line for breakfast at the Salvation Army, where he was indignant to have to endure a lengthy sermon before being fed (Sinclair 88); his research in London led to The People of the Abyss, which London later said was "the book he loved the most" because "no other book had taken so much of his young heart and tears" (Sinclair 89). London was the only one of the four major Naturalistic figures with experience in sportswriting. He covered numerous prizefights, often for the Hearst newspapers, and his accounts often turned into books such as The Game and The Abysmal Brute. Sinclair notes that London "made prizefighting the subject of his best journalism" and that subsequent writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer are indebted to his pioneering in the macho tradition (248).

Norris began contributing to various campus publications as a student at the University of California and, at about the same time, began writing for several San Francisco newspapers and magazines, including The Wave, a magazine with which he had a long association, publishing about 120 pieces (Kwiat 109n). He wrote travel sketches from South Africa in 1895-96 for the San Francisco Chronicle and covered the Boer War for Collier's and the

Spanish-American War for McClure's. Later, as an editorial reader at the Doubleday publishing house, he called to the attention of his superiors the manuscript of Dreiser's novel Sister Carrie. It is also interesting to note that some of Norris's characters are young journalists: Strelitz, in the short story "His Sister," and Condy, the largely autobiographical hero of Blix.

The boom of the 1890s did not exclude the American news industry. Although a handful of newspapers were already well established (including the New York Evening Post, founded in 1801, and Times, founded in 1851), the 1880s and '90s saw a growth in the newspaper business that has never been equaled. According to Shelley Fisher Fishkin's From Fact to Fiction, a study of the effects of journalism experience on Whitman, Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, the number of daily newspapers in the United States was six times greater in 1900 than it had been in the 1860s. Fishkin calls the last two decades of the nineteenth century "the Age of the Reporter" and accounts for "reporters' growing sense of their own importance" by several factors: increased individual recognition via use of by-lines, better salaries for reporters, and a significantly improved market due to improved literacy and the general growth of the population (87).

The 1890s also saw the emergence of the great news agencies: the Associated Press (AP) and United Press (UP), both founded in 1892, and the International News Service (INS), founded in 1906 by William Randolph Hearst (which merged with UP in 1958 to become United Press International). The establishment of these international news organizations, combined with the fairly recent international circulation of the New York Times, drastically improved the job market (and travel opportunities) for American writers. The emergence of numerous "little magazines" such as The Wave had a similar effect.

As Joseph Kwiat has pointed out in "The Newspaper Experience: Crane, Norris, and Dreiser," one of the prime benefits of reporting for the Naturalists was its training in "the ability to see . . . [and] to observe" (101). The observer's perspective is intrinsic to Naturalism as Zola conceived it; following Claude Bernard's guidelines for experimental science, Zola believe that the novelist should set up his literary "experiment" and then

disappear, or rather transform himself instantly into an observer, and it is not until after he has ascertained the absolute results of the experiment, like that of an ordinary observation, that his mind comes back to reasoning, comparing, and judging whether the experimental hypothesis is verified or invalidated by these same results. (Bernard, qtd. in Ellmann 273)

Of course, a writer drawing material entirely from his

or her imagination cannot logically participate in such an experiment; the writer cannot be said merely to "observe" what happens to characters when he or she is the primary force in determining what happens. But when authors transplant characters from their real experience--when Crane, for example, "borrows" Maggie and the trappings of her environment from his observation in the New York Bowery--and their fortunes are based on what the writer has actually observed in the lives of people like them, then Zola's role for the writer can be filled.

Zola's criticism of romance was harsh. He believed that when writers imposed their "personal authority" on literature, then reading became a process of "taking little recreations in the world of lies." Instead of their own imaginations or other literary sources, writers should draw material from the world around them, "recogniz[ing] no authority but that of facts" (qtd. in Ellmann 285-86). He wrote, "The experimental method alone can bring the novel out of the atmosphere of lies and errors in which it is plunged. All my literary life has been controlled by this conviction" (qtd. in Ellmann 284).

The Naturalists' experience as reporters made this credo of "no authority but the facts" possible. Just as Zola spent hours learning the vocabulary and idiom of the working-class French for novels such as Germinal and

l'Assommoir, Crane, Dreiser, Norris, and London spent countless hours in the laboratory of the streets, watching experiments which they had not set into motion and documenting the "results." Because the newspapers where these men were employed were located in rather large, urban areas, many of the most important works of the first American Naturalistic period time are city novels and novellas: Maggie, Sister Carrie, An American Tragedy, and McTeague. (London, who in his gold-mining, seal-hunting, and tramping expeditions was reporting from a different front, is a notable exception.)

The journalism experience of the Naturalists also accounts for the copiousness of detail for which their works have been repeatedly praised. The journalist's eye, by habit, notices virtually everything in its view and has more opportunity for viewing than the eye of the more secluded writer. Zola's description of the washhouse in l'Assommoir is nearly photographic:

The washhouse was about half way up the street, just where the road began to go uphill. A flat-roofed building was surmounted by three enormous tanks, big grey galvanized cylinders heavily studded with rivets, while behind them rose the drying-room, which formed a lofty second storey [sic], enclosed on all sides by narrow-slatted shutters through which the air could blow, and you could see washing drying on lines of brass wire. To the right of the tanks the narrow exhaust pipe of the engine coughed out jets of white steam with a harsh, regular beat. (33)

A reader can hardly doubt that a description like that of Clyde Griffiths' first impression of the Green-Davidson Hotel in Kansas City in An American Tragedy must have come from Dreiser's own wonder at the ambience of big-city finery:

[A]fter hours, instead of going directly home, he walked north to the corner of 14th and Baltimore, where stood this great hotel, and looked at it. There, at midnight even, before each of the three principal entrances--one facing each of three streets--was a doorman in a long maroon coat with many buttons and a high-rimmed and long-visored maroon cap. And inside, behind looped and fluted French silk curtains, were the still blazing lights, the a la carte dining room and the American grille in the basement near one corner still open. And about them were many taxis and cars. And there was music always--from somewhere. (36)

Irving Howe has written that Dreiser's books are "crowded with exact observation" (Afterword 817). Many of the Naturalistic writers were so faithful to the geography of the cities they wrote about that a reader with a fairly accurate, contemporaneous map of certain neighborhoods and districts could have traced characters' progress. The Norton Critical Edition of Maggie includes a three-page map of lower Manhattan in the 1890s labeled "New York City Locales Mentioned in Maggie" (62-64). One is reminded of the meticulousness with which Dostoevsky detailed Raskolnikov's movements through St. Petersburg in Crime and Punishment. Although the fairly common critical view of Naturalism as merely an extension or exaggeration of

Realism is a risky oversimplification, it is true in the sense that the Naturalists carried to new degrees the Realists' insistence on verisimilitude; if the Realists sought to paint scenes which approximated reality, the Naturalists sought to reproduce photographic likenesses, a tendency which came from their experience as reporters.

Another benefit of the news boom was that it provided writers with a steady supply of potential material. Jack London, for example, defended himself against plagiarism in 1906 by claiming that both he and the writers he was alleged to have copied (who had published a story highly similar to one of London's Alaska tales four years earlier) had drawn on the same newspaper sources; London argued that "there was no real plagiarism, as his style transformed journalism into literature" (Sinclair 132). News was in wider circulation than ever before, and London and his peers scoured newspapers and magazines for interesting tidbits and kept files and journals for later use.

In fact, just such a method inspired two of the most significant naturalistic novels, McTeague and An American Tragedy. Norris's novel was "suggested by [October 1893 San Francisco Examiner] newspaper accounts of a particularly squalid murder in a poor section of San Francisco" (Frohock, Norris 10). Collins notes that while Norris was a

University of California student, he had begun "to record details of life in the poorer sections of San Francisco" (x). Already thoroughly familiar with the city as a long-time resident, Norris did not need further research to aid in his description of life in a working-class neighborhood there. He did visit the mining regions of the Sierras when he was working on the last section of the novel, in an attempt to narrate accurately McTeague's flight through those geographic areas after Trina's murder.

The murder which "suggested" McTeague to Norris actually took place in a kindergarten, as does McTeague's murder of Trina in the novel's climax (Pizer, Nineteenth 13); in fact, the address of the kindergarten in McTeague is the same as that of an actual kindergarten which Norris's mother founded and supported (Pizer, "Genesis" 296). Norris's use of specific San Francisco locales, particularly the commerce of Polk Street, is heavily documented. Norris's use of that milieu is the subject of at least two doctoral dissertations, and the Norton Critical Edition of McTeague includes two of the original San Francisco Examiner articles and three articles about the textual background of the novel.

For An American Tragedy, Dreiser was heavily indebted to both research and primary sources. It is fairly well known that Dreiser modeled Roberta Alden's death on Chester

Gillette's 1905 murder of Grace Brown, who at the time was six months pregnant with Gillette's child. It is perhaps less common knowledge that Dreiser had been following murder cases since 1891 and keeping clippings, with the idea of writing a book. When Dreiser was a young reporter for the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, he was assigned to write about a case in which a young man had poisoned his girlfriend with candy. This was the first of many cases to illustrate a pattern which intrigued Dreiser: "a young man . . . murders his pregnant sweetheart because he has met a richer and more beautiful woman in the meantime" (Lehan 143). Lehan and Swanberg document over a dozen similar crimes occurring between 1891 and 1907 with which Dreiser was familiar, some of which he had reported himself (Lehan 143; Swanberg 253). This pattern interested Dreiser because "the killer was motivated less by hatred than by the passion to rise in society," a motivation which the novelist saw as "a recurrent and bloody indictment of the nation's false standards" (Swanberg 253).

In the early 1920s, when Dreiser was writing An American Tragedy, accuracy was foremost in his mind. According to Pizer, Dreiser drew extensively on the New York World accounts of the case (Nineteenth 52); he also used the actual court transcripts from Chester Gillette's trial (Gerber 79) and letters written to Gillette by Brown,

which became the models for Roberta's written pleadings with Clyde (Salzman viii). Living in Manhattan while drafting the novel, Dreiser visited two prominent New York psychiatrists to discuss homicide from a psychological standpoint. In late 1923 and early 1924, when he was writing about the trial, he consulted two attorney friends who shared his office building about legal authenticity. In 1925, writing the section about Clyde's imprisonment and execution, Dreiser, through the intervention of H. L. Mencken, visited the Auburn penitentiary, where Chester Gillette had been put to death nineteen years earlier.

But Dreiser went one step further, actually putting himself in Chester Gillette's shoes. In June 1923, he and his wife Helen toured the area around Cortland, New York, where Chester Gillette and Grace Brown had lived. They inspected the factories and tree-lined avenues of Cortland, drove to see the rural farm where Brown had grown up, visited the lodge where Gillette had sequestered himself after the murder, talked with a boat attendant who showed him where Brown's body had been found, and rowed a boat to the middle of Big Moose Lake, to the approximate spot where the murder had occurred (Swanberg 277; Gerber 79-80). Describing the visit in her memoirs, Helen Dreiser remembered feeling concern that Dreiser was so caught up in the experience that he might even attempt to re-enact

the crime (My Life 85).

But perhaps the strongest evidence of "the power of the press" in An American Tragedy is the fact that the idea for Roberta's "accidental" drowning occurs to Clyde when he reads about a similar case in the newspaper. Clyde's attention was drawn ("Because of his great interest in canoeing," Dreiser says) to the front page of the Albany Times-Union, bearing the headline, "ACCIDENTAL DOUBLE TRAGEDY AT PASS LAKE--UPTURNED CANOE AND FLOATING HATS REVEAL PROBABLE LOSS OF TWO LIVES AT RESORT NEAR PITTSFIELD--UNIDENTIFIED BODY OF GIRL RECOVERED--THAT OF COMPANION STILL MISSING" (438). In his slow-witted way, Clyde realizes a few pages later that "if only such an accident could occur to him and Roberta," then he could have the "glorious future" he covets (440). It seems perfectly apt that a novel inspired by newspaper accounts of actual crimes should feature as its central incident a crime suggested to its perpetrator by a newspaper.

In 1890, Jacob Riis, a reporter for the New York Tribune and Evening Sun, published How the Other Half Lives and, in 1892, The Children of the Poor. Riis, whose work was later recognized by President Theodore Roosevelt, was probably the first American writer to treat urban poverty in a book-length study. The slum captured the imagination of many American thinkers and writers in the 1890s, partial-

ly because it was a new concept in the United States, For example, W.E.B. DuBois, who would go on to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910, studied the living conditions of black residents of Philadelphia's Seventh Ward. After more than five thousand field interviews, in 1898 DuBois published The Philadelphia Negro, "the first study of the effect of urban life on blacks" (Divine et al. 560). Interestingly, many of DuBois's observations were strikingly Naturalistic; his conclusion about the causes of crime (a particular interest) was that it "stemmed not from inborn degeneracy but from the environment in which blacks lived. Change the environment, and people would change, too" (Divine et al. 560).

The Naturalistic writers saw in the increasing stratification of American society an effective illustration of Darwinian and Spencerian principles. Consequently, they drew their protagonists disproportionately from the lower echelons. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that in many Naturalistic works, the higher class people are the ones who have regular jobs. A central part of Pizer's definition of Naturalism in Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature is the contention that "the [N]aturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class. His characters

are the poor, the uneducated, the unsophisticated" (10-11). Examples are not hard to supply: Maggie Johnson (and her whole family and community), Caroline Meeber, Clyde Griffiths, McTeague, Henry Fleming, Wolf Larsen.

With the novella Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, which the author published at his own expense in 1893 after commercial firms rejected it as too coarse, Stephen Crane opened a new social milieu to American writers. Perry Westbrook has called Maggie "the first self-consciously [N]aturalistic piece of extended fiction in American literature" (132-33). Crane dealt perhaps more frankly than any American writer before him with alcoholism, abuse within a family, premarital sex, and prostitution; the degradation of the Johnson family prompts one neighbor to ask Maggie's brother Jimmy, "Eh, Gawd, child, what is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?" ((10). It is little wonder that many editors and some critics considered the work offensive to public sensibilities. Largely because of Crane's dealing with these issues, Maggie is considered by more than a few critics to be "the novel which first clearly differentiated the American from the English novel tradition" (Magill 54).

An American Tragedy and McTeague, the two novels which comprise the genesis of the American fact-based

homicide novel, both have protagonists who fit the Naturalistic socioeconomic prescription. McTeague's father was a miner who was "For thirteen days of each fortnight . . . a steady, hard-working shift-boss" but who became on his day off "an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol" (2; all text references to Rinehart edition). McTeague's mother, her imagination fired by a traveling "charlatan," chose dentistry as a career for her son and left him a little money upon her death to begin setting up his "Parlors." So he becomes a dentist, by training (apprenticeship) rather than education, and establishes a practice in a San Francisco shop where he goes through the motions of dentistry more than practicing it and where "his only pleasures . . . [were] to eat, to smoke, to sleep, and to play upon his concertina," for which he knows six tunes (1). The extent of McTeague's ambition is "to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive" (3).

McTeague inhabits a world of small shops and practitioners: bars, butchers, drug stores, restaurants, barber shops, stationers' stores, etc. Polk Street is lively but somewhat monotonous; in fact, the opening paragraph of the novel presents McTeague as a creature of habit: "It was Sunday, and, according to his custom

on that day," McTeague has his lunch at a cheap restaurant and, on his way back to his rooms, picks up his filled beer pitcher, "as was his habit," at a neighboring saloon.

Despite his wife's good fortune in winning a five-thousand-dollar lottery jackpot, McTeague's socioeconomic situation never really changes--another characteristic of the Naturalistic protagonist. Trina is so parsimonious that she will not buy butter for the bread, though she doesn't know why she is saving:

A good deal of peasant blood still ran undiluted in her veins, and she had all the instinct of a hardy and penurious mountain race--the instinct which saves without any thought, without idea of consequence--saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why. (99)

Trina is like a squirrel, storing up nuts with a vague notion that they will someday be useful. When her family requests fifty dollars to save them from financial disaster, she wonders why they can't be "a little more economical," finally (upon her mother's second appeal) convinces McTeague that they might send the family twenty-five dollars together, and even then withholds her twelve-fifty, reminding herself that her family is asking for a sum which represents two months' interest (183-4). "It's mine! It's mine! It's mine!" she thunders repeatedly, "her teeth clicking like the snap of a closing purse" (152). Her stinginess draws her farther inside herself and away from

her husband, whose resentment and frustration eventually drive him to murder her in the cloakroom of a kindergarten where she works as a cleaning lady.

Clyde Griffiths' case also illustrates that the Naturalistic protagonist cannot really improve his or her social standing, even when favorable opportunities present themselves. Born to a family of street evangelists with a father known as "old Praise-the-Lord Griffiths," Clyde learned early that his family had not received an ample share of "the Lord's blessings":

the family was always "hard up," never very well clothed, and deprived of many comforts and pleasures which seemed common enough to others. And his father and mother were constantly proclaiming the love and mercy and care of God for him and for all. Plainly there was something wrong somewhere. (9)

Although Clyde does not suffer the physically abusive atmosphere of Maggie, Dreiser's novel is even more explicit about sexual matters, including abortion. Clyde's mother must help his unmarried sister Esta through her pregnancy and lover's abandonment, all without the moralistic father's knowledge. Much later, after Clyde and his girlfriend Roberta Alden work out a rooming arrangement for her which is conducive to their sexual relationship, Clyde has Roberta's pregnancy to deal with, and he procures several medicines thought to be abortifacients (none of which works). Not surprisingly, Dreiser's frankness about sexual

matters in An American Tragedy earned him a major censorship trial (in Boston). One of the novel's courtroom defenders was Clarence Darrow, who would later figure prominently in the Leopold-Loeb case in Chicago, the basis for Meyer Levin's novel Compulsion. Pizer has said that one of the most modern aspects of the Naturalistic novel is its rejection of "the 'great lie' of nineteenth-century fiction--the convention that insofar as literary art is concerned relations between the sexes consist either of high romantic love or the minor rituals of middle-class courtship and marriage" (Twentieth 5).

Like McTeague, Griffiths does not seem to be able to improve his position significantly even when presented with the opportunity to do so. Although he progresses, over the duration of the novel, from his job as a bellhop in a large hotel to a supervisory position in his uncle's factory, he clearly operates in a culture to which he does not belong. His situation illustrates the isolation often suffered by the person who tries to change social class. Although Clyde's uncle is good enough to invite the young man to Lycurgus and to employ him, his attitude is largely charitable: Clyde is "quite good looking and well-mannered too," and he looks remarkably like Samuel Griffiths' son Gilbert, so the elder Griffiths is moved to "do a little something for him--give him a chance to show what he could

do, at least" (156-57). Sensing Gilbert's fear of displacement, however, his father is quick to add that the family need not treat Clyde as a social equal:

he wouldn't be coming [to Lycurgus] with any notion that he was to be placed on an equal footing with any of us. That would be silly. Later on, if he proves that he is really worth while [sic], able to take care of himself, knows his place and keeps it, and any of you wanted to show him any little attention, well, then it will be time enough to see, but not before then. (158-9)

As the Griffiths family are making up their minds not to include Clyde in their "set," Clyde is also strictly forbidden (by his cousin Gilbert) from fraternizing with the young women who work at the factory. Thus Clyde's dilemma: the Lycurgus Griffithses expect him to conduct himself as a member of their class (so as not to embarrass the family) while denying him the privileges associated with that status and, simultaneously, frown on his associating too closely with the workers, particularly women. This does not leave Clyde with a very large social circle.

Another aspect of Clyde's dilemma is the fact that other people seem as confused as he about his status. While Gilbert is conducting him through the factory on his initial tour, Clyde encounters a worker named Whiggam, a man who has made slight advances toward authority and who impresses Clyde with his ability to adjust his behavior

toward other employees, depending on their position relative to his own. Whiggam is respectful almost to the point of genuflection with Gilbert, the heir apparent, but somewhat condescending toward the workers who lack his seniority. As Clyde and Whiggam move farther from the administrative offices into the bowels of the factory, Clyde notes that his companion gradually raises his eyes and addresses people more "directly" and "authoritatively" (186).

Clyde, on the other hand, never masters the concept of status-appropriate behavior, largely because he and others are confused about his status. After his initial visit to the factory, having encountered the evidence of his uncle's wealth and status, Clyde feels both fortunate and unfortunate. Leaving the factory, he "congratulated himself on being connected with this great company" while at the same time feeling slighted that his uncle did not receive him in person. Whiggam's behavior is a balancing act which Clyde never learns to achieve, largely because he is confused as to where he begins: workers like Whiggam, aware that Clyde is a Griffiths, address him as "Mr. Griffiths," even when he is working on the lowest rung on the company ladder, in a veritable sweatshop where collar material is steamed and shrunk. But the members of the Griffiths family treat him like nobody, waiting months

after his arrival before inviting him to their house (even then for brief introduction, not for social activity).

When Clyde does finally begin to receive social invitations, the sender's motives are generally not pure. Sondra Finchley initially takes an interest in him because he looks like Gilbert and she sees a way to make other young men jealous. Later, as Clyde shows up at more and more parties with Sondra because she develops genuine affection for him, inviting him begins to be "the thing to do." And even when Clyde is on the verge of being accepted in the Griffithses' circle and they are forced to begin inviting him themselves, the problem of Roberta's pregnancy threatens all his hopes of social improvement. In fact, thanks to Dreiser's counterpointing of the Roberta plot and the Sondra plot, when Clyde is arrested, he is simultaneously as close to being somebody and as close to being nobody as he has ever been before. He effectively illustrates Donald Pizer's contention that Naturalistic novels are generally "about people who seem to be going nowhere" (Nineteenth 40); in Clyde's case, he is "going nowhere" because he is taking steps forward and backward at the same time. Dreiser's working title for the novel, Mirage, reflects this lack of real movement.

Perry Westbrook has noted that because Naturalism shares with Realism the aim of verisimilitude and because

most people fall within the realm of "the dull general average," the common protagonist is consistent with the Naturalists' goals; "since mediocrity is the lot of most mankind," Westbrook declares, "the [N]aturalist must concern himself with mediocrity" (143). The Red Badge of Courage, he notes, is about not a heroic officer but "the common private soldier" (143); "The Open Boat" is about characters so typical that, except for one (Billie, the oiler), they do not even have individual names. Crane's choice for Maggie's family of the second or third most popular surname in the United States--Johnson--is not coincidental. Similarly, McTeague and An American Tragedy focus on characters who, except for a single sensational act, might never have been distinguishable from anybody else in their culture.

The third central aspect of Naturalism--and the one most frequently used in isolation to define it--is the presence of a deterministic philosophy. Basically, determinism is the belief that a person's actions are caused or determined by something other than his or her will. Those factors might be biological, psychological, sociological, or historical. Perry Westbrook offers a more formal definition; he says that determinism is the doctrine

that all occurrences in the universe are governed

by inexorable laws of cause and effect. Since human activities, whether of the body or the mind, are subject to these same laws as part of the universal order, determinism is more narrowly used to denote absence of freedom in our volitions and choices. (ix)

It is central to determinism that these forces which affect human fortunes are outside a person's control. According to philosopher James Downey, determinism does not preclude the possibility of limited control over one's volitions and actions, but that control is very minimal and may be an illusion.

Determinism is so central a part of the Naturalistic formula that, as Westbrook has suggested, the terms determinism and Naturalism are almost synonymous (133). While this is something of an overstatement, the deterministic aspect of the Naturalistic novel is more integral to its identity than the influence of journalism or the social class of the protagonist. Mitchell offers a "negative test" for the Naturalistic novel: "any sure evidence of effective choice, of free will or autonomous action, makes a novel something other than Naturalistic" (530).

This adherence to determinism is also part of the legacy of Emile Zola, who wrote, "Determinism dominates everything. . . . [T]here is an absolute determinism for all human phenomena" ("Novel" 277). Zola also believed that identifying determinants should be the goal of modern

science:

The end of all experimental method, the boundary of all scientific research, consists in finding the relations which unite a phenomenon of any kind to its nearest cause, or, in other words, in determining the conditions necessary for the manifestation of this phenomenon. Experimental science has no necessity to worry itself about the "why" of things; it simply explains the "how." ("Novel" 271-72)

The Naturalistic novelist, to use Zola's analogy, places a character in a situation and brings certain environmental and genetic forces to act on him or her. The narrative thus becomes the explanation of what consequences would inevitably follow, given these forces and the factor of chance (which generally does not favor the Naturalistic protagonist).

In Maggie, for example, Crane demonstrates the natural result of a young girl's growing up in an atmosphere of alcohol, abuse, and parental neglect with two brothers who are even more susceptible to the effects of that environment than she: despite her attempts to protect her brothers and to create a more stable environment for herself (which the possibility of a relationship with Pete suggests), she becomes a prostitute and, eventually, throws herself into the river. Crane wrote in Hamlin Garland's first copy of Maggie that the novella "tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless" (Maggie 1).

The forces which act on Clyde Griffiths are both genetic and environmental. Although Dreiser drew heavily on sources for Books II and III of An American Tragedy, Book I is the product of his imagination (and, one might argue, his experience as a seeker of the good life and the son of religious zealots). Dreiser attempts in Book I to account for how a young man like Griffiths could end up on death row by manufacturing a past to go with the present of young men like Chester Gillette. Clyde's genetic legacy is described very early:

Asa Griffiths, the father, was one of those poorly integrated and correlated organisms, the product of an environment and a religious theory, but with no guiding or mental insight of his own, yet sensitive and therefore highly emotional and without any practical sense whatsoever. . . . [H]is wife was of a firmer texture but with scarcely any truer or more practical insight into anything. (13-14)

And Dreiser is quick to note that this information is not important "save as it affected their boy" (14). As Pizer points out, Clyde has also inherited a religious attitude from his parents, although he rejects their particular beliefs. He "still worships as zealously as they--only he worships the worldly rather than the unworldly" (54-55). Pizer says that although Clyde still has the enthusiasm of his parents' belief, he also, unfortunately, has their naivete (54-55). Additionally, Clyde shares his parents' lack of "practical insight." How different his fate might

have been had he given some attention to birth control or told the truth about Roberta's death.

The environment in which Clyde finds himself, combined with his urge to live like the people in the big houses on Wykeagy Avenue, are the primary forces in his undoing. He is virtually overcome by economic forces: born with almost nothing, he sees in Sondra the opportunity to have everything. In fact, he has imagined a "happily ever after" in which he marries Sondra and becomes an heir to the Finchley fortune. Economic determinism is also apparent in Clyde's trial, as Sondra is able to keep her name out of the proceedings because her family has money. A secondary problem is Clyde's lack of patience: he wonders, for example, why he ever got involved with Roberta: "Just because of a few lonely evenings! Oh, why, why couldn't he have waited and then this other world would have opened up to him just the same. If only he could have waited!" (428). Of course, every reader knows that the answer to "Oh, why, why couldn't he have waited" is another biological drive--sex. Philip Gerber has commented that Dreiser's "detailing" of the pressures which affect Clyde prevents the novel from being "just another 'fictionalized' account of a sordid crime'" (82).

The central incident of An American Tragedy--the death of Roberta--is determined by a combination of all these

factors and chance. Although Clyde has thought and thought about killing Roberta in some sort of staged "accident" and clearly realizes the advantages of her death to himself, Roberta's plunge into the lake and the camera's and boat's striking her are pure bad luck: she simply loses her balance in a shaky boat. Her death results from Clyde's vulnerability to the forces which prey on him throughout the novel, represented by the "little voice" which speaks to him while Roberta is in the water. But chance plays a larger role than in this episode alone. In the form of the automobile accident, it drives Clyde from Kansas City to Chicago, where by chance he meets his uncle Samuel. That Roberta becomes pregnant involves more bad luck, and Clyde just happens to read in the newspaper about the murder which prompts his boat trip with Roberta.

That Dreiser did not believe in free will is abundantly documented. His subscription to Darwinian and Spencerian principles did not leave much room for the possibility that man determines the consequences of his own actions. When, toward the end of Jennie Gerhardt, Lester Kane tells Jennie, "all of us are more or less pawns. We're moved about like chessmen by circumstances over which we have no control" (401), he is speaking for Theodore Dreiser.

The determinants acting on McTeague are almost purely biological. Because of the impact of Darwin and Spencer,

the American Naturalists tended to see man as "subject to the same laws as the rest of the organic and inorganic universe" (Pizer, Nineteenth 115). Or, as Zola put it, "Science proves that the existing conditions of all phenomena are the same in living beings as in inanimate . . . . A like determinism will govern the stones of the roadway and the brain of man" (qtd. in Ellmann and Feidelson 276-77). The notion that the same biological and environmental determinants affect man and all other matter caused the Naturalists to see humans in more animalistic terms; that is to say, they tended to focus on man as subject to the same instincts and drives as organisms which in the traditional vitalistic scheme were thought of as "lower."

Norris's characterization of McTeague consistently places him somewhere between the human and the animal. Included in the initial description is the detail that McTeague's jaw is "salient, like that of the carnivora," that both his body and his mind are "heavy, slow to act, sluggish," and that "he suggested the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient" (2-3). His movements are described as "bull-like" (3); answering Marcus, he "wags" his head (10); Marcus calls him a "lazy duck" (7); he sits gazing at Trina's pulled tooth in his palm with "some strange elephantine sentiment" (20).

Early in the novel, when he is alone with Trina, who is anesthetized, McTeague begins to struggle consciously with his animal instincts:

There in that cheap and shabby "Dental Parlor" a dreaded struggle began. It was the old battle, old as the world, wide as the world--the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted, and the simultaneous arousing of the other man, the better self that cries, "Down, down," without knowing why; that grips the monster; that fights to strangle it, to thrust it down and back. (22)

With "the fury of a young bull in the heat of high summer," McTeague kisses Trina sloppily on the mouth, dissipating his lust somewhat, but Norris is quick to point out that the "dormant" beast, once aroused, will not be retamed: "From now on he would feel its presence continually; would feel it tugging at its chain, watching its opportunity" (23). Poor confused McTeague is left to wonder "Why he could not always love [Trina] purely, cleanly . . . What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh?" (23).

The "perverse, vicious thing" grows harder to ignore as Trina becomes more and more selfish. In the weeks before the murder, McTeague is like "a caged brute"; when he is drunk, he takes pleasure "in abusing and hurting [Trina]" (223); at one point, he even gnaws her fingers. He walks the streets, attempting "to fight the wolf away" (267).

After the murder, McTeague becomes a pursued animal, possessing even a sort of "sixth sense" or "animal cunning" about his pursuers which often rouses him from sleep and drives him into the night (285). Searching for the mining region of his youth, he is effectively guided by impulse, returning "Straight as a homing pigeon, and following a blind and unreasoned instinct" (281). His flight into Death Valley "through a primeval river bed" is virtually an evolutionary regression. Westbrook has called McTeague "a walking--or lumbering--embodiment of every atavistic trait a Darwinian could think up" (134-5).

The Naturalists' interest in man's animalistic tendencies figures prominently in their images and symbols. Westbrook points out that "the love of animal similes" characterizes all the Naturalists (144). An episode often cited as the epitome of the Naturalistic influence is the scene in Chapter One of Dreiser's novel The Financier when young Frank Cowperwood is mesmerized by the life-and-death struggle of a lobster and a squid in a store-front aquarium. The episode, Dreiser says, was "a tragedy which stayed with [Cowperwood] all his life and cleared things up considerably intellectually" (3). It clarifies for young Cowperwood the Darwinian nature of existence:

The incident . . . answered in a rough way that riddle which had been annoying him so much in the past: "How is life organized?" Things lived on each other--

that was it. Lobsters lived on squids and other things. What lived on lobsters? Men, of course! Sure, that was it! And what lived on men? he asked himself. Was it other men? (5)

In An American Tragedy, after Clyde realizes that Roberta's death would free him from his entanglement, he suffers nightmares about being chased by "a savage black dog that was trying to bite him," then being lost in a jungle filled with snakes and other "menacing" reptiles, and finally having his path blocked by a gigantic "horned and savage animal" (442). On the day of Roberta's death, the strange cry of the "weird, unearthly" bird, sitting on its dead branch, sharpens Clyde's anxiety; he does not know whether the bird's cry is "a warning--a protest--a condemnation?" (490).

One Naturalist, London, was so interested in the traits shared by animals and humans that he actually used animals as characters in novels such as White Fang and The Call of the Wild. In those novels, London dealt with the concept of domestication, concluding that domesticity is no more than a veneer for any animal's baser instincts. In The Call of the Wild, Mitchell notes, Buck, once returned to the wilderness, quickly learns "the law of life" and becomes a survivor, ultimately abandoning human civilization altogether. In White Fang, the metamorphosis occurs in reverse: White Fang, trained in savage practices, responds

to Weedon Scott's kindness and becomes a virtual family pet (although at the end of the novel he is still capable of protecting the family). Mitchell theorizes that London used dogs as central characters because readers were less likely to think of dogs as exercising conscious choice, and therefore "the consequences of heredity, temperament, and innate capacity were more easily isolated" (540-41). Thus, London could illustrate the Darwinian principles more clearly.

But the use of animal imagery to suggest that humans are animals with only a slightly heavier veneer of civilization is most pervasive in McTeague. A central symbol is McTeague's little canary, whose cage represents McTeague's own entrapment by the forces--largely biological--which act on him; the canary is the only thing McTeague takes with him during his flight, and the final image in the novel is that of "the half-dead canary chattering feebly in its little gilt prison" (324). The canary is also part of McTeague's undoing, as a deputy pursuing him notes, "It isn't hard to follow a man who carries a bird cage with him wherever he goes" (286).

Besides the canary, one of McTeague's oldest possessions is a stone pug dog. McTeague's friend/adversary Marcus Schouler assists at an animal hospital and frequently appears with a dog on the end of a leash (yet another symbol

of lack of freedom). The activity of the Polk Street butcher shop and its employees is frequently noted. When Trina takes up wood carving, she specializes in Noah's ark animals. Every time the cleaning woman, Maria, is asked her name, she inexplicably replies, "Maria--Miranda--Macapa. Had a flying squirrel an' let him go" (15). The reader collecting animal images can open McTeague to nearly any page (for example, on page 218, selected randomly, McTeague twice tells Trina that she'd "rather live in a rat hole" than give him a nickel).

Animal imagery is central to both the murders in the novel--Trina's and the earlier murder of Maria. After Trina finds Maria propped up with her throat cut ear to ear, she stumbles out into the street to encounter, appropriately, "a butcher's boy . . . getting into his two-wheeled cart" and "a peddler of wild game . . . coming down the street, a brace of ducks in his hand" (231). Before Trina's murder, McTeague walks the San Francisco streets, struggling "to fight the wolf away" (267). Trina's murder is witnessed by the kindergarten cat, and her body is found by two five-year-olds, one of whom, "the daughter of a butcher," declares that the cloakroom "'Tsmells like my pa's shop" (276).

The Naturalists' determinism resulted in a rhetorical orientation that placed them outside the social norm in

several ways. First, they tended to reject traditional religion. In a world where events are determined by biological and environmental forces and by chance, God is vulnerable to displacement, which accounts for the protests against evolution which have persisted since the theory was originally articulated. Dreiser, for example, said that his faith was "blown to bits" by his reading of natural science (Swanberg 60). Kaplan has noted that "the vulnerability of the religious imagination" is a common theme in Naturalism. There is no better example than An American Tragedy, wherein Clyde as a young boy rejects the God his parents worship because he can't believe that a merciful God would let believers suffer as the Griffiths family does. Pizer has said that "The major characteristic of the form of the naturalistic novel is that it no longer reflects . . . certainty about the value of experience but rather expresses a profound doubt or perplexity about what happens in the course of time" (Nineteenth 34). That doubt is a direct consequence of the shift away from the belief that "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world."

The Naturalists also exhibited a previously unprecedented interest in criminals and criminal behavior and a tendency to downplay the moral implications of crime. This resulted largely from their view that man's behavior

is determined by deep-seated biological drives and impulses and their awareness that the capacity for violence is one of the closest links between man and the other animals. As Kaplan has put it, "[p]rimordial violence, 'the red animal,' releases the most elemental and unsocialized passions and instincts" (96).

Also, the crime beat was an aspect of daily life for many reporters in the 1890s, and some took more than a professional interest: Fishkin describes a club formed by reporters in the Chicago area called "the Whitechapel Club" after the lower-class area in London where Jack the Ripper had preyed on prostitutes in the late 1880s. Members met in a room "decorated . . . with a coffin-shaped table, murder weapons, and human skulls" (91). In A Book About Myself, Dreiser recalls getting together with other reporters to talk about particularly sensational crimes.

In McTeague, Norris chooses to focus on the scientific, rather than the moral, causes of McTeague's behavior. He was very much influenced by the work of Cesare Lombroso, whose book L'Uomo delinquente (The Criminal Man, 1876) is generally regarded as the first study in criminal anthropology. The book was translated into French in 1887, and although an English translation did not appear until 1911, Pizer documents that Lombroso's ideas were in circulation in the United States by the late 1880s (Norris,

189, n57). Lombroso identified certain "atavisms" which he said were present in those who commit criminal acts; the traits are different for different crimes. His theories were immediately applied to fiction by Emile Zola, whose novel La Bête humaine was subsequently critiqued by Lombroso from a sociological perspective.

When Norris read in the San Francisco papers of the Collins murder which inspired McTeague, he immediately recognized its illustration of themes he was encountering in Zola's novels. Lombroso's work presumed that criminal traits were "atavisms" or throwbacks to previous evolutionary stages. Thus, McTeague acquires primitive dimensions, and the reader comes to feel that his criminality is the result of biological inheritance rather than immorality.

Even less socially acceptable than their desire to understand criminal behavior was the Naturalists' attempt to mitigate it and to imply that the criminal is also a victim. A traditional philosophical position is that the concept of morality exists only so far as men are free to choose their behavior; both Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, for example, believed that "any meaningful concept of moral responsibility must be based on the assumption that a choice between good and evil actions is possible; and such choice can exist only where the will is free" (Westbrook 1). Thus,

in a world governed by biological and environmental forces, such a choice is not feasible, and the concept of moral culpability is moot. As Westbrook points out, this is a revision of Calvinistic determinism, as, in a Calvinistic universe, we deserve punishment for our sins, regardless of why we commit them (7).

McTeague and An American Tragedy mark the real commencement of the murderer-as-victim tradition in American literature. Both McTeague and Griffiths are the victims of biological and economic forces beyond their control; ultimately, neither man can survive what his biology and environment have made of him. When, in An American Tragedy, the attorney Jephson describes the circumstances of the murder as "A case of being bewitched, my poor boy--by beauty, love, wealth, by things that we sometimes think we want very, very much, and cannot ever have" (681), he could be speaking of either novel.

As much as Norris's novel deals with the central issues of the later nonfiction homicide novels, it is Dreiser who really cast the mold, particularly where creating sympathy for the protagonist is concerned. Dreiser's comprehensive examination of the circumstances which propel Clyde to want Roberta dead and then to allow her to drown is his primary means of arousing sympathy for him. The death scene itself does no serious damage to the reader's

perception of Clyde; it is, as Gerber has pointed out, "neatly balanced between guilt and innocence" (86). Like Hurstwood's feelings in the safe-locking scene in Sister Carrie, Clyde's motives are sufficiently ambiguous that premeditation cannot be presumed. He suffers from what Perry Smith would call "blood bubbles"--lack of resolve. During the trial, Dreiser adds to the sympathy for Clyde by referring to him in fictionalized newspaper accounts as "young Griffiths" and the "boy slayer," although he is twenty-two (620-22). He is so hapless a criminal that 127 witnesses testify against him (648).

Dreiser's novel establishes another theme which, though absent from Norris, is highly significant in subsequent novels based on real murder cases: the issue of capital punishment. Another of Dreiser's means of maintaining sympathy for Clyde in Book Three is emphasizing that his punishment is too harsh. Questions about the death penalty are raised in nearly every work in the homicide novel tradition and, in most, it is opposed. Thus, the Naturalistic novelists endorse a view that determinism mitigates a person's moral responsibility for his actions. The anti-capital punishment stance is as strong in An American Tragedy as in any subsequent work. Dreiser's concern with how young men like Chester Gillette ended up on trial for murder led him to create Book One

of the novel, a section which H. L. Mencken, a staunch defender of the death penalty, thought "a great mistake" (Gerber 82). Chapter 29 of An American Tragedy is an extended description of "the death house," which Dreiser calls "one of those crass erections and maintenances of human insensitiveness and stupidity principally for which no one primarily was really responsible." He describes the activity and effect of the death chamber in equally condemnatory tones:

without anything worthy of the name of thinking on any one's part--there had been gathered and was now being enforced all that could possibly be imagined in the way of unnecessary and really unauthorized cruelty or stupid and destructive torture. And to the end that a man, once condemned by a jury, would be compelled to suffer not alone the death for which his sentence called, but a thousand before that. (759)

Clyde endures long days spent contemplating the death house and the men around him who also have appointments with it. He constantly reminds himself that "There [is] a door. It [leads] to that chair. That chair" (758; emphasis Dreiser's). He agonizes through the executions of each man to go before him. The effect on Clyde of one, that of Pasquale Cutrone, is described in extended fashion; during the entire procession and subsequent dimming of the prison lights, Clyde is "literally shivering with fear and horror" (771). He attempts to console himself with the knowledge that "This whole business of the death penalty

was all wrong. The warden thought so. . . . He was working to have it abolished" (773).

Perhaps the most unpopular of the Naturalists' themes was the notion that society itself must share the blame for the crimes of men like McTeague and Clyde Griffiths. As Westbrook has said, An American Tragedy encourages the reader to question the concept of "individual responsibility in all murders, at least those perpetrated by amateur criminals" (149). This was not a role which society particularly wanted questioned; not surprisingly, the censorship trials involving both Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy were based to a large extent on Dreiser's sympathetic treatment of both protagonists despite their socially inappropriate behavior. If, as Ellmann and Feidelson say, the Realists were motivated by "aesthetic conscience," the obligation to depict life objectively or to be a "secretary to society," the Naturalists were motivated by social conscience. They felt obliged to portray man as a creature placed at a considerable disadvantage by biological and social factors who, nevertheless, merits some sympathy.

Dreiser was drawn to stories of young men like Chester Gillette because he saw developing an American archetype:

Abstracted, the murders followed lines that might be predicted with near-scientific exactness, and their significance tallied rather well with Dreiser's own

notions of an American society that had become materialist to the core, glittering with blandishments for the young and encouraging them to pursue "the dream of success" at all cost. (Gerber 77)

The sheer number of similar cases which Dreiser observed caused him to question the concept of individual responsibility and to seek to distribute the guilt over a society which, in his mind, increasingly resembled a Darwinian jungle.

Dreiser naturally sympathizes with the underdog, as he was, in many ways, an underdog himself. Mitchell has pointed out that Dreiser was "the first major American novelist raised on the wrong side of the tracks . . . the first Catholic, the first to hear a foreign language at home, the first whose family was impoverished and disreputable" (542). He was Clyde Griffiths' brother, just as, according to Ellen Moers' famous suggestion, he was "in every sense, the brother of Sister Carrie" (567). Donald Pizer has observed that this sympathy for the underdog, for the "poor" and "impotent" "mark[s] the entire range of [Dreiser's] fiction--and his life" (Nineteenth 152), but it really marks much more than that: it applies equally to all the Naturalistic writers, who held firm in their conviction that all human beings have inherent worth. Gerber says that this notion that "a reader, loathing Clyde's motives and his methods, can still

understand and sympathize with the boy in his predicament" is "the great point" of An American Tragedy (85). And Crane wrote to Hamlin Garland in the Maggie inscription that if one accepts the theory of environmental influences, "one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people" (Portable 1).

Despite the pessimism often associated with Naturalism, the Naturalists also felt that society was improvable; this is consistent with their more optimistic perception of evolution as progressing in a positive direction. At the conclusion of An American Tragedy, Dreiser points the way to the society in which young men like Clyde Griffiths will not want so much that they kill to get it: Clyde's nephew Russell is allowed by his grandmother to run to the corner for an ice cream cone. Mrs. Griffiths realizes that "She must be kind to him, more liberal with him, not restrain him too much . . . for [Clyde's] sake" (814).

Zola insisted that the difference between determinism and fatalism was that determinism "considered the human condition to be alterable and improvable" (Ellmann and Feidelson 232). The role of literature in the Naturalistic scheme was to help facilitate this alteration, an alteration which Dreiser, Norris, Crane, and London felt particularly necessary in light of America's late nineteenth-century

growing pains. As Michael Millgate explains in American Social Fiction,

American writers have repeatedly been worried, confused, or angered . . . by the irreconcilability of American ideals and American experience, and one result of this sense of the gulf between the way things should be and the way things are, has been a readiness to regard the novel as a political instrument. (196)

Perhaps no other period in American literature has elicited as much misunderstanding and negative criticism as the first stage of Naturalism. Dreiser has been roundly criticized for his cumbersome, often awkward style, and Norris, for his tendency toward melodrama. All of the Naturalists (with the possible exception of Crane) have been viewed by some critics as overly dogmatic, compromising their art in the service of their sermons. Their works have drawn fire from critics whose objections are quite obviously political, who do not share the writers' emotional attachment to lower-class figures, or who are troubled by the fact that nearly all the Naturalists flirted with socialism or, in the case of Dreiser (the only one of the four to live long enough) with Communism. They have traditionally been viewed as somewhat unintelligent, largely because, for the most part, they were not intellectuals, not well educated, and not always consistent in their thinking. It has been pointed out more than once, for example, that the concept of social reform probably is

not consistent with a purely deterministic orientation.

A significant misunderstanding of American literary Naturalism is that its practitioners were in unanimous agreement with some aesthetic and philosophical prescription for the novel. Although many of the same winds blew upon the four early Naturalists, those winds tended to blow them in different directions, so that Crane's work takes on more impressionistic overtones, London's more biological, and Dreiser's and Norris's more economic and social. Neither is the period characterized by one particular kind of novel, as Pizer has pointed out. The writers produced quest novels, about protagonists such as Carrie and Henry Fleming who search for self-fulfillment; works in which individuals such as Maggie and McTeague are overwhelmed by socioeconomic forces; and novels about characters such as Clyde Griffiths who are failed by society (Twentieth 151-52).

Pizer's comment that Naturalism "has been one of the most persistent and vital strains in American fiction" (Twentieth ix) is borne out by the Naturalists' contribution: the adaptation to fiction of the most revolutionary scientific and philosophical ideas with which any age has been presented. If their achievement is less magnificent than some critics would have hoped, perhaps that is due not only to their personal and artistic

limitations but also to the enormity of their task. Regardless of the mixed critical estimation of their work, they cast a long and important shadow on twentieth-century American literature.

## CHAPTER IV

## NATURALISM IN TRANSITION:

## THE FACT-BASED HOMICIDE NOVEL, 1930-1960

"After the Depression, with the entry of a new generation into literature, we can observe another thematic change in realistic American fiction. By and large, the plebian classes, the lower class, and special groups of the American population were not centrally treated in American fiction before the end of the Twenties. But suddenly we can observe the change. It is mirrored in the racial backgrounds of writers, in the themes, in the subjects, and in the conditions of life which are treated. The orphan asylum, the streets of the city, poolrooms, lower-class homes and family life, the backward sections of America, such as parts of Georgia or the decaying sections of New England, hobo life--all this is introduced into the American novel . . . . A bottom-dog literature, in the social sense, began to develop."

James T. Farrell, Literature and Morality

Many critics and literary historians believe that after the 1925 publication of An American Tragedy, Naturalism went into remission. In "Naturalism and the Languages of Determinism," Lee Clark Mitchell writes that the "particular constellation of influences at work on writers now thought of as Naturalists disappeared with World War I," concluding that "the movement was . . . short-lived" (545). Richard Martin says that by the 1920s or '30s, "literary [N]aturalism of the sort practiced by

London, Norris, and Dreiser . . . seemed to be played out" (210). As Pizer notes in Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism, by the 1940s, critics as eminent as Malcolm Cowley, Lionel Trilling, and Philip Rahv were heralding Naturalism's death (85). In "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism" (1942), Rahv declared that Naturalism had fallen into a state of "utter debility" and "lost its power to cope with the evergrowing element of the problematical in modern life" (589). In the early forties, in essays later collected as The Liberal Imagination, Trilling outlines what he sees as the causes of Naturalism's demise, and Cowley's "A Natural History of American Literary Naturalism," which appeared in 1947, reads like an obituary for the movement.

Evidence to support Naturalism's reported demise was not difficult to compile. In 1925, Jack London had been dead for nine years, Frank Norris for twenty-three, and Stephen Crane for twenty-five. Over the remaining twenty years of his life, Dreiser published no more novels; the two remaining, The Bulwark and The Stoic, were published posthumously (in 1946 and 1947, respectively). He wrote short stories, several collections of vignettes and of socio-political propaganda, and three or four autobiographical works, including Newspaper Days. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, people were sometimes surprised

to learn that Dreiser was still alive.

Dreiser himself had reason to doubt the longevity of his achievement. Confident that An American Tragedy would win the 1926 Pulitzer Prize, the author was dismayed and somewhat surprised when Sinclair Lewis won instead, and declined, for Arrowsmith. When he and Lewis were finalists for the 1930 Nobel Prize, a recognition he had coveted since 1911, Dreiser sent an emissary to Europe to wage a publicity campaign on his behalf. American newspapers predicted that Dreiser would be chosen, but the Swedish Academy selected Lewis by a vote of two to one. Dreiser was, according to his biographer Swanberg, "bitterly disappointed" (368), and not just because the prize carried a cash award of over \$46,000. Certainly Dreiser, realizing at 59 that his best work was behind him, yearned for the validation that being the first American writer named a Nobel laureate would have brought. His failure to win--especially on the heels of An American Tragedy's publication--reinforced his life-long perception of himself as an outsider. The whole episode was, in Swanberg's words, "a deep and lasting" wound (368). The selection of Lewis also implied that Realism had never really been displaced as the dominant mode in American letters.

But just as reports of Dreiser's own death in the 1930s were, to use Mark Twain's famous phrase, "greatly exaggerated," the swan songs for Naturalism were also premature. Most critics have tended to see the publication of An American Tragedy as the end merely of the first phase of American Naturalism; even if it might accurately be regarded as the major phase, it is certainly not the only one.

Some critics have tended to see more than one stage in the early period itself. For example, in The American Novel and Its Tradition, Richard Chase argues that Frank Norris was really the "father" of American Naturalism because of his familiarity with Zola and his conviction that Naturalism had distinctly Romantic elements, a conviction (and practice) which, according to Chase, established continuity with the Romantic tradition. Chase argues, for example, that "Norris's romance-novels succeeded in reclaiming for American fiction an imaginative profundity [present in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville] that the age of Howells was leaving out" (203). In Chase's view, Dreiser's work was a second stage; Chase groups Dreiser with other writers, including William Faulkner, who adapted the approaches of the early Naturalists to their own work (204). Robert Spiller and his colleagues in Literary History of the United States corroborate Chase's

view, maintaining that upon the publication of Jennie Gerhardt in 1911 and the republication of Sister Carrie in 1912, Naturalism entered a second phase and that the earlier phase had been "experimental" (1037).

Until the 1982 publication of Donald Pizer's Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism, there was no book-length study of American Naturalism focusing on the twentieth century alone; the majority of full-length critical works have always tended to cover the period from the 1890 publication of Maggie to the 1925 appearance of An American Tragedy (Pizer, Twentieth 156, n1 to "Preface"). Pizer sees two clearly distinct Naturalistic periods after the 1920s. The first, the 1930s, involves the novels, often called "proletarian" for their examination of working-class lives, of John Steinbeck, James T. Farrell, and John Dos Passos. Pizer examines the tendency, begun with An American Tragedy, to focus on how man is limited by socioeconomic circumstances; his primary illustrations are Farrell's Studs Lonigan trilogy--Young Lonigan (1932), The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan (1934), and Judgment Day (1935)--together comprising a life-long examination of an Irish-American in a depressed urban environment; Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath (1939), the story of the migratory Joad family's attempt to survive the Great Depression; and Dos Passos' U.S.A., a collection of three

novels (The 42nd Parallel, 1930; 1919, 1932; and The Big Money, 1936) which "have as their protagonist the social background of the nation, and as their major theme the vitiation and degradation of character in a decaying civilization based on commercialism and exploitation" (Hart 209). Dos Passos' trilogy also uses several nonfiction techniques: a "Newsreel" comprised of "contemporary headlines, advertisements, popular songs, and newspaper articles" intended to establish atmosphere (Hart 209); and interwoven biographies of famous Americans. Farrell uses a technique similar to the "Newsreel" in the first Studs Lonigan book.

Pizer points out that the "Naturalistic fiction of the 1930s had its roots in the social conditions of the decade and in the intellectual and literary currents of the previous decade" (Twentieth 13). The social conditions were, of course, those of the Great Depression. The literary influences were the more psychological approaches of writers like James Joyce; Farrell, for example, makes extensive use of stream-of-consciousness in Young Lonigan, and Dos Passos and Steinbeck are both indebted to the epic tradition of which Ulysses was the most successful recent example. The intellectual forces which operated upon the 1930s Naturalists were not Darwin and Spencer but Marx and Freud, in the work of whom the writers discovered their

theme: "that life [specifically, economic conditions and biological drives] placed tragic limitations on individual freedom, growth, and happiness" (Pizer, Twentieth 13). The psychological and deterministic approaches found synthesis in Freud, who wrote in A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis (1920) that "there is within [man] a deeply rooted belief in psychic freedom and choice [which] is quite unscientific . . . and must give ground before the claims of a determinism which governs even mental life" (qtd. in Westbrook 112). Both Pizer and Tasker Witham have noted that Farrell, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck continued to imply the necessity for (and possibility of) social reform that Dreiser had advocated (Pizer, Twentieth 16; Witham 275); Pizer describes "the basic cast of the [N]aturalistic novel of the 1930s" as "the diagnosis of an illness and the suggestion of a remedy" (Twentieth 16).

The post-World War II Naturalists of the late '40s and early '50s were less sure that improvement was possible. More heavily influenced by nihilism and existentialism, the writers of what Pizer sees as the third American Naturalistic period had new reasons to question man's ability to control his own destiny: the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the Korean conflict, and McCarthyism. Pizer describes the impact on the writers of the 1940s and '50s of a world which seemed increasingly bent on mass

destruction and denial of individual liberty:

these events of the war years and post-war period offered massive evidence of the impotence of the informed will when confronted by the atavistic destructiveness of human nature and the vast, uncontrollable power of the social and political institutions of modern life. The distinctive note of the age was not the hope implicit in tragedy but the chaos present in the struggle for survival and power. (Twentieth 86)

In this environment, Pizer maintains, freedom "is not categorically denied but is rather submitted to a close scrutiny of its nature and efficacy in a world consisting largely of conditions which limit and qualify it" (Twentieth 88).

In discussing the Naturalism of the 1940s and '50s, Pizer focuses on three novels: The Naked and the Dead (1948), by Norman Mailer; Lie Down in Darkness (1951), by William Styron; and The Adventures of Augie Marsh (1953), by Saul Bellow. Pizer says that the early novels of Mailer, Styron, and Bellow exemplify "the third major expression of the American attempt to explore at moments of national stress through highly structured dramatizations of particular social moments the problem of man's belief in his freedom in an increasingly restrictive world" (Twentieth 89). Like Crane in The Red Badge of Courage, Mailer uses war (in this case, the Pacific theatre of World War II) as a metaphor for man's struggle to find meaning in his

life, exploring American social stratification through its manifestation within the microcosm of one army platoon (for a more thorough discussion of Mailer's Naturalism, see Chapter VI).

Criticism of Lie Down in Darkness has tended to focus on Styron's tendency to echo Faulknerian themes of family disintegration and the loss of potential in the younger generation to mental incapacity or suicide. Pizer observes that "oddly neglected as a major approach . . . is its character as a [N]aturalistic novel, and in particular as a novel in which the metaphor of a troubled journey through life is used to explore the [N]aturalistic question of our responsibility for our fates" (Twentieth 116). Although the Loftises in their middle-class comfort do not fit the Naturalistic socioeconomic prescription, they act as though conditioned by social and psychological forces. Also significant, says Pizer, is Styron's tone--one of "[N]aturalistic tragic compassion" (Twentieth 132).

Bellow's picaresquely entitled novel The Adventures of Augie March follows the search for self-fulfillment of the title character, a young Jewish man from Chicago. Pizer maintains that

Augie March is about the "rough forces" of experience, about all that compels and conditions and shapes man, particularly the shaping power of other human wills. It is also about the darkness in nature, the nature of decay and death rather than of eternal

renewal. And it is also about the human effort to maintain hope despite these realities, the hope which musters as much grace and wit as is possible in the face of the permanent and insoluble enigma of man's condition. Augie March, in short, for all its comic vibrancy, picaresque swiftness of movement, and larky prose is also a [N]aturalistic novel of ideas. (Twentieth 134)

Certainly all three of these novels illustrate Pizer's comment that the Naturalistic novels of the late '40s and early '50s increasingly focused on the failure of institutions and groups, the necessity of searching for meaning on an individual level, and the difficulty of finding any (Twentieth 87). Neither the army of The Naked and the Dead nor the Loftis family of Lie Down in Darkness could be considered a well-functioning unit. Augie March's family, like the Loftis family, is disintegrating: his mother is unable to support the family; one brother is mentally retarded; another brother marries for money, and Augie's grandmother dies. In at least two of these novels, the reader leaves the characters in a fairly bleak state: the surviving platoon members in Mailer's novel return from a dangerous mountain patrol to find that their efforts have had no bearing on the outcome of the battle for the island, and the Loftis family, having buried Peyton without finding a way to heal their emotional and psychological wounds, leave the station on a train heading into darkness. Witham echoes Pizer's observation of the philosophical

difference between the second round of Naturalists and the third (and his delineation of those separate periods) in his comment that in An American Tragedy and the proletarian novels of Steinbeck, Farrell, and Dos Passos, the Naturalistic writer "suggested a hope that the lot of man might be improved through . . . control of his physical and social environment," whereas [the Naturalistic novels] of the forties and fifties either painted a dark picture in which human happiness was largely a matter of chance . . . or sought for hope in specifically human values" (265). The continued optimism and humor of Augie March might be an example of those values.

During the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, another formulation of the Naturalistic period continued to appear in American novels: the protagonist who, through a combination of biological and environmental factors, was driven to homicide. Four important examples exist, two from the second Naturalistic period and two from the third. They are William Faulkner's Light in August (1932), James M. Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934), Richard Wright's Native Son (1940), and Meyer Levin's Compulsion (1955). All four novels focus on a protagonist who commits murder, and all four are based to some extent on fact. All four writers explore the question of how much free

will the protagonist exercises, and, in every case, it is not much. Some variation exists from novel to novel: for example, Compulsion follows the facts of an actual case far more closely than the other three, and in Postman the deterministic element often seems to be pure chance, whereas in the other three the determinism is a complex of social, psychological, and historical circumstances. Light in August and Native Son are works very much within the literary mainstream, while Postman has always had a more commercial reputation, and Compulsion is now somewhat obscure. But variation from author to author and work to work has always characterized Naturalism, in the United States and elsewhere; the point is that the literary ancestors of In Cold Blood continued to be present in significant examples during the thirty years between An American Tragedy and Capote's 1965 novel.

Upon Light in August's publication in 1932, William Faulkner was acquiring a reputation as the author of violent novels. The rape and murder which are central incidents in Sanctuary, published the year before, had caused a prejudice among readers, Herschel Brickell later reported, which led many to condemn Faulkner as objectionable without even reading his books (571). Upon Sanctuary's publication, Henry Seidel Canby announced that Faulkner had joined the

"cruel school" of fiction and become "a prime example of American sadism" (109). Certainly Faulkner's new novel, featuring the brutal murder of a white spinster by a man rumored to have black blood who is himself later killed and castrated by a vigilante, did nothing to mitigate that image. Indeed, Michael Millgate says that reviews of Light in August indicate "the extent to which the violence and . . . sensationalism of Sanctuary had come to dominate [critics'] sense of Faulkner as a novelist" (New 13).

Light in August is saturated with violent acts; reviewer Evan Shipman said that the novel contains as much violence as an Elizabethan blood tragedy (300). The brutal, grotesque deaths of Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas constitute the violence of the novel's foreground--the ten days which comprise the present, from Lena Grove's arrival in Jefferson to her departure. These two acts are set against a background of other deaths, mostly violent, all in the past: the murder of Joe's father by Joe's grandfather, Doc Hines, who subsequently allowed his daughter, Joe's mother Milly, to die in childbirth; Colonel Sartoris's killing of Joanna Burden's grandfather and half-brother over a question of voting rights for blacks; the death of Gail Hightower's Confederate grandfather, shot while raiding a chicken house, and the suicide of Hightower's wife, driven to promiscuity and

self-annihilation by her husband's withdrawal into the past. Every major character except Lena Grove has a violent death somewhere in the family album, in a novel written by a man whose great-grandfather was himself both killer and victim: William Clark Falkner (1825-89) killed at least two men during heated arguments, apparently in self-defense (Blotner 16-17) and was later murdered by a business associate (Blotner 47-48).

The murder which is the central act of Light in August was not a product of Faulkner's imagination but largely derived from an actual homicide just outside Oxford on September 8, 1908. Nelse Patton, a black "trusty" from the county jail in Oxford, went to the home of Mrs. Mattie McMillan on an errand from Mrs. McMillan's husband, an inmate. When Mrs. McMillan apparently spurned his advances, Patton slit her throat with a razor. Arrested after a mob pursuit, Patton was killed the same night when a group of local men broke into his cell. The men castrated Patton and hung his naked body from a tree in the public square. Details of the pursuit were readily available to ten-year-old Billy Falkner, as fifteen-year-old John Cullen, the brother of Falkner's friend Hal Cullen and son of a Lafayette County deputy sheriff, was involved in the pursuit and actually fired squirrel shot into Patton after intercepting him in a thicket. John Cullen was also present

later at the jail. Nelse Patton's crime is detailed in two standard Faulkner sources: Joseph Blotner's definitive Faulkner: A Biography (113-14) and Old Times in the Faulkner Country, a collaboration of John Cullen and Floyd C. Watkins. The Cullen-Watkins book contains a whole chapter about the Nelse Patton affair, including selections of original newspaper articles about the case (89-98).

A second crime which Blotner offers as a potential source was the 1919 murder, again just outside Oxford, of a black woman by her husband, Leonard Burt. Burt was apprehended four months later and was shot to death in an escape attempt en route from the Oxford jail to the courthouse (he was not castrated). Although Nelse Patton's crime resembled Joe Christmas's killing of Joanna Burden more closely than did Burt's, Blotner points out two important details of the Burt case: first, Burt's wife's body was badly mutilated, reminding one of Joanna Burden, with her head nearly severed and facing a direction different from the rest of her body; and second, leaving the house, Burt had set a fire in an attempt to hide the murder (762-63).

Despite these two models, however, Faulkner did not focus Light in August on the murderer right away. He insisted that the novel began with "Lena Grove, the idea of the young girl with nothing, pregnant, determined to

find her sweetheart" (Gwynn and Blotner 74) and that, at the outset, he knew "no more about it than a young woman, pregnant, walking along a strange country road" (qtd. in Blotner 703). But even if the image of Lena did cause the novel to crystallize in Faulkner's mind, she was not the first of the major characters to occur to Faulkner. Millgate maintains that University of Texas manuscripts confirm the primacy of the material about Gail Hightower (New 6-7), and, according to Blotner's account, Faulkner initially conceived of a novel to be called Dark House and wrote and discarded two preliminary pages featuring Hightower. Blotner further demonstrates that the minister was a revision of an even earlier character, Dr. Gavin Blount, in a story called "Rose of Lebanon" which was rejected by Scribner's about a week before Faulkner began writing Light in August (700-01). Joe Christmas came along later than both Hightower and Lena, as Regina K. Fadiman confirms in her detailed textual study Faulkner's Light in August: A Description and Interpretation of the Revisions (33-4). But Christmas soon came to dominate the story in Faulkner's mind, as Blotner attests:

As Faulkner worked his way further into the novel, Joe Christmas had taken an increasingly powerful hold upon his imagination. Lena Grove was still an important figure, but . . . she had not remained both the generative figure and the central one. She was [now] integrated into the Christmas plot . . . ; she served more and more as counterpoint for the obsessed

and doomed Christmas. (761).

Fadiman's conclusion that Faulkner added "late" the long flashback section which comprises the story of Joe's youth (chapters six through nine, pages 111 to 206) indicates the writer's increasing concentration on his murderer (33-4). It was a creative act motivated by the same impulse that led Dreiser, in inventing Book I of An American Tragedy, to give Clyde a past which led up to the present Dreiser already knew from his nonfiction models.

Drawing on the Patton and Burt cases, Faulkner supplied an original motive for Joe Christmas's murder of Joanna Burden, and in doing so, he created a drama of major deterministic proportions. Like Norris and Dreiser, Faulkner was interested in the circumstances which led his protagonist to murder; in the case of Light in August, those factors are largely religious and racial. Christmas is the victim of a society characterized by an absolutist Calvinism, illustrated in the novel by his grandfather, his "adoptive" father Simon McEachern, and Joanna Burden and her ancestors. One great virtue of the Calvinist system is simplicity, as it employs basic dichotomies such as good and evil, elect and damned, and heaven and hell. The Calvinist's world is thus ordered and predictable, but it does not allow for gradations of human behavior. The legacy of Calvinism for Christmas is that it causes

him to need to polarize experience and to agonize over anyone or anything that does not fit neatly into a category.

Joe Christmas has also incorporated Calvinism's insistence on the sober, dispassionate life. He cannot find pleasure in food, sex, or human companionship, largely because of a formative experience at the orphanage where his grandfather left him. Five-year-old Joe has sneaked into the dietician's room to eat her sweet toothpaste when she returns with a doctor and begins having sex. Concealed behind a curtain and increasingly upset by his predicament and the "pinkwomansmell" of the dietician's clothes, the boy gulps down toothpaste until he vomits, at which point the dietician flings back the curtain and hurls at young Joe a double epithet: "You little nigger bastard!" (114). As a consequence of this unfortunate juxtaposition, Joe develops a distaste for food, women, and sex which prevents him from enjoying any of the three for the rest of his life. One might say that his attitude toward and his appetites for food, women and sex are determined by the orphanage experience.

Finally, Joe is shaped by the Old Testament theology of Calvinism, which holds that a person controls what happens to him: if he is obedient, he is rewarded; if he is disobedient, he is punished. The utter predictability of this system explains why Christmas stays with McEachern,

whom he hates, for thirteen years; it is, as Robert Gibb has said, "an awfully easy code to live by" (335): at least Joe always knows what to expect, and McEachern's fundamental attitude gives order to the boy's life (only when McEachern becomes unpredictable, losing control of himself over Joe's liaison with Bobbie Allen, does Christmas finally leave).

Joe's negative attitude toward women is also colored by the fact that, from his perspective, they do not toe the Calvinist line as rigidly as men. After the orphanage episode, for example, Joe expects to be punished; when the dietician gives him a silver dollar instead of a whipping, he is confused and loses more respect for her, because she has broken the rules (116-17). Three years later, when Joe's refusal to learn his catechism has earned him a day of fasting imposed by McEachern, the boy is similarly confused--even outraged--when Mrs. McEachern brings him a tray of food; he throws the tray into the corner and, an hour later, eats from the floor like a dog, on his hands and knees, the posture he feels he deserves (144-46). Until Hightower's attempt to save him by inventing an alibi late in the novel, any mercy extended to Joe Christmas is always extended by women. That mercy, a New Testament concept, is foreign to Calvinistic doctrine. Thus, Joe is like Flannery O'Connor's Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," for whom Jesus's teaching that God

is merciful to sinners has "thown everything off balance" (1957).

The social circumstances which act upon Faulkner's protagonist have an effect similar to the polarizing effect of Calvinism. In the orphanage at the age of five, Christmas is introduced to the possibility of his biraciality when his grandfather (the orphanage janitor) encourages the naive children to call Christmas "Nigger! Nigger!" and subsequently asks the five-year-old to consider why God made him "a nigger" (361-62). Confused by Hines' questions, Joe innocently asks a black gardener, "How come you are a nigger?" and draws a scathing and scarring response:

'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' he says, 'I aint a nigger,' and the nigger says, 'You are worse than that. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know,' and he says 'God aint no nigger,' and the nigger says, 'I reckon you ought to know what God is, because dont nobody but God know what you is.' (363)

The frightening notion that "dont nobody but God know what [he] is" haunts Joe for the rest of his life. The question of Joe's racial heritage remains unanswered and unanswerable, as both his parents are dead. His grandfather has presumed that the child is black because, in Hines' dichotomized Calvinistic thinking, black is associated with evil and the child, as a bastard, must

be evil (354). Once raised in Hines' consciousness, the possibility of Joe's blackness becomes a fact. (Interestingly, a similar assumption characterized much early scholarship about the novel, as Millgate attests, with a surprising number of critics referring to Christmas as black or mulatto, New 18-19).

Not knowing his racial heritage devastates Joe. His tragedy, like Oedipus's, is a tragedy of identity (except that in Light in August it is lack of knowledge rather than knowledge which destroys). When Joanna Burden asks him how he knows that one of his parents had black blood, Christmas, after a silence, responds, "I dont know it. . . . If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time" (240-41). Alexander Welsh uses psychologist Erik Erickson's term "somebodyness" to describe what Christmas lacks (124); indeed, in a culture polarized as black and white, the protagonist's ambiguous status leaves him feeling very much a nobody, a pariah, as Cleanth Brooks has argued. Faulkner said that "the tragic, central idea of [Joe's] story is that he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out" (Blotner 762).

Joe's murder of Joanna Burden is an attempt to exercise control, to forge an identity. Burden represents the forces which have haunted Christmas throughout his life: she is female; she encourages him, as McEachern had, to pray,

and she insists, for the sake of what Blotner calls her "Negrophiliac" purposes, on seeing him as black, so that she can educate and "improve" him. Thus, by her murder, he seeks to kill the nobody she reminds him that he is. Like Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, Christmas fills some chink in his plaster through the murder of the white Negro sympathizer, and thereby gains dimension: he escapes into the natural world (of which he, unlike Lena Grove, has never been a part), where, after a few days, he is no longer hungry, and feels "peaceful . . . cool, quiet" (316). He goes to meet his death at the appointed time, and, when Percy Grimm is pursuing him, Christmas does not fire his loaded pistol.

Ironically, the identity he achieves is a tragic one--the community perceives him as the black murderer of a white woman--and, in finally becoming a somebody, Christmas seals his own doom. He thinks he has free will--that he acts of his own volition and has finally reinstated the Calvinist balance (by committing the act which will bring the punishment), but Faulkner makes clear that he does not; instead, Joe's acts are determined by the religious and social conditioning he has experienced. Blotner says that "Faulkner presented Christmas in his maturity as thinking he acted out of something like free will, though his history made it clear that he had largely

been shaped by his environment" (763-4).

The deterministic scope of Light in August extends beyond the protagonist to include every other major character, as scores of critics confirm. Perry Westbrook contends that "not one of [the characters] is a free agent in the sense of having the ability to break out of the fated groove of his will" (180). The factors which have determined the grooves of characters' wills are, in Faulkner, predominantly historical. As Frohock puts it, "[o]ut of [the] past come the obsessions and anxiety states of the characters which stand in the place of motives, determining their conduct" (Violence 154).

As Ilse Dusoir Lind and Edward Volpe have discussed extensively, Joanna Burden is, like Christmas, a victim of her Calvinistic past. Into her life has fallen the "shadow" of her family's attempt to help black Americans, an attempt which claimed the life of Joanna's grandfather and half brother Calvin, murdered, her father says, "not by one white man but by the curse which God put on a whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of" (239). As a young woman, Joanna asks her father how she can "escape, get away from under the shadow," but he makes clear that there is no escape, and Joanna dies in her attempt "to raise the shadow with [her]" (240). In fact, the word shadow occurs four times

in the paragraph in which Joe kills Joanna.

The minister Gail Hightower is also the product of his past and the victim of dichotomized perceptions: he cannot reconcile his grandfather's ignominious death in a chicken coop with his otherwise idealized portrait of that relative. Faulkner writes that the minister "grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost" (449). Hightower also suffered the misfortune of having been born to middle-aged parents, an incommunicative father and bedridden mother, to whom he was not close. Volpe says Hightower is "not responsible for the conditions which make him afraid of life. He is a victim of the character and circumstances of his parents" (158).

Certainly Lena Grove's actions in the present of the novel are also determined by past actions, albeit her own: because she had sex with Lucas Burch and became pregnant, she must now inevitably seek him. That her reunion with Burch is foreordained is clear to Lena; she tells Martha Armstid, "a family ought to be all together when a chap comes. Specially the first one. I reckon the Lord will see to that" (18).

Westbrook says that just as "the orthodox Christian ascribes the perverted will of man to the sin in the Garden of Eden, Faulkner relates the sorry plight of his doomed characters to family histories of violence and crime" (179)

--and, one might add, illicit sex. Light in August is an extended dramatization of the past living in the present, a reminder that, as Gavin Stevens tells his nephew Chick in Intruder in the Dust, "[y]esterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago" (194).

Faulkner is also interested in tomorrow, specifically in how today's victim becomes tomorrow's victimizer. The presentation of the victimizer as not only formerly but simultaneously a victim is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Light in August and one which was clearly important to Faulkner. Asked by a University of Virginia student why he would impose Christ symbolism on "such a sort of bad man as Joe Christmas," Faulkner replied that "man is the victim of himself, or his fellows, or his own nature, or his environment" (qtd. in Welsh 125) and that Christmas seemed to him "tragic" rather than "bad" (Gwynn and Blotner 118). Blotner notes that Faulkner's "anguished sympathy for this victim is clear throughout the novel" (763). Every other victimizer in the novel is also accorded victim status. By virtue of his blinding Calvinism, Doc Hines is, in Volpe's words, "[l]ike all the pursuers in the novel . . . in reality, the pursued" (162). McEachern, of course, suffers from the same ailment. The victim Hightower in turn victimizes his wife. Joanna Burden, overshadowed by the "burden" of the family's philanthropic

commitment, victimizes Joe Christmas.

Even Christmas's ultimate victimizer Percy Grimm is presented as a victim of his own history and culture. The tragedy of Grimm's life is that he was prevented by age from seizing the identity he wanted as a soldier in the first World War (he blames this tragedy on his parents) and thereby demonstrating his manhood. He is "saved" by the National Guard's establishment and, donning that uniform becomes, in his mind, a symbol of America and white supremacy (425-6). In Faulkner's scheme, Grimm is entirely shaped by the time of his birth and the beliefs of his culture. Volpe explains the cycle which makes the victim a victimizer:

Grimm is a volitionless victim of a racist concept. The fear and guilt of his society, which initially produced the concept, are reinforced by his act, and the concept will be imposed, during childhood, upon the heirs of the executioners and make these victims, in their turn, executioners. (173)

Hightower's final vision of Christmas's and Grimm's faces blending into each other drives home Faulkner's point (466).

Several critics have been quick to point out that Faulkner's novel cannot accurately be viewed as Naturalistic because the forces which act on his characters are not scientific and biological forces. In The Myth of Southern History, for example, F. Garvin Davenport, Jr., holds that Faulkner's determinant is "the force of history and not

the force of glands and hostile universes" (118). And in Free Will and Determinism in American Literature, Westbrook says that the characters' "bondage will not seem so great as that presented in a strictly [N]aturalistic novel where the characters are the playthings of environment and biochemistry"; ultimately, he concludes, Faulkner's determinism "squares more closely with Calvinism than with [N]aturalism" (178).

While Westbrook is, of course, right that Faulkner's determinism is more Calvinistic than Naturalistic, two responses to his and Davenport's contentions are necessary. First, Davenport's contention that biological forces do not influence the characters is an overstatement. Faulkner is very much interested in the clash between Joe Christmas's human and more primitive tendencies, as the toothpaste scene makes clear: "Even at five, [Joe] knew that he must not take more than [a single mouthful]. Perhaps it was the animal warning him that more would make him sick; perhaps the human being warning him that if he took more than that, she would miss it"; despite these warnings, the boy continues to eat "worms" of paste, until he vomits (113-4). The orphanage itself is described as "enclosed by a ten-foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo" populated by children who chatter "sparrowlike" (111). And certainly Faulkner is interested in the

animalistic dimensions of Joanna Burden's newly awakened sexuality; often, arriving for a sexual rendezvous, Joe actually "hunts" Joanna:

sometimes he would have to seek her about the dark house until he found her, hidden, in closets, in empty rooms, waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats. Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbon upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania . . . . She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: Negro! Negro! Negro! (245).

As Blotner notes, in both Light and August and Sanctuary, Faulkner is interested in "the psychopathology of sex" (761).

A second response to Davenport's and Westbrook's contentions that Faulkner's determinants are not strictly biological or Darwinistic would be that Naturalism has never concerned itself purely with biological causes. Rather, it has concerned itself, following a Darwinian model, with the environment of man; that environment might present biological determinants, but it might just as easily present economic or social ones. Even in the work of the early Naturalists who emphasized the biological determinants most heavily--Zola and Norris--the economic and social determinants are always present. Faulkner's recurring use of "the Player" who moves Percy Grimm and Joe Christmas

around like chessmen (an analogy also present in Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt) during the pursuit sequence late in the novel makes clear that the novelist saw man as characterized by an essential lack of freedom. His determinism may begin with different causes, but it ends with the same effect.

The indictment of society characteristic of Naturalism is also present in Light in August. Irving Howe observes that in "Percy Grimm, the small-town boy who has absorbed sadism from the very air, Faulkner gives form to his pained awareness that a society of inequality can lead only to abuse of status and arbitrary violence" (Faulkner 126). Richard Church calls the novel "a great book" which "burns throughout with a fierce indignation against cruelty, stupidity, and prejudice" (qtd. in Millgate, Intro. 16). Millgate notes that the "social sweep" of Light in August has often earned Faulkner comparison with Charles Dickens ("Novel" 48) and theorizes that British reviewers of the novel were more positive than American ones (who sometimes found the various plots disconnected) because non-Americans "did not need to confront so directly the bleakness of the novel's social and political implications" (Intro. 17). Several critics, foremost among them Cleanth Brooks, Olga Vickery, and André Bleikasten, have explored the phenomenon of isolation in the novel--noting the social disruption that can result when an individual's values

clash with those of his or her society. Brooks points out that nearly all the characters in the novel "are outcasts . . . pariahs, defiant exiles, withdrawn quietists, or simply strangers" ("Pariah" 55). Thus, as Dreiser portrays a young man who is destroyed by his attempt to conform to his society's values, Faulkner illustrates case histories of those who deviate from the community; in both cases, the sheer force of society can crush the individual. And although it is deeply grounded in the Southern experience, dealing with what Millgate calls "the South as a conditioning environment" (Social 205), the novel also seems to have achieved the universal level, become "widely regarded as a fable of the modern predicament" (Millgate, Intro. 5), examining what Volpe terms "the crippling clutch of abstract concepts upon the mind and soul of the human being . . . the effect of any absolutist view that makes the human being its servant and victim" (173).

Asked by a local reporter why he didn't seem very "excited" about winning the Nobel Prize, William Faulkner replied, "Well, . . . they gave it to Sinclair Lewis and Old China Hand [Pearl] Buck, and they passed over Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson" (Blotner 1342). He later said that the award was "a recognition of all the writers of [his] time--Dos Passos, Hemingway, Dreiser, and Anderson"

(Blotner 1351). In that statement, Faulkner aligns himself with American writers who were continuing (at least in some respects) the tradition of Naturalism. His subscription to a deterministic philosophy, his employment of characters from what Cleanth Brooks calls "the ranks of the plain folk" (Yoknapatawpha 47), and his insistence that the culture he inhabited was seriously flawed all justify his own place in that tradition and Donald Pizer's comment that "the Faulkner of the 1930s can be plausibly viewed as a Southern exponent of several major [N]aturalistic qualities" (Twentieth 86).

Placing Native Son in the tradition of the homicide novel requires little more than a bibliography, one which will reveal much that is expected and a few surprises. Among the thirty-one reviews of the novel collected in Richard Wright: The Critical Reception (ed. Reilly), eleven critics compare Native Son to An American Tragedy, ten to The Grapes of Wrath, and eight to Crime and Punishment. Two recent doctoral dissertations trace the impact on Wright of Naturalists earlier than and contemporaneous with him: in "Richard Wright's Use of His Reading of Fiction," Susan McBride describes Wright's interest in Dreiser, Farrell, and Hemingway, and, in "The Influences of Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and James T. Farrell [on Wright]," Alvin

Starr traces the influence of those writers. Tony Magistrale's "From St. Petersburg to Chicago: Wright's Crime and Punishment" describes parallels between Native Son and Dostoevsky's best-known novel. Michael Francis Lynch, in "Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Dostoevsky: The Choice of Individual Freedom and Dignity," examines the concept of free will in the work of those writers, and Horst-Jurgen Gerigk, in "Culpabilité et liberté: Dostoevskij, Dreiser et Richard Wright," discusses the interrelatedness of freedom and guilt, especially in Crime and Punishment, An American Tragedy, and Native Son.

The strong critical alignment of Wright's novel with Steinbeck's work, particularly with The Grapes of Wrath, might seem more disproportionate today than it would have in 1940. Because of the stature which the passage of time has accorded other writers working in the 1930s (Faulkner and Hemingway, for example), Steinbeck's importance to his contemporaries can be underestimated. If the proletarian or protest novel was the dominant mode of the decade, then certainly The Grapes of Wrath must be considered among its foremost manifestations. In his introduction to Images of the Negro in American Literature, Seymour Gross calls Native Son "the culmination of the protest tradition . . . and its finest example" (18). Although one might quibble over the superlative, it is

logical, as Gross maintains, that the "proletarian ideology" of the thirties writers would eventually find fodder in "the image of the Negro, [as] he was clearly the most dislocated and deprived figure on the American economic landscape" (16). Hakutani argues that Native Son, Grapes, and Of Mice and Men are informed by the same concept of sacrifice, that "Bigger sacrifices himself to gain a new vision of moral and social justice" just as George "sacrifices" Lenny and Tom Joad "sacrifices" his family ("Richard" 224). In The New Republic, Malcolm Cowley called Native Son "the most impressive American novel I have read since The Grapes of Wrath" (which had won the previous year's Pulitzer Prize, 67), and Lewis Gannett called the book "The Grapes of Wrath of 1940" (42).

Perhaps the only aspect of the early reviews more surprising than the large number of critics who see Wright's novel as the direct descendent of Steinbeck's is the virtual omission of comparisons with Faulkner, and specifically with Light in August. But subsequent critics have not ignored the similarities, perhaps the most thorough treatment of which comes in Walter Taylor's "How to Visit the Black South without Visiting Blacks" (from Faulkner's Search for a South). Taylor argues that Wright's and Faulkner's novels might be perceived as the same problem in two different manifestations; "[n]ine years before Wright

showed what his transplanted South had done to Bigger," Taylor maintains, "Faulkner . . . visit[ed] a South that sounded remarkably like the one Wright had escaped" (66). Hakutani point out that Bigger, like Joe Christmas, achieves identity through the act of murder (219) and that Wright, like both Faulkner and Steinbeck, tends to be highly symbolic ("Richard" 221). Connections between Faulkner and Wright are also the subject of two doctoral dissertations: in "The Quest for Identity in Modern Southern Fiction: Faulkner, Wright, O'Connor, Warren," Tony Magistrale explores the use of the quest motif in works by those authors, and Sybil J. Dunbar, in "William Faulkner and Richard Wright: Two Perspectives of the South, the Female as a Focal Point," discusses the degree to which Faulkner and Wright hold Old-South attitudes about women. And in "Domestic Prey: Richard Wright's Parody of the Hunt Tradition in 'The Man Who Was Almost a Man,'" John E. Loftis compares Wright's short story to Faulkner's "The Old People." The Taylor essay remains the only source that focuses on a comparison of Native Son and Light in August.

A reasonable proposition concerning the absence of references to Light in August in early criticism of Native Son is that Wright was not really under Faulkner's influence at the time. Because the reading program upon which Wright

embarked in the late 1920s was based almost exclusively on the mention of writers in H.L. Mencken's essays (Black Boy 268-74), Wright tended to read the writers whom Mencken admired and had encouraged--the earlier Naturalists and European and Russian novelists whom he mentioned in Black Boy. He did not add Faulkner to his reading list until the mid-thirties (Gayle 77). As Wright was working on Native Son as early as 1935 (Kinnamon 4), one might plausibly argue that whatever similarities exist between Light in August and Native Son resulted from their authors' responding to the same social environment rather than the influence of Faulkner on Wright. Faulkner's awareness of Wright's achievement is much clearer; he said that Bigger Thomas's story moved him "powerfully" and that "the man who wrote Native Son is potentially an artist" (qtd. in Blotner 1190). His congratulatory letter to Wright implies that he recognized their common Naturalistic purpose: "I think you will agree that the good lasting stuff comes out of one individual's imagination and sensitivity to and comprehension of the suffering of Everyman, Anyman" (qtd. in Blotner 1190-91). Five years later, Faulkner also sent Wright a note praising Black Boy (Gayle 176).

In his own accounts of his literary influences, Wright aligned himself firmly with the Naturalists. In his description in Black Boy of using a white friend's library

card and a forged note to borrow books from a Memphis library, Wright lists the many literary acquaintances he subsequently made, at least a third of them Naturalists or writers who felt a strong Naturalistic influence: Anderson, Dostoevsky, Moore, Tolstoy, Hardy, Crane, Zola, Norris, Ibsen, Balzac, Turgenev, Dreiser (272). He was especially drawn to Dreiser:

I read Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt and Sister Carrie and they revived in me a vivid sense of my mother's suffering; I was overwhelmed. I grew silent, wondering about the life around me. It would have been impossible for me to have told anyone what I derived from these novels, for it was nothing less than a sense of life itself. All my life had shaped me for the realism, the [N]aturalism of the modern novel, and I could not read enough of them. (274)

Yoshinobu Hakutani points out in "Richard Wright and American Naturalism" that while Wright does not distinguish here between realism and Naturalism, it is clearly the idea of suffering, a concept at the heart of the Naturalistic orientation, that he is drawn to (217), as Faulkner suspected.

Although Wright acknowledged the effect upon him of Dreiser's earlier novels, An American Tragedy has spawned the bulk of the comparisons between the two men. In The New York Times Book Review, Peter Monroe Jack hailed Wright's novel as "the Negro 'American Tragedy'" (53), and Clifton Fadiman, reviewing for The New Yorker, declared that Native

Son "does for the Negro what Theodore Dreiser in An American Tragedy did a decade and a half ago for the bewildered, inarticulate American white" (48). Fadiman said the two novels are alike "in theme, in technique, in their almost paralyzing effect on the reader, and in the large, brooding humanity . . . that informs them both" (48-9). Edward Skillin, Jr., commented in his review of Native Son that Wright succeeds "in making environment the principal villain in this new American Tragedy" (62). Irving Howe discusses Max's final speech to the jury as "a device apparently borrowed from Dreiser" ("Black Boys" 9). John P. McWilliams, Jr., discusses the long trial sections in both An American Tragedy and Native Son in "Innocent Criminal or Criminal Innocence: The Trial in American Fiction." Barbara Foley takes a predominantly rhetorical approach in "The Politics of Poetics: Ideology and Narrative Form in An American Tragedy and Native Son." Blyden Jackson says that Wright shares not only Dreiser's vision but also his most noted flaw: "[Wright] was . . . another Dreiser with an elevated mission and a hopelessly flatulent prose style" (445), a shared weakness which Richard Lehan also mentions in Dreiser and the Hostile Critics. And Harold Bloom says that Bigger Thomas "can be apprehended only as we apprehend Dreiser's Clyde and Carrie, which is under the sign of suffering. . . . there is something maternal

in Wright's stance towards Bigger, even as there [is] in Dreiser's towards Clyde or Carrie" (Bigger 1). Bloom declares Wright "[a] legitimate son of Theodore Dreiser" (Bigger 3).

Wright's description of his method for Native Son places him squarely in the Naturalistic tradition. His comments in "How Bigger Was Born" about the approach he planned to take could (except for the mention of Bigger) have been lifted directly from the pages of Zola's "Le roman expérimental":

why should I not try to work out on paper the problem of what will happen to Bigger? Why should I not, like a scientist in a laboratory, use my imagination and invest test-tube situations, place Bigger in them, and, following the guidance of my own hopes and fears, what I had learned and remembered, work out in fictional form an emotional statement and resolution of this problem?" (33)

Just how familiar Wright was with the work of the French Naturalists is unclear; the American writer mentions Zola in Black Boy, but he is recalling a list from Mencken's A Book of Prefaces of names which, at the time, he didn't even know how to pronounce (272). Although neither McBride nor Starr discusses Wright's familiarity with Zola, Robert James Butler, in "Wright's Native Son and Two Novels by Zola," points out striking similarities between the American work and Zola's Thérèse Raquin and La Bête Humaine. Houston Baker has also noted this connection in Long Black Song.

Whatever Wright's familiarity with Zola's work, he was obviously familiar with the Frenchman's aims.

In "Richard Wright and American Naturalism," Hakutani points out that Wright's novel Lawd Today (published posthumously in 1963 but written before Native Son) also bears the Naturalistic stamp. That novel, which might be called One Day in the Life of Jake Jackson, follows Jackson through one day in his life as a postal clerk whose diversions from the monotony of mail-sorting are alcohol, gambling, abusing his wife, and bemoaning his lot with equally unhappy friends. The Jacksons might live next door or upstairs in Maggie Johnson's family's tenement or be the several-generations-removed descendants of the Rougon-Macquarts. The "today" of the novel is Abraham Lincoln's birthday, and Jake must plod through his day, feeling enslaved by his race and the economic conditions of the Depression, bombarded by commemorations of the "Great Emancipator." Lawd Today and Native Son, Wright's first two novels, justify Blyden Jackson's comment that Wright

cut his writer's teeth on [N]aturalism, and much of the reason that most black writers for more than twenty years seemed decidedly more akin to Frank Norris than to Henry James may be discovered in the simple circumstance that Wright was similarly so akin. (447-8)

Foremost among Wright's goals for Native Son as he describes them in "How Bigger Was Born" was the necessity

of making his protagonist "authentic . . . true" (33, 34; emphasis Wright's). He agonized over Bigger's characterization: if Bigger seemed too ruthless, he would reinforce white readers' stereotypes; if he were idealized, he would lack verisimilitude. In the end, Wright felt that he was "hunting on the trail of more exciting and thrilling game . . . a breathing symbol draped out in the guise of the only form of life my native land had allowed me to know intimately, that is, the ghetto life of the American Negro" (34-5). He began to write, determined "to tell the truth as [he] saw it and felt it" (40).

Initially, as his model for Bigger, he had in mind not one person but several; Bigger's birth, he said, had its genesis in his childhood, "and there was not just one Bigger, but many of them" (24). In "How Bigger Was Born," Wright describes five prototypes ("Bigger No. 1, Bigger No. 2 . . .") for his character. What they all had in common was a spirit of defiance; the "Bigger Thomases," Wright says, "were the only Negroes I know of who consistently violated the Jim Crow laws of the South and got away with it, at least for a sweet brief spell. Eventually, the whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price" (26). Wright also attributed Bigger's "authenticity" to his work at the South Side Boys' Club in Chicago, "an institution which tried to reclaim the

thousands of Negro Bigger Thomases from the dives and alleys . . . in order that [they] might not roam the streets and harm the valuable white property" ("Bigger" 31). The Boys' Club's "distraction" for Bigger basically consisted of ping pong and checkers, and Wright was so horrified at the notion that recreation could cure social ills that he quit ("Bigger" 37).

For nearly three years, Wright worked toward creating a composite of the "Biggers" he had known in Mississippi and Chicago. Then, in May 1938, in testament to Bigger's verisimilitude, Wright found the character he was shaping fully formed in the Chicago papers. Robert Nixon and Earl Hicks, both young, illiterate black men, were charged with the rape and murder of a white woman, Florence Johnson, whose head had been smashed, apparently with a brick (the same weapon with which Bigger would murder his girlfriend Bessie; Native Son, 222-23). Very early, the case focused on Nixon, who, under duress, confessed to several other crimes with which he apparently was unconnected; this prefigures Bigger's being grilled about other crimes in Chicago and Los Angeles. Whether Nixon was guilty of Johnson's murder is not clear; Wright's discussion in "How Bigger Was Born" suggests that he thought Nixon a symbol of the hysteria which threatened all young black men (38).

Wright, living in Brooklyn at the time of Nixon's

arrest, sent two airmail special delivery letters to his friend Margaret Walker (subsequently Alexander) in Chicago requesting that she send him clippings about the case. Walker later recalled that she sent enough clippings for Wright to cover the floor of his nine-by-twelve-foot bedroom and that "he was using them in the same way Dreiser had done in [An] American Tragedy. He would spread them all out and read them over and over again and then take off from there in his own imagination" (Alexander 60). Of particular significance in the press accounts was the "openly racist" Tribune's description of Robert Nixon in an article headlined "Brick Slayer Likened to Jungle Beast":

civilization has left Nixon practically untouched. His hunched shoulders and long, sinewy arms that dangle almost to his knees; his outthrust head and catlike tread all suggest the animal. . . . He is very black--almost pure Negro. His physical characteristics suggest an earlier link in the species. (Leavelle; qtd. in Kinnamon 5)

The Tribune reporter went on to compare Nixon to the ape murderer of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Kinnamon 5). Leavelle's "Brick Slayer" story and many others like it are reprinted, some verbatim, in Native Son (the excerpt above appears with minor changes on page 260). Wright acknowledged in "How Bigger Was Born" that "[m]any of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in Native Son are but fictionalized versions

of the Robert Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the Chicago Tribune" (38).

Wright's autobiographical Black Boy suggests a second source which he might have had in mind as a model for Bigger's accidental killing of Mary Dalton. When Wright was nine, he and his mother and siblings lived with his Aunt Maggie, who was regularly visited late at night by a mysterious "uncle." Soon young Richard is told that white people are looking for "uncle," that, if asked, he is to say that "uncle" isn't there, and that he can't know any more. Finally, Aunt Maggie and "uncle" leave in the middle of the night, for reasons clarified in his conversation with Maggie and Bigger's mother:

. . . "you've done something terrible," Aunt Maggie said. "Or you wouldn't be running like this."

The house is on fire," 'uncle' said. "And when they see it, they'll know who did it."

"Did you set the house afire?" my mother asked.

"There was nothing else to do," 'uncle' said impatiently. "I took the money. I had hit her. She was unconscious. If they found her, she'd tell. I'd be lost. So I set the fire."

"But she'll burn up," Aunt Maggie said. . . .

"What could I do?" 'uncle' asked. "I had to do it. I couldn't just leave her there and let somebody find her. They'd know somebody hit her. But if she burns, nobody'll ever know." (76-77)

For a reader familiar with Native Son, Aunt Maggie's fussing with her trunk brings to mind the scene in Native Son in which Bigger conceals Mary Dalton's body in her own half-packed trunk (NS 87). Wright must have recalled

"uncle"'s rationalization that "if she burns, nobody'll ever know" when writing Bigger's realization, "[h]e would burn her! That was the safest thing of all to do" (89).

Like his Naturalistic predecessors Dreiser, Norris, and Crane, Wright also took pains to assure the authenticity of his locale. In November of 1938, he traveled to Chicago with a typed list of goals, all aimed at matching his novel to the city terrain. His agenda, now contained in the Wright Archives at Yale, is reprinted by Kinnamon; it includes selecting sites for many landmarks, most notably the Dalton home, an "empty house for Bigger's murder of Bessie," and Bigger's home; tracing Bigger's flight through the forty-third to thirty-ninth blocks of Indiana Avenue; obtaining copies of official documents from the Nixon case, such as the indictments and the inquest return verdict; and visiting the Cook County jail, the courtroom where Robert Nixon had been tried, the death house at the Statesville penitentiary, and, if possible, Nixon himself, who was awaiting execution. Two additional agenda items reveal Wright's interest in perhaps the most notorious Chicago homicide: he planned to check local libraries for accounts of the Leopold-Loeb case and to find the homes of Nathan Leopold, Richard Loeb, and Bobby Franks (Kinnamon 28). In July 1924, Leopold and Loeb had been convicted of murdering fourteen-year-old Franks, their motive osten-

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sibly intellectual--to see if they could get away with it. Wright's curiosity about the Leopold-Loeb material strongly suggests an awareness that he was working in a tradition. Kinnamon says Wright's itinerary for the Chicago trip reveals "how thorough and meticulous [he] was in accumulating [N]aturalistic details to insure the verisimilitude of his Chicago setting" (6).

Although the Nixon case helped Wright with what Hakutani has called "documentary detail characteristic of a [N]aturalistic style" ("Richard" 222), his own experience in the racial climate of the South made the plot almost intuitive. He wrote, "[n]ever for a second was I in doubt as to what kind of social reality or dramatic situation I'd put Bigger in, what kind of test-tube life I'd set up to evoke his deepest reactions. Life had made the plot over and over again, to the extent that I knew it by heart" ("Bigger" 38). The pervasiveness of the scenario he planned to describe caused Wright to feel an inevitability about Bigger's fate which permeates the novel. He began writing, Wright said, and "the plot fell out" ("Bigger" 38). The story of Bigger's crime and punishment was so well established in its author's mind that he wrote the 576-page first draft in four months ("Bigger" 40).

The rat scene which opens Native Son establishes the deterministic environment which will characterize the novel.

Wright intended to establish immediately "the motif of the entire scheme of the book, that would sound, in varied form, the note that was to be resounded throughout its length" ("Bigger" 39). Clearly, that note is entrapment and violence. The rat, trapped in the Thomas's flat with its escape hole covered and Bigger and Buddy in conspiracy against it, does not have a chance. Guided purely by instinct, it can only stand on its back legs and utter a defiant shriek. Undaunted by the rat's helplessness, the Thomas family perceives it as the aggressor; Bigger's mother, for example, is convinced that the rat has the volition to sneak in while they sleep and cut their throats. The point, of course, is that the Thomas family are to the rat as white society will be to Bigger when he becomes the prey. Just as the rat grabs instinctively at Bigger's pants leg in panic, so Bigger will kill Mary and then Bessie to avoid the "justice" of a society which perceives him as vermin. Robert Butler says in "The Function of Violence in Richard Wright's Native Son" that "society does to [Bigger] precisely what he did to Mary and Bessie"--and to the rat--"it kills him, partly out of fear and partly out of hatred" (19).

Bigger Thomas is trapped within the narrow range of possibilities that a predominantly white power structure allowed young, illiterate black men in the 1930s. He takes

his job with the Dalton family because he has no choice--otherwise, the family's "relief" will be cut off (12). He places the pillow over Mary Dalton's face because he does not see any other way out of being caught in her room by her parents--and as Wright testifies in "How Bigger Was Born," young black men had been convicted of rape and hanged on much weaker evidence. Bigger's actions throughout the death scene are instinctual, motivated entirely by fear. Her mother is in the room? Thank goodness Mrs. Dalton is blind. Is Mary beginning to mumble? Put a pillow over her face . . . . He never dreamed Mary would suffocate and is surprised when he learns that she has (84-6). Cutting off Mary's head and putting her corpse into the basement furnace are loathsome tasks for Bigger, but again, he sees no other option. As soon as he realizes Mary is dead, he begins to think of himself as prey:

The reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place. She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman. He had to get away . . . .

In the darkness his fear made live in him an element which he reckoned with as "them." He had to construct a case for "them." (86-87)

Having in mind Roberta Alden's drowning in An American Tragedy, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., calls Mary Dalton's death "Dreiserian, determined by Bigger's social conditioning and the terrible pressure of the moment" (134).

Again, in his rape and murder of Bessie, Bigger is presented as acting on impulse and instinct. When Bessie begs him not to rape her, "he paid her no heed. The loud demand of the tensivity of his own body was a voice that drowned out hers." He feels as if he were "on some vast turning wheel that made him want to turn faster and faster . . . conscious of nothing now but of her and what he wanted" (219). He tells himself that "[h]e had to now. Imperiously driven, he rode roughshod over her whimpering protests, feeling acutely sorry for her as he galloped a frenzied horse down a steep hill in the face of a resisting wind" which "became so strong that it lifted him high in the dark air, turning him, twisting him, hurling him" (219-20). Before Bessie's murder, he again realizes his entrapment: "What about Bessie? He could not take her with him and he could not leave her behind." And the fact which seals her doom--that he has confessed to her--Bigger also blames on her: "It would have been much better if he had not said anything to Bessie about the murder. Well, it was her own fault. She had bothered him so much that he had had to tell her" (220). Even his choice of a weapon is presented in deterministic terms: his gun would make noise and draw attention, so "[h]e would have to use a brick" (221). Still, Bigger struggles until he convinces himself that he is in a corner; three times in

the next two paragraphs, he reminds himself that "[h]e could not take her and he could not leave her." The third time, he adds, "[i]t was his life against hers" (221-2). Even the book's section titles, "Fear," "Flight," and "Fate," suggest that Bigger is a creature of instincts and impulses controlled by external forces.

The deterministic aspect of the novel has been uniformly recognized by critics. For example, Harold Bloom has commented on the novel's "rhetorical pathos of terror" which "seems to overdetermine all of [Bigger's] actions" (Bigger xv). In "Richard Wright and Native Son: Not Guilty," Dorothy S. Redden argues that while Bigger may feel that he makes choices, his choices are determined by the culture of which he is a product and that "accountable" might be a better word for him than "guilty" (80-81). In his essay comparing Native Son and Crime and Punishment, Tony Magistrale maintains that a central difference between Raskolnikov and Bigger Thomas is that Bigger lacks control over his fate, while Raskolnikov does not. Skerrett says that Bigger is "[t]rapped by the economics of the Depression and the resultant intensification of racial prejudice and discrimination" (129). James Baldwin has called the novel "the story of an unremarkable youth in battle with the force of circumstance," adding that, in Bigger's case, "the force

of circumstance is not poverty merely but color, a circumstance which cannot be overcome" ("Thousands" 240).

A rather common position in Native Son criticism is that through Mary Dalton's death, Bigger breaks out of his deterministic lock-step and ceases to apprehend the world merely intuitively. Hakutani articulates the argument in his comment that "in rebelling [Bigger] leaps from determinism to freedom," that he "triumphs" over the society which produced him by disregarding the "rules" ("Richard" 220, 223). Bloom calls this the novel's "Dostoevskian aspect, in which murder is the mode of creativity" (Bigger xv). The argument largely stems from Bigger's insistence in the novel's conclusion that Mary's death prodded his awakening: "What I killed for must've been good! . . . When a man kills, it's for something. . . . I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em" (392). Bigger undeniably undergoes a transformation by virtue of Mary's death, thereafter demonstrating a broader awareness of events in the world around him (such as revolutions in China and the U.S.S.R.) and a greater capacity for introspection (as his conversations with his attorney Max demonstrate); in this respect, the comparisons with Raskolnikov are valid.

But it is a stretch to imply that Bigger becomes a free agent. After Mary's death, Bigger is still at the

mercy of his own fear, as his killing of Bessie reveals, and he is still at the mercy of society, as the newspaper articles and jeering crowds make clear. In a sense, Bigger at the end of the novel is more trapped than ever--literally in a cage, with no way out save the electric chair. He may feel more "alive," but he is no more free.

A final dimension of Bigger's entrapment is his isolation. "Half the time," Bigger says, "I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knothole in the fence" (23). Wright said that a significant experience in his preparation for Native Son was reading in a magazine about Gorky and Lenin, in exile, touring London, with Lenin pointing out the landmarks: "'Here is their Big Ben.' There is their Westminster Abbey.' 'There is their library'" ("Bigger" 30; emphasis Wright's). This clarified for Wright what he came to call "the Bigger Thomas reaction"--the notion that everything in the world is "theirs," not ours ("Bigger" 30). And while Bigger may participate in "their" world only with "their" permission (as when Mary and Jan invite him along on their outing), "they" may poke their noses into his whenever "they" choose.

True to the Naturalistic tradition, Richard Wright ultimately indicts society for Bigger Thomas's exclusion and its consequences. Wright points to two specific factors which caused Bigger to "revolt":

First, through some quirk of circumstance, he had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life. ("Bigger" 27).

In the first respect, he is Joe Christmas; in the second, he is Clyde Griffiths; in both, he is more acted on than acting. Wright says in his comments on the novel that Bigger "hover[s] unwanted between two worlds--between powerful America and his own stunted place in life" and that the novel attempts to present the "No Man's Land" where Bigger winds up. Like Clyde Griffiths, he drifts between where he came from and a place he can never get to, for which his culture has nevertheless taught him to aspire. He is, in James Baldwin's words, "a monster created by the American republic" ("Thousands" 240).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Native Son is Wright's avoidance of reductive stereotyping, so that the characters avoid pure victim or villain status. Not a single black woman is presented as wholly good, and the Daltons, the embodiments of the white establishment, are, at worst, "blind" to the real desperation of young men like Bigger. In a novel very much about the oppression of black Americans by white Americans, the most redeeming character is a white man, Max, who, in his impassioned plea for Bigger's life, puts society itself on trial.

Wright said that in Native Son, he wanted to write a novel which readers "would have to face . . . without the consolation of tears" ("Bigger" 37), i.e., without oversimplified reactions. Harold Bloom recommends precisely the kind of novel which Wright wanted to avoid in his argument that the novelist should not have had Bigger kill Bessie because that murder "calls in doubt the novel's apparent outcry against social injustice" (Bigger 2). The implication--that Wright's message would be more effective if Bigger were clearly "more sinned against than sinning"--fails to take into account that Bessie's murder is intended to intensify, not mitigate, Bigger's status as a victim. Like generations of black men before him, he enacts his revenge on a racist society by lashing out at the only person whom it is within his power to victimize--the black woman.

As Irving Howe has argued, Wright's real achievement is the novel's double-barreled approach to racial problems in the United States; it forced white Americans "to recognize [themselves] as the oppressor" while also forcing black Americans "to recognize the cost of [their] submission" ("Black Boys" 7). Wright made clear, Baldwin says, that "the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society" ("Protest" 5)--that the victimizer's abuse of the victim will ultimately have

consequences. Irving Howe has said that "[t]he day Native Son appeared, American culture was changed forever" because the novel "[a]ssaulted the most cherished of American vanities: the hope that the accumulated injustice of the past would bring with it no lasting penalties" ("Black Boys" 7). We want to think that Bigger Thomas is a monster, an alien; we must realize, Wright reminds us, that he is a "native son."

Until very recently, literary critics have treated James M. Cain primarily as a writer whose novels could be characterized by their immense popularity, somewhat explicit (for the 1930s and 40s) sex and violence, and success when translated to motion pictures. This critical tendency is substantiated by both David Madden and Paul Skenazy, authors of the only two full-length critical works on Cain (Madden's in 1970, seven years before Cain's death; Skenazy's in 1989). Skenazy verifies that Cain had traditionally been "treated more often as a cultural phenomenon than as a writer of substance" (ix). For example, in The Novel of Violence in America, F.M. Frohock says that "nothing [Cain] ever wrote was completely outside the category of trash" (13).

To a large extent, Cain suffered from a stereotype--the notion that a writer who enjoys popular success is

undoubtedly not producing works of real literary merit. Three of Cain's novels, The Postman Always Rings Twice, Mildred Pierce, and Serenade, each sold over two million hardcover copies (Madden 121). Postman, whose phenomenal success in 1934 catapulted Cain to international status almost overnight, has undergone numerous printings over the years in at least eighteen languages (Hoopes 248) and remains, according to Madden, "one of America's all-time best-sellers" (121). The degree to which the motion picture industry has embraced Cain's work has also tainted his reputation as a serious writer. Although he was not particularly successful himself as a screenwriter, he enjoyed a long association with Hollywood, including a failed attempt in the 1940s to change the handling of writers' copyrights. At least eighteen films have been based on his novels and stories. Postman alone has spawned six films, including four in Europe, and one of the two American adaptations was produced by a major studio as recently as 1981 (Skenazy 195-96). These circumstances have made it difficult for critics to get past the notion of Cain's novels as, in Edmund Wilson's words, "simply the preliminary design for a movie" (qtd. in Skenazy 137).

The amount of violence and sex in Cain's works has also damaged his reputation, as it has led some critics to view him as a soft pornographer. Madden says that

"reviewers often attack Cain as though he were running for public office and would certainly misguide the multitude if elected" (122). Several of Cain's novels contain murders, including, in both Postman and Double Indemnity, the premeditated murder of a man by his wife and her lover for their own gain. The scene in Postman when, immediately after their murder of Nick Papadakis, his wife Cora and Frank Chambers have sex on the ground outside the wrecked car containing Nick's body, with Chambers (the narrator) declaring, "I had to have her, if I hung for it" (46), epitomizes the sexual content of Cain's works which troubled many readers. Although fairly mild by modern film and literature standards, Postman was not adapted for the screen until the mid-1940s, after the success of the milder Double Indemnity.

The critics' assignment of Cain to the "tough guy" school of writing and, thereby, to the company of writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, in its labeling of him as a genre writer, has also tended to reduce him in stature. Of course, Cain does have much in common with these writers, particularly the gritty realism of his characters and landscapes. But Cain's placement in the "tough guys" camp has largely had the same effect as perceptions of him as commercial or exploitative--it has tended to limit critical approaches to his work.

Most of the criticism about Cain over the past sixty years (excepting reviews) falls neatly into two categories: discussions of the adaptation of Cain's works to film and of those works as examples of the thirties "tough guy" school. Almost entirely ignored is the presence of Naturalistic elements in Cain's work--Postman in particular. Although several writers have passingly mentioned Naturalistic elements, no critic has developed a full-scale argument of the influence. Essentially, The Postman Always Rings Twice provides a kind of transition in homicide novels from the classic explicit Naturalism of Norris and Dreiser to Truman Capote's more implicit, detached style.

The strongest Naturalistic element about Postman is the degree to which the events of the novel are determined. On the most obvious level, what happens to Frank Chambers seems no more than a matter of luck, good and bad. To begin with, the drivers of the hay truck on which Chambers has hitched a ride happen to discover him and throw him off just down the road from Nick and Cora Papadakis's restaurant and "auto court" (motel). From that point (at the end of line one), Cain takes a reader on the roller coaster ride which is Frank and Cora's fortune. Their first attempt to murder Nick effectively illustrates the fragility of their situation. The lovers plan that Cora will hit Nick over the head while he bathes, hold him

underwater until he drowns, and then escape out the bathroom window and down a ladder (so that the locked bathroom door will corroborate their contention that Nick had an accidental fall). Frank, watching from below, will blow the car horn if anyone drives by or pulls in. A cat appears, and Frank is so vexed by it (in fact, calls attention to it as a symbol of bad luck--"A cat was the last thing I wanted to see then. . . . it wasn't anything but a cat, but I didn't want it around that stepladder," 19) that he doesn't notice, in time to blow the horn, the policeman who pulls up. Just as Cora strikes Nick, the cat steps off the ladder and onto the fuse box causing a fuse to blow and the power to go off. Thus, Frank and Cora (and Nick, temporarily) are saved--just when Frank thought they would be caught--by the very embodiment of luck. The image of Frank standing beside the policeman watching the cat and expecting Cora to appear any moment in the bathroom window to announce that Nick is dead comes to be an appropriate symbol for the degree to which he and Cora fail to control their fortunes.

The up-and-down pattern continues, just as unpredictably. After Nick's murder, just when it looks as though the prosecution has frightened Chambers into turning state's witness, Frank's shyster lawyer (whose name, Katz, echoes the luck motif) smooth-talks Nick's

insurance company out of cooperating with the prosecution (arguing that Frank, if granted immunity, will file a whopping lawsuit against Cora for his own injuries). Thus, Frank is taken to Katz's office expecting to learn when Cora will be hanged; he finds instead that she has been freed and awarded ten thousand dollars from Nick's insurance policy. Later, after Frank and Cora re-establish their trust (which his being coerced to testify against her had breached), marry, and declare their commitment to each other and the child Cora is carrying, Cora is killed instantly when Frank slams into a culvert wall while attempting to pass a truck. Throughout the novel, Frank and Cora seem the passive victims of circumstances. Although they think they are "up on a mountain" (85) after Nick's murder, they later realize that the murder bound them inextricably and determined their fate: Frank says, "We're chained to each other, Cora. We thought we were on top of a mountain. That wasn't it. It's on top of us, and that's where it's been ever since that night" (108). The final irony of the novel, that Frank, thinking he has escaped punishment for Nick's murder, must suffer execution for the accident which killed Cora, also reinforces the inescapability of one's fate.

The tone of inevitability in the novel is reinforced by the tempo, what Tom Wolfe has called its "momentum"

or "acceleration" (Introduction v). Frank and Cora meet on page four, have sex for the first time on page eleven, begin planning Nick's murder on page fourteen, attempt it for the first time on page eighteen, and accomplish it on page forty-three. As Skenazy says, by page forty-six (of the paperback), "the lovers' wish has come true" (22). The novel begins in motion, as Frank is thrown from the hay truck, and never slows down. This pace underscores the feeling of things out of control.

That Cain intended the out-of-control theme as central is obvious from his introduction to the novel The Butterfly in 1947, in which he describes the basic Pandora's box plot he often sought to develop. He calls the notion of Pandora's box

a conceit that pleases me, somehow, and often helps in my thinking. I think my stories have some quality of the opening of a forbidden box, and that it is this, rather than violence, sex, or any of the things usually cited by way of explanation, that gives them the drive so often noted. Their appeal is first to the mind, and the reader is carried along . . . by his own realization that the characters cannot have this particular wish and survive. (Madden 61)

Cain's title for the novel also reflects his own perception of Frank Chambers' entrapment. After Alfred Knopf asked Cain to replace the original title, Bar-B-Q, Cain happened to be talking with the playwright Vincent Lawrence about the anxiety of waiting for his first novel

to be accepted. Lawrence described his own experience of waiting for news of his first play's fate, which was to come via mail. When he could no longer stand watching for the mail carrier, he told Cain, he would go out into the backyard, knowing that he would know when the postman came because there was "no fooling about that ring. The son of a bitch always rang twice, so you'd know it was the postman" (qtd. in Hoopes 237-38). Lawrence's comments reminded Cain of the Irish tradition "that the postman must ring twice, and in olden times, knock twice" (Hoopes 238). When he announced that his new title would be The Postman Always Rings Twice, Lawrence observed that "he sure did ring twice for Chambers, didn't he?" and Cain responded "[t]hat's the idea" (Hoopes 237).

But the determinism of Postman is more complicated than simple luck. Without his powerful, animalistic, sexual attraction to Cora, Frank would never have been standing under a window waiting for her to kill Nick. Frohock has said that Chambers' "response to stimuli [is] automatic and completely physical," noting a scene when Frank vomits because he cannot have sex with Cora (19). Frank is rough and forceful with Cora, once drawing blood from a bite on her lip in response to Cora's plea, "Bite me! Bite me!" (11). After Nick's murder, Frank socks Cora in the eye to make her look injured, and this stimulates them both:

I hauled off and hit her in the eye as hard as I could. She went down. She was right down there at my feet, her eyes shining, her breasts trembling, drawn up in tight points, and pointing right up at me. She was down there, and the breath was roaring in the back of my throat like I was some kind of animal, and my tongue was all swelled up in my mouth, and blood pounding in it. . . .

Next thing I knew, I was down there with her, and we were staring in each other's eyes, and locked in each other's arms, and straining to get closer. Hell could have opened for me then, and it wouldn't have made any difference. (46)

Joyce Carol Oates says that Frank and Cora behave "as if the world extends no farther than the radius of one's desire" (111). Skenazy reinforces the connection between Frank and Cora's sexual nature and the inevitability of their destruction in his comment that the two are "entrapped by their circumstances and longings" and "destroyed by the fulfillment of their passion, the limits of their lives, and the horrible demands of fate" (27, 29). And David Fine argues that although the lovers "beat a murder rap . . . [they] are unable to escape each other" (28).

Frank is destroyed, essentially, by his own appetites and impulses. That he is a creature of appetites is verified by his constant mention, in a novel with little extraneous detail, of what he eats. In an opening chapter less than 750 words long, Frank catalogs his first meal at Nick and Cora's, a breakfast consisting of "orange juice, corn flakes, fried eggs and bacon, enchilada, flapjacks, and coffee" (4). In fact, Frank's relationship with Cora

is equated throughout with consumption. They make their sexual overtures in Cora's kitchen. During their first sexual encounter, Frank bites her lip like a starving man suddenly given food. The food motif is as central to this novel as it is to Light in August, although the offering of food stimulates Chambers but repulses Joe Christmas. Madden comments that "Postman is characteristic of many Cain novels in its depiction of sex as enhanced vividly and palpably by the elements of violence, food, [and] drunkenness" (77). Skenazy says that Frank and Cora engage in "a kind of consumerism of each others' bodies," a "cannibalism [which] is a caricature of their culture's materialist hungers" (31). The novel's initial title, Bar-B-Q, suggests that Cain's use of the food motif is deliberate.

Postman is also characteristic of many Naturalistic novels in that Cain uses animal imagery to reflect the beast-like tendencies of the characters. Frank finds Cora in the kitchen the morning after their first sexual encounter "snarling like a cougar" and giving off a particular "smell," like an animal in heat (13). Starting out on the car trip which will culminate in Nick's murder, the trio are delayed by a customer--who "raised rabbits at Encino"--for whom they stage an elaborate argument, as a part of their alibi, about who is too drunk to drive

(40). Singing in the back of the death car, Nick is "pleased as a gorilla that [had] seen his face in the mirror" (43).

Because one of Cain's favorite family excursion destinations upon first moving to Los Angeles was the Goebels Lion Farm (Hoopes 225), it is not surprising that the dominant animal symbol in Postman is the cat. When Cora asks if she looks like "a little white bird" in the uniform Nick makes her wear, Frank replies that she reminds him of a "hellcat," a metaphor she transfers immediately to her desire to be rid of Nick (15). After Frank bashes in his skull with a wrench, Nick crumples on the back seat of the car, "curled . . . like a cat on a sofa" 43). The ladder-climbing cat who foils the first murder attempt is echoed later by the jungle cats of Madge Allen, the woman with whom Frank goes to Mexico when Cora returns to Iowa for her mother's death. Allen raises jaguars and pumas for film work and novelty performers, and later gives Cora a puma kitten (proof to Frank that she has been there), which is, for some reason, dragged into the courtroom during Frank's trial for Cora's death. Allen and Chambers' discussion of the difference between "outlaw" or "jungle" pumas, who are "lunatics" because of "being bred in captivity," and more domestic cats (95) obviously parallels the tension between Frank's brutishness and wanderlust

and Cora's much more civilized ambitions (having an outdoor beer garden with colorful awnings, for example). Skenazy observes that the cats in Postman "suggest the characters' need to choose between the 'road' world with its wildness, abandon, and animality, and the entrepreneurial and domestic life" (28). It is not surprising that one of the titles Cain suggested when Knopf rejected Bar-B-Q was Black Puma (Hoopes 237).

The atmosphere of Postman is also, recognizably, that of the Naturalistic novel. Tom Reck's comment that the main characters are "Anglo-Saxon whites descended from traditions of economic, educational and moral poverty" who lead "a life of misery, drunkenness, adultery, violence, of economic and emotional woe" might just as accurately describe Crane's Maggie (381). Despite the differences between urban New York and rural California, the garbage piles on which Jimmy Johnson conducts his "warfare" in the opening pages of Maggie were not foreign to Cain--at least not according to Raymond Chandler, who vividly describes Cain's fascination with life's dirtier aspects:

James Cain--faugh! Everything he touches smells like a billy goat. . . . Such people are the offal of literature . . . . Hemingway with his eternal sleeping bags got to be pretty damn tiresome, but at least Hemingway sees it all, not just the flies on the garbage can. (qtd. in Skenazy 169)

Madden corroborates that several critics have felt that

Cain "worked a literary lode bordering a trash heap" (123). The commonness of Nick and Cora's place is stressed in Chambers' initial description of it: "a roadside sandwich joint, like a million others in California" (3). These characters live a gritty, tarnished existence. Both Frank and Cora work in an atmosphere of grease--his automobile, hers kitchen--and Nick, whom Frank generally refers to as "the Greek," is repulsive to Cora because he "is greasy and he stinks" (16).

Frank's, Cora's, and Nick's lives are as hopeless as they are squalid. The principles are on the outside of the American dream, peeping in, like Bigger Thomas, "through a knothole in the fence." Cora's Hollywood dream, fueled by her victory in an Iowa high school beauty contest, died when her first screen test made her realize that she came across as "a cheap Des Moines trollop, that had as much chance in pictures as a monkey has" (12). The scale and tawdriness of Nick's dream of being a successful American businessman are aptly indicated by the new neon sign Frank talks him into buying: a red, white, and blue monstrosity bearing the words, "Twin Oaks Tavern, and Eat and Bar-B-Q, and Sanitary Rest Rooms, and N. Papadakis, Prop. . . . It also had a Greek flag and an American flag, and hands shaking hands, and Satisfaction Guaranteed" (10, 12).

Frank Chambers is a creature of impulses and drives rather than dreams. Frank's impulses draw him to Cora and to the open road. Fine has pointed out the appropriateness of the automobile as a symbol for Chambers, who lives in the present, always going or dreaming of going. Skenazy says of Frank that he "has no ambitions because he has never thought that he might achieve anything" (24). While Postman lacks the social indictment of An American Tragedy and McTeague, Cain does, nevertheless, convey a realistic sense of social inequity during tough times; this is clearly the same culture as that of Steinbeck's novels. Skenazy writes that Cain

taps into the frustrated ambition, suppressed anger, and unsatisfied yearnings of masses of struggling people during the Depression years, confronted not only by a hopeless future, but forced to recognize the comparative success and prosperity of others (Katz, Sackett, and the other lawyers, businessmen, and politicians of Cain's novels).

The America of Postman has failed in its promises of opportunity and fulfillment. (23)

That these characters are aware of the contrast between "the American dream" and their reality is made apparent during the murder scene, when Cora tells Nick that she wants to detour along the isolated, precarious Malibu road so that she can see "where the movie stars live" (41).

Because of the economy and objectivity of Cain's style, he is prevented from commenting directly on Frank's plight,

but his comments about the novel clarify that his feelings were sympathetic. In his correspondence with Alfred Knopf, Cain wrote "[s]uperficially, this is a murder story, but basically it is a romantic love story, and if this love story doesn't move, everything goes to pieces" (qtd. in Hoopes 236). His insistence on viewing Postman as a love story stemmed from a conversation with Lawrence in which the playwright pointed out that Dreiser had failed with the play The Hand of the Potter because "it made a plea for a degenerate without ever getting you interested in that degenerate" (Hoopes 232). Lawrence said that with any story, "you had to make the reader or audience care about the people, which inevitably led into a love story" and that "[o]ne of the lovers had to be a losing lover"; otherwise, "[w]hat makes [the reader] want to give a damn about him?" (Hoopes 232). Although much of the early positive response to Postman focused on its style, writers also noted their sympathy for Frank Chambers. Joyce Carol Oates writes that "between Frank Chambers and Meursault [of Camus' The Stranger] one believes ultimately in Frank: he is as probable as the roadside sandwich joint we have all seen. . . . [a]ggressor but really victim" (113).

A final aspect which Postman shares with the Naturalistic homicide novel is its basis in fact. Cain described to his biographer, Roy Hoopes, how he got the

idea for the novel from a gas station he regularly patronized during his drives in the California countryside:

Always this bosomy-looking thing comes out--commonplace, but sexy, the kind you have ideas about. We always talked while she filled up my tank. One day I read in the paper where a woman who runs a filling station knocks off her husband. Can it be this bosomy thing? I go by and sure enough, the place is closed. I inquire. Yes, she's the one--this appetizing but utterly commonplace woman." (225)

Cain also claimed that the Ruth Snyder/Judd Gray case in New York, a high-profile murder trial which, according to Hoopes, "dominated" newspapers in 1927, served as an important source (232). Discussing his plans for the novel with Lawrence, Cain learned of an interesting twist in the Snyder/Gray case: after the lovers had killed Snyder's husband, Snyder had sent Gray off on a train to Syracuse with a bottle of arsenic-laced wine, which, fortunately, he did not open for fear that he would call attention to himself (Hoopes 232-3). Cain realized that the true tension in the story he wanted to tell lay not in the murder but in its aftermath, that, as he told Lawrence, "no two people can share this terrible secret and live on the same earth. They turn against each other, as Judd and Ruth did" (qtd. in Hoopes 233). Thus, Cain conceived the tense scenes in which Frank and Cora ask themselves, "if he (or she) could kill Nick, what's to stop him (or her) from killing me?" They learn, as Sartre's characters conclude in No

Exit, that "[h]ell is--other people!" (816).

Like the early Naturalists, Cain was a journalist by training and loyalty. Despite his success in fiction, he insisted throughout his life that he be described in Who's Who as "a newspaper man" (qtd. in Hoopes 199). He worked for the Baltimore American and Sun, The American Mercury, and the New York World. He even spent a nine-month stint as the twenty-sixth "Jesus" (managing editor of The New Yorker) before he left in frustration over the magazine's eccentricities and Harold Ross. Cain was probably happiest when writing editorials, and he was good at it, as the collection 60 Years of Journalism by James M. Cain, edited by Hoopes, makes clear. The meticulousness of detail which journalism demands carries over to his fiction. He discussed with an insurance agent in California the complicated scheme whereby an insurance company decides not to cooperate in Cora's and Frank's trials; the agent assured him that the scenario was not only plausible but precedented and sent Cain a copy of the California Motor Vehicle Act in which he had highlighted information "that'll make [your book] better" (Hoopes 234).

Cain claimed not to have read the major writers of his time because of what Madden calls a "disinterest in fiction" (113). His close friends, with the exception of Lawrence, were journalists. And yet, his novels are

clearly a product of the same culture as those of the 1930s proletarian novelists. Frohock calls Postman "the ultimate exploitation of the climate of sensibility which also produced the best novels of Faulkner, Hemingway, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Farrell, and Dos Passos" (22) and notes that the novel "followed the lines of an early novel of Zola's called Thérèse Raquin" (16). Madden points out that the novel involves its protagonist in "tangles" similar to those in which Clyde Griffiths struggles (164). In his well-known essay "The Boys in the Back Room," Edmund Wilson also notes the similarity between Postman and An American Tragedy. Wilson says that Cain, like Dreiser,

is particularly ingenious in tracing from their first beginnings the tangles that gradually tighten around the necks of the people involved in those bizarre and brutal crimes that figure in the American papers; and is capable even of tackling . . . the larger tangles of social interest from which these deadly little knots derive. (21)

(Wilson also notes, quite correctly, that Tragedy is a greater novel because it has fewer gimmicks.) Skenazy compares the characters Cain created in the thirties to those of Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway in their "suspicion of the grave pronouncements and reigning ideals of American civilization" (7); he also says that Postman, Mildred Pierce, and Double Indemnity "provide as revealing a rebuke to the Chamber of Commerce image of [California]

as Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath and Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust" (ix). What is striking is that the fiction writers to whom Cain is compared are generally Naturalists or writers whose work felt the Naturalistic influence in the 1930s.

The Naturalistic element has not been ignored by critics. In a discussion of the "undying vitality" of Naturalism in the 1930s and '40s, Frederick J. Hoffman mentions "the contribution made by James Cain to the surface picture of American violence" (Modern 186). Stoddard Martin argues that the "California writers" who are the focus of his book of the same title--London, Steinbeck, Hammett, Cain, and Chandler--"were all firmly based in the Naturalistic mode which Frank Norris had pioneered in before them" (7). In his specific discussion of Cain, Martin holds that in Postman Cain reveals "a Naturalistic distinctness," and that Frank Chambers has a "beach bum mentality" in that "his only intimation of divine power comes not from the law or justice or love even so much as from the waves" (156).

But if Cain shares much of the Naturalistic agenda, he also represents a significant departure. The aspect of Cain's work which received highest praise from critics--his style--is generally recognized as the weakest aspect of the early Naturalists, Dreiser and Norris in

particular. In this respect, particularly in the economy of his works, his closest parallel among the early Naturalists is, again, Crane, who had the most facility with language.

Cain's primary stylistic achievement was the efficiency of his prose. He accomplished this economy primarily by pushing the action forward and resisting the urge to comment on it. In Postman, of course, he has the great advantage of a first-person narrator who is not introspective. Although he was initially uncomfortable with David Madden's term "pure novel," Cain decided after extended correspondence with Madden that this was, in fact, what he wrote. He told Madden that his understanding of the term was a novel "whose point is developed from the narrative itself, rather than from some commentary on the social scene or morality of the characters, or economic or political aesthetic preachment." His goal, he said, was "to let the fable deliver its own 1, 2 & 3" (qtd. in Hoopes 516). Chapter 6 of Madden's book, "Cain and the Pure Novel," makes clear that the restraint Cain described was what the critic had in mind and also that any philosophy which emerges from a Cain novel is disseminated by characters or symbols.

Another important aspect of Cain's detachment is increased reliance on dialogue to carry the narrative.

He eliminated what he called "saying," authorial explanation surrounding dialogue to indicate who is speaking and how, insisting that "If Jake is to warn Harold, 'an ominous glint appearing in his eyes,' it would be a great deal smoother and more entertaining to the reader . . . to slip . . . the right subtle amount of ominous glint in the speech" (qtd. in Hoopes 234). Thus, Cain's prose shares the dramatic style of Hemingway's, containing long passages of dialogue through which the reader moves quickly without narrative interruption. His linguistic refinement is his strong link with the "New" journalists of the 1960s. In the homicide novel tradition, it establishes him as the immediate stylistic progenitor of Truman Capote.

When Meyer Levin's biographer Steven J. Rubin wrote that, after the 1940 publication of Citizens, Levin left behind the writing of social novels, he must have forgotten Levin's Compulsion (1956), a book based on the Leopold-Loeb murder case of 1924. Compulsion is a literary oddity: a novel which borrows the outline, details, and some of the actual reporting (from Levin's own articles) of a real murder case but fictionalizes the names of the participants and employs alternating first- and third-person points of view. Although the book does not fit neatly into the Naturalistic homicide novel tradition, it does fulfill

several of the major requirements.

As Rubin's comment indicates, Levin in the 1930s was working in the proletarian novel tradition. Both The New Bridge (1933) and Citizens (1938) are informed with the concern central to the works of Steinbeck, Farrell, and Dos Passos--that an increasingly capitalistic system was eroding the country's values. The Old Bunch (1937), more a social than a political novel, nevertheless explores the preservation of values within a community. All three novels are "collectivist" works, in which, as Rubin says, "concern for the individual is subordinate to concern for the group as an entity" (36). The community in question in The New Bridge consists of the residents of Joe Joracek's apartment building, who struggle to prevent the eviction of Joe, who is unemployed (although he was a member of the crew which constructed the building). As in Wright's novel Lawd Today, the action of The New Bridge is restricted to one day in Joe's life--that of his threatened eviction. The Old Bunch treats the second-generation Jewish community of Chicago's West Side, an area where Levin himself grew up. The novel is a kind of collage of voices, those of young Jewish boys and girls growing into an awareness of what it means to be Jewish in America. In Levin's epic attempt to use multiple perspectives "to encompass an entire social system," The Old Bunch resembles Dos Passos' U.S.A.,

says Rubin. He also argues at length that the novel has a distinctly Naturalistic orientation, based largely on the meticulousness of Levin's cultural details and the focus on individuals who are "overwhelmed by the forces of environment and the grinding weight of a capitalistic economy" (38).

Before Compulsion, Levin also made two attempts at writing novels which were virtually "documentary" (Rubin 87). Reporter (1929), based on Levin's experience on the Chicago Daily News in the mid-1920s, was aesthetically undistinguished but significant (especially as predecessor to Compulsion) because of Levin's aim, which, he wrote in his autobiography, concerned

the relationship of printed news--the appearance of things--to the reality of events. This was not so much a search for the "news behind the news" as a wish to somehow render the fluidity of experience that became lost in the arid little paragraphs of newspaper stories. It seemed to me that if I could put down precisely what happened, down to the most trivial of events, I would inevitably capture reality. (In Search 28)

Levin wanted to achieve what David Madden, in Proletarian Writers of the Thirties, calls "higher journalism," reporting that would transcend the factual accounts of daily newspapers to get at a higher truth. Levin's fidelity to the truth of his own experience is perhaps best indicated by the fact that Reporter was withdrawn just a few months

after publication, after a local newspaperwoman recognized herself clearly enough to threaten a libel suit ("Levin" 282).

Levin's second attempt at the documentary mode was Citizens, an account of the Memorial Day 1937 confrontation between members of a local steelworkers' union and the Chicago police. Ten workers were killed in the melee; they are represented in Levin's novel as biographies interrupting the narrative, functioning much like the biographies in U.S.A.. Levin's research for Citizens reminds one of Zola's research for the Rougon-Macquart novels, especially Germinal. He spent months studying the workers in the mill environment, dining with them at a local boardinghouse, attending union meetings, and interviewing workers. His goal for the book was not so much to achieve an accurate narrative of the "Memorial Day Massacre" itself but "to understand the meaning of the workers' lives, their relationship to the economic system, and their role in the class struggle . . . taking place in America" (Rubin 54). Thus, Levin aimed to write what might now be called "explanatory journalism" or "feature writing."

In the mid-1940s, discouraged by uneven reviews of his earlier novels and, particularly, by his lawsuit over the rights to a dramatic version of The Diary of Anne Frank

(which he felt, apparently with good reason, had been appropriated from him by playwrights who went on to win every major theatrical award), Levin decided to return to his newspaper days of the 1920s when his publisher reminded him that his Chicago experiences had always prompted his best work (85).

The story of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb's "crime of the century" had stayed with Levin, partially because of his identification with the two murderers. Leopold, Loeb, and Levin were all Jewish (as was the victim, Bobby Franks); the murderers were Levin's age and, like him, were students at the University of Chicago, he as an undergraduate, they in law school. He understood, Levin wrote in his autobiography, Leopold and Loeb's feeling of "being strangers to our parents and our past, unsure of our place in society" (In Search 21). Rubin says that Levin identified with the teen-age murderers' "alienation from their parents, their pathological intellectual curiosities, and their obsessive need for experience" (85). He clearly wanted to cultivate in readers his own understanding of the killers' motives; in his foreword, he defends himself against perceived opposition to exhuming the Leopold-Loeb material, explaining, "I write of it in the hope of applying to it the increase of understanding of such crimes that has come, during these years [since

1924], and in the hope of drawing from it some further increase in our comprehension of human behavior" (ix).

A strong connection between Levin and the earlier Naturalists is the importance of journalism as a training ground for his novels. He followed a noteworthy succession of writers, most notably Theodore Dreiser, through the doors of the Chicago Daily News. Clearly, he saw his position there as a means to a career, not a career in itself; he wrote in his autobiography that in the 1920s,

[o]ne's development as a writer required an apprenticeship on the News. . . . one didn't apply for a newspaper job in order to become a journalist. At least, not on the Chicago Daily News. One applied in order to become an author. (17-18)

Daily News reporters had provided an important clue in the Leopold-Loeb case when they matched a ransom note to documents produced on Nathan Leopold's typewriter by friends who had borrowed it. The reporters subsequently won a Pulitzer Prize for reporting (Rubin 85).

Despite Levin's providing fictional names for the characters, he apparently adheres quite closely to the facts of the actual case. The accuracy of Compulsion is aided by Levin's use of many of his original news stories. He interviewed the families and friends of Leopold, Loeb, and Franks, and, although Richard Loeb had been killed in prison in the 1930s, he received the full cooperation

of Nathan Leopold (Rubin 87-8). The proceedings of Loeb and Leopold's trial closely follow the court records, and attorney "Jonathan Wilk"'s speech is reproduced verbatim. In his Foreword he acknowledges the speech's "real author, Clarence Darrow" (ix).

However, Levin makes no pretense to the sort of accuracy Capote claims in the preface to In Cold Blood. Levin admits in his Foreword that

[s]ome scenes are . . . total interpolations, and some of [the] personages have no correspondence to persons in the case in question. . . .

Though the action is taken from reality, it must be recognized that thoughts and emotions described in the characters come from within the author, as he imagines them to belong to the personages in the case he has chosen. (ix)

Often, though, when Levin leans away from journalistic accuracy, he tends in the direction of the Naturalistic novel. For example, early in Book I, the body of "Paulie Kessler" (Franks) is found stuffed in a drainage pipe in an outlying marsh by a character whose identity is never developed in the original newspaper accounts. In Compulsion, however, this character is Peter Wrotzlas, a steel worker who has fortuitously veered off his usual path to work to run an errand. Wrotzlaw notices a foot sticking out of the pipe and realizes, according to Levin, on an entirely instinctual level, that something is wrong: "It was even said to be providential that Wrotzlaw has

once lived on a farm, for in a submerged way his nature sense knew something strange was there, neither animal nor fish" (22). Because he can detect the unnatural, Wrotzlas is also able to find a stocking and the glasses which will eventually help to convict the killers. Levin's characterization of Wrotzlaw as a person who interacts instinctually with the world is clearly Naturalistic; Wrotzlaw might be McTeague on the way to work.

Levin's treatment of the two main characters, Judd Steiner (Leopold) and Artie Straus (Loeb), is not strictly Naturalistic. The author is clearly interested in the "why" of the case, as his comments in the novel's Foreword confirm. Rubin says, "an understanding of the deviant personalities of the two intellectual criminals themselves" is "essential" to Levin's purpose (89). But if the causes of Judd and Artie's crime can be called deterministic in any sense, it is the determinism of Sigmund Freud--concerned with psychological causes--rather than that of Zola and Norris. It is, also, to some extent, the more sociologically oriented determinism of Dreiser.

The Leopold-Loeb case was "one of the earliest cases in which a psychoanalytical study of the defendants had been attempted" (Rubin 86), and its employment in that case owed largely to the affluence of the Leopold and Loeb families (Richard Loeb's father, for example, was a vice

president of Sears). The psychoanalytical defense is replicated in Levin's novel. The two boys, the narrator/reporter says, "would virtually be taken apart, to see what made them tick" (307). Two psychiatrists, reportedly getting \$1000 a day, interview first family members, then Judd and Artie themselves. Then a third, a man of real professional prominence who has studied in Europe and actually knows Jung and Freud, arrives to synthesize the results. The philosophy of these men is essentially deterministic: they felt that "[t]he entire aim of psychiatry was to unravel the causes of behavior. And if all behavior had a cause, where was guilt?" (342).

The conclusion in each case is that the boy is not in control of his actions yet not insane. The specialists trace the "deviance" of both boys to negative experiences with nannies. Judd's, called Trudy, was "illiterate . . . animalistic, indulgent, teaching him to gratify every selfish desire, walking around slovenly and half naked, even taking him into her bed and initiating him as a child to perversions as well as to normal acts" (330). Trudy and Judd speak entirely in German, and he thinks of her as a "moron" (325). Artie's governess, Miss Newsome, is as conservative as Judd's is permissive; she strenuously encourages his intellectual and moral development--so strenuously that he quickly develops mechanisms of evading

her, such as lying and stealing (330-31). Miss Newsome is particularly "prudish" about sexual matters, and when she refuses to answer nine-year-old "Artie"'s questions about his new brother's birth, he is left confused and resentful (331). The result is that both young men have grown up without an adequate sense of what is morally and sexually acceptable.

The Straus and Steiner family situations are basically the same: both boys are raised in an atmosphere of affluence and parental detachment. A family friend says that Artie's father's is "a man entirely occupied with his affairs. On festive occasions he would put in an appearance, at Artie's birthday parties" (310). Mrs. Straus characterizes her husband as "not a demonstrative man" (312). When young Artie wants to talk to someone about his brother's birth, he reminds himself that "you never ask your father" (331). Mrs. Straus prides herself on being "a new woman, a leader," with "advanced knowledge of child care," but it is clear from her cultural involvements and her leadership of "all sorts of committees for settlement work with children" that she has put the welfare of other children before that of her own (310). During the crucial period of Artie's childhood--the arrival of his brother--he perceives that his mother is too preoccupied with "her adorable new baby that everyone

adores" to talk to him (331). To compensate Artie for their detachment, the Strauses strive to make their home a center of teen-age social activity: "young people were always welcomed . . . and everybody was always going in and out, on the grounds, using the tennis court" (310). What they do not realize is that they are just putting more people between them and their son. The degree of the Strauses' separation from their son is indicated by the mother's attempt to explain to psychiatrists why the family never sought help for Artie when he exhibited symptoms of abnormality: the family "simply hoped [he] would grow out of it, as boys do" (313).

It is revealing that, during the psychiatric interviews, Judd Steiner never mentions his father. Besides the fact that Judah Steiner, Sr., is a person of little consequence to his son, Judd is preoccupied with the memory of his mother, whose inherited kidney disease worsened after Judd's birth and eventually caused her death. His idealization of his mother is clarified in his answer to the psychiatrist's question, "How did you think of your mother?": "I used to picture her as the Madonna. I still do" (321). Fueled largely by Mrs. Steiner's absence, Judah Steiner indulges his son; for example, after Judd is caught without a fishing license and has his expensive equipment confiscated, his father simply buys him more (314). Judah

Steiner's actions are motivated by his belief that "nothing should stand in the way" of a boy as gifted as his son, an attitude which is, unfortunately, conveyed to the boy. And in both families, the nanny, who might be expected to relieve the child's suffering, compounds it.

Each boy also suffered from the suspicion that his family might have been better off without him. Because his mother's nephritis worsened after his birth, Judd blames himself for her death. Even when a psychiatrist reminds him that her condition was inherited, he insists, "I contributed to her death . . . . I often wish I had never been born" (323). Further isolated from his parents by the birth of his brother, Artie tortures himself with a disturbing possibility: "Mumsie and Popsie are having the baby really because they want someone else, not you. Nobody wants you" (331).

Finally, and ironically, both Judd and Artie suffer from a superiority/inferiority paradox. Their considerable affluence has led them to feel an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Their remarkable intelligence also contributes to this problem; Artie was the youngest student ever to enter the University of Chicago, and Judd's intelligence, the psychiatrists learn, exceeds the Stanford-Binet scale's ability to measure it. Thus, when the boys encounter the Nietzschean superman in philosophy class, they convince

themselves that the German philosopher was writing about them. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how Nietzsche's elitist, anti-democratic arguments would have appealed to two young, rich, brilliant boys who had always been told they were exceptional.

The boys' preoccupation with Nietzschean philosophy might seem to obscure a Naturalistic reading of their actions, but it is important to remember that, despite Nietzsche's harsh criticism of evolution theory, the superman concept is entirely consistent with Darwinism. The superman can be viewed as the inevitable victor in the selection process, who survives because of his superiority. The dimensions of that superiority are spelled out by Nietzsche, who maintained, according to Durant, that

in this battle we call life, what we need is not goodness but strength, not humility but pride, not altruism but resolute intelligence; that equality and democracy are against the grain of selection and survival; that not masses but geniuses are the goal of evolution; that not "justice" but power is the arbiter of all differences and all destinies. (301-02)

Subscribing to this philosophy, Judd and Artie convince themselves that committing the "perfect crime"--determining the destiny of another human being and exerting their intelligence and perceived power over the police--would verify that they were supermen.

A final aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy appealed to Judd and Artie--his insistence that "[t]he man who does not wish to be merely one of the mass" should "have a purpose for which [he] will do almost anything except betray a friend," a loyalty which Nietzsche called "the final patent of nobility" (320-21; emphasis Nietzsche's). After compiling their profiles of the killers individually, the psychiatrists conclude that "a good deal can be made out of how these two distorted personalities conjoined, and how each functioned in their union" (329-30). Truman Capote called the fatal combination of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock a folie à deux (madness of two), and the same concept can certainly be applied to Straus and Steiner. Judd says that when he is near Artie, he feels "alive"; he characterizes his relationship with his accomplice as "blind hero worship" (328). As fits the pattern, Artie is more casual about his feelings for Judd but clearly needs the reinforcement of Judd's adoration. Indeed, there is every implication that Artie kills Paulie Kessler to impress his friend. In true Nietzschean form, the moment when Judd realizes that Artie has betrayed him to the police is far worse for him than the murder itself (252).

That both "Artie" and "Judd" were profoundly disturbed is obvious from the crime itself, with its apparent motive of intellectual stimulation. Before the young men have

even been arraigned, family members and attorneys discuss their awareness that the appropriate plea may be insanity, a plea which is not entered because it would send the trial to a jury, which would mean a certain death sentence. With a plea of guilty, on the other hand, the punishment would be set by a judge, who would, presumably, be less vindictive (280). Motivated by their fear that Judd and Artie may be insane and that they will have to say so in court, the psychiatrists hired by the boys' families agonize over whether to proceed with their examinations:

Storrs and Allwin stood as a pair of surgeons might stand in an operating room, staring into an incision that disclosed not only a known cancer, but a number of other dreadful growths. To cut out all of them would mean sure death. Would it not be best then to close the incision quickly? (335-6)

A final word concerning the novel's determinism must be said about the closing argument of defense attorney Jonathan Wilk, the Clarence Darrow stand-in. The speech, reprinted verbatim from court records of the Leopold-Loeb trial (Rubin 91) took two days (four court sessions) to deliver, and Levin's description of it via the novel's narrator can be described as nothing short of laudatory. The narrator calls it the most eagerly anticipated speech "in all courtroom history" (424).

Wilk's speech is rooted in two basic principles: that crime is a disease, and that whether it is caused

by heredity or environment (or both), the individual can do nothing to prevent contracting it. In the course of the speech, Wilk refers repeatedly to his clients as "these two unfortunate boys" who killed Paulie Kessler "because somewhere in the infinite processes that go to the making up of the boy or the man something slipped" (431). His belief that Straus and Steiner are victims of forces beyond their control is verified by his conviction that "any mother might be the mother of Artie Straus, of Judd Steiner" (432) with a son who "must tread the same road in blind childhood that these poor boys have trod" (454).

For the something that "slipped" in Judd and Artie, Wilk indicts (albeit apologetically) heredity, the parents of each boy, and even the University of Chicago, which taught them Nietzsche, for not keeping "a closer watch, if possible, upon the individual" (447). But the central thrust of Wilk's appeal is toward "society," which he blames for its bloodthirstiness, as evidenced in other crimes, in public support for World War I, and, most of all, in its clamoring for the executions of his clients. His indictment of the justice system makes quite clear that, to him, the criminals are merely victims:

Crime has a cause as certainly as disease, and the way to rationally treat any abnormal condition is to remove the cause.

If a doctor were called on to treat typhoid fever he would probably try to find out what kind of water

the patient drank, and clean out the well so that no one else could get typhoid from the same source. But if a lawyer were called on to treat a typhoid patient he would give him thirty days in jail, and then he would think that nobody else would ever dare to drink the impure water. (448-9)

Wilk finally suggests that a death sentence for Artie and Judd would become, in itself, a determinant, a brand which would stigmatize the Straus and Steiner families for generations to come (452).

The concluding section of the novel confirms Rubin's contention that the free will/determinism question is Levin's theme (91); its complexity is illustrated by two stories. The first is of a meeting between the narrator and Willie Weiss, a classmate and friend of Judd and Artie's, at the time of the meeting a prominent Chicago psychologist, who explains Judd's "compulsion" to participate in Paulie Kessler's death as a need to destroy himself, to return to the womb (signified by the burial place, which Judd chose, a cistern filled with water). The point of this story is that Judd does not participate by choice, motivated by his strong attachment to Artie, but that he is compelled to do so. The second story concerns the narrator's World War II experience in Germany, on a platoon with another soldier whom he prevents from raping a girl, recalling Jonathan Wilk's warning that the point of the Straus/Steiner case should be to prevent future

violence. For the narrator, the clarifying of Judd's "compulsion" raises the question of free will: "If something like this [explanation] were valid," he considers, "then we were hopelessly driven, in the grasp of such dreadful forces" (490).

The second story, it seems clear, is intended to answer the narrator's question, for in resisting the pressure he feels to go along with the rape, he feels that he has exercised volition. Yet it is equally apparent that his behavior is influenced by the great speech of Wilk, and the speech's effect on the young man seems to bear out the attorney's conviction that with proper influences, young people can function more successfully than did Artie Straus and Judd Steiner. Thus, while Levin deals with the same question asked by the Naturalists, his answer is ultimately more ambiguous: the individual can, if he is strong and decent enough, exercise free will, but that strength and decency are difficult to achieve, given our environment. The final ambivalence of Levin's position is articulated in his Foreword: "I do not wholly follow the aphorism that to understand all is to forgive all. But surely we all believe in healing, more than in punishment" (x).

Levin's fictionalization of his material makes his book, in some ways, difficult to classify. In his use

of fictional names, he follows in the tradition of the Naturalists, who, even when they were writing about actual cases, never used murderers' real names. Rubin explains that Levin wanted the license which fictional identities would allow him: "[b]y not using the names of those involved in the case, Levin allowed himself the freedom to transcend actual events in order to discover inner feelings and to speculate as to motivations" (89). Thus, Levin sought to achieve truth, a higher value than fact.

Levin's most important structural technique, the alternating of a third-person omniscient point of view and a first-person point of view (that of Levin's fictional counterpart, reporter Sid Silver) is certainly a deviation from the Naturalistic tradition. Through Silver, Levin allows the reader to see simultaneously the killers and the case being assembled against them. In Book I, he often achieves irony through this effect, as when Judd and Artie are waiting for the ransom to be dropped off, when the police have already informed the Kessler family that Paulie's body has been found.

Even more significantly, Levin makes clear the novel's theme through the involvement of Silver. Because the point of view in the third-person sections is so much more detached than in Silver's, it is difficult to imagine how the author could achieve the same commentary on the killers'

motivations and on the question of determinism without his reporter/stand-in. If the real virtue of the Straus/Steiner case is its potential to make society more humane, then certainly Sid Silver is a tangible argument for that. In a sense, Levin has taken two threads which have always existed in the Naturalistic novel--the narration of the story and the narrator's need to comment on the story--and separated them.

Compulsion, with its dual narrative perspective, is actually the closest work in the homicide novel tradition to the nonfiction novel as it is often practiced by Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer. As in The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test and The Armies of the Night, the writer dramatizes himself (albeit with a stand-in) as a participant in the action; Hunter S. Thompson calls this technique "gonzo journalism." Levin's need to see himself as a central figure in the case is obvious from his romanticizing of Sid Silver's involvement. When Silver goes to the mortuary to see the found body, he immediately establishes his importance: "It was even said afterward that but for my going out there just then, the murderers might never have been caught" (21), then immediately effaces himself: "it has always bothered me that I received a kind of notoriety, a kind of advantage out of the case. Obviously what I did that morning was only an errand" (21). And Levin sets

up a framework for his novel--with basis in fact--of Silver's having been asked by the Illinois parole board to interview Judd Steiner because "better than anyone else still alive, [his editors] said, [he] knew the story" (495). In other words, he creates himself a role as Most Important Survivor.

As in other works of "gonzo journalism," the participation of the author in the story is intrinsic to its theme: Compulsion is as much the story of the Straus/Steiner case's importance to Sid Silver--and to Meyer Levin--as it is a narrative about the crime. In that sense, it cannot claim to represent reality--only a particular individual's experience of it. Silver says in his pseudo-preface, "there is no finite reality; our idea of actuality always has to come through someone, and this is the reality through me" (4). The most persuasive critics of literary nonfiction--John Hollowell, Ronald Weber, John Hellman, Chris Anderson--have argued against what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh calls "zero-degree interpretation," the possibility of reporting anything with absolute objectivity (Anderson, Style 2). In its anticipation of the practice of the New Journalists, Levin's Leopold/Loeb novel seems quite contemporary.

Compulsion has been compared, by the very few critics who have written about it, to other books in the homicide

novel tradition, most notably An American Tragedy (because every book in this tradition is compared to An American Tragedy) and to Crime and Punishment (owing to the influence of the Nietzschean philosophy). But it is certainly not a novel of the first order. Levin often treats his young stand-in Silver melodramatically, romanticizing his role in the investigation. A little more of Cain's or Capote's emotional restraint would have resulted in a better book. Also, the psychology of the novel often seems amateurish, especially compared to In Cold Blood, published only nine years later; the psychological methods used to dissect Straus and Steiner ultimately reflect its 1920s setting more than its 1950s composition. As Tasker Witham says in The Adolescent in the American Novel, 1920-1960, "Compulsion certainly does not rank with Crime and Punishment as literature, or even with An American Tragedy or Native Son; but it will probably remain as a significant landmark among literary interpretations of criminal minds" (93). Witham does call Compulsion "the best of the post-war novels of juvenile delinquency" (94), though one must keep in mind that this comment was written in 1963.

Ultimately, Levin's book is most valuable, as Levin himself realized, for its portrayal of a particular phase in twentieth-century America. Levin wrote in the Foreword that "[c]ertain crimes seem to epitomize the thinking of

their era," and that, just as Crime and Punishment and An American Tragedy arose out of their particular times and places, Compulsion is to be taken as a period document (ix). The era of Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold's crime was the pre-Depression 1920s, a period which has been described by F. Scott Fitzgerald as "one long party." For readers of the Naturalistic tales of McTeague and Clyde Griffiths, Levin's novel warned of peril at the other end of the social scale, implying that, like poverty, prosperity too has its perils.

The "bottom-dog literature" heralded by James T. Farrell includes, as a significant sub-species, the fact-based homicide novel, which might more accurately be called "dog-eat-dog literature." With the notable exception of Compulsion, whose protagonists are certainly not "bottom dogs," the Naturalistic preoccupation with social misfits, outcasts, and nobodies continues through the fact-based homicide novel well past the mid-century mark. In Native Son and Light in August, Wright and Faulkner introduced into the tradition issues of racial identity and equality which would continue in In Cold Blood, with Perry Smith's struggle over his biraciality, and in The Algiers Motel Incident, with John Hersey's examination of violence provoked by racial prejudice. Levin's dramatizing his

reporter prefigures the I-centered "gonzo" journalism of Algiers Motel and of the New Journalism in general. And Cain's achievement in stylistic detachment and in carefully crafted, minimalist prose has much in common with In Cold Blood.

## CHAPTER V

## THE OLD NATURALISM MEETS THE NEW JOURNALISM:

CAPOTE'S IN COLD BLOOD

"This could affect the type of words on pages  
you could be reading for a while."

Jimmy Breslin

Few critics have offered higher praise for Truman Capote's work than Capote himself, who, upon the publication of In Cold Blood in 1965, told Shana Alexander that the book was "destined to become a classic." The publication of the book, with its preceding New Yorker serialization and its attendant paperback and movie rights deals, was what George Garrett called a "Big Package Deal" (2) and an enormous commercial success. The New York Times Book Review gave Capote the longest interview in its history (Capote, "Story"). Critics lavished superlatives on the novel, calling it "a frank bid for greatness" (Garrett 3), "brilliant" ("Capote's Dissection," "Country"), "a work of art" ("Stranger"), and "the most thorough and sensitive piece of investigative reporting that's come out in a long, long time" (Delaney). John Gregory Dunne and Conrad Knickerbocker both called the novel "a masterpiece," the term most frequent in all the reviews.

Time's reviewer said that the novel "drains an event of its content as few events have ever been emptied before" ("Country"). John Gavin, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction, wrote in the Boston Sunday Herald, "for the first time I have read the story of a senseless and horrible crime that takes the reader behind the scenes and reveals the true facts of the causes." Granville Hicks said the book was written with "extraordinary skill" (35). In the Cleveland Press, Charles Stella called Capote "a reporter without peer." F. W. Dupee (The New York Review of Books) declared it "the best documentary account of an American crime ever written" (3). Capote's biographer Gerald Clarke writes that at the time of the book's publication, "the modern media machine--magazines, newspapers, television, and radio--became a giant band that played only one tune: Truman Capote" (362).

But Capote's claims about the literary novelty of the book's form were met with a much more divided response. In a notorious self-coronation, Capote told George Plimpton that In Cold Blood was "a nonfiction novel," which he called "a new literary art form" (Capote, "Story" 2). Critical reaction to Capote's claim tends to follow two courses: those who enthusiastically defend it and those who rather mildly dismiss it in passing. Among those who defend Capote's claim is Irving Malin, who argues that because

Capote's journalism "selects to persuade us" rather than merely to report, his claims for the book's status should be taken seriously ("Murder"). The Miami Herald reviewer calls Capote's book "something entirely original in the novel." William Wiegand writes that "only with Capote [does] the growing obliteration of the lines that demark journalism from fiction [seem] virtually complete" (245). John Barkham accepts Capote's claim and encourages other writers to emulate his methods. In the New Orleans Times-Picayune, James Conaway calls In Cold Blood "an original work of art." Philip French's description of the book as "the culmination of a clearly thought out and carefully executed response to the American literary situation" would seem to allow it the status Capote sought.

But an equal number of critics reject Capote's claims. Clarke writes that New York Times reviewer DuPee, despite his admiration for Capote's book, "genially dismissed the notion of the nonfiction novel"; Dupee writes, "to this claim the only possible retort is a disbelieving grin" (364). Melvin Maddocks observes that Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year (1722), not In Cold Blood, was the first nonfiction novel. Diana Trilling maintained that the book is not a novel because Capote does not shape the facts which he presents, and the book consequently lacks theme. In the London Observer review, which became

famous for its attack on Capote's moral position with regard to the novel, Kenneth Tynan also dismisses Capote's claim for the book's status. Although generous in his praise of the book, George Garrett says that the notion of it as a new literary form "may be blamed on the publisher and dismissed as a device. About on the level of the 'new, improved ingredients' that show up with depressing regularity in advertisements for toothpaste, detergents, deodorants, etc." (12). Despite Garrett's acknowledgment of numerous In Cold Blood cousins in fictional "stories of crime and punishment" and in journalism, he concludes that "[t]he question of form . . . remains a challenge, unresolved and probably unanswerable" (12).

Certainly, in many respects, Capote had not broken new literary ground. Despite his phenomenal achievement in the genre, Capote was not the first to write nonfiction using the techniques and devices of fiction. His closest predecessor among major American writers is Ernest Hemingway, whose Death in the Afternoon (1932) and The Green Hills of Africa (1935) had, in William Wiegand's words, "pretty well settled for this generation" questions about "the difference between literature and journalism" (243). Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi (1883) is another well-known work in the literary nonfiction form. And obviously, in using the novel format to tell the story

of a factual murder, Capote's ancestors go back much farther even than the Naturalistic works of Norris and Dreiser, at least to Stendhal's The Red and the Black (1830).

But Capote's novel does not fit snugly into either of these traditions. The nonfiction predecessors by writers such as Twain and Hemingway have more in common with the New Journalism as Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer have generally practiced it than with Capote's reporting methods in In Cold Blood. Primarily, Twain's and Hemingway's works are first-person accounts, I-centered reportage in which a strongly committed personal voice is the primary conduit for the narrative, whereas, in In Cold Blood, Capote uses a third-person, ostensibly highly detached narrator. His predecessors in this regard are far fewer and more obscure. The one he acknowledged as his immediate prototype was New Yorker reporter Lillian Ross's Picture, an account of the making of John Huston's film The Red Badge of Courage.

Most of Capote's predecessors in the homicide novel tradition use real murder cases as points of departure but make no claim to journalistic accuracy. Norris, Dreiser, Faulkner, Wright, Cain, and Levin do not use murderers' real names, for example, and none conducted actual interviews with his subject. Any research involved in those novels' preparation, such as Dreiser's travels

through the lake region of New York or Wright's trip to Chicago, was conducted more in the interest of verisimilitude than of factual accuracy.

Capote worked to splice these two traditions--combining literary technique with the factual accuracy and journalistic detachment of top-notch reporting. He seemed to believe that he had achieved a balance in what he called the "nonfiction novel."

What he does not seem to have realized is that his treatment of Perry Smith results in a book which, in every way, fulfills the criteria of the Naturalistic novel. In his discussions of the novel, Capote does not mention Naturalism or any of the works in the homicide novel tradition, except one: he told Lawrence Grobel that although he was not, in general, "a great admirer of Faulkner," he "liked one novel of his very much, called Light in August" (131). It is interesting but certainly not coincidental that Capote should single out Faulkner's most Naturalistic work and the novel in which homicide figures most prominently. Capote was working squarely in the Naturalistic homicide novel tradition, merely intensifying the role that journalistic accuracy had previously played. He did not create a new literary genre, but he did breathe life into an existing one.

The aspect of Capote's nonfiction novel which ties it most firmly to the Naturalistic tradition is his choice of Perry Smith as protagonist. Like the earlier American Naturalists, Capote followed Thomas DeQuincey's advice from "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" that the "poet" writing about murder

must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with him (. . . a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them--not a sympathy of pity of approbation). In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflux of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic; the fear of instant death smites him "with its petrific mace." But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion--jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred--which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look. (733, emphasis mine)

Capote chose Perry Smith, the murderer, for his protagonist, as Norris chose McTeague and Dreiser chose Clyde Griffiths. He chose Smith, not a member of the Clutter family, or K.B.I. agent Dewey, or even Dick Hickock, for the same reason that he focused on the murderers rather than the victims: Smith embodied what DeQuincey calls the "great storm of passion." And in his manipulation of the narrative to favor Smith, Capote causes the reader to develop DeQuincey's "sympathy of comprehension" for his protagonist.

In Part I, "The Last to See Them Alive," Capote cuts back and forth from the Clutter family at home in middle

America to the killers moving toward them, developing an atmosphere of inevitability which Donald Pizer has compared to Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" ("Documentary" 113). From page one, Perry Smith is treated more sympathetically than any other character; from the beginning of Part II, "Persons Unknown," Capote begins to shape the novel around Smith. Capote's literary fancy was drawn toward Smith for at least three reasons: (1) he, not Hickock, is the confessed murderer; (2) he is by far the more dynamic of the two characters; and (3) similarities between Smith's life and Capote's life created in the writer a depth of feeling for Perry which he did not hold for Dick (or any other character). As Phillip K. Tompkins says, it is "Perry Smith--not the victims, the investigators, the lawyers, not even the pair of killers--who dominates this book" (170).

The most basic reason for Capote's choice of Perry Smith as protagonist is that he, not Hickock, was almost certainly the murderer of the Clutters. Dick maintains from the beginning that Perry shot all four Clutters, and although Perry initially accused Dick of killing the two women, he later admitted that he had implicated Dick only "to fix [him] for being such a coward. Dropping his guts all over the goddam floor" (287). Out of consideration for Dick's family, Perry later admitted--verbally and by

signed confession--that he had killed all four. Obviously, Capote felt that Perry's motives in the confession were sincere, as, at the end of Part III, "Answer," he puts in Perry's mouth the grisly narrative of what happened inside the Clutter house. If DeQuincey was right that the "poet" writing about murder must spotlight the murderer, then Perry would seem to be Capote's only choice.

If Perry's being the murderer is the most basic reason for his suitability as protagonist, however, it is not the most compelling. In almost any murder case, the murderer is the most interesting of the dramatis personae because he (or, rarely, she) is the figure of greatest mystery, the one whose experience is farthest removed from the reader's and whom the reader will feel least capable of comprehending. It is exceedingly difficult for the average person to understand Perry Smith's attitude that "[i]t's easy to kill--a lot easier than passing a bad check. . . . [killing the Clutters] was like picking off targets in a shooting gallery" (327). The psyche that produces a sentiment of this magnitude is a far more suitable subject for the Naturalistic novel than the psyche of any of the victims or investigators.

It is difficult to see how Capote could have made a suitable protagonist of any member of the Clutter family. Among his characterizations of the family members, only

the mother, Bonnie Clutter, has any dimension. This is largely because her bouts of emotional instability (and perhaps mental illness) prevent her from being a stereotype. A bird-like, delicate woman, Mrs. Clutter sleeps in her own bedroom and has recently been to a Kansas City institution for two months' treatment. In fact, because of Mrs. Clutter's widespread reputation for instability and eccentricity, more than one person who heard ambulances headed toward the Clutter house wondered if she had "snapped" and attacked her family (86).

The other family members are flat, middle-America paper dolls who might have stepped out of a Norman Rockwell painting. Herb Clutter, the father, is the typical upstanding heartland farmer. Capote tells the reader that Clutter was "[a]lways certain of what he wanted from the world" and "had in large measure obtained it" (16). Nancy Clutter is made from the same mold as her father. Nancy has recently played Becky Thatcher in the school play, dates the quarterback of the football team, and, on the morning of her death, is teaching another local girl how to bake a cherry pie. She is "the town darling" (17). Kenyon Clutter, fifteen, is the typical rural teenager. He learned to drive at eleven, is an amateur carpenter, harrasses his sister about her boyfriend, makes teasing comments to Nancy's friends on the telephone, sneaks

cigarettes behind his father's back, and "could not conceive of ever wanting to waste an hour on any girl that might be spent with guns, horses, tools, machinery, even a book" (52).

If In Cold Blood were not based on fact, critics would say that these characters lack dimension; they are clichés come to life. If their flatness were not a serious enough problem, it would be difficult for Capote to make a protagonist of anyone whose murder seventy-two pages into a 384-page book is the beginning, not the end, of the story Capote wants to tell. And focusing on Alvin Dewey, the forty-seven-year-old fourth-generation Kansan assigned by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to the Clutter case, would reduce the story to a mere murder mystery.

Even Dick Hickock, Smith's colleague-in-crime, is too unremarkable to serve as protagonist. Whereas Perry comes from a broken family with an alcoholic mother and an abusive father, Dick's background is exceedingly normal--a lower-middle class two-parent family living in a "modest" farmhouse where the mother makes Sunday dinner and the men watch sports on television. Perry is artistic and imaginative; in his spare time, he paints and plays the guitar. Dick is realistic, mundane, and passionless; he runs over stray dogs for a hobby. In prison, Capote brought Dick Playboy and Harold Robbins novels, while Perry

preferred Thoreau and Freud. When Perry describes an elaborate, romantic, fanciful recurring dream, Dick replies, "I'm a normal. I only dream about blond chicken" (111). Capote himself articulated the fundamental difference between the two men: "Dick was a small-town punk and crook, and might have remained one all his life. Perry was different, though: Perry would have killed someone eventually, if not the Clutters" (Howard 72).

Capote goes to great lengths to characterize Perry Smith as a person whose actions are entirely determined by his environment and circumstances. During the trial section of the book, when Capote uses the testimony of experts to establish a psychological portrait. W. Mitchell Jones, a psychiatrist with years of experience treating the criminally insane, traces Perry's problems to his childhood. Jones classifies Smith as paranoid schizophrenic, identifying as "particularly pathological" two aspects of his personality: (1) "his 'paranoid' orientation toward the world" and (2) "an ever-present, poorly controlled rage--easily triggered by any feeling of being tricked, slighted, or labeled inferior by others" (qtd. in ICB 333-4). Jones finds the roots of Perry's general distrust and weak self-perception in Smith's alienated youth:

His childhood, related to me and verified by portions of the prison records, was marked by brutality and lack of concern on the part of both parents. He seems

to have grown up without direction, without love, without ever having absorbed any fixed sense of moral values. . . . He is suspicious and distrustful of others, tends to feel that others discriminate against him, and feels that others are unfair to him and do not understand him. He is overly sensitive to criticisms that others make of him, and cannot tolerate being made fun of. He is quick to sense slight or insult in things others say, and frequently may misinterpret well-meant communications. He feels he has great need of friendship and understanding, but he is reluctant to confide in others, and when he does, expects to be misunderstood or even betrayed. . . . He has had few close emotional relationships with other people, and these have not been able to [with]stand small crises. He has little feeling for others outside a very small circle of friends, and attaches little real value to human life. (qtd. in ICB 333-34)

Jones's evaluation was endorsed by Joseph Satten, a "widely respected veteran in the field of forensic psychiatry," who felt that Perry typified a kind of murderer he had recently described in "Murder Without Apparent Motive--A Study in Personality Disorganization," published in the July 1960 American Journal of Psychiatry. Satten's thesis is that murderers like Perry Smith suffer from "severe lapses in ego-control which makes [sic] possible the open expression of primitive violence, born out of previous, and now unconscious, traumatic experience" (qtd. in ICB 335). As both doctors explain, the ego of a person like Smith becomes a sort of open wound, and when the wound is irritated, the person strikes out at the person who caused the irritation--whether or not that person caused the original wound.

That salt is rubbed into the wound of Perry's ego when he is inside the Clutter house is clear even to him. In his confession to Dewey, he describes the humiliation he suffered in trying to retrieve a silver dollar which had rolled underneath a chair in Nancy Clutter's bedroom:

I had to get down on my knees. And just then it was like I was outside myself. Watching myself in some nutty movie. It made me sick. I was just disgusted. Dick, and all his talk about a rich man's safe, and here I am crawling on my belly to steal a child's silver dollar. One dollar. And I'm crawling on my belly to get it. (271-72)

At this point in his narrative, Perry rubs his knees and asks Dewey for aspirin; it is clear, though, that there is a part of Perry far more hurt than his knees, as the rage which follows demonstrates. In the basement minutes later, when Perry bends again on his damaged knees with the hunting knife before Herb Clutter's throat, he relives the search for the dollar:

I knelt down beside Mr. Clutter, and the pain of kneeling--I thought of that goddamn dollar. Silver dollar. The shame. Disgust. And they'd [the Parole Board] told me never to come back to Kansas. But I didn't realize what I'd done till I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning. Screaming under water. I handed the knife to Dick. (276; emphasis Capote's)

Perry's desire to visit his rage on the people who have caused his feelings of alienation is also obvious. Dr. Jones observed that Perry's rage was generally "directed

at authority figures--father, brother, Army sergeant, state parole officer" (334). Perry said that when the nun who put ointment on his penis in an orphanage, allegedly believing that it would cure his incontinence, was fired, it made him feel better but "never changed [his] mind about her & what [he] wished [he] could have done to her & all the people who made fun of [him]" (310). Of his sister Barbara, who had treated him like a baby doll when he was an infant but cooled her affection for him when he started to run with a street gang in San Francisco, he said, "I wish she'd been in [the Clutter] house that night. What a sweet scene!" (292). And he seems to realize that the Clutters were not the true targets of his rage, but stand-ins; trying to figure out why he killed the Clutters, he says,

I wonder why I did it. . . . I don't know why . . .  
. . . I was sore at Dick. The tough brass boy. But  
it wasn't Dick. Or the fear of being identified.  
I was willing to take that gamble. And it wasn't  
because of anything the Clutters did. They never  
hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all  
my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the  
ones who had to pay for it. (326)

What the Clutters had to pay for was the horror of Perry Smith's childhood: the pain of watching his mother drink and copulate with numerous men, seeing his parents fight violently, and being tortured in institutions for offenses such as bedwetting over which he had no control.

Most of all, the horror of his childhood was the realization of his fear of abandonment and isolation, in the form of his mother's telling him, when he was eight or nine, "to find a new home" (148).

As an adult, Perry was even more alone than he was as a child. In fact, his decision to team up with Dick Hickock was caused by another perceived abandonment: Perry returned to Kansas (in violation of his parole agreement) on Thursday, November 12, 1959--two days before the murders--primarily to find Willie Jay, a prison chaplain's clerk and Perry's "real and only friend," who was to be paroled on that day (55-56); upon his arrival, though, Perry was "dizzy with anger and disappointment" to learn that Willie Jay had already left to pursue some "fine opportunities" farther east (59). So Perry agreed to participate in Dick's "score," feeling at that point that "the choice was between Dick and nothing" (59).

When he and Dick finally left Kansas a week after the murders, Capote writes that crossing the border into Oklahoma, Perry "was leaving nothing behind, and no one who might deeply wonder into what thin air he'd spiraled" (125). His mother and two siblings dead and his father now outcast in his memory, Perry has no one to miss him. But Capote is quick to point out that "[t]he same could not be said of Dick," who left behind "those [he] claimed

to love: three sons, a mother, a father, [and] a brother" (125). While Perry would be visited in prison only by Capote and, once or twice, by his army friend Don Cullivan, Hickock continued to be visited and supported by his parents, right up to his execution.

Ironically, the murder itself isolated Perry even from Dick; on the way out of the Clutter house, Perry realized the full implications of Dick's insistence on leaving no witnesses:

in those few seconds before we ran out to the car and drove away, that's when I decided I'd better shoot Dick. He'd said over and over, he'd drummed it into me: No witnesses. And I thought, He's a witness. I don't know what stopped me. God knows I should've done it. Shot him dead. Got in the car and kept on going till I lost myself in Mexico. (277)

When, at the time of Perry's arrest, the authorities decided to isolate him for questioning, their act of separating him from Dick was merely a gesture; the first of the shotgun blasts served to seal his alienation from everyone.

Finally, Capote chose Smith as his protagonist because strong similarities in their lives led the writer to sympathize with the murderer. This identification with the protagonist is not uncommon in the Naturalistic homicide novel, where it is especially true in the cases of Dreiser and Clyde Griffiths, Richard Wright and Bigger Thomas, and Meyer Levin and Artie Shaw and Judd Steiner. Both

Capote and Smith had alcoholic, somewhat promiscuous mothers and absent fathers. Despite the fact that Perry's family was far more itinerant than Capote's, both men experienced childhoods characterized by isolation. Capote was reared by elderly relatives in Alabama who were affectionate but busy with their own lives, and young Perry Smith spent several years in orphanages and juvenile facilities after his mother's alcoholism incapacitated her. The central problem of each boy's childhood was the same: his parents considered him a liability and consequently shuffled him around; this lack of stability created in both boys a deep insecurity and a constant fear of abandonment. It is remarkable that such different families could isolate their sons in such remarkably similar ways.

Two other similarities drew Capote to Perry Smith: Perry's latent homosexuality and his artistic inclinations. In some ways, Perry seems almost asexual. He has a strong aversion to heterosexual sex (probably largely due to his mother's promiscuity), and is disgusted by Dick's sexual brag and habits. In Mexico and Florida, Perry is reluctant when Dick suggests that they buy sex, and he frequently makes excuses to avoid brothels or resorts (228). But Perry needs men to function as mentors and guides, and Dick largely serves this purpose for him. Capote writes that "Dick's literalness, his pragmatic approach to every

subject, was the primary reason Perry had been attracted to him, for it made Dick seem, compared to himself, so authentically tough, invulnerable, 'totally masculine'" (27).

Capote used the French term folie à deux to describe the relationship between Smith and Hickock (Grobel 118). Basically, the folie à deux is an equation of two factors whose combination becomes more than the sum of their parts. Thus, Dick and Perry or Artie and Judd together have capabilities which neither has on his own. Neither Dick nor Perry alone would have committed the Clutter murders; Perry would not have been inside the Clutter house without Dick's initiative and planning, and Dick could not have pulled the trigger. Dick was essentially an instigator who often lacked the wherewithal to follow through, and Perry was a follower with the potential for explosive violence. It is easy to see how each could transfer his culpability to the other and what resentment this might breed.

The second reason for Capote's strong identification with Perry is the artistic ability (and sensibility) both possessed. That Smith saw Capote as an artistic mentor is well documented. In prison, the convicted murderer asked the writer to bring him classic works of literature and philosophy, as well as a dictionary and thesaurus so

that he could improve his pretentious vocabulary (Clarke 344-5; ICB 169). Perry had both musical and artistic abilities. He bragged that he could play both guitar and harmonica "[the] first time [he] picked one up" (155), and Capote has commented that Perry's Jesus portrait was "in no way technically naive" (ICB 56). The point is not the quality of Perry's work or the likelihood of his success, had his life been different; it is the role that art served in both men's lives, the fact that both Smith and Capote "turned to art to compensate for what had been denied them" (Clarke 326).

Frustrated by Perry's self-pity and his insistence on blaming his background for his crime, Capote once yelled at him, "I had one of the worst childhoods in the world, and I'm a pretty decent, law-abiding citizen" (Clarke 327). Capote certainly realized, as Dreiser realized in the case of Clyde Griffiths and Levin realized in the case of Nathan Leopold and Dick Loeb, that, given the strong similarities in their childhoods, the path taken by the murderer might well have been his--as John Bradford said, "there but for the grace of God go I." Harper Lee, who accompanied her lifelong friend Truman Capote to Kansas for the initial research, said that Truman's and Perry's relationship was "more complicated than a love affair; each looked at the other and saw, or thought he saw, the man he might have

been" (Clarke 326).

Perhaps the real irony of the relationship between the two men was that in committing the act which precipitated his own destruction, Perry Smith also became a part of the writer's masterpiece. Perry was certainly aware of this irony; he told Capote, "all [I] ever wanted to do in [my] life was to produce a work of art . . . And now, what has happened? . . . I kill four people, and you're going to produce a work of art" (Capote, "Story" 39). Capote also knew that he owed the success of his book to Perry Smith; he told an interviewer that he didn't really commit himself to writing a book based on the Clutter murders until he had been conducting his research for about eight months (initially he planned only a New Yorker piece):

And then something in the whole material appealed to something that has always been inside me anyway, waiting there. It was Perry that made me decide to do it really. Something about Perry turned the whole thing, because Perry was a character that was also in my imagination. (qtd. in Nance 210-11)

Equally important, from a literary standpoint, to the question of why Capote chose Perry Smith as the protagonist of In Cold Blood is the question of how Capote arranges his material to feature Smith in that role. He employs at least three methods: first, he devotes more space to Perry than to any other character; second, he describes Perry with details intended to bend the reader's

sympathy in Perry's direction; and third, he orchestrates the narrative itself in Perry's favor.

In Cold Blood is composed of four main parts: "The Last to See Them Alive" (11-90), "Persons Unknown" (91-179), "Answer" (181-280), and "The Corner" (281-384). Each part is further subdivided into short sections separated by white space; the book contains eight-four such sections in all. More space is devoted to Perry than to any other individual; he is the focus of ten sections, for a total of seventy-two pages (out of 384). By contrast, Dick is the primary focus of only four sections, for a total of about thirteen pages. Twenty-eight additional sections involve both Perry and Dick, but at least half of these sections concern Perry more than Dick (e.g., Perry's thoughts while Dick is driving). About ten sections involve Alvin Dewey (about thirty-six pages), but some of these deal with the investigation and do not focus exclusively on him. Only seven sections focus exclusively on a member of the Clutter family (Herb, three; Nancy, two; Kenyon and Bonnie, one each). In addition, thirteen sections deal with the community of Holcomb itself and the townspeople's reactions to the murder. Thus, about a fifth of the book's total pages are devoted exclusively to Perry, and thirty-eight of eighty-four sections are primarily about him.

Perry Smith is also the subject of the longest section of the novel, number thirty-five. This twenty-seven page section (144-171) occurs nearly halfway through the book and covers Perry and Dick's last day in Mexico. It is a good example of Capote's cinematic technique of focusing on Perry in the foreground of a scene while Dick is otherwise occupied in the background. In this episode, Dick has sex with a Mexican woman (one of two he has promised to marry) on the bed in the hotel room he and Perry share while Perry sorts through his "possessions"--the maps, letters, and other memorabilia which he carries around with him. Perry is selecting the most important to take with him while he sends the rest to pick up later in Las Vegas. Among the papers Perry keeps with him are three documents, the full texts of which are printed in the section: 1) an essay called "A History of My Boy's Life," written by Perry's father for the Kansas State Parole Board in December 1958, before Perry's release the following July; 2) a letter from Barbara Johnson, Perry's sister, dated April 28, 1958, addressing the general topic of people's culpability for their actions; and 3) Willie-Jay's "very sensitive" (in Perry's eyes) appraisal of Barbara's letter (166). From these three documents and the long reflection which his father's letter prompts in Perry, the reader develops a thorough acquaintance with Perry's

life and feelings. No other character in the book is given the benefit of such lengthy treatment; the second-longest section (sixteen pages) contains Perry's confession to Alvin Dewey en route from Las Vegas to Garden City, and the longest section concerning Dick covers eight pages.

In Perry Smith, Capote was fortunate to find a character with some inherently sympathetic qualities. For example, Perry's child-like attributes make it difficult for a reader not to feel some pity for him. He was a short man at five feet four inches, and Capote constantly reminds the reader of that stature by pointing out such details as Perry's rolled-up jeans and the fact that, when he sits, his feet often don't touch the floor. Perry chews (rather than swallowing) aspirin for his damaged knees and washes it down with root beer. He is asked to spit out his chewing gum as he mounts the scaffold. He is very protective of his possessions, carrying his guitar and his boxes of mementoes everywhere he goes, like a child who wants to take his whole toy box over to grandma's. And Perry's dreams of finding buried treasure and being rescued by a giant bird are the dreams of a child, not a man.

It might be argued that Capote includes these details simply because they are what Tom Wolfe calls "status details"--details that, by their specificity, suggest verisimilitude. But Capote includes far more of these

details about Perry than about Dick, and he repeats some so often that they take on nearly symbolic value. For example, the shortness of Perry's legs and the smallness of his feet are mentioned repeatedly, probably because Capote himself was so charmed by those features. Harper Lee has said that when he saw Perry seated at his arraignment, Capote exclaimed, "[l]ook, his feet don't touch the floor!" and she thought to herself, "oh! oh! This is the beginning of a great love affair!" (Clarke 326). Scarcely two pages into the reader's first encounter with Perry, Capote points out his "stunted legs" and his "tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, [which] would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady's dancing slippers" (26). Agent Nye notices the same detail when Perry is seated for questioning in Las Vegas (254), and Dewey notices it again when he sees Perry's feet dangling below the scaffold. Perry's small footprint outlined in blood on the mattress box where Herbert Clutter was murdered is the only physical clue in the house linking Smith to the crime. Certainly this level of emphasis would seem to go beyond status details.

Another method used by Capote to characterize Perry Smith favorably is setting up scenes in which Perry is described by a woman who feels sympathy for him (a device which Capote had used effectively in Other Voices, Other

Rooms and which Norman Mailer uses in The Executioner's Song to characterize Gary Gilmore). The best example of such a woman is Mrs. Josephine ("Josie") Meier, wife of Finney County Undersheriff Wendle Meier and cook for the jail prisoners. Though Mrs. Meier admits that she "never had much truck with Dick," she obviously developed affection for Perry (345). To separate him from Hickock, Perry was held in the ladies' cell at the Finney County jail (he is the first man in Mrs. Meier's memory to occupy it); that cell actually adjoined the Meiers' kitchen. When he has been there barely an hour, Mrs. Meier, noticing that he has not touched his food, asks "if he had any special dish he liked" so that she can "try to fix it for him the next day" (285). When she went to bed that night, Mrs. Meier told her husband that Perry "wasn't the worst man [she] ever saw" (285). On the night of his conviction, she told Capote, she heard Perry crying and sat outside his cell holding his hand and trying to console him with offers of his favorite dish, Spanish rice. She felt bad that she and her husband had a social engagement that night, and she would have to leave Perry alone. "The bad part," she told Capote, "was saying goodbye. When you knew where he was going, and what would happen to him" (345-46). Mrs. Meier also described a red squirrel which Perry had taught to eat from his hand and which returned looking

for him after he was taken to death row at Leavenworth. Through the eyes of Mrs. Meier, "a direct and practical woman who nevertheless seem[ed] illuminated by a mystical serenity" (283), the reader sees a Perry Smith very different from the one who cut Herb Clutter's throat.

Confronted by Clarke about the fact that Mrs. Meier later expressed indifference toward Smith to Phillip Tompkins, Capote theorized that she had succumbed to pressure from her husband, and he stood by his original account. And, if Capote did romanticize Mrs. Meier's attitudes to some extent, this would only reinforce the idea that his goal in her scenes is to win the reader's sympathy for Perry.

Capote emphasizes the differences in Perry's and Dick's behavior inside the Clutter house as a means of winning sympathy for Perry. (His source for these details is Perry's confession, which, Dewey attested, was "very much" like Hickock's statement in every aspect except for who killed whom, 277). Although he was the actual murderer, Perry's behavior toward them before their deaths is far more courteous and considerate than Dick's. Dick punches Kenyon Clutter when he doesn't get out of bed fast enough, threatens to rape Nancy Clutter, roars at Herb Clutter, "[d]idn't I tell you to shut up?," and goads Perry into committing the first murder, which leads inevitably to

the rest.

Perry, on the other hand, has an extended conversation with Nancy Clutter (while Dick is looking for the fictitious safe) about music, art, her boyfriend, her love of horses, and the fact that his mother was a rodeo rider; he told Dewey that Nancy seemed "really nice. A very pretty girl, and not spoiled or anything" (274). Downstairs in the furnace room, Perry "didn't feel [he] ought to ask [Herb Clutter] to stretch out on the cold floor," so he dragged over an old mattress box to place under him (272). Throughout his confession, Perry referred to the Clutters respectfully, in his "soft" voice, as "Mr. Clutter" and "Mrs. Clutter." He placed Kenyon in the basement on "a comfortable-looking couch," and, when the boy had a coughing fit, placed a pillow under his head (273). Detectives Dewey and Duntz had noted early in the investigation that the brutal murders were committed with "fragmentary indications of ironic, erratic compassion," indications which had convinced them "that at least one of the killers was not altogether uncharitable" (273); these acts of "compassion" were all the acts of Perry Smith.

Capote also softens a reader's judgment of Perry somewhat by implying that Perry did not go into the Clutter house planning to commit murder. Perry's description of his last conversation with Herb Clutter reveals a marked

lack of premeditation:

Just before I taped him, Mr. Clutter asked me--and these were his last words--wanted to know how his wife was, if she was all right, and I said she was fine, she was ready to go to sleep, and I told him it wasn't long till morning, and . . . somebody would find them, and then all of it, me and Dick and all, would seem like something they dreamed. I wasn't kidding him. I didn't want to harm the man. I thought he was a very nice gentleman. Soft-spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat. (275; emphasis mine)

The most important of the minor discrepancies documented by Phillip Tompkins between Capote's account and his sources concern Perry Smith. In addition to tangential issues like how much money Nancy Clutter's horse sold for and the degree of Bobby Rupp's athletic prowess, Tompkins challenges Capote's presentation of Smith, specifically his self-control at the time of the murders and the degree of his remorse. In a New York Times interview, Capote described Perry's actions in the Clutter basement as a "mental explosion" (Tompkins 167), a psychological phenomenon akin to what Dr. Jones called "a paranoid schizophrenic reaction" (ICB 334). The implication in Capote's account is that Perry had almost no self-control, as the statement "I didn't realize what I'd done until I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning" suggests (276). Capote's version is based on Perry Smith's initial confession and any statements Perry may have made privately.

Tompkins found a slightly different account in the version of Alvin Dewey, who was called to testify to Perry's confession because Perry never signed a statement validating it (due to the discrepancy concerning Hickock's involvement). Dewey's account differs from that described in In Cold Blood in two ways: first, he told the court that Smith and Hickock had "debated who was going to do what and who was going to start it" and that Perry had taken the initiative; and second, Dewey testified that Perry described how he hid the knife "with the blade up along his arm," pretending to tighten the cords around Herbert Clutter's wrists, so that Clutter would be taken by surprise (Tompkins 166-67). Both details indicate a degree of premeditation and calculation not present in Capote's version.

Tompkins also challenges the accuracy of Perry's final speech, maintaining that Perry did not apologize before mounting the scaffold. In Tompkins' version, Perry says, "[a]ny apology for what I have done would be meaningless at this time. I don't have any animosities toward anyone involved in this matter. I think that is all" (169). In Capote's version, Perry stares at his hands covered with ink and paint from the portraits of himself and other inmates' children painted during his last few years on Death Row, and he delivers a more emotional speech:

I think it's a helluva thing to take a life in this manner. I don't believe in capital punishment, morally or legally. Maybe I had something to contribute, something--[At this point, Capote notes, Perry's "assurance faltered; shyness blurred his voice, lowered it to a just audible level"]. It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize. (381)

Tompkins says his account was corroborated by Bill Brown, editor of the Garden City Telegram, and by Associated Press representatives who witnessed the executions, some of whom told Tompkins that Capote was so distraught that he "was unable to watch [and] walked away, out of earshot" (169). Capote's own version was that he was "at the foot of the gallows" (Grobel 118; Alexander), actually closer to Smith than the media representatives, that he was the last person to speak to both Smith and Hickock, and that it was the other journalists who didn't catch all of Perry's statement.

Smith's actual last words may never be known, but to charge Capote with inaccuracy and stop there seems beside the point. If Capote did romanticize Perry's statement and, perhaps, his own role in the execution, it only reinforces the argument that his real intention was to portray Smith as a sympathetic character. Of challenges to the accuracy of his characterization of Perry Smith, Capote told William Nance,

[a]ll I can do is show you his letters. You read the letters of Perry Smith and you know darn well that my portrait of him is absolutely accurate, and

it's not a sentimental distortion on my part, of identifying with him. I did identify with him to a great degree. Never did deny it. It's also quite true that my portrait of him is absolutely one hundred per cent the way he was. (215)

Capote seems to admit that he was after a higher fidelity than the truth of every line; according to Nance, Capote felt he was "accurate on the deepest level [because] he [had] presented the real Perry Smith" (215).

Another device used by Capote to develop Smith as a character is his inclusion of the psychiatrists' opinions which were not a part of the official court transcript. Dr. Jones was asked "whether he had an opinion as to whether or not Richard Eugene Hickock [and subsequently, Perry Edward Smith] knew right from wrong at the time of the commission of the crime" (330). He answered yes in the case of Hickock and said that he had no opinion about Smith; when he offered to elaborate on both answers, the prosecution objected and was upheld. But Capote is not content to omit the explanation; he adds, "had Dr. Jones been allowed to speak further, here is what he would have testified" and, based on interviews with Jones, adds a paragraph of elaboration to his affirmative answer about Dick and a five-and-a-half page clarification of his indecision about Perry (330-38). In terms of strict fidelity to the facts of the case, Capote may be out of line in including this "testimony," but he believed that

its inclusion helped him get at the real truth, which was the truth about Perry Smith. Capote believed all along that Perry understood what happened inside the Clutter house as well as anyone, telling George Plimpton that he chose to use Perry's version of events because "Perry's happens to be the one I believe is the right one" (Capote, "Story" 38). There is, in fact, a startling correspondence between Perry's layman's explanation that "maybe the Clutters had to pay" for the traumas he had suffered and Drs. Jones' and Satten's professional analyses.

But Capote's most successful strategic maneuver where Perry's characterization is concerned is his pacing the story in Perry's favor, by withholding the narrative of the murder until late in the book. Toward the end of Part I, Capote cuts from Hickock's car creeping, headlights off, up the Clutter driveway, to the discovery of the bodies the following morning. Part of his purpose, obviously, is to maintain suspense by delaying the explanation of what actually happened in the Clutter house. But the larger effect is to preserve the sympathy which the reader has begun to develop for Perry. When the gruesome details are finally revealed three-fourths of the way through the book, Smith is the narrator, leading the reader through the Clutter house, from victim to victim. By placing the reader's experience of the murder entirely within Perry's

consciousness, Capote is able to mute it somewhat with the details of Perry's little acts of "ironic, erratic compassion"--details neither Hickock nor any other narrator would have been likely to include. As George Garrett has argued, Capote did not wish to fully dramatize "the naked brutality of the murder scene" because [h]ad he done so, early or late, he could probably never again have engaged the reader's sympathy for Perry Smith" (9-10).

Harper Lee told Newsweek that her friend Truman "knows what he wants . . . . And if it's not the way he likes it, he'll arrange it so it is" ("ICB: An American Tragedy" 58). What Capote wanted in In Cold Blood was a narrative which featured Perry Smith in as sympathetic a light as possible, and he orchestrated his material carefully in order to achieve that version. Capote's skill in characterization and his sheer good fortune in stumbling across a person who fundamentally fit the Naturalistic bill combined to form a figure whom Norman Mailer has called "one of the great characters in American literature" (Clarke 326).

Capote's interest in writing nonfiction using the techniques of the fiction writer preceded In Cold Blood by several years. He had established himself as a fiction writer at the age of twenty-four with the publication of the short novel Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948) and

continued to write fiction until the mid-1950s, when he published two nonfiction pieces in The New Yorker. The first, The Muses Are Heard (published as a short book in 1956), was an account of an American opera company's tour of the Soviet Union performing Porgy and Bess. The Muses Are Heard was well received, and Capote claimed he had found the writing of it surprisingly pleasurable (Clarke 294). The next year (1957), he published a profile of Marlon Brando, "The Duke in His Domain," in The New Yorker. The profile, based on a dinner interview during which Capote got Brando to make some startling revelations, was called "a vivisection" by Dorothy Kilgallen and "a masterpiece" by legendary New Yorker editor William Shawn (Clarke 303).

Although pleased with both New Yorker pieces, Capote's appetite for nonfiction was not sated; he wanted to try the same method "on a grand scale" (Gobel 112). During his work on Breakfast at Tiffany's (1958), the short novel about Holly Golightly, an eccentric young hillbilly stirring up New York cafe society, Capote's thoughts were still on nonfiction. In fact, he had postponed the writing of Breakfast at Tiffany's when the opportunity to go to the Soviet Union came along (Clarke 290). He still wanted to write his "nonfiction novel--a book that would read exactly like a novel except that every word of it would be absolutely true" (Gobel 112). Even after the warm

reception of Breakfast at Tiffany's, he found himself unable to concentrate on writing fiction because of what he described as a greater temptation:

I couldn't sit there to write . . . [i]t was as though there were a box of chocolates in the next room, and I couldn't resist them. The chocolates were that I wanted to write fact instead of fiction. There were so many things that I knew I could investigate, so many things that I knew I could find out about. Suddenly the newspapers all came alive, and I realized that I was in terrible trouble as a fiction writer. (Clarke 317)

It seems appropriate that Capote found his "box of chocolates" in a newspaper--The New York Times of Monday, November 16, 1959. In an article entitled "Wealthy Farmer, 3 of Family Slain," Capote read "[a] wealthy wheat farmer, his wife and their two young children were found shot to death today in their home. They had been killed by shotgun blasts at close range . . ." (39). Thus, Capote turned reporter, leaving New York less than a month later with Harper Lee (whose own novel, To Kill a Mockingbird, was just about to be published) for the little town of Holcomb, Kansas, to investigate a multiple-murder case which remained unsolved for nearly six weeks after he arrived.

In his research for the book, Capote drew primarily on three kinds of sources: (1) interviews with the townspeople of Holcomb, the law enforcement officials who worked on the case, and, eventually, the murderers themselves;

(2) official documents, particularly the transcript of the trial of Perry Edward Smith and Richard Eugene Hickock; and (3) his own observation of the town, the ongoing investigation, and the subsequent trial and executions. His insistence that his novel be read as journalism is obvious from the acknowledgments page, where he writes, "[a]ll the material in this book not derived from my own observation is either taken from official records or is the result of interviews with the persons directly concerned, more often than not numerous interviews conducted over a considerable period of time."

Capote is not a practitioner of what Hunter S. Thompson calls "gonzo journalism"; he does not dramatize himself as a character in his nonfiction and does not directly call attention to himself in any other way. With respect to narrative perspective, In Cold Blood is more strictly journalistic than any work of "gonzo journalism" (Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test or Norman Mailer's The Armies of the Night, for example). Like a good reporter, he maintains a detached stance and is fastidious in his attribution. In "The Last to See Them Alive," Capote describes an encounter involving sixteen-year-old Nancy Clutter, fifteen-year-old Kenyon Clutter, and Paul Helm, the husband of the Clutter's housekeeper. Capote is careful, at the end of the chapter, to identify Helm as

his source: "'And that,' [Helm] was to testify the next day, 'was the last I seen them.'" (52-54; emphasis mine).

Many of the townspeople of Holcomb became minor characters in In Cold Blood because of the information they were able to provide; in fact, in the novel's preface, Capote calls them his "collaborators." For example, Bobby Rupp, Nancy Clutter's boyfriend, had been at the Clutter house until around eleven p.m. on November 14 (the Clutters were killed in the early hours on the 15th). As the last person who had seen the family members alive, Rupp was not only a valuable source for Capote but also an early suspect for the police. Nancy Clutter's friend Nancy Ewalt and her father Clarence discovered the bodies the next day when they came to the Clutter house to pick Nancy up for Sunday school. Eccentric Holcomb postmistress Myrtle Clare told Capote about seeing the ambulances heading to the Clutter farm. And Josephine "Josie" Meier, wife of the Holcomb County undersheriff, helped the author with his description of Perry and Dick's stay in the county jail.

A scene in Part IV, "The Corner," detailing Perry Smith's reaction on the evening of his conviction and sentencing clarifies Capote's willingness to hint at his fact-gathering techniques as he conveys the facts; the section begins with the statement, "[a] week later Mrs.

Meier was sitting in her parlor talking to a friend" (345). It does not seem too speculative to suggest that this "friend" is Truman Capote. The third-person generic "a friend" is his means of maintaining the journalistic stance.

Capote's method as an interviewer has been sufficiently noted and is now frequently mentioned in journalism textbook chapters about interviewing or feature writing. The a priori of Capote's strategy was that there would be no notetaking or recording. He bragged to anyone who would listen about his phenomenal memory, saying he had prepared for the exhaustive interviews by memorizing pages from catalogs and then having friends quiz him (Capote, "Story" 38). Clarke describes Capote's rationale:

Not once was he or [Lee] seen taking notes: it was [his] theory that the sight of a notebook, or worse still, a tape recorder, inhibited candor. People would reveal themselves, he maintained, only in seemingly casual conversations. Unless they saw a pen or pencil flying across a page, they could not believe that their words were being recorded. (322)

They often conducted interviews together, and during the first weeks of their stay in Kansas, while the diminutive, effeminate-voiced Capote had difficulty warming up the Holcombites, Lee, drawing on her experience in rural Southern towns, dominated the interviews. Later, Capote and Lee would return to their hotel, write separate accounts of the day's interviews, compare their versions, and,

as Lee said, "get it right" (Clarke 322). Getting it right often required more interviews: according to Clarke, Capote and Lee more than once interviewed the same person three times in one day (322).

Capote was also dependent on a variety of printed sources. One of the most important was the official transcript of case number 2322, District Court of Finney County, Kansas: "The State of Kansas, Plaintiff, vs. Richard Eugene Hickock and Perry Edward Smith, Defendants," a 515-page document (Tompkins 127). Part III, "Answer," and Part IV, "The Corner," of the novel both depend heavily on the official transcript for details about the arrest and subsequent conviction of Hickock and Smith; in those sections, Capote relies particularly heavily on the testimony of the K.B.I. agents involved in the investigation. In June of 1966, four months after the book's publication, Phillip K. Tompkins, then a professor at Kansas State University, published an Esquire article questioning Capote's veracity. Much of the article, "In Cold Fact," consists of Tompkins' alternating between Capote's description of events and the account of those same events in the official transcript. Ironically, although Tompkins does point out some of Capote's minor liberties with the facts (such as which car, the one with Dick or the one with Perry, was in front on the drive from

Las Vegas to Garden City, Kansas, following the arrest), the effect of his juxtaposition of the two accounts is ultimately to convince the reader of Capote's rather strict fidelity to official records.

Other important printed sources used by Capote were (1) Perry's "confession," a "seventy-eight page document which he had dictated to the Finney County court stenographer, recount[ing] admissions already made to [K.B.I. agents] Alvin Dewey and Clarence Duntz" (ICB 287); (2) autobiographical essays written by Dick and Perry at the suggestion of a psychiatrist, long sections of which (Perry's in particular) Capote quotes verbatim; and (3) letters written by Smith and Hickock over a period of roughly five years, between the time of their conviction and sentencing on March 29, 1960, and their execution on April 14, 1965. According to Clarke, Capote wrote both Smith and Hickock the two letters a week each was permitted on death row, and they answered regularly, their letters to Capote numbering "in the hundreds" (343). Capote also includes passages from an essay by Smith's father called "A History of My Boy's Life," written for authorities.

But perhaps Capote's most important source for the book was his own experience in Kansas. Capote and Harper Lee remained in Holcomb and Garden City about a month, from the time of the murders in November of 1959 until

mid-January 1960, about two weeks after Dick and Perry's arrest. They attended the trial and sentencing in March of the same year. A few weeks after his initial lukewarm reception, Capote began to cajole and charm the residents of Holcomb in his characteristic puckish fashion, and that manner gained him remarkable access to people and material. Probably second in importance to the relationships he developed with the murderers themselves was his friendship with Alvin Dewey, the K.B.I. investigator assigned to the Clutter case. Dewey's wife Marie was, like Capote, a native of New Orleans, and the Deweys were flattered that a writer of Capote's status would share their stories and their gumbo. In fact, Capote and Harper Lee were dining at the Dewey house on December 30, 1959, when the call came that Hickock and Smith had been apprehended (Clarke 323-24).

Shortly after the trial, Capote left for Europe to piece together his narrative, believing that "[g]regariousness is the enemy of art" (Clarke 330). From his European hideaways, he corresponded regularly with Dick and Perry and returned to Kansas from time to time to conduct more interviews. In April of 1965, much against his wishes but prompted by his instincts as a reporter, he was present for the executions.

Perhaps the most journalistic aspect of In Cold Blood is the fact that the unfolding story dictated Capote's

work schedule, rather than vice versa. By the beginning of 1963, he had finished the first three of the book's four parts (Clarke 339). But he could not go beyond the first section of part IV--the account of the trial--until Perry's and Dick's appeals were exhausted and their sentences either commuted or carried out. In other words, Capote could not finish the story until the story finished itself. It was a tortuous period, one which presented him with a moral dilemma: he wanted desperately to finish his book, but, as an opponent of capital punishment and, after years of interviews, Smith's and Hickock's friend, he could not in good conscience wish for the executions.

The ordeal exhausted Capote, as Clarke describes: "His entire future awaited their walk to the Big Swing, and his comments to his friends, which indicated his real feelings, ran like a grim counterpoint to the consoling comments he was making to Perry and Dick." To his friend Cecil Beaton he wrote, "I'm finishing the last pages of my book--I must be rid of it regardless of what happens. I hardly give a fuck anymore what happens. My sanity is at stake . . ." (Clarke 352). He later called his work on the book "the most emotional experience of my creative life" (Gobel 117) and said that if he had realized when he initially arrived in Kansas how difficult a task lay before him, he "would have driven straight on. Like a

bat out of hell" (Clarke 320).

With regard to Capote's work as a reporter, the questions raised by Phillip Tompkins are certainly relevant. Wouldn't two convicted murderers be inclined to lie to a writer, either because they wanted to look more innocent or because, once on death row, they had nothing to lose? Are ordinary townspeople reliable sources, when they might have faulty memories or the desire to impress a famous writer from the big city? And mightn't a writer like Capote be tempted to fictionalize here and there in the interest of writing a best-seller?

Tompkins spent nine days examining the official records and interviewing many of the people who had provided information to Capote, but he was ultimately unable to document any glaring errors. In his article, Tompkins notes that Nancy Clutter's horse Babe was sold for \$182.50, not the \$75.00 Capote reported, that Nancy's boyfriend Bobby Rupp was a less proficient basketball player than Capote indicated, that the relatively minor details noted earlier about the ride from Las Vegas were inaccurate, and that Perry Smith might not have apologized before his execution, as Capote said he did.

These examples might support Bobby Rupp's statement to Tompkins that Capote "put things in there that to other people make good reading but the people who were actually

involved know that he exaggerated a little bit" (125; emphasis mine), but they hardly support the charge of blatant inaccuracy which Tompkins' tone implies. Remarkably, Rupp's statement about Capote's "exaggerations" seems to be the only comment by a principal in the case published in a book or a nationally circulated periodical which challenges Capote's accuracy. Former postmistress Clare told a reporter that if the people of Holcomb were offended in any way by Capote's account, it was largely because he had made them look so provincial. Clare said her advice to townspeople would be "if the shoe fits, wear it" (Clarke 358).

As for the trustworthiness of the murderers as sources, it is important to note that there were never any major inconsistencies in the stories they told either the police or Capote, even when they were questioned separately. Only one apparent inconsistency appears in their stories--the question of whether Smith committed all four murders--and this inconsistency was resolved when Perry requested that his confession be changed before signing it (287-88). It should also be noted that Capote does not, at any point, attempt to adjudicate between Dick's and Perry's accounts or to ascribe motives to either man; he does not interpret. Faced with the unenviable task of describing an event to which four of the six eyewitnesses

were dead, Capote did what any good journalist would do: he reported what he had been told by appropriate sources.

Probably the factor most responsible for Capote's accuracy is the amount of time he spent in Holcomb and Garden City. He and Lee interviewed and re-interviewed, checked dates and distances, and examined documents, all with a scrupulousness impossible for most reporters, whose stories must appear in tomorrow's newspaper or next week's magazine. Capote said that "[o]ne doesn't work for almost six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions" (Clarke 358). Clarke notes that several other reporters checked on Capote's accuracy but found no "errors of substance" (358). And The New Yorker's own fact checker said that he had worked with many important writers and that Capote was "the most accurate" (Clarke 351).

Although Capote did not commit major factual errors in describing what happened in Kansas, it is worth noting that he did describe one scene which did not happen. At the conclusion of the novel, Nancy Clutter's best friend Susan Kidwell and K.B.I. agent Alvin Dewey meet at the Clutter graves on a beautiful spring day. Kidwell is a student at the University of Kansas majoring in art (Nancy Clutter's intended major), and Capote goes to great lengths to imply that her life could have been Nancy Clutter's

but for the circumstances he has described. Capote created the scene, he said, because he did not want to end with the bleakness of the executions; he wanted to achieve a sense of resolution by dramatizing the idea that life goes on. The scene plays like the conclusion of a made-for-t.v. movie. Most critics felt that it was overly nostalgic; Clarke agrees that it "verges on the trite and sentimental" and that the novel "is the poorer for it" (357-58).

Ironically, the one scene which Capote manufactured is probably the only one which does not ring true for a reader. Its inclusion has perhaps been best explained by Gore Vidal. In a Playboy interview, Vidal charged that Capote suffered from a lack of imagination and consequently robbed the imaginations of his friends: that he was heavily indebted to Carson McCullers for his novel Other Voices, Other Rooms and to Christopher Isherwood, whose Sally Bowles (Goodbye to Berlin, I Am a Camera) became Holly Golightly in Breakfast at Tiffany's. Vidal calls Capote "ruthlessly unoriginal"; he maintains that In Cold Blood was successful because when Capote turned to nonfiction and did not have to make up his own material, he could concentrate on what he did best: the writing itself, the choosing and arranging and selecting of words and sentences and scenes. "[H]e'd found his own voice," Vidal said, "and that is what writing is all about" (Grobel 130). Thus, if the conclusion of

In Cold Blood does not "work," it represents Capote's failure as a novelist, not as a journalist.

The most widespread misreading of In Cold Blood stems from its journalistic texture and methods. Because Capote does not appear in the narrative (except very incidentally as "a friend" in whom one of the "witnesses" confides a detail), a surprising number of critics have either praised Capote for his objectivity or criticized the novel for its lack of a central authorial vision. These perspectives amount to the same misconception about the novel--that it lacks a theme. In "The Capitulation of Literature? The Scope of the 'Nonfiction Novel,'" Ivo Vidan says that Capote has a "blind spot," which is that his "sum of facts does not become meaningful"; the reader, Vidan says, "does not see [in In Cold Blood] any kind of call to take up a position" (176). Vidan goes so far as to say that Capote's detached method is "diametrically opposed" to Naturalism (158). In an essay comparing An American Tragedy and In Cold Blood, John McAleer maintains that "[u]nlike Capote, Dreiser had a thesis that went deeper than a demonstration of form" and that in failing to consider "how the potentials of his materials might be utilized to express a true, universalizing experience, Capote seems to have mistaken craft for art" ("American" 570, 571). In Capote's lengthy Playboy interview, questioner Eric

Norden reveals the same misreading in this question: "In Cold Blood scrupulously refrains from speculating about the motives of the two murderers. You thus avoid answering the crucial question, Why? Is there no answer--or did you fail to find one?" (Capote, "Playboy" 60-61).

Capote's response to Norden's question is succinct: "There is an answer and it's implicit in the book. . . . short of getting a baseball bat and clubbing you over the head with it, I don't see how I could have made the point any more clearly" (Capote, "Playboy" 61-62). Certainly, Capote directs the reader toward the prescribed position through less obvious means than the authorial intrusion of the early Naturalists. His method falls within the realm of what Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction calls "the seductive point-of-view," the employment of various subtle devices like presence--the mere devotion of space--to convince a reader to "see the human worth of a character whose actions, objectively considered, we would deplore" (378-79). As Anderson points out, Capote's withholdings (the delay in the narrative of the murder itself, for example) also play a key role in clarifying the author's vision of his material: "[i]n the space left by the withdrawal of the narrator," Anderson contends, "meaning takes place" (Style 49). Ultimately, one would have to reply to Vidan's contention that "[t]he public

does not see here any kind of call to take up a position" that the public does not read very well.

Not only does Capote's narrative possess a clear and meaningful shape, but the critics who have read perceptively enough to see that shape are unanimous in their identification of it. Essentially, Capote presents in In Cold Blood an allegory of the American experience: the Clutters, in their established Midwestern paradise, represent comfort and respectability, while Perry and Dick represent restlessness and depravity. The Clutters are the "haves" and Dick and Perry the "have nots." Inevitably, when they come together, mutual destruction is the outcome. If, as David Galloway has suggested in "Why the Chickens Came Home to Roost in Holcomb, Kansas," the Clutters embody "much of what is most admirable about the American spirit" (159) then Perry and Dick suggest what is most frightening about America: that those who have been denied participation in "the American dream" are neither patient nor forgiving. The allegorical pattern of In Cold Blood fits so tightly that, had Capote not drawn his material from real life, one suspects that critics might have found the lines too neatly drawn.

Perhaps the tendency of some critics to see In Cold Blood as lacking in theme explains the curious absence of critical discussions of the novel as a Naturalistic

work. Although a handful of reviewers (Granville Hicks, most notably) compare Capote's novel in passing with An American Tragedy, the word Naturalism itself is notably missing from scholarship, with two exceptions. In "The Novel in America Today," a 1981 overview of contemporary novels, Helen Weinberg identifies two trends in the fiction of the previous two decades, one of which is a resurgence of Naturalism. Weinberg maintains that "Naturalism has come back into the contemporary novel through the documentary impulse. Truman Capote was perhaps the trend-setter with In Cold Blood" (62). (She also calls Mailer's The Executioner's Song "remarkably [N]aturalistic" 62.) Contemplating the future of Naturalism beyond the 1940s, toward the end of Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism, Donald Pizer speculates that it might find an outlet in "documentary narrative (for example, In Cold Blood)" (152). The excellent film version of the novel also seems to place In Cold Blood in the Naturalistic tradition: en route to Holcomb, Dick and Perry pass a movie theatre whose marquee advertises A Place in the Sun, the 1951 Oscar-winning adaptation of An American Tragedy. (An alert reader cannot resist the double-entendre: An American Tragedy comes to Kansas.)

Despite these brief discussions, however, critics have virtually ignored the Naturalistic dimensions of In

Cold Blood, an omission which would be less surprising were those dimensions less profound. In The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing, Ronald Weber declares that "the challenge of documentary journalism" is

to remain faithful to the facts yet invest fact with some of the resonant implications of fiction. It is a difficult enough task, but made all the more so when the subject is murder and the facts are so stunning in themselves. (171)

Certainly, Capote has met that challenge, and, in its "resonance," In Cold Blood has outlived Louis Rubin's 1966 prediction that in ten years, most readers would have forgotten it.

## CHAPTER VI

**MAILER'S BIG "NON-BOOK":  
THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG AS DENOUEMENT**

"Between us, I have a big problem.  
Where are the sympathetic characters?"

Larry Schiller, interviewing Gary Gilmore

When Norman Mailer's The Executioner's Song was published in 1978, it shocked a lot of people--not because of the brutality of the crimes Mailer depicts but because of the style in which the book is written. Mailer had written so much I-centered New Journalism such as The Armies of the Night dramatizing himself as a central consciousness that long-time Mailer readers were stunned not to see an "I" in his new narrative. The common critical reaction, articulated with astonishment, was, as Arthur Kretchner says, that Mailer had "changed his voice" and adopted a "flat, midwestern, uncolored, intentionally repetitive" tone (qtd. in Manso 592-93). Judith Scheffler points to Mailer's unprecedented absence as a voice and controlling personality" in the novel (184), and Joseph Wenke observes that The Executioner's Song marks a notable departure from Mailer's earlier nonfiction in that, in the new book, Mailer is not pressing an ideology (214). Even Larry Schiller, the researcher who originally involved Mailer in the

project, commented after reading the first ten pages of manuscript, "Jesus, you're not using your own voice," to which Mailer replied, "You've given me so much material, so much fact, I don't have to rely on my own ego" (qtd. in Manso 581-2).

If The Executioner's Song marks a stylistic departure for Mailer, it represents something of a thematic one as well. The Naturalism of earlier works such as The Naked and the Dead (1948) has given way to existentialism, and the author who suggested in that earlier novel that men are at the mercy of their own (and each other's) determinism confesses that he does not know how to account for "man's inhumanity to man." Shortly after The Executioner's Song's publication, Mailer told interviewer William F. Buckley, Jr., that the novel posed questions which were more important than any answers he could provide:

what I discovered at a certain point--and I think this is really the core of it--is I thought, I can write a book that will really make people think in a way they haven't thought before. This material made me begin to look at ten or 20 [sic] 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. . . . 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. (qtd. in Hellmann 60)

When The Executioner's Song won the Pulitzer Prize in 1980, no one was more unhappy than Truman Capote. Still smarting from the disappointment of In Cold Blood's having been overlooked by the major literary award committees, Capote charged that, if not for his book, Mailer could never have written The Executioner's Song. Capote felt that he had crafted the prototype for writing nonfiction like fiction, and he had commented earlier that Mailer should have subtitled The Armies of the Night "Variations on a Theme by Capote." Of Armies, Capote told his biographer Gerald Clarke, "there [had] never been a greater literary ripoff in the twentieth century" (399). Then, to compound Capote's frustration that Mailer had borrowed his technique, with The Executioner's Song, Mailer borrowed his topic as well. Nearly twenty years earlier, when Capote was working on In Cold Blood, Mailer had criticized him publicly for writing nonfiction, claiming that it represented "a failure of the imagination" (Grobel 113). So in 1980, Mailer's literary triumph in the same genre with the same topic was more than Capote could stand.

Despite the fact that Capote did not plow the nonfictional ground which Mailer cultivated, Capote's remark

that Mailer could not have written The Executioner's Song if not for In Cold Blood is more than the self-congratulatory remark of a jealous rival. Mailer did attempt to write an accurate account of the last nine months of Gary Gilmore's life; like Capote, he uses techniques of both journalism and literature. Like Capote, he chooses the murderer as his protagonist. And like Capote, he eschews participation in the narrative. But unlike Capote, Mailer does not approach his subject from a Naturalistic standpoint, for two reasons: he did not experience the personal involvement with Gary Gilmore that Capote had with Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, and he cannot construct a deterministic argument for Gary Gilmore's murders because, ultimately, he does not know why Gilmore committed them. As he admitted to Buckley, he has many questions but no answers. Thus, while it contains clear elements of the homicide novel which descended from the Naturalistic tradition, The Executioner's Song finally resembles the New Journalism more than the Naturalistic novel. Just as it represents a departure from Mailer's earlier achievements, the book also marks a departure in the homicide novel from the Naturalistic tradition. After In Cold Blood, no book snugly fits the Naturalistic mold.

The central stay of Mailer's adherence to the nonfiction homicide novel tradition is his focus on the

murderer himself, Gary Gilmore, who, when he was shot by a Utah firing squad in 1977, became the first person executed in the United States after the Supreme Court's reinstatement of capital punishment. Throughout the novel, Mailer works to soften the reader's opinion of Gilmore by juxtaposing him with three women sympathetic to him--his cousin Brenda Nicol, his mother Bessie Gilmore, and his girlfriend Nicole Baker.

Mailer works to set up the reader's sympathy for Gilmore immediately, by placing Chapter 1, "The First Day," within the consciousness of Gary's first cousin Brenda, who has more sympathy for him than does any other character. The novel opens with Brenda's memory of having helped Gary conceal a broken apple tree limb when she was six and he was seven. "The First Day" refers to April 9, 1976, when Gilmore was paroled from a Marion, Illinois, prison and flew to Provo, Utah, where Nicol met him at the airport and took him to her home. The first chapter concerns Brenda's recollections of Gary himself, his letters to her (full of self-analysis and isolation), and her hopes about his future. Thus, Mailer establishes a strong sense of the effect on Gary of over half a life spent in prison: "once in a while Gary would remark [to Brenda] that having been in prison so long[, ] he felt more like the victim than the man who did the deed" (19). This image of Gilmore

as a victim is reinforced at the end of Chapter One, again from Brenda's point-of-view: his eyes, Brenda notices, "had the expression of rabbits she had flushed, scared rabbit was the common expression, but she had looked into those eyes of scared rabbits and they were calm and tender and kind of curious. They did not know what would happen next" (28).

Brenda's attitude toward Gary is often that of a frustrated mother figure: she loves him (in fact, "I love you," is the last thing she says to him before his arrest for murder, 267), and her desire to straighten him out by dealing firmly with him is always tempered by the fact that she can't say no to him--for long. When, just a few weeks after his release, Gary calls Brenda to pick him up in Idaho where he has violated his parole by crossing the state line, gotten drunk, and initiated a barroom brawl, her advice to him is "you just get your thumb out of your rear end and put it in the air" (57). Brenda subsequently mopes around the house all day, worrying about how Gary will get home, and finally goes after him when he calls again from Salt Lake City late in the afternoon.

Even when Gilmore is arrested for murder, the reader sees him through Brenda's eyes. When the police need her to keep Gary talking on the phone long enough for them to arrest him, she suffers pangs of guilt; she "felt like

a traitor. Gary's trust was the weapon she was using to nail him. It was true she wanted to nail him, she told herself, but she didn't want, well, she didn't want to betray him to do it" (265). Between phone calls to Gary and from the police department, Brenda bawls, and when his arrest is inevitable, she says to the police dispatcher, "he's coming out. I know he's got a gun, but for God's sake, try not to kill him. I mean it. Don't fire" (267). Emphasizing Brenda's affection for Gilmore allows Mailer to maintain the impression that there might be something redeeming--or at least human--about him, after all.

Mailer uses a second Gilmore relative--Gary's mother Bessie--for similar purposes. Because she is more sympathetic than Gilmore himself and because she cares about him, a reader is encouraged to care for him, too, if only to prevent his mother's further misery. By the time of Gary's third-from-last incarceration, Bessie's world is a mere shadow of the one she shared with Frank Gilmore. Though far from a perfect husband, Gilmore had provided her with a large Victorian-style house, with marble floors and mahogany furniture, for which he had paid cash. But after Frank's death, Bessie took in only about \$70 a week busing tables; her arthritis prevented her from being promoted to waitress. After the property taxes fell several years into arrears and the Mormon Church wouldn't

bail her out by paying the taxes (about \$1,400) and giving her a life lease in exchange for the deed, Bessie was forced to move to a \$3,500 trailer. By the time of Gary's arrest on the two murder charges, Bessie's crippling arthritis cost her her job and made her feel more like eighty-three than sixty-three. She sat in her trailer day after day, reading about Gary in newspapers, telling herself "I'm ugly" (487), and shouting at the teenager sent by the Mormon Church to wash her dishes to "Go away" (490).

Despite her increasing bitterness, though, Bessie Gilmore continued to offer encouragement to Gary. When he was imprisoned at the Oregon State Penitentiary, she had a friend drive her the eighty miles every other Sunday (as often as the prison allowed), although they sometimes arrived to find that Gary was in solitary confinement and couldn't have visitors. When Gary's brother Gaylen died, Bessie hired two prison guards to transport Gary to and from the funeral. And when she learned of her son's desire to have his death sentence carried out, Bessie wrote to him, "I love you & I want you to live. . . . If you have 4 or 5 people who really love you, you are lucky. So please hold on" (491).

Bessie Brown Gilmore is, above all else, a survivor; perhaps the most moving thing about her is her simple will to endure. Through Gary's numerous run-ins with the law

and the deaths of her husband Frank from cancer and her son Gaylen from complications caused by an ice pick stab to the stomach, Bessie reminds herself stoically that strength is in her genes: "I am the daughter of the very first people who settled in Provo. I am the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of pioneers on both sides. If they could live through it, I can live through it" (314).

Mailer also plots very deliberately the placement of the three chapters in Book One which focus on Bessie. The first, Chapter Nineteen ("Kin to the Magician"), occurs almost exactly two-thirds of the way through Book One, immediately after Gary's arraignment on the murder charges. That chapter details Gary's family background (including the evidence that his grandfather was the magician Harry Houdini) and, in a bit of foreshadowing, Bessie's childhood dread of executions (310). The second and third chapters, numbers thirty ("The Slammer") and thirty-two ("Old Cancer, New Madness"), occur just after the death sentence is handed down. In Chapter Thirty, Mailer describes Bessie's friendship with Grace Gilmore McGinnis (no relation, oddly enough), who taught the Gilmore boys in high school and transported Bessie to and from the Oregon State Penitentiary. Chapter Thirty-two records Bessie's increasing premonitions of her son's execution. Gilmore's arrest and sentencing serve as the two high points of Book

One, and Mailer's juxtaposition of those crucial incidents with the consciousness and sentiment of Bessie Gilmore serves primarily to remind a reader that this murderer is still a mother's son.

Bessie describes the complexity of her feelings for Gary in a question to her youngest son, Mikal: "Can you imagine what it feels like to mother a son whom you love, when he has deprived two other mothers of their sons?" (492). When she heard--on Good Morning, America--that the execution had been carried out, she (according to Mailer) "cried into the sore flesh of her heart" and said aloud to the mountain which had become her symbol of stability and certainty, "Mountain, you can go to hell. You're not mine anymore" (975-76). Her perspective is the one least often seen in capital punishment cases--that of the murderer's survivors. Her agony illustrates George Eliot's observation in The Mill on the Floss that it is difficult to punish the guilty without also punishing the innocent.<sup>3</sup>

Nicole Baker Hampton Barrett Hudson Baker, Gilmore's girlfriend, also encourages the reader's sympathy for Gary Gilmore, not only because she is more inherently sympathetic than he is but also because Gilmore seems most stable when he is around her. Nicole herself is more pathetic than sympathetic. After she was sexually abused by a live-in

uncle over a six-year period (from age six to about age twelve), Nicole gave up on the possibility of virtue and, in her own words, "became a slut" (101). By the sixth grade, she had the misfortune of having what she termed "the biggest boobs in the elementary school," a distinction which earned her the nickname "Foam Rubber" (100). At ten or eleven, she was writing shockingly pornographic letters to classmates (99). When Nicole was twelve and the abusive uncle was killed in Vietnam, she blamed herself, superstitiously believing that her "evil thoughts" had caused his death (102). Not surprisingly, at thirteen, Nicole was sent to a psychiatric institution for the first time.

By the time she met Gary Gilmore, Nicole had been married three times (the last time for two weeks), cohabited with several other men, prostituted herself to support her second husband's drug habit, and borne two children. When Gilmore moved in with her, Nicole had moved up from waiting tables to sewing in a factory, making \$2.31 an hour and bringing home \$80 a week (in 1976) to support herself and two children. She drove a Ford Mustang that she got for \$175 because the seller liked her and because she had saved a hundred dollars "from screwing welfare out of extra money they'd once given her" (82).

It is difficult to hold Nicole entirely responsible for her apparent worthlessness, though, because she seems

so thoroughly adolescent. A tiny woman whom Gilmore called his "elf," Nicole approached the world with the logic and naivete of a twelve-year-old. For example, when she found out, at seventeen, that she was pregnant with her second child, she admitted to a Planned Parenthood worker that she "had never known how to keep from getting pregnant" (118). Her logic in deciding to keep the baby is characteristically simple: "She thought about having an abortion. But she couldn't bring herself to kill a baby. She couldn't stand Barrett anymore, but she loved Sunny [her daughter]. So she couldn't see killing a new baby she might also love" (119).

The immediate catalyst of Gilmore's capital crimes was Nicole's refusal to see him anymore because he had become so demanding and dependent. The day before the first of the two murders for which Gilmore would be executed, he told Brenda,

I think I'm going to kill Nicole. . . . I can't take it . . . . When she pulled the gun on me today, . . . I thought about taking it. But I didn't want Nicole to start screaming. She was frantic to get away from me. (207)

Later the same day, as he fired two shots into the back of gas station attendant Max Jensen's head at close range, Gilmore pronounced the first shot for himself and the second "for Nicole" (226). At least two other circumstances fueled

Gilmore's descent to violence: (1) the Fiorinol, Prolixin, and alcohol he ingested to numb the pain of Nicole's departure and his chronic headaches; and (2) the fact that he desperately needed money to keep his beloved pick-up truck, which had become like an extension of his ego. Had Nicole not left him, these circumstances would probably have led him to more petty crimes, but it is doubtful that he would have killed anybody. His relationship with Nicole, had it continued, might have saved not only Gilmore but his victims as well.

But despite Mailer's attempts at humanizing him by associating him with more sympathetic women, Gary Gilmore ultimately falls short as a Naturalistic protagonist. Regardless of Brenda's and Nicole's feelings for him, it is hard for a reader to sympathize with a man who could shoot two people as coolly as Gilmore does and who says such shocking things as "Why don't we just grab a couple of bitches and rape them?" (66) and, two months after the murders, "you know, this is the first time I've ever had any feelings for either of those two guys I killed" (386). Even Larry Schiller, after he began interviewing Gilmore, voiced the concern that the book and movie projects would be unsuccessful because his subject wasn't sufficiently sympathetic (629). Ultimately, Gilmore is much more Dick Hickock than Perry Smith. Unlike many murderers, he is

of at least average intelligence. He writes insightful and interesting letters, and he is charming in a sociopathic sort of way. But on a day-to-day basis, he is an adolescent, foul-mouthed career criminal whose inability to adjust to the world outside prison is far more pathetic than tragic. The Executioner's Song is not a book in which we root for the bad guy to get away just because we are focused on him throughout. Gilmore is taken away to jail, and his cousin Brenda speaks for the reader when she says "Thank God" (273).

Truman Capote alleged that part of Norman Mailer's inability to conjure sympathy for Gilmore stemmed from the fact that Mailer never met him. Capote felt that The Executioner's Song suffered because Mailer did not have the level of personal involvement and intimacy with Gilmore that Capote had with Perry Smith and Dick Hickock:

I have no respect for Norman Mailer's book The Executioner's Song, which, as far as I'm concerned, is a nonbook. He didn't live through it day by day, he didn't know Utah, he didn't know Gary Gilmore, he never even met Gary Gilmore, he didn't do an ounce of research on the book--two other people did all the research. He was just a rewrite man like you have over at the Daily News. I spent six years on In Cold Blood and not only knew the people I was writing about, I've known them better than I've known anybody. So Mailer's book just really annoyed me. Can you see why it annoyed me? (qtd. in Grobel 113)

Capote's deeply felt jealousy led him to understate Mailer's role in the research which formed the basis for The

Executioner's Song. After he got involved in the project, Mailer did travel to Utah and Oregon to talk with Gilmore's survivors and other witnesses to his life and crimes. And certainly the novel suggests a wealth of supporting material of the same kinds Capote used, material Mailer describes in his Afterword:

The Executioner's Song is directly based on interviews, documents, records of court proceedings, and other original material that came from a number of trips to Utah and Oregon. More than one hundred people were interviewed face to face, plus a good number talked to by telephone. The total, before count was lost, came to something like three hundred separate sessions, and they range in length from fifteen minutes to four hours. Perhaps ten subjects are on tape for more than ten hours each. Certainly, in the last two and a half years, Nicole Baker's interviews have added up to thirty hours, and conversations with Bessie Gilmore may come to more than that. It is safe to say that the collected transcript of every last recorded bit of talk would approach fifteen thousand pages.

. . . In addition . . . . [m]any trips were taken to Oregon State Prison to interview guards and prisoners who had known Gilmore during his many years in that institution. (1021, 23)

What Mailer hides in the passive voice of "more than one hundred people were interviewed" and "many trips were taken" is the fact that he did not do very much of this work himself. Although Mailer's lack of direct involvement with Gary Gilmore is not grounds for conviction of the literary crimes with which Capote charged him, it is reasonable to suggest that his disengagement affected his critical distance and the attitude about Gilmore he con-

veys. Even if Capote was wrong about the cause of Mailer's detachment from Gilmore, he was right about its effect.

The Executioner's Song consists of two sections: "Western Voices," which spans the time from Gilmore's parole to his conviction and sentencing, and "Eastern Voices," which covers the last few months of Gilmore's life and basically details the story of his marketing for posterity. That marketing was orchestrated by Lawrence Schiller, a former Life photographer who had syndicated the Fisher quintuplets, taken a rather famous photograph of Jack Ruby on his deathbed, covered the trials of Sirhan Sirhan and Charles Manson, and generally earned a reputation as "the journalist who dealt in death" (Ex. Song 582). Schiller sold the idea for a story on Gilmore first to ABC, then to Gary's uncle Vern Damico, and finally to Gilmore himself. Schiller and a team of other researchers conducted hundreds of hours of interviews with Gilmore. And, in May of 1977, nearly four months after Gilmore's execution, Schiller brought in Norman Mailer as the "rewrite man."

Schiller explained that he chose Mailer because he thought the author would understand Gary Gilmore. Like Gilmore, the writer had reportedly had a violent relationship with his father and, perhaps more importantly, possessed "a great passion for women." Like Gilmore, Mailer could be provoked to violence if a woman threatened his

masculinity; in 1960, for example, Mailer created a media stir by stabbing his second wife, Adele Morales Mailer, at a Manhattan party (Manso 579). In a Village Voice review of The Executioner's Song, James Wolcott observed that "Gilmore's life comfortably accommodated all the aspects of Mailer's evolving philosophy" (46). And Mailer himself noted that he saw in Gilmore "the perfect character" because, as he said, Gary "embodied many of the themes I've been living with all my life" (Mills 425).

Perhaps the closest similarity between Gilmore and Mailer was both men's fascination with Nicole Baker. On one of his trips to Utah, Mailer stayed overnight in the house in Spanish Fork where Nicole had lived, perhaps as a way of legitimizing his involvement in the story. Schiller has suggested that Mailer's interaction with Nicole was "figuratively . . . another marriage for Norman" (Manso 579). Mailer comments in the Afterword that "without the cooperation of Nicole Baker, there would not have been a way to do this factual account--this, dare I say it, true life story, with its real names and real lives--as if it were a novel" (1021-22).

It is difficult to imagine how Mailer could have written the first half of the book without Nicole's participation and it seems impossible that he would have written The Executioner's Song at all without Larry

Schiller. Thus, although Mailer, like Capote, got his material from journalistic techniques, it was second-hand journalism at best. And when Mailer was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, Capote felt "like a war hero who has hobbled home, expecting a parade, only to discover that others, who have never even seen the enemy up close, have picked up all the medals" (Clarke 398). Mailer had, literally, never seen Gary Gilmore "up close," so his identification with Gilmore was more like that of a novelist for his fictional protagonist than that of a journalist for his flesh-and-blood subject.

In fact, at least one critic has suggested that Mailer felt a much closer attachment to Lawrence Schiller than to Gilmore, because he felt that both he and Schiller had "a problematic reputation" that was attributable to public misunderstanding (Wenke 210). But Mailer's use of Schiller as a major character in Book Two is very much a device, as Mailer himself admitted when he said to his researcher, "you have to be in the book [because] when Nicole goes into the nuthouse and Gary is in prison there's no central character who can serve as the link between them. You're that character" (qtd. in Manso 585). Perhaps the best evidence of Mailer's error in judgment in putting Schiller in so prominent a position is the fact that the second half of the book is so much less interesting than the first.

In the words of Arthur Kretchmer, who was editor-in-chief at Playboy when excerpts from Schiller's interviews with Gilmore appeared in that magazine as a prelude to the novel's publication, "the story of Schiller's negotiations . . . [is] nowhere near as interesting as Mailer decided [it was]" (qtd. in Manso 595).

Besides the damage to Book II, Mailer's overdependence on Schiller hurt The Executioner's Song in another way. His lack of personal involvement with Gary Gilmore left him without an explanation for Gilmore's crimes, and he was unable to detect one from his materials. Thus, Mailer cannot make the deterministic argument, or any other argument, for that matter. In this respect, he departs most drastically from the novel about homicide as the Naturalists wrote it.

Mailer is interested in the "why" of Gary Gilmore's story. For this reason, he acknowledges the contributions of many "witnesses"; his list, in the book's Afterword, runs to about 135 names. Mailer or his researchers talked to Bessie Gilmore about Gary's childhood and adolescence, had a former resident of a juvenile facility where Gary lived write a thorough description of life at that institution, visited all the prisons where Gary was incarcerated, had Nicole go over and over even the most intimate and sordid details of her brief relationship with

Gary, and pored over six to seven hundred double-sided pages of letters.

These sources gave Mailer an abundance of insight into Gary Gilmore's personality. Gilmore had an abusive father and relatively passive mother. He suffered from severe migraines, for which he took Fiorinal, and depression, for which he took Prolixin; sometimes he took both drugs, washing them down with alcohol. He confessed strong pedophilic tendencies, particularly a powerful attraction to young girls. Much of the reason he was attracted to Nicole in the first place was her tiny physique; he repeatedly referred to her as his "elf," and he became "a hellion" after Nicole, at his request, shaved her pubic hair (142-43). He had a similar attraction to young boys, which he acted on in reform school. In fact, at least one psychologist suggested that Gilmore's interest in pornography involving children repulsed him so strongly that he killed Benny Bushnell and Max Jensen in order to commit suicide by firing squad.

From these squalid aspects of Gilmore's personality, a Naturalist would have constructed an argument about causes, but Mailer regards them merely as what Tom Wolfe has called "status details," facts to be included in an account because the writer knows them to be true. Ultimately, Mailer presents all possible explanations for

Gilmore's behavior because he is unable to sort them out. In the Mailer chapter of Style as Argument: Contemporary American Nonfiction, Chris Anderson argues convincingly that Mailer employs what Mas'ud Zavarzadeh (The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel) calls "zero-degree interpretation" (Style 122). Anderson says that Mailer is

relentlessly recording all the trivia, all the meaningless details of [Gary Gilmore's] experience, reproducing the texture of his life without making it meaningful or giving it a literary shape. It's as if he has set a camera down in the middle of this event, in the tradition of Warhol and cinema verite, and simply recorded all that passed the camera's eye. (119)

This is undoubtedly the same effect that Diane Johnson attempts to describe when she says in The New York Review of Books that Mailer's style is "all tape recorder" (3).

In assembling his material, then, Mailer used the realist's--not the determinist's--criterion of emphasis. The early chapters of Book One contain many passages about Gilmore and Nicole's sex life because they apparently had sex frequently--not because Norman Mailer believed that sex was a particularly weighty factor in an equation which led ultimately to the solution x = murder. If it happened and Mailer knew about it, he put it into the book. If it happened a lot, it got more space than something which happened only once or twice. Essentially, Mailer attempts

to offer a realistic description of the last nine months of Gary Gilmore's life--not to make an argument about it. Anderson points out that the "Ruminator," who, in The Armies of the Night, reflects on and interprets the meaning and effectiveness of the anti-Vietnam rhetoric, is replaced in The Executioner's Song by the "Recorder," who merely reports or catalogs, and that, consequently, Gilmore's story seems "undigested" (120).

The difference between Mailer's handling of Gilmore's family background and Truman Capote's treatment of Perry Smith's family history clarifies each writer's method. In the sections of The Executioner's Song which deal with Gilmore's father, mother, or brothers, Mailer focuses as often on those other family members and how Gary's problems have affected them as he does on how their family life affected Gary. For example, Chapter 30, "The Slammer," the chapter which immediately follows Gilmore's sentencing, describes how Gary's previous incarcerations have worn down his mother and even her friend Grace McGinnis, who, after driving Bessie to and from visits with Gary for over two years, finally decides "I have only so much energy. I can't carry this. I am a devout coward. . . I just have to pull out" (464). But when Capote reviews Perry Smith's family history, his intent is always to determine how that past led to Perry's present. Capote is far more

selective because he is sculpting, whereas Mailer is painting a broad canvas.

Mailer's attitude about the book's editing affirms that he was not interested in carving a particular shape out of Gary Gilmore's final days. Mailer originally told Schiller that he expected the book to take six months (Manso 581), and although it took over twice that long, one year is still a far cry from the six that Capote spent on In Cold Blood. In fact, Capote actually spent more time in Kansas researching than Mailer spent on The Executioner's Song from start to finish. That getting the book to correspond to some imagined design was not among Mailer's high priorities seems clear from his response to Schiller's request for revision: "Sure . . . if I had five years, I might go through it a couple of times. But I can't do that. I've gotta publish now. It would take me three months to do what needs to be done, and I'm stuck for money" (qtd. in Manso 592). Although Mailer did agree to edit a little when Schiller got him an additional \$100,000 (for a total project advance of \$600,000), he eventually gave in to the impatience which is another similarity with Gilmore. Kretchmer characterized Mailer's attitude as "you hit the deadline[;] they take it away" (qtd. in Manso 595).

Mailer's lackadaisical attitude about the final shape of the book resulted largely from his lack of emotional

involvement with the material and, specifically, with Gary Gilmore. Capote's allegation that Mailer was no more than a "rewrite man" was certainly accurate in the sense that Mailer's emotional investment was more like an editor's than like that of the reporter on the scene. It is reasonable to assume that, had Norman Mailer known Gary Gilmore, he might have felt a stronger obligation to shape the book toward some motive--whether or not that motive was ultimately knowable.

The emotional involvement of the novelist with the protagonist is the heart of the Naturalistic tradition, because in order to portray the character at the mercy of deterministic forces, the writer must first see him or her as a victim. This is the perspective from which Dreiser views Carrie Meeber and Clyde Griffiths; it is the way that Norris sees McTeague, Crane sees Maggie Johnson, Thomas Hardy sees Tess Durbeyfield, and Truman Capote sees Perry Smith. But determinism is not the glass through which Mailer sees Gary Gilmore. Undeniably, he sympathizes with Gilmore (particularly where the relationship with Nicole was concerned), and he goes to some pain to arrange for the reader to sympathize with Gilmore, too. But he does not see Gilmore as a puppet manipulated by forces outside his control. Without that perspective, Mailer never developed the rhetorical agenda

that the Naturalistic writer of a homicide novel acquires--the need to argue that the murderer himself is a victim. As Lee Clark Mitchell argues in "Naturalism and the Languages of Determinism," "any sure evidence of effective choice, of free will or autonomous action, makes a novel something other than Naturalistic" (530). Mitchell calls this a "negative test" for Naturalism, and Mailer's book fails it.

What Mailer substitutes for a unified, deterministic theme intended to explain the protagonist's actions is a collage of different explanations, chiefly Gilmore's own and those of the psychologists appointed to examine him. Gary Gilmore himself believed in karma and reincarnation, as well as chance. (In fact, another reason that Mailer was interested in Gilmore was that in the mid-seventies, the author, too, flirted with a belief in reincarnation, Mills 425.) Gilmore had dreams which he interpreted as psychic memories. For example, he believed that he had been beheaded in the eighteenth century (145) and that he and Nicole had been lovers in previous incarnations (329). He felt that maybe he and his cellmate Gibbs were "meant to meet" because of strong similarities in their relationships with their girlfriends (366). In his more philosophical moods, he flirted with the idea that he was a criminal because of bad karma. Asking the

court to circumvent the customary appeals process and carry out his death sentence swiftly, Gilmore argued that "There is some crime from my past. I feel I have to atone for the thing I did then" (482). It was Gilmore's belief in reincarnation that finally convinced Larry Schiller that Gilmore's death wish might not be a bluff:

For the first time it hit him that Gilmore might want to go all the way. Up to then he had assumed Gilmore would accept his execution because he was a proud con trapped in a role. Now he understood that Gary might expect to find something on the other side. Not only willing to gamble on it, but gamble everything. It must be, Schiller thought, the way he sometimes felt shooting craps when he knew he was coming up with a seven. (671)

That Gilmore believed in his spiritual future as well as his past is also substantiated by his sensing that he would "one day have a dream that he was a guy named GARY in 20th century America and that there was something very wrong" (359).

But despite his belief in spiritual debts, Gilmore ultimately felt that he was responsible for his own actions. "I believe we always have a choice," he wrote to Nicole shortly after his arrest (344). To the end, he felt that he was still making choices; indeed, the primary reason he opted not to appeal was to maintain his sense of control. His suicide pact with Nicole two months before his execution illustrates his desire to make his own

choices. And the possibility that he underdrugged himself in order to survive and know whether Nicole had obeyed him (608) demonstrates that he wanted to determine more than his own destiny. Mailer wrote that Schiller, as he closed in on a deal with Gilmore, "began to feel how much Gilmore was in control" (641). Schiller also observed that Gary's hunger strike was motivated not by "despair" but "as a way to make Gilmore the dealer" (650-51).

Of course, Gilmore acted out his autocratic drama in an environment where he had few real moves, a paradox which Mailer also skillfully shows a reader. In the last few weeks of his life, as the execution began to seem more and more inevitable, Gilmore increasingly gave orders to prison officials, attorneys, and media representatives; Mailer describes him as like "a graduate student going for his orals before a faculty of whom he was slightly contemptuous" (656). Faced with the growing improbability of escaping the firing squad, Gilmore exercised what few options he had within the confines of maximum security--basically, choosing whether or not to cooperate with people around him. And he was fully aware that he didn't have real freedom; in urging the Utah Board of Pardons not to commute his sentence to life imprisonment, he said, "I simply accepted the sentence that was given to me. I have accepted sentences all my life. I didn't

know I had a choice in the matter" (657).

An episode late in the book illustrates the narrow limits of Gilmore's free will. On the evening before his execution, as his attorney left the visiting room, Gilmore asked him, "You wouldn't change clothes with me, would you?" and described how, with a disguise, he might escape (886). Gilmore's question does grave damage to notion of him as a man hell-bent on his own execution and suggests his true motivation--that, seeing his choices reduced to death and thirty or forty more years in prison, he chose death. His choice was motivated by two factors: first, he found prison insufferable, especially the effect of the noise on his headaches; and second, his choosing execution presented more complications for the officials of the prison and legal system who had to carry it out. Scheffler says, "The final Gary Gilmore opts for free will . . . though it may be purchased at others' expense" and he thus "affirm[s] the paradoxical free will that generations of prisoners have proclaimed in journals and stone wall etchings" (190).

Mailer adds to the collage of explanations the theories of psychologists who examined Gary Gilmore. Gilmore's attorneys did not call on psychologists during Gilmore's trial, because they felt that he could not be found legally insane (419). In fact, the inconclusiveness of the

psychiatric reports is illustrated by the comments of Dr. John Woods at the mitigation hearing which preceded sentencing. Dr. Woods, speaking for a group of psychologists who had examined Gilmore, testified that the combination of beer and Fiorinal could have "impair[ed] Gilmore's judgment and . . . loosen[ed] the controls on a person that already ha[d] very poor control of himself," but admitted on cross-examination that he had previously written a report which declared Gilmore free of any mental illness or "altered perception of reality" and said that the alcohol and medication were "not likely" to have diminished Gilmore's sense of responsibility for his actions (433-34).

Mailer also presents the arguments of those who feel that the prison system itself is to blame for Gilmore's inability to function normally in society. Gilmore spent eighteen of the twenty-two years between ages thirteen and thirty-five behind bars. The reader realizes how little prison has prepared Gilmore for the "outside" when Brenda takes him to J.C. Penney's to buy jeans and he says pathetically, "I don't know how to go about this. Are you supposed to take the pants off the shelf, or does somebody issue them to you?" (36). Prosecutor Noall Wootton blames prison for much of Gilmore's trouble, calling his incarceration "a total, dismal, complete failure" (439).

In the end, a reader seeking to learn why Gary Gilmore crossed the line from shoplifting and parole violations to murder is left with many puzzle pieces but no specific directions on assembling them. Certainly Nicole's rejection, the drugs and alcohol, and Gilmore's inability to adapt to life outside prison were all factors. But Mailer leaves the reader to weigh and combine those factors; his purpose is not rhetorical. In the end, as McLaughlin notes, "Gary Gilmore remains unexplained and unexplainable" (225).

Despite the critical insistence that The Executioner's Song represents a stylistic departure for Mailer and a movement away from his earlier Naturalism, the theme of the book is common to his literary nonfiction: the ultimate impossibility of recovering meaning from the chaos of modern life. As Anderson points out, "inexplicability" poses the same problem for Mailer in The Executioner's Song that it does in Of a Fire on the Moon and The Armies of the Night (129-30). In "History vs. Fiction: The Self-Destruction of The Executioner's Song," Robert L. McLaughlin argues that the book subverts its own attempts to make meaning, largely because, in the Afterword, Mailer undercuts the authority of his own sources (226). Mailer himself points out, McLaughlin notes, that all of his sources--interviews (including those with Gilmore),

newspaper accounts, the involvement of Lawrence Schiller--ultimately lack credibility. In that Afterword, Mailer admits that he can come no closer to "the truth" than "the recollections of the witnesses," that often, confronted with conflicting accounts, the author had chosen "the version that seemed most likely" and that "it would be vanity to assume he was always right" (1020). Of media accounts, Mailer suggests in the novel itself that reporters used a kind of press pool, wherein they would "put a common evaluation on the story the way an open market arrive[s] at a price" (791). McLaughlin suggests (and the novel bears out) that Schiller was much more interested in resurrecting his own reputation as a journalist than in getting at "truth." Perhaps most problematic is the unreliability of Gilmore himself, who presents various "masks" to the interviewers:

Rereading the interviews and letters, Farrell began to mark the transcripts with different-colored inks to underline each separate motif in Gilmore's replies, and before he was done, he got twenty-seven poses. Barry had begun to spot racist Gary and Country-and-Western Gary, poetic Gary, artist manque Gary, macho Gary, self-destructive Gary, Karma County Gary, Texas Gary, and Gary the killer Irishman. Awfully prevalent lately was Gilmore the movie star. (806)

Perhaps it was Mailer's awareness of his inability to claim accuracy which led him to ask his publisher, Little, Brown, to classify The Executioner's Song as a "truelife novel"

(Mills 430). The book won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, although the Pulitzer committee gives awards in categories like "General Nonfiction" and "Explanatory Journalism."

Ultimately, McLaughlin maintains, The Executioner's Song is largely about how difficult it is to write a novel like The Executioner's Song (237). Anderson says that perhaps even more than Armies or Fire, the book is about "the dramatization of process, the story of the effort to recover the event. . . . It's as if Mailer, rather than writing a book, chooses to present us with the material he would have to work from in writing a book" (120). This compilation resulted in another of the gargantuan manuscripts which led Tom Wolfe, in his 1965 review of An American Dream, to suggest that Mailer might improve his prose style by studying at the school of James M. Cain (Hoopes 487-88).

The notion of forging meaning out of chaos brings up an aspect of Mailer's work which is--and has always been--fundamentally Naturalistic: the conviction, shared by all the Naturalistic writers, that something in American society is fundamentally askew. In Advertisements for Myself, Mailer acknowledged that while he was working on The Naked and the Dead, he reread three novels which had affected him profoundly when he first read them as a college freshman: Studs Lonigan, U.S.A., and The Grapes of Wrath

(27). In his chapter on Mailer in Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism, Donald Pizer notes that Malcolm Cowley called The Naked and the Dead "The Studs Lonigan Boys in the South Pacific" (90). Pizer contends that Mailer is a "major twentieth-century American [N]aturalist" and that The Naked and the Dead is one of the "best and most significant novels" in recent American Naturalism. Pizer points out the definite influence of Naturalism in Mailer's use of the Army platoon, with its race and class conflicts, as a microcosm of American society, and his characterization of the "fascistic" General Cummings with his "willingness to view men as machines or animals" (90-1).

In addition to the Naturalists of the 1930s, Mailer acknowledged the influence of Dreiser, specifically An American Tragedy. That he knew the novel well is indicated by actress Shelley Winters' account of Mailer's explaining it to her, in preparation for her role as Roberta in the film adaptation A Place in the Sun. Mailer went scene by scene through the novel with Winters, explaining that Clyde Griffiths basically suffered the fallout from a shift in American society from morals to status. Winters said she presumed that "Norman was a protege of Dreiser because he knew the book so well" (qtd. in Manso 141-42).

In a 1963 essay, Mailer acknowledged the specific influence of Dreiser on The Naked and the Dead. He wrote

that "the central terrain of the modern novel" was divided between the kind of novels Tolstoy wrote, about the social forces which affected men, and the kind written by Dostoevsky, more intensely psychological novels, in which individuals are observed in the "terror" of "exploring the mystery about themselves" ("Some Children" 128). Mailer says that An American Tragedy is a perfect example of the Tolstoyan kind and that Moby Dick epitomizes the Dostoevsky strain. He noted that in The Naked and the Dead, he sought to "straddle the categories" ("Some Children" 128). Mills' comment that Mailer's 1965 novel An American Dream "reenacted" to some extent both An American Tragedy and Crime and Punishment would seem to indicate that Mailer did sometimes manage that balance (277).

But Mailer's comment in 1963 that the Tolstoyan novel was getting harder and harder to write might be read as an indication that the Naturalistic influence was ceasing to have its effect on him. The increasing complexity of American society, he said, made it difficult to write social novels with the broad sweep of Zola and Balzac. He asks,

Who can create a vast canvas when the imagination must submit itself to a plethora of detail in each joint of society? Who can travel to many places when the complexity of each pool sucks up one's attention like a carnivorous cess-fed flower? ("Some Children" 129)

One is tempted to say that in The Executioner's Song Mailer has given up on Tolstoy and migrated to the Dostoevskian model of exploring the terror of the self. Actually, Mailer still manages to do both, by examining social realities as they are personified in one "self"--Gary Gilmore. But whereas Dostoevsky and Melville look into Raskolnikov and Ahab and find motive, Mailer finds Gary Gilmore hollow. Chris Anderson says that the subject of The Executioner's Song is ultimately "vacuum" (131), that "what [Mailer] wants us to see is the pointlessness, the dreariness of the Gilmore story. . . . What Gilmore's life illustrates is the fundamental mundaneness of part of America" (124-5). Commenting on the vernacular effectiveness of The Executioner's Song, John Garvey says that if "future readers want to know how Americans sounded in the 1970s they can come to this book" (140). By extension, if the theme of the book is that the chaos of modern life defies explanation, future generations could also get an accurate picture of the existential climate of post-sixties America from Gary Gilmore's story. In this sense, Norman Mailer fills the role which Harold Bloom has prescribed for him: "Mailer, now celebrated, doubtless will vanish into neglect, and yet always will return, as a historian of the moral consciousness of his era" (Mailer 6).

CHAPTER VII  
NATURALISM IN THE '90s?

"Naturalism in American fiction is now  
about as dead as the well-known dodo."

Randall Stewart (1958)

In Cold Blood and The Executioner's Song are the most important nonfiction homicide novels to be published in the United States since 1960. But the homicide novel genre has spawned so many true-crime "copycats" like the recent flurry of Amy Fisher/Joey Buttafuoco books that it has acquired negative connotations. In fact, true crime has become a kind of cultural phenomenon which recently earned feature status in The New York Times. On December 13, 1992, in "Serial Killers Claim Movies as Their Prey," Pat H. Broeske makes the alarming statement that "mass murderers are rapidly becoming popular culture's favorite villain for the '90s" (18). As if to verify Broeske's assertion, the March 14, 1993, New York Times Book Review featured page-one reviews of two recent homicide novels with sidebars about the circumstances of their composition ("I've Always Gravitated to Crime" 21), all under the general heading "The Psychopaths Among Us," and a half-page advertisement for a third (3). But the Fisher/Buttafuoco case best

demonstrates the scope (and shamelessness) of the "true-crime" school, having even been satirized in a mock-Masterpiece Theatre version on the NBC program Saturday Night Live.<sup>4</sup> All of this suggests that some criteria for separating the Perry Smiths from the Amy Fishers are in order, and Naturalism can help clarify the distinction.

As Charles H. Brown has observed in "Journalism vs. Art," In Cold Blood may not rightly be viewed as a new literary species, but it and Mailer's nonfiction works in the 1960s were instrumental in establishing literary nonfiction as a force to be reckoned with, imitated, and analyzed; Capote's and Mailer's successes in nonfiction constituted a "seal of approval" for the mode (33). Their works also touched off a critical debate as to appropriate critical terms for evaluation of nonfiction. Are An American Tragedy and In Cold Blood to be judged by different standards? Because literary nonfiction employs narrative as its primary strategy, critics have tended to judge it according to the criteria which they would apply to realistic novels rather than to journalism; thus, many reviews of Capote's novel mentioned the crisp pace of the storytelling or the effectiveness of the characterizations, but evaluations of the book's factual fidelity are extremely rare (in fact, Philip Tompkins' In Cold Fact is the only one).

In "Literary Status for Nonfiction Narratives," Eric Heyne argues convincingly that factual accuracy per se is not an appropriate standard by which to judge a nonfiction account because a reader's ability to ascertain the degree of a work's conformity to facts is highly variable, depending "on the epistemology and experience of the individual reader" (142). Heyne proposes substitution of the useful terms "factual status" and "factual adequacy." "Factual status" is the context the author gives the reader concerning the accuracy of the narrative. Capote, for example, notifies the reader in the preface to In Cold Blood that any material "not derived from [his] own observation" is derived either "from official records or . . . interviews with the persons directly concerned." Statements such as Capote's are present with surprising frequency in nonfiction novels, and, as Heyne maintains, shape a reader's expectations.

"Factual adequacy" is "the degree to which [the work] satisfies our standards of truthfulness" (140). Once a reader determines that a writer intends a narrative to have factual status, Heyne says, then he or she can "weigh" its factual adequacy (140). Thus, because Dreiser makes no initial claims for factual status in An American Tragedy, the reader expects from it only ordinary verisimilitude (despite its being derived from fact); with In Cold Blood

or The Executioner's Song, because the authors have made claims for factual status, the reader applies a different standard. Factual "status" and "adequacy" are the primary criteria which distinguish fiction from literary nonfiction.

The primary quality which fiction and literary nonfiction share, and which distinguishes literary nonfiction from nonfiction per se or mere reporting, is theme. Heyne says that "the first and generally most important sign of a valuable true story is its ability to convince us to see the world in a new way"; literary nonfiction, therefore, has "the capacity to alter our understanding of the world beyond the narrative" ("Status" 142). Certainly fiction can be said to have the same capacity, so that we can distinguish Wuthering Heights from a Harlequin romance on the rack at the grocery story check-out by saying that the reader of Wuthering Heights gains a deeper understanding of (and perhaps a useful paradigm for) love and separation, while the reader of the Harlequin romance merely has a vicarious experience. The works which "alter our understandings" most profoundly, in other words, are the superior works. The same criterion can be used to distinguish general nonfiction from literary nonfiction. Whereas In Cold Blood contributes something important to a reader's understanding of criminal behavior and how murder affects an average community, the New York

Times article which prompted Capote to go to Kansas merely adds to its reader's store of factual information.

The Naturalistic novel--nonfiction or not--takes Heyne's contention one step further. If "literary" works can be said to "convince us to see the world in a new way," then Naturalistic literary works convince us to see the world in a particular way, as do Marxist works, or feminist works, or works with any specific orientation. Based on the premises developed thus far about the Naturalistic homicide novel, then, what generalizations can be made about the particular view of the world which it has traditionally encouraged, and how has that view changed over the last thirty years?

By now it seems overly reductive to define the Naturalist homicide novel as a work in which a character is driven to murder by forces outside his control and far more productive to identify patterns which persist in that novel. First, the protagonist is a young person, always male, generally between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five; the significance of age is that the protagonist has not fully matured. Thus, the reader sees him as a person not adequately prepared to deal rationally with the world.

Second, his social status limits him within his culture. He is almost always poor, and, more often than

the average protagonist, he is a member of a cultural minority; he may be black, like Bigger Thomas; Jewish, like Judd Steiner and Artie Shaw; or (most problematic of all) of mixed racial heritage, like Joe Christmas or Perry Smith. It is not coincidence that Dreiser, the early master of the Naturalistic homicide novel, was the first American Catholic writer of stature and the first to grow up speaking a foreign language at home.

The settings of novels in this tradition exhibit one of two tendencies: to be urban, novels of San Francisco (McTeague), Chicago (An American Tragedy, Native Son, Compulsion), Kansas City and "Lycurgus" (An American Tragedy); or to exist "out there," in some remote, isolated locale such as the wheatfields of rural Kansas (In Cold Blood), the highways of rural California (The Postman Always Rings Twice), the foothills of central Utah (The Executioner's Son), or the provincial South (Light in August).

Finally (and most importantly), the paradigmatic experience of the Naturalistic murderer is that of isolation. This began with his parents. Joe Christmas, Bigger Thomas, and Gary Gilmore all have dead fathers (Joe's mother is, of course, dead as well). Mothers tend to be overbearing and to judge their sons based on the terms of their own lives rather than their sons'; the mothers

of Bigger Thomas, Clyde Griffiths, and McTeague are examples. Even the sons of two-parent families experience this isolation, as their parents are distracted by religion (An American Tragedy), alcoholism (McTeague, In Cold Blood) or professional and civic obligations (Compulsion).

Characters are also isolated from successful relationships with potential lovers. McTeague is just as isolated in his marriage to Trina as he was when he lived alone. Women are stumbling blocks for Clyde Griffiths, Joe Christmas, and Bigger Thomas. The relationship between Frank Chambers and Cora Papadakis is seriously damaged by the lack of trust which results from Nick's murder and their subsequent legal problems. The possibility of successful relationships for other characters (Perry Smith, Artie Straus and Judd Steiner, Joe Christmas) is blunted by their generally unacknowledged homosexual tendencies. Gary Gilmore's relationship with Nicole Baker occasionally shows a glimmer of real promise but is more often abusive or perverse (owing to Gary's pedophilic tendencies).

Another source of isolation is economic: with the exceptions of McTeague and Clyde Griffiths, characters are unable to hold a job and to maintain any semblance of traditional economic security. They are largely uneducated or mildly educated, with the obvious exception

of Steiner and Shaw, whose education above the norm isolates them as much as Perry Smith's education below it. They are further isolated by their migratory nature, as only McTeague and Steiner and Shaw stay put for any length of time. In all cases, this isolation is presented as largely unwilling.

Ultimately, it is possible to identify a Naturalistic homicide novel archetype: a generally young man, the pattern of whose life has been isolation from every possible community, ultimately kills a person or persons whom he perceives to represent the cause or source of his isolation. A tension develops between the way the killer's society views him and the way he is handled by the novel's author, and the author attempts to persuade the reader to his view. The author mitigates the killer's culpability through deterministic means, presenting him as more victimized than victimizer. Nevertheless, the young man is condemned by the very society responsible for his isolation.

The nonfiction homicide novels published since 1960 (except In Cold Blood and The Executioner's Song) which have been generally well-received or very prominent vary widely in their degrees of conformity to this archetype. Generally, these books can be grouped into three categories: 1) those which follow the Naturalistic tradition in focusing

on the killer himself; 2) those which focus primarily on the victim rather than the killer; and 3) those which are more concerned with society than with any particular individual.

Only two of these works focus exclusively on a murderer: Vincent Bugliosi's Helter Skelter (1974) and Joe McGinniss's Fatal Vision (1983). Helter Skelter, the story of Charles Manson, who, author (and Manson prosecutor) Bugliosi would have us believe, brainwashed his "family" of runaways and social misfits into the murder of nearly a dozen people in 1969, including actress Sharon Tate, wife of film director Roman Polanski. In his New Republic review, W.C. Woods said Helter Skelter "tells everything medicine and law will probably ever know" about the crimes and life of Charles Manson. Yet for all its attempt at interpreting Manson's apocalyptic philosophy, the book ultimately feels like a "best guess" approach to Manson's motives, and its authors admit their uncertainty, while still subtitling the book "The True Story of the Manson Murders."

Like many other novels in this tradition (most notably In Cold Blood), Helter Skelter opens with an establishment of the backdrop, both geographic and social: "It was so quiet, one of the killers would later say, you could almost hear the sound of ice rattling in cocktail shakers in the

homes way down the canyon" (3). Bugliosi's account is arranged chronologically into eight sections and an epilogue; probably in an attempt to establish its status as a reference book on the Manson family, the book also includes an initial seven-page "Cast of Characters," maps of the Death Valley area and the Tate residence, a "chilling 64-page photographic record of the victims, the killers, [and] the evidence" and, unique among books of its type, an index. Although Helter Skelter strongly suggests that Manson's society is drastically out of touch with the hopelessness and misguided ambition of its younger generations, Bugliosi does not sympathize with his protagonist, which is not surprising, considering that he prosecuted the case. His relief at seeing Manson convicted sometimes affects his tone; New York Times reviewer Michael Rogers notes that "when Bugliosi raises his voice, one still senses the calculated flavor of a closing argument to the jury." Helter Skelter shares something of the social awareness of the Naturalistic novel, but Bugliosi's methods are primarily nonfictional, not literary, as his copious documentation suggests.

The second book to focus on the murderer himself is Joe McGinniss's Fatal Vision (1983), an account of former Army Captain Jeffrey MacDonald's conviction nearly nine years after the murders of his wife and two daughters at

their Fort Bragg (North Carolina) home. MacDonald, a physician, maintained in his defense that a group of Manson-style hippies killed his family and wounded him in retaliation for his refusal to continue dispensing them narcotics. Significantly, a magazine opened to an article about Manson, who was constantly in the news in early 1970 because the Tate-LaBianca murders had occurred just six months earlier, and Manson and his family would go to trial four months later, was found by police on the MacDonald coffee table in the unusually orderly living room where MacDonald claimed he had been assaulted. Due largely to inconsistencies in his stories and the persistence of his father-in-law, the Green Beret physician was convicted and sentenced in 1979 for murders which had occurred in February 1970.

Joe McGinniss's involvement in the MacDonald case was extremely unusual, as he was originally recruited by MacDonald's defense team to help prove MacDonald's innocence but, during the course of his interviews and observations, was persuaded of his subject's guilt by the evidence accumulated by Colette MacDonald's father. The story of MacDonald's successful libel suit against McGinniss is told by Janet Malcolm in The Journalist and the Murderer (1990). McGinniss's defense was that he had a higher obligation to the truth of the case than to any promise

he might have made to MacDonald, a murderer.

McGinniss's portrayal of his protagonist is, needless to say, not sympathetic. He sees the physician as completely self-absorbed, too threatened by the third child his wife was carrying to continue the marriage and too concerned with his All-American reputation to consider divorce. As McGinniss presents him, Jeffrey MacDonald is, after the crime, preoccupied with his own status as victim and with details such as whether he should wear his khaki or green uniform for reporters' cameras. As early as page 209 (of 563), McGinniss is satirizing MacDonald as a guest on the Dick Cavett show: sympathetically introduced by Cavett as a man living through a nightmare, the doctor is "greeted by a surge of applause"; asked to narrate the story of the murders if it isn't "too painful," MacDonald replies that he "can skim through it briefly"; when Cavett inquires about the "cost" of the ordeal, MacDonald prefaces his response with, "aside from my family and what not," going on to discuss his legal fees. McGinniss's attitude is clear from his description of the guest's departure: "And Jeffrey MacDonald exited to music and applause" (210-13).

Perhaps McGinniss's most revealing technique is his allowing MacDonald to expose himself, by interspersing throughout the novel sections narrated in third person

and sections entitled "The Voice of Jeffrey MacDonald," in which the protagonist recounts his courtship with Colette and the early years of their marriage. By allowing a reader to hear his subject's broken responses to investigators' questions, McGinniss establishes MacDonald as uncomfortable and, perhaps, duplicitous. Asked to explain an aspect of the fiber evidence which would help to convict him, MacDonald stammers, "[l]isten, I know all about that, and, ah--look, ah, all--Jesus Christ. All I can say is that it seems to me these fibers in a struggle could have gotten on everyone, and I don't know. I--I mean, obviously, I wish-I can't give you the answers specifically"(126). McGinniss's epigraph for the novel, the "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" speech from Macbeth, establishes McGinniss's skepticism that MacDonald's story (and his "honor") might be "A dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain" (Macbeth, II, 1, 33). Fatal Vision is a nonobjective documentary account of domestic violence written to argue MacDonald's guilt. There is nothing Naturalistic about it.

Three nonfiction homicide novels focus primarily on victims: John Hersey's The Algiers Motel Incident (1968), Joseph Wambaugh's The Onion Field (1973), and Judith Rossner's Looking for Mr. Goodbar (1975). Hersey's book illustrates the continuation of the social protest

tradition, and Wambaugh and Rossner apply the Naturalistic method to victims rather than murderers.

Just after the Detroit race riots of 1967, Hersey was asked to write part of a report for the President's Commission on Civil Disorders (Algiers 24). As he delved deeply into the racial situation in Detroit, he became skeptical about a confrontation between Detroit police and a group of black young adults at the Algiers motel. Three men, Carl Cooper, Auburey Pollard, and Fred Temple, were killed in what was reported as a sniper situation. More and more, Hersey came to see the dead men as victims of institutionalized racism and the whole situation as a metaphor for racial strife in the United States. His interest in the oppression of a cultural minority clearly has precedent in Naturalism, and his condemnation of social ills is as sincere as Dreiser's in An American Tragedy. His montage of biographies and excerpts from interviews and legal documents reminds a reader of Dos Passos' techniques in U.S.A.

The book also has clear ties to the I-centered school of the nonfiction novel practiced by Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer, as Hersey dramatizes his own role in the investigation: "[a]t this point in the narrative, enter myself," says the author twenty-one pages into the book (24). Throughout, Hersey focuses most of his attention

on the victims; in fact, several reviewers comment that the chapter about 19-year-old victim Aubrey Pollard's background is the most effective (Sokolov, Mitgang).

Hersey's book was allegedly rushed to press in five weeks; it appeared in the fall of 1968 and describes events occurring as late as June 5 of the same year. Reviewers have pointed to three negative consequences of this timing: first, that Hersey did not take time to study carefully the report of the commission which he originally represented; second, that the book rambles, driven by rhetoric rather than a clear principle of organization; and third, that Hersey compromised the constitutional rights of the police defendants by publishing the book before their cases had been adjudicated. Ultimately, Hersey was motivated more by his idealism, as Stephen Schlesinger observes in his Atlantic review, than by any journalistic sense of including all the facts. The Algiers Motel Incident is a book written to expose "a hopelessly rotten system . . . which automatically disbelieve[s] the stories of black people" (Schlesinger). The novel is ultimately a greater triumph as social protest than as journalism.

The Onion Field (1973) is unique among nonfiction novels in the homicide tradition as it focuses on a victim who was not killed. Wambaugh's book, the story of the March 9, 1963, slaying of LAPD officer Ian Campbell,

includes discussion of the family and criminal backgrounds of Campbell's killers, Gregory Powell and Jimmy Smith, but Wambaugh shares the investigating detective's opinion that Powell and Smith are merely "[s]mall-time losers who couldn't do anything right" (208). Wambaugh focuses instead on Karl Hettinger, Campbell's partner, who survived the shooting by escaping across an onion field. Wambaugh examines Hettinger as a victim not only of Powell and Smith but also of a rigid police department code: at gunpoint and urged by his partner, Hettinger relinquishes his service revolver (153), violating the macho police dictum that "[a]nybody that gives up his gun to some punk is nothing but a coward" (241). Time reviewer Ray Kennedy speculates that Wambaugh, a fourteen-year LAPD veteran, is the "young red-faced vice officer" who realizes the absurdity of this code of honor but recognizes the imprudence of saying so.

The Onion Field examines the pathology of Hettinger's guilt, exacerbated by a memorandum implying officer error circulated through the department after the killing and a squad meeting at which Hettinger is told, "let's hear your opinion about how you guys fouled up. The things each of you did wrong. Or what you didn't do and should've done" (216). At Campbell's funeral, Hettinger compulsively apologizes to the slain officer's family, friends, and neighbors (230). His guilt literally reduces him, as he

loses over twenty pounds and actually shrinks an inch (339). Overwhelmed by the stress of the trial (one of the longest court cases in California history), Hettinger eventually resigns, develops kleptomania, subsequently loses a security job because of his thefts, and finally contemplates suicide. Reviewer C.M. Sevilla calls Wambaugh's book the story of "the near destruction of a sensitive young man." Hettinger's guilt over relinquishing his gun is the prime determinant in that near destruction.

The New York Times reviewer, James Conaway, placed The Onion Field squarely in the homicide novel and Naturalistic traditions, declaring Wambaugh's book

obviously indebted to Truman Capote . . . belonging to the tradition of Dreiser and Farrell--constructing, from a glut of well-observed detail, unspectacular and often squalid lives lived among the concrete freeways, the bright, tawdry strips, the transience, brutality and beleaguered decency of a society set on the edge of America.

The book is, ultimately, a study in the determinism of psychological trauma and is, after In Cold Blood, the second-best nonfiction homicide novel in the contemporary (1960- ) period.

Judith Rossner's Looking for Mr. Goodbar is a fact-based novel. In its looser use of factual material, it more closely resembles the earlier Naturalistic homicide novels and seems more literary (as opposed to journalistic).

Leslie Fishbein says that Looking for Mr. Goodbar is "similar to the facts of the original case" (174), the details of which Lacey Fosburgh related in Closing Time: The True Story of the "Goodbar" Murder (1977).

Rossner traces the outline of protagonist Theresa Dunn from her real-life counterpart, Katherine Cleary, who was killed by a drifter, Joe Willie Simpson, on New Year's Eve 1969. Like Cleary, Dunn is a teacher of deaf children, who was raised in the sheltered environment of suburban Irish Catholic family life. Dunn, like Cleary, suffers recurring back problems, the vestiges of a childhood bout with polio, and is a devoted teacher and aunt. But Theresa Dunn, like Katherine Cleary, has a second self, a double who, as Joan Barthel said in the New York Times Book Review, "is "familiar with hard drugs, heavy drinking, and masochistic sex" (1). Dunn's masochistic nymphomania eventually does her in, as she picks up "Mr. Dead Wrong" in a New York bar.

Rossner sees Theresa Dunn's story as a study in victimization. As Barthel says, the author attempts to answer the question, "what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" The answer, of course, is that Theresa Dunn is not a "nice" girl--at least, not in the conventional sense of the term. She is a deeply disturbed woman, whose own feelings of low self-esteem began during the polio

episode, when she was hospitalized for nearly a year, her whole torso encased in a cast for much of that time. As a result of the illness, Theresa feels that her body is ugly and inadequate; she turns to sex for compensation. Rossner writes that the "illness was said to have altered [Theresa's] personality, and maybe that was why she couldn't remember. She'd become another person" (23). One might argue that polio was the central determinant in Theresa Dunn's life, and that she is a woman destroyed by her own psychology and biology.

Rossner's quite Naturalistic approach also extends to Dunn's murderer, Gary Cooper White. Rossner writes in her preface that "the most notable quality of his confession" was that despite his brutal crime, White "had a very clear sense of himself as the victim of the woman he had murdered" (4). To some extent, Rossner shares his view of himself, taking several measures to mitigate his reputation with a reader. She begins the novel with her comments about his confession, followed by the confession itself, focusing Theresa's story with her killer's perception of her. The author presents him as a small-time hood who, in the weeks before Dunn's murder, lived with a flamboyant homosexual whom he cajoled (sometimes through sex) into supporting him while he squirreled away money for his pregnant wife in Florida. Rossner also reduces

the brutality of the murder itself from eighteen stab wounds, a beating with a blunt object, and desecration of the corpse to a single blow on the head and repeated stabbing after Dunn is unconscious (Fishbein 174). The final image of himself which Rossner allows White to present via his confession is lack of control: he says, "I don't know why I stabbed her. . . . I don't know if I knew she was dead" and, concerning his Ohio arrest, "I don't know how I ended up in Cleveland. I meant to go to Miami" (19-20). Significantly, at the end of the novel, Rossner repeats the murderer's narrative of his evening with Dunn virtually verbatim.

Rossner's comment that White "seems to have lived always with the sense of fighting for his life with his back against the wall, a context in which otherwise insane acts seem quite reasonable" (6) comes dangerously close to rationalizing his crime. Martha Duffy's comment in Time that "[o]ne can even have some sympathy with [Theresa's] killer" illustrates the effect of Rossner's ambivalent treatment of the crime itself, an ambivalence which drew the ire of some feminist readers (a disproportionate number of reviewers of the novel were women). Fishbein, for example, argues that "if one accepts the view of the publisher's blurb that Theresa Dunn was trying to come to terms with a new sexual freedom and

searching for liberation, then the penalty for such a search seems to be death," an implication which reinforces the argument "that women's liberation is dangerous to women" (174).

Two books, Gerald Frank's narrative The Boston Strangler (1966) and Calvin Trillin's collection of "true homicide stories," Killings (1984), focus more on communities than any individual. In late 1963, Frank, a young reporter who had by his own admission "had [his] fill of crime" became interested in a series of stranglings which were terrorizing the Boston area. In "A Note to the Reader," Frank takes pains to establish his authority and that of his account: he points out that he was "the only writer completely involved with the case" and was "given the fullest cooperation" of legal authorities involved in the investigation (ix-x). He establishes what Heyne would call the "factual status" of his narrative in his claim that "everything that is in [the] book is based on fact" and is accurate "within the limits of human error" (x). He cites as sources "hundreds of hours of personal interviews"; official records, reports, and transcripts; and personal letters and diaries (x). To reinforce the book's suggestion of accuracy, Frank also includes a map of the Boston area with crime scenes chronologically marked and a list of the thirteen known

victims with the dates, based on "original police estimates" of their deaths.

Frank explores the psychology of Albert DeSalvo, the prime suspect, who was never charged in the stranglings due to a finding of mental incompetence but was subsequently sentenced to life in prison for a series of rapes and robberies (Gaute and Odell 58). The author details DeSalvo's history, including his "wretched" upbringing as one of six children in a family dependent on welfare and deserted by a tyrannical, promiscuous father (228), his record as a juvenile offender, and his two-year stint (1960-62) as "the Measuring Man," during which time DeSalvo knocked on apartment doors with a tape measure, pretending to be a photographer in search of attractive models (225-29). The sheer number of women who came forward after DeSalvo's picture appeared in Boston newspapers to tell police that they had been raped by him, combined with the number of rapes he admitted and his wife's comments, make clear that he is "sexually insatiable" (231), a virtual prisoner of himself. After an early rape, a victim hears DeSalvo murmur, "[h]ow do I leave this place?" and directs him to her door (229). The more the reader learns of his sexual compulsions, the more metaphoric the question seems.

But DeSalvo is not Frank's primary interest. In fact, the strangler does not appear except as he is suggested

by his crimes until Part Four, 225 pages into a 364-page book. Frank is primarily interested in the effect of the stranglings and the terror they inspired in the Boston area. The author writes in his prefatory note that his interest

was not so much in writing a book about the Boston stranglings as it was to write about what happens to a great city when it is besieged by terror--terror stemming from a horrifying explosion of the violence that seems more and more a part of contemporary life. How do people behave in a climate of fear? What defenses do they put up? To what extremes are they driven? How does rationality cope with irrationality, common sense with hysteria? (ix-x)

Frank begins to focus his book as the story of a community in the very first sentence: "This is a story about Boston" (3). He recreates the atmosphere of a city whose citizens changed their locks, looked over their shoulders, flinched at the sound of footsteps, clamored for each news report, and eyed each other suspiciously, while its police probed nearly every suspect questioned for any crime for possible connection to the stranglings and called in everybody from the F.B.I. to psychics. Frank even dramatizes the red herrings, reinforcing the book's wide-angle effect. Newsweek reviewer Sandra Schmidt acknowledged that Frank used methods of fact-gathering "that Truman Capote made famous," but his interest in the crime's effect on the community is equally Capote-esque. Clearly, a kind of

determinism operates in Boston, whose citizens are entirely at the mercy of a force not controlled even by the man who embodies it.

In Killings (1984), Calvin Trillin achieves a more panoramic view, as his series of stories allows him to cover a broader geographic and socioeconomic range. The stories in Killings, which originally appeared in the New Yorker column "U.S. Journal," allowed Trillin to exercise his interest in "writing about America without an emphasis on politics and government" ( Introduction xi). The author makes his anthropological focus clear in his Introduction:

At times during my travels, I may have become more interested in the community where the killing took place--or at least in the effect the killing had on the community--than I was in the victim. I was never much interested in the violence involved. . . . These stories are meant to be more about how Americans live than about how some of them die. (Intro. xviii-xix)

Because community is paramount, Trillin establishes setting just after the title of every story. He could not have invented more picturesque place names: Jeremiah, Kentucky (1); West Chester, Pennsylvania (15); Center Junction, Iowa (30); Running Springs, California (41); Gallup, New Mexico (53); Miami Beach, Florida (67); Seabrook, New Hampshire (81); Cleveland, Tennessee (94); Manchester, New Hampshire (106); Riverside, California (121); Knoxville, Tennessee (133); Coalport, Pennsylvania

(149); Fairfield, Iowa (160); Savannah, Georgia (179); Tucson, Arizona (196), and Grundy County, Iowa (209).

The moral climate of each story is established next: "Jim Berry came to Center Junction in 1962 and didn't do much that anybody approved of from then until the time he left, rather suddenly, last June" (30); "John Mervin, a menacing-looking young man with long unkempt hair and a shaggy beard, was arrested for murder last November, confirming the suspicions of a lot of West Chester citizens about the kind of crimes young people who looked like that were capable of perpetrating" (15); "Ronnie Maddux met Wanda Gibson eight years ago . . . . in Cleveland, Tennessee, on the southeast side of town--a neighborhood that attracts some poor-white country people, who wander into Cleveland from the hill counties to work in a furniture factory, and some locals like Ronnie Maddox who never seem to work very long anywhere" (94); "Hank Piasecny, like a lot of people in Manchester, worked his way up from the mills" (106); "The feud between the Ahumadas and the Lozanos, everyone agrees, began late one night in January of 1964 . . . . in Casa Blanca. . . ; spiritually, Casa Blanca is unto itself" (121); "Until she was sixteen, FaNee Cooper was what her parents sometimes called an ideal child. . . . She seemed to believe what she heard every Sunday at the Beaver Dam Baptist Church about good and evil and

the hereafter" (133); "As a refuge, Fairfield, Iowa, has a lot going for it" (160); "The soil in Grundy County is often spoken of as the richest soil in Iowa--which means, Grundy County residents sometimes add, that it must be about the richest soil in the world" (209). It is common for Trillin to spend the first few paragraphs of a story describing the geographic and/or social landscape against which the death in question will take place. He writes, "the place was the context for the killing, and the killing was an opportunity to write about the place" (xviii). In an interview about Killings, Trillin referred repeatedly to Heart of Darkness; the connection, in his mind, is Marlow's notion that the truth of a story is not inside a kernel but surrounding it, as a kind of aura. In Killings, Trillin applies this conviction to sudden death.

A significant difference between Killings and nonfiction homicide novels such as In Cold Blood and The Executioner's Song is that, in Trillin's stories, the violence comes from within the community, whereas in Capote's and Mailer's books, a relatively stable community which is a sort of repository of middle-America values is threatened or invaded by outsiders. In "You Always Turn Your Head," for example, the violence is perpetrated by a "native son"--a young, disillusioned American Indian who takes the mayor of his own town hostage. In "It's

Just Too Late," sixteen-year-old FaNee Cooper is destroyed by her involvement with local teen-aged misfits and her own low self-esteem. Two-year-old Melisha Morganna Gibson is tortured and killed by her own stepfather. In "Stranger With a Camera," the outsider--documentary filmmaker Hugh O'Connor--is the victim, in this case, of a small Kentucky mountain community's fear of outsiders.

Although Trillin's nonfiction stories of sudden death might seem to have developed along a different route from the "tummy trilogy"--three books about eating (American Fried, 1974; Alice, Let's Eat, 1978; and Third Helpings, 1983)--there is a clear continuum: in both kinds of books, Trillin's aim is to individualize places and people. Trillin says that the sudden deaths which drew his attention

were not those in which the people involved could be thought of as a type of person or a representative of what the lawyers call 'others so situated' . . . When someone dies suddenly shades are drawn up, and the specificity of what is revealed was part of what attracted me. (xiv)

Whether people in towns across America are killing each other or feeding each other, Trillin looks through the same lens, which filters out the stereotypical and magnifies the particular. A non-native would get the same sense of the diversity of the United States from Killings and any of the food books. William E. Geist observes in The New York Times Book Review that Trillin "used murder as

one convenient excuse to travel around and write enlightening columns on the diversity of people and places in America." "Come to think of it," Geist adds, "he was doing the same sort of thing in those books about jambalaya, buffalo chicken wings, alligator tails, and other regional delicacies."

The victims of these "killings" range in age from two-year-old Melisha Morganna Gibson to eccentric eightysomething businessman Walter Bopp, and they are Caucasian, African-American, Mexican-American, Cambodian, Hmong, Navajo, Polish-American, Soviet. The book's sheer cultural sweep is dazzling for 231 pages.

Killings is permeated by an awareness of contemporary America as a place burdened with social problems: child abuse, alcoholism, the drug trade, the integration of immigrants into communities, tension in communities between majorities and frustrated minorities, the breakdown of family relationships, the prevalence of weapons, and bigotry based on race, religion, and gender. The tone of each story, however, is totally detached, often ironic. Although Trillin's book is clearly a product of the same culture as the 1930s social protest novels, this characteristic deadpan style prevents the Killings pieces from writing the social prescriptions of Steinbeck and his contemporaries.

A very recent nonfiction homicide novel, Alec Wilkinson's A Violent Act (1993), is one of the most comprehensive in perspective. Wilkinson balances the narrative equally among the background of Mike Wayne Jackson, who shot his probation officer Tom Gahl and two other people on September 22, 1986, the effect of Gahl's death on his widow Nancy and their two sons, and the reaction of the rural community in which Jackson takes cover. After an initial thirty-two-page section narrating Jackson's crimes on September 22, Wilkinson presents a fourteen-page section about Nancy Gahl and her children (covering the period of Tom's funeral), then a sixty-page "Case Study" of Jackson, a fifty-page section called "A Country of Barking Dogs," about how the F.B.I.'s search for Jackson (who had fled on foot from a wrecked car) paralyzed the community of Wright City, Missouri, a twenty-four page section focusing on the tracker who eventually found Jackson (based on Wilkinson's original New Yorker profile), and, finally, a thirty-eight page denouement which returns to Tom Gahl's family.

Wilkinson's concern in A Violent Act is ultimately with violence itself, its causes and consequences. Mike Jackson, Wilkinson writes, "was incorrigibly violent and no one could really tell why" (4). Wilkinson's composite of Jackson suggests an unusually sensitive boy whose sister

characterized him as a natural victim, saying that he "had no protection in him. No way of recovering from a setback, it was all just too raw. He couldn't take the shocks. He'd get knocked down and he couldn't get back up that easily" (50). Unfortunately, Jackson had a lot to recover from: an alcoholic, promiscuous father who often temporarily deserted the family (and left for good when Mike was eight) and who teased young Mike with the possibility that his father was someone else. His mother constantly reminded him that her expectations were higher than his accomplishments, that he "could have done better" (51).

More and more, Jackson turned in, shutting out other people, except two--his wife Carolyn, whom he seems to have loved but treated badly, and Lee "Skip" Von Hauger, who ran a building-renovation business with ex-convict labor and drug and theft rings on the side and whom Jackson considered an "idealist father figure" (75). Diagnosed with an antisocial personality disorder and low tolerance for frustration, Jackson was often incapable of controlling his anger; in fact, in the weeks before her son shot Tom Gahl, Jackson's mother had sought to have him institutionalized.

Pushed over the top by his mother's refusal to lend him \$2500 to repair the run-down house he lives in, Jackson

buys a shotgun, saws it off, and practices concealing it beneath his trench coat. Jackson's rampage is clearly the result of pent-up anger, directed at the wrong people. Ironically, his lack of self-control causes him to become Nancy, Christopher, and Nicholas Gahl's determinant--the figure who throws their lives out of control. At the novel's end, Wilkinson describes the Gahls as climbing "[a] step at a time . . . from the hole dug for them by someone else" (226).

In the nonfiction homicide novel tradition, Wilkinson's book is probably most like Frank's, particularly in its examination of a community held hostage by fear. After abandoning his car, Mike Jackson eluded law enforcement officers for ten days and made the F.B.I.'s "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" list. In the interim, residents of Wright City are escorted by police officers through road blocks to their own houses, and awakened in the middle of the night by officers tapping on their bedroom windows to check on them. Parents kept their children home from school, and mail went undelivered. The description of the first night after Jackson's presence in the community became well known sounds very much like Capote's description of Holcomb in the days following the Clutters' murders:

Tuesday night people turned on all the lights in their houses and on their porches and in their driveways and yards. Some replaced the bulbs from their outdoor

lights with more powerful ones. They sat in their houses with guns in their laps. Men walked their grounds and their downstairs rooms with rifles while their families slept. (119)<sup>5</sup>

Wilkinson's portrayal of a community besieged also extends to the law enforcement officials working on the case. The first few days in the woods, they jump at the sound of every squirrel or deer. They explore barns, sheds, and ravines and are sometimes so exhausted that they sleep on the grass in front of the command center. The frustration at following dead-end trails is made particularly clear when they are led by a tracking dog over miles of rural terrain into the town and to an empty house, only to suspect that the dog followed the trail backward (158).

Ultimately, A Violent Act illustrates Tony Tanner's comment about In Cold Blood that "in order to appreciate the full import of any incident you must see as much of the sequence and as many of the ramifications as possible" (345). In thirty-two crisply written pages, Wilkinson details Jackson's September 22 crimes. After abandoning his car, Jackson disappears, to reappear (in the present time of the novel) 138 pages later, just long enough to commit suicide (170). Oddly, he seems most present when he is a fugitive, looming everywhere because he could be anywhere; he gives life to Chris Anderson's contention

that "absence creates presence" (Style 69). The fifty-one-page section "A Country of Barking Dogs" contains some of the best writing for sheer style and suspense in the homicide tradition. With his deft manipulation of point of view, Wilkinson drops Jackson at his vanishing point and simulates the community's suspense for the reader.

In late 1989, Tom Wolfe issued "a literary manifesto for the new social novel" in a Harper's article about the composition of his novel The Bonfire of the Vanities (1987). Wolfe explores what he calls "one of the most curious chapters in American literary history," which, he says, "is not over yet"--the disappearance, beginning in about 1960, of what he calls the "realistic" novel (47). It is clear from his discussion that he has in mind the novel of social realism, a tradition which includes the Naturalistic novel, as Wolfe traces this tradition to Zola and Balzac, and says that Faulkner, Lewis, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Mailer are more recent practitioners of it (46). Citing several of the well-known obituaries for the Naturalistic novel from the late 1940s and the 1950s (such as that of Lionel Trilling in 1948), Wolfe explains what he perceives to be the bases for the devaluation of social realism: first, that the industrial age has progressed beyond the realistic novel's usefulness, and

second, that, as Philip Roth had observed in the early 1960s, "actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures daily that are the envy of any novelist" (qtd. in Wolfe 48)--that, as a popular cliché paraphrases Byron, "the truth is stranger than fiction." "By the mid-1960s," Wolfe writes, "the conviction was not merely that the realistic novel was no longer possible but that American life itself no longer deserved the term real" (49; emphasis his).

As a consequence of realism's falling out of vogue, Wolfe says, fiction writers sought "to get rid of not only realism but everything associated with it." As his example, Wolfe cites John Hawkes' comment that he "began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting, and theme" (49). Clearly, to Wolfe, this approach amounts to "throwing out the baby with the bath water"--he claims that the "introduction of realism into literature in the eighteenth century by Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett was like the introduction of electricity into engineering" (50) and that abandoning realistic techniques would make as much sense "as if an engineer were to set out to develop a more sophisticated machine technology by first of all discarding the principle of electricity, on the grounds that it has been used *ad nauseam* for a hundred years" (51).

The purpose of fiction, Wolfe maintains, is still to examine "characters' electrifying irrational acts . . . the acts of a heart brought to a desperate edge by the pressure of society" (51). To accomplish this, Wolfe recommends the journalistic techniques of Zola, citing that author's experiences in the French coal mines which provided the documentation for Germinal. Finally, Wolfe says that realistic techniques are not only still applicable to American life but actually essential:

At this weak, pale, tabescent moment in the history of American literature, we need a battalion, a brigade of Zolas to head out into this wild, bizarre, unpredictable, Hog-stomping Baroque country of ours and reclaim it as literary property. Philip Roth was absolutely right. The imagination of the novelist is powerless before what he knows he's going to read in tomorrow morning's newspaper. But a generation of American writers has drawn precisely the wrong conclusion from that perfectly valid observation. The answer is not to leave the rude beast, the material, also known as the life around us, to the journalists but to do what journalists do, or are supposed to do, which is to wrestle the beast and bring it to terms. (55)

A student of the nonfiction homicide novel tradition cannot help but feel that, in Wolfe's comment that fiction no longer deals with "a heart brought to a desperate edge by the pressure of society" (51), he has overlooked a number of important works, including all the ones mentioned in this chapter, by authors continuing to write social realism in a period which overlaps almost exactly with the one

Wolfe identifies. Beginning with Capote's early work on In Cold Blood in late 1959, writers in the homicide tradition have incorporated more and more the methods of journalism, so that the only real difference between An American Tragedy and Capote's novel is a shifting of the literature/journalism balance in the direction of the latter.

In his essay, Wolfe laments the absence of works dealing realistically with the social conflict and change of the 1960s. Writing The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, he recalls, he was constantly looking over his shoulder, sure that someone would beat him to the finish with a novel about the hippie experience. "[T]o this day," Wolfe notes, those novels "remain unwritten" (45). He notes that a similar vacuum exists where novels about "the so-called sexual revolution" and the civil rights movement were concerned. Although the market has not been flooded with novels about those social issues, one has to wonder what better examples Wolfe could want than Looking for Mr. Goodbar and The Algiers Motel Incident. Perhaps Goodbar is not sufficiently journalistic to fit Wolfe's prescription, but Algiers Motel seems exactly the sort of book Wolfe has in mind.

For most Americans, the most frightening social phenomenon of the modern period is the increased threat

of violence. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the first war to be brought to Americans via television in their own living rooms, the war and civil rights demonstrations, the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Americans felt threatened in a way they had not previously. Certainly the threat of violence and the ultimate fear--the loss of one's life--are at the heart of books like In Cold Blood, The Executioner's Song, and The Boston Strangler. We are not all out "looking for Mr. Goodbar," but we all open the door to strangers, stop at the gas station, and sleep in our own beds. The idea that these acts make us vulnerable is a fact of modern life, a social reality.

There are a couple of possible explanations for Wolfe's overlooking the nonfiction homicide novels. First, a problem which has always tainted this genre is its commercial appeal. Starting with The Postman Always Rings Twice, the books in the homicide novel tradition have all sold well. Postman, In Cold Blood, and The Executioner's Song spent a long time on bestseller lists, even in the hardback editions. The hyping of Capote's novel certainly did nothing to dissuage the perception of these books as overly commercial. Although In Cold Blood was published in January 1966, nearly a dozen articles about it appeared in print in 1965. In September, Glenway Wescott declared

in Book Week that the novel "may well be the masterpiece of next year." In the first week of its publication, the book sold 180,000 copies, and within a month of its release, it was nearing the top of Publisher's Weekly's all-time best-seller list ("Target"). Also, beginning with McTeague, each of the novels in this tradition has inspired at least one film version, with the exception of Light in August, which was optioned to a studio but never developed (see Appendix A). To some extent, these novels (particularly the ones not written by major literary figures like Norris, Dreiser, Faulkner, Wright, Capote, and Mailer), have suffered from the prejudice that commercial appeal signals lack of literary value. Wolfe notes in his Harper's article that

the intelligentsia have always had contempt for the realistic novel--a form that wallows so enthusiastically in the dirt of everyday life and the dirty secrets of class envy and that, still worse, is so easily understood and obviously relished by the mob, i.e., the middle class. (47)

Wolfe notes Dickens' difficulty establishing a reputation with the Victorian intelligentsia as a case in point. The presumption is, if the average reader likes it, it must not be literature.

In another sense, however, Wolfe's overlooking of the fact-based homicide novels is more defensible. That is the argument, suggested by a few recent critics, that

the Naturalistic novel may not have evolved from Realism at all, but from the Romantic tradition. It is ironic that, while the early American Naturalists have acquired a reputation as amateur critics, Frank Norris himself first articulated the connection between Naturalism and Romanticism. In two essays, "Zola as a Romantic Writer" (1896) and "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901), Norris argues for the stature of Romanticism and Naturalism's attachment to it.

Norris's basic argument is that Realism occupies itself with "the smaller details of everyday life, things that are likely to happen between lunch and dinner, small passions, restricted emotions, dramas of the reception-room, tragedies of an afternoon call, crises involving cups of tea" ("Zola" 1106). The characters of the Romantic tale, on the other hand, "must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death" ("Zola" 1107). Realism, says Norris, "notes only the surface of things" ("Plea" 1166), while Romanticism considers "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" ("Plea" 1168-9). Granted, these definitions are offered

in a highly subjective tone, but Norris's basic distinction is to say that Realism deals with the typical while Romanticism deals with the atypical.

Norris applies his distinction to the novels of the Rougon-Macquart series, whose characters, he maintains, "live in a world of their own" and "are not of our lives any more than are the Don Juans, the Jean Valjeans, the Ruy Blas, the Marmions, or the Ivanhoes" ("Zola" 1107). To be noted by the Romantic novelist, Norris says, one must "leave the rank and file, either run to the forefront of the marching world, or fall by the roadway. . . . become individual, unique" ("Zola" 1107). Naturalism is, for Norris, the sub-species of Romanticism which deals with those who "fall by the roadway" (one would suppose that tragedy deals with those who "march to the forefront"). It is "the drama of the people, working itself out in blood and ordure. . . . among the lower--almost the lowest--classes; those who have been thrust or wrenched from the ranks" ("Zola" 1108).

Norris's argument is supported by several influential critics. In The American Novel and Its Tradition, Richard Chase says that the significant connection between the Naturalism of Norris and the Romanticism of such writers as Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville "has not been understood" and that Norris's claims for that connection have been

thought "merely vague and eccentric" (187). Nevertheless, says Chase, Norris "wrote books that departed from [R]ealism by becoming in a unified act of the imagination at once [R]omances and [N]aturalistic novels" (187). Don Graham, in "Naturalism in American Fiction: A Status Report" (1982), concurs that "the [N]aturalistic novel seems paradoxically to share something with the pre-eminent American form, romance" (5). Graham observes that, like the "best books" of Hawthorne and Melville, the "best" by Norris, Dreiser, Dos Passos, Farrell, et al. are fundamentally romances. Ultimately, says Graham, "the American [N]aturalistic novel is a romance in which the adventurers never achieve clarity of illumination or even the comforts of irony" (8). Even Donald Pizer's definition of Naturalism in Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature sounds more like a definition of Romantic than Realistic works. Pizer says that two "tensions" exist in late nineteenth-century Naturalistic works: 1) the identification in characters from the lower social echelons of possibilities for adventure and heroism not expected to be present in those persons, and 2) the Naturalist's attempt to find some "compensating human value" to mitigate the squalor of the protagonist's life (13). These factors of "heroism" and "compensating human value" sound more like qualities

which might apply to Captain Ahab and Hester Prynne than to any of the characters of Howells or James.

Norman Mailer has said that "the war between being and nothingness is the underlying illness of the twentieth century" ("Art" 214). Certainly, for characters like Clyde Griffiths and Joe Christmas to struggle for "being" from the "nothingness" which is their legacy is a more fundamentally Romantic than Realistic quest. One might argue that the protagonists of the nonfiction homicide novels are all on Romantic quests toward fulfillment: for McTeague, the goal is a giant gold tooth; for Clyde Griffiths, it is Sondra Finchley (and all that she represents); Joe Christmas and Bigger Thomas seek identity in a world which tells them they are nobodies; Perry Smith's goal is acceptance and affection, as his daydream of being a lounge singer with a large, appreciative audience suggests. In every case, because these characters inhabit a Naturalistic world, they are doomed not to realize these goals, and that is the source of our sympathy for them. Whatever nobility they achieve stems from their persistent attempts to achieve anyway, and this nobility prevents their situations from seeming merely pathetic.

Critics have noted Romantic aspects of nearly every book in the homicide novel tradition. For example, many have observed that the sensibility of novels like An

American Tragedy and Sister Carrie has distinctly Romantic overtones. Thomas Riggio has pointed out images in An American Tragedy, like the bird which worries Clyde on the day of Roberta's death, which seem borrowed from Edgar Allan Poe. Others have discussed melodramatic aspects of McTeague which link it with the fiction of Zola. In "The Function of Violence in Richard Wright's Native Son," Robert James Butler points out Bigger Thomas's Romantic and Naturalistic "selves" (105), and, in "How Bigger Was Born," Wright speaks of Hawthorne and Poe as precursors. The gothic influence has been noted in Native Son, Light in August, and In Cold Blood. Perhaps the best example of the fact-based homicide novel following clearly in the Romantic tradition is Robert Penn Warren's World Enough and Time, subtitled A Romance.<sup>6</sup> Because of the Naturalist's sociological and psychological approach to these characters and the acts of violence which they commit, the homicide novels have a place in the Romantic tradition which, as Norris said, goes "straight through clothes and tissues and wrappings of flesh down deep into the red living heart of things" (Zola, "Plea" 1165).

One question remains: how the New Journalism fits into this theory of Naturalism as derived from Romanticism. Surely the methods of journalism--painstaking research and meticulous documentation--would seem much closer to

Realism than to Romanticism. This is true of conventional journalism, reporting the news purely objectively. But the primary distinction between the New Journalism and the "old" journalism is that the New Journalists also want to comment on what they are reporting--not merely to give an account, but to give an explanation. This is not possible in a Realistic account, which must simply tell, and its impossibility is the primary reason for the Naturalists' rebellion against Realism and reversion to the Romantic occupation of dissecting the human heart, searching to explain the terror of which man is capable.

As I write the concluding paragraphs of this dissertation in the summer of 1993, Long Island horticulturalist Joel Rifkin has been implicated in the murders of at least thirteen Manhattan prostitutes. Rifkin was arrested at 3:15 a.m. on a Long Island highway when authorities who pulled him over because his pickup truck lacked a license plate discovered a decomposing body in the back. By the time Rifkin's story appeared in the next week's national news magazines, some writer undoubtedly already had a book contract (and a major network had probably secured television rights).

But Joel Rifkin's sordid story is not likely to lead to a classic work of literature, largely because the

competitive nature of the publishing industry will not allow time for that. The recent works in the fact-based homicide novel tradition are, like their predecessors and unlike more commercial true-crime documentaries, books to which their authors devoted years. Capote's six years on In Cold Blood has become the prototype, but other authors made significant investments of time: The Onion Field is based on a homicide which took place ten years before its publication; Fatal Vision, published in 1983, deals with a 1970 crime (the time span was largely necessitated by Jeffrey MacDonald's ongoing trials); the violence which is the basis for A Violent Act occurred in 1986, six years before its 1992 publication; Looking for Mr. Goodbar reached bookstores five years after Katherine Cleary's murder; some of the incidents which inspired stories in Killings (1984) took place in the late 1960s (although most were written within a year or so of the deaths they depict); and, in perhaps the most extreme example, Compulsion appeared thirty-one years after the crime which inspired it. It is no accident that the recent books most in need of more authorial attention--The Algiers Motel Incident and The Executioner's Song--despite the fact that their authors, Hersey and Mailer, enjoy high "literary" reputations, were the books produced most quickly: Algiers Motel, based on a July 1967 incident,

published in the fall of 1968, and The Executioner's Song, a 1979 book based on July 1976 crimes (a project with which Mailer did not become involved until mid-1977).

Rifkin's atrocities do not fit another characteristic of crimes which have inspired classic fact-based homicide novels: they are too high profile. None of the homicides which are the basis of Naturalistic fact-based novels drew the level of national media attention which would dictate publishing decisions. The best works in the tradition, McTeague, An American Tragedy, Light in August, Native Son, and In Cold Blood, were based on relatively isolated homicides which may have temporarily dominated the local media but were rarely noticed beyond; the notable exception, the Clutter murders, was reported in The New York Times only because Herbert Clutter had been appointed by President Dwight Eisenhower to a national agriculture commission. Among the second tier of works, those which deviate from the tradition in being less deterministic (and, therefore, more documentary) or generally less well written, the Leopold-Loeb case was by far the most prominent, but it is doubtful that Compulsion would have been a book of the same quality had Levin published it in 1926 rather than 1956. The more "literary" recent books are those which also deal with very localized crimes: The Onion Field, Looking for Mr. Goodbar, Killings, and A Violent Act.

In the near-century since the publication of McTeague, the United States has continued to undergo revolutionary change. The scope and capabilities of the modern media dwarf the newspaper surge of the 1890s; these days, junior high school journalists get news from halfway around the world the same day via the Cable News Network (CNN) and can operate state-of-the-art computerized page layout programs. The publishing industry makes decisions based on ideas, reputations, and commercial possibilities rather than manuscripts. Television has made true crime seem ubiquitous, particularly in the flurry of shows such as Top Cops, America's Most Wanted, and Unsolved Mysteries which have appeared in the last few years. Some writers are even making a career from it: Wambaugh, McGinniss, Bugliosi, Ann Rule, Jerry Bledsoe.

If there are books in the Naturalistic fact-based homicide novel tradition still to be written, they will not center on crimes we learn about from the evening news. They will deal with murders which startle the communities in which they occur and are then resolved with barely a ripple outside those communities. They will be written by journalists or novelists who are interested in the stories on their own merits rather than their commercial potential, who will find that one fact-based homicide novel resolves whatever led them to want to write it in the first

place. And they will focus on men whose childhoods were almost as great an atrocity as the crimes they commit, who seem more acted upon than acting, and who will be consigned to the same fate they would have suffered one hundred years ago.

It may be impossible for such novels to be written in 1990s America. An aspect of modern American life even more threatening to the Naturalistic fact-based homicide novel than the commercial nature of the publishing industry is the present political climate. Since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the United States has moved further and further from the idealism and sociological orientation of the 1960s. The dominant ideology insists on the possibility of free will; it holds individuals responsible for their own actions, whether they have given birth to children while on welfare, contracted the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (H.I.V.), or committed murder. In a culture in which over eighty percent of the people believe in the death penalty, it is increasingly difficult to believe that a deterministic argument about the causes of crime could still move readers. In that sense, the widespread praise for The Executioner's Song, no apologia for Gary Gilmore, probably had at least as much to do with the ideological climate of the late 1970s--the same climate in which Ronald Reagan was elected--as with Mailer's

remaking himself as the book's controlling intelligence. Given these conditions, it is entirely possible that a fact-based homicide novel played to the tune of the Ballade des Pendus would now fall largely on deaf--or literary--ears.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In 1966, the year in which In Cold Blood would have been eligible for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize winner for nonfiction was Edwin Way Teale's Wandering through Winter; the winner of both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award for fiction was The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter. (Those who would protest that the fiction category was inappropriate for Capote's novel should recall that Mailer's The Executioner's Song won a Pulitzer Prize in that category fourteen years later.) The Pulitzer for Feature Writing would not be instituted until 1979, and those in the categories of Explanatory Journalism and Specialized Reporting not until 1985. The difficulty of categorizing In Cold Blood is illustrated by its own publishers, who, in recent Signet paperback editions have alternately classified the book as both fiction and nonfiction.

<sup>2</sup>There are, for example, three books based on the Bundy case (Richard W. Larsen's Bundy: The Deliberate Stranger, Ann Rule's The Stranger Beside Me, and Stephen G. Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth's The Only Living Witness). Several cases have inspired two different versions; two prominent recent examples are the Richard Herrin-Bonnie Garland case (Peter Meyer's The Yale Murder and Willard Gaylin's The Killing of Bonnie Garland) and the murder of Salt Lake City businessman Franklin Bradshaw by his grandson, prompted by Bradshaw's daughter, Frances Bradshaw Schreuder (At Mother's Request by Jonathan Coleman and Nutcracker by Shana Alexander). There are at least half a dozen different accounts of the Leopold-Loeb case, the Bruno Hauptmann case (concerning the kidnapping and murder of the Lindbergh baby), and the 1958 Nebraska murder spree of Charles Starkweather. But the record is probably held by the murders committed by "Jack the Ripper," the mystery surrounding whose identity has kept the crimes vivid in the public imagination for more than a century. In fact, six books concerning the "Ripper" legend were published as recently as 1987, in anticipation of the murders' 1988 centennial (Melvin Harris's Jack the Ripper: The Bloody Truth, Martin Howells and

Keith Skinner's The Ripper Legacy, Donald Rumbelow's The Complete Jack the Ripper, Terence Sharkey's Jack the Ripper: A Hundred Years of Investigation, Peter Underwood's Jack the Ripper--One Hundred Years of Mystery, and Colin Wilson and Lee Odell's Jack the Ripper: Summing-Up and Verdict). The best directory of books based on real cases is probably J. H. H. Gaute and Robin Odell's The New Murderers' Who's Who, which covers hundreds of notorious cases during a period of over 160 years; each entry is keyed numerically to relevant entries in the 1032-item bibliography.

<sup>3</sup>In Book Third, Chapter VII, Eliot writes, "So deeply inherent is it in this life of ours that men have to suffer for each other's sins, so inevitably diffuse is human suffering, that even justice makes its victims, and we can conceive no retribution that does not spread beyond its mark in pulsations of unmerited pain."

<sup>4</sup>On May 19, 1992, eighteen-year-old Amy Fisher shot Mary Jo Buttafuoco at Buttafuoco's home in Massapequa, Long Island, leaving the victim with hearing loss and facial paralysis. Fisher's motivation, she said, was her frustration over the fact that Joseph ("Joey") Buttafuoco, 36, the victim's husband, with whom Fisher alleged she had a two-year affair, showed no inclination to leave his wife. Fisher and her attorney further alleged that Joey Buttafuoco had been involved in Fisher's prostitution. Buttafuoco maintained that he and Fisher were merely acquaintances and that she had been a customer in his auto body shop. On September 23, 1992, Fisher pled guilty to first-degree attempted manslaughter; she was freed on bail pending sentencing but, on November 5 of the same year, voluntarily entered prison, saying she wished to avoid further notoriety. In the spring of 1993, all three major American television networks featured movies based on the case, and the media attention devoted to Fisher and Joey Buttafuoco became a national joke.

<sup>5</sup>Compare Capote's very similar description of Holcomb, Kansas, two days after the murder of the Clutters: "Tuesday, at dawn, a carload of pheasant hunters from Colorado--strangers, ignorant of the local disaster--were startled by what they saw as they crossed the prairies and passed through Holcomb: windows ablaze, almost every window in almost every

house, and, in the brightly lit rooms, fully clothed people, even entire families, who had sat the whole night wide awake, watchful, listening" (105).

<sup>6</sup>Robert Penn Warren's World Enough and Time (1950) traces the story of Jeroboam Beauchamp (whom Penn Warren calls Jeremiah Beaumont), hanged for murder in Kentucky in 1826. The manuscript of Beauchamp's confession was given to the author by his friend Katherine Anne Porter during his 1944-45 stint as poetry consultant for the Library of Congress. The book's subtitle, A Romantic Novel, makes clear that Penn Warren intended something other than a documentary account, and, as Katherine Snipes discusses in Robert Penn Warren (New York: Ungar, 1983), the author takes several liberties with the facts of the case, endowing it with what Snipes calls "a lyrical, poetic quality" (80) and exploring "the motif of death and rebirth" (82).

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## APPENDIX A

## A Filmography

The following is a list of books discussed in this dissertation followed by titles of major films based upon them, the names of the films' directors, and the dates.

McTeague

Greed (d. Erich von Stroheim, 1924)

An American Tragedy

A Place in the Sun (d. George Stevens, 1951)

The Postman Always Rings Twice

Osessione (d. Luchino Visconti, 1942)

The Postman Always Rings Twice (d. Tay Garnett, 1946)

The Postman Always Rings Twice (d. Bob Rafelson, 1981)

Native Son

Native Son (d. Jerold Freedman, 1986)

Compulsion

Rope (d. Alfred Hitchcock, 1948)

In Cold Blood

In Cold Blood (d. Richard Brooks, 1967)

The Executioner's Song

The Executioner's Song (d. Lawrence Schiller, 1982; t.v.)

The Boston Strangler

The Boston Strangler (d. Richard Fleischer, 1968)

The Onion Field

The Onion Field (d. Harold Becker, 1979)

Helter Skelter

Helter Skelter (d. Tom Gries, 1976; t.v.)

The Helter-Skelter Murders (d. Frank Howard, 1988)

Looking for Mr. Goodbar

Looking for Mr. Goodbar (d. Richard Brooks, 1977)

Fatal Vision

Fatal Vision (d. David Greene, 1984; t.v.)