

Wide Awake in America:

**The Emergence and Dissolution of American
Ceremonial Rites of Passage**

**Frank Gullo
M.A. Thesis
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Abstract

This thesis purports to delineate and offer conclusions about a wide range of American "coming of age" texts. Traditional, New Historicist, and Sociological research methodologies all served as points of departure for the definition of terms, selection of evidence, and specific thesis arguments.

The thesis is organized into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the genre characteristics and tradition of the European bildungsroman, and the thematic and stylistic departure of its American "coming of age" counterpart. The second chapter considers cultural and anthropological studies of boyhood in non-Western societies in order to determine the extent to which rites of passage and "coming of age" studies are universal. The third and fourth chapters both present close readings of specific American "coming of age" texts: chapter three foregrounds the indissoluble relationship between an American boy's coming of age and the natural world, and chapter four focuses on the dissolution of the American wilderness, the resultant urban alternative, and the subsequent maturity of the boy without access to a natural world in which to perform traditional rites of passage.

The thesis speculates on the possibilities of replacing the neutral matrix of the natural world with some other template that engenders moral growth. The thesis concludes with a consideration of cyberspace as a new, egalitarian neutral matrix from which we can potentially create new rites of passage, and return to liberating basics.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: The European Bildungsroman and
the American Coming of Age Text**

Chapter 2: Ceremonial Rites of Passage

**Chapter 3: Of Rivers, Mountains, and Big Woods:
Coming of Age on the Frontier**

Chapter 4: He Who Is Alone: The Modern Coming of Age Protagonist

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Chapter I:
The European *Bildungsroman* and
the American Coming of Age Text

There are two significant difficulties for literary scholars interested in American coming of age texts: the dearth of criticism on the subject, and the critical restrictions of *bildungsroman* categorizations. The latter problem is not specific to American literature: critics of the Victorian and Continental novel have struggled in an effort to rank and select ideal, representative *bildungsromane*. But the establishment of intransigent literary markers indicates a larger critical dilemma in *bildungsroman* scholarship, the inability of scholars to arrive at a functional English equivalent of the German term.

As James Hardin comments in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, much of the problem with "bildungsroman" is that the German root word "*Bildung*...defies adequate translation" (Hardin x, xi). He elaborates by demonstrating the complexities and innuendoes of the German word:

...it implied "cultivation," education
and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense,
certainly not merely education with all the
current institutional connotations of the word.
It also strongly implied "formation" or "forming,"
a meaning that is not rendered in the usual
English translations. (xi)

In spite of the difficulties, numerous critics and scholars have attempted to formulate an English alternative'. For example, Randolph Shaffner settles on the term "Apprenticeship Novel" because the phrase synthesizes the "how and why of self-development" (Shaffner 9), integral components of the classic *bildungsroman*. In his *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, after sifting through various English

approximations--"the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life-novel"--Jerome Buckley concludes that "none of the substitutes quite replaces the label *Bildungsroman*" (Buckley vii). He goes on: "If the word ultimately escapes precise definition or neat translation, its meaning should nonetheless emerge clearly enough from an account of the novels themselves and the steady recurrence of certain common motifs in them" (viii). In other words, Buckley suggests letting critics and context be the final arbiters.

Because critics have been unable to reach a consensus on an English equivalent of "bildungsroman," they have splintered the study of the genre. While most bildungsroman scholars begin with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as the genre prototype, their subsequent points of departure vary according to specific interest in a single nation's literature and relatively subjective requisites for representative *bildungsroman*. This methodology ultimately delimits the scholarship since individual critics find themselves commenting on an increasingly limited number of texts, depending on how rigid their criteria are. Further, these inflexible genre characteristics preclude the possibility of expanding the scope of *bildungsroman* studies, by either an inclusion of modern and post-modern texts or through an infusion of examples from non-Continental and non-British literatures. American coming of age literature has been especially ignored because of these types of inviolate, normative impositions on critical *bildungsroman* studies. One critic dismisses the American *bildungsroman* in a footnote, citing as a principal reason the difficulty in extending the American symbolic spiritualization of 'nature' and confrontation with "an 'alien'--usually an Indian or a

Black" to fit the "fully secularized universe of...Western Europe" (Moretti 229). Thus, instead of allowing for an open-ended interpretation of *bildungsroman* and synthesizing a more global perspective on adolescence and maturity (Russian literature is often excluded as well), Moretti and similar critics opt for the convenience of rigid categorizations.

Shaffner and Buckley, for example, both helpfully establish what *does* and *does not* constitute a *bildungsroman*. Buckley, for his part, is especially thorough in his explication of the "English Bildungsroman," privileging as salient genre characteristics the protagonist's move from the country or provincial town to the city, his conflict with family, his experience with institutionalized education, his subsequent need for a more visceral learning experience in the city, his sexual awakening, his reappraisal of values, his "after painful soul-searching," and his ultimate epiphanic coming of age (17-18). Shaffner, before establishing "Apprenticeship Novel" as his *bildungsroman* equivalent of choice, comments that "definitions unjustifiably restrict a genre as protean as the novel" (Shaffner x). But his point of departure--that literary categorizations, if they are to be used at all, must be functional and open-ended--is compromised by his many page-length lists of representative "Apprenticeship Novels" and "itemized checklists" of distinguishing type traits (17). Shaffner's inclusion of only five American candidates for the "Apprenticeship Novel" (notable in their absence are Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*) indicates the debilitating, decreasing narrowness of his focus. Such a critical process fails to provide a means by which one may add texts and expand the *bildungsroman* canon accurately to reflect the

changes and diversity of the twentieth century (a gay narrator in Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* or the cocaine sniffing teenagers of Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero*, for example).

This is not to suggest that one should read American coming of age texts by ignoring the characteristics and tradition of the European *bildungsroman* entirely. One of the best methods of identifying the distinct characteristics of American coming of age texts is to establish general motifs of European *bildungsromane* and to note where and how American texts differ. In establishing a brief overview of the predominant features of European *bildungsromane*, I shall thus be using a general, open-ended methodology with a broad range of genre types and anti-types. As Jeffrey Sammons has suggested,

...the word Bildungsroman should have something to do with *Bildung*, that is, with the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity.... A novel designated as a Bildungsroman should, it seems to me, be in some degree in contact with this concept. It does not much matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not. (Sammons 41)

With Sammon's non-restrictive *bildungsroman* formula as a point of departure, I will briefly examine a few British genre models², not to establish whether individual texts fit a set of conditions, but rather to point out the range of motifs they have in common.

Although Buckley ignores textual inconsistencies, most of his *bildungsroman* candidates differ sharply in mood and structure: some are tragic (*Jude the Obscure*, *The Mill on the Floss*), some are providential (*David Copperfield*), and some are forerunners of Modernist technique and innovation (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Of Human Bondage*). But the one trait common to all the texts, which Buckley *does* notice

and comment upon, is the persistence of an aesthetic sensibility in the protagonist. In provincial town or sprawling city, the protagonist is usually guided by an appreciation for the fine arts and a sensitivity to the merits of a liberal education: "Its hero, more often than not, emerges as an artist of sorts, a prose writer like David Copperfield or Ernest Pontifex, a poet like Stephen Dedalus, an artisan and aspiring intellectual like Hardy's Jude, a painter like Lawrence's Paul Morel or Maugham's Philip Carey" (Buckley 13).

This aesthetic sensibility does not necessarily have to be found in a university or institutionalized setting. Indeed, for a protagonist of the English *bildungsroman*, "the whole world with all its manifold influences serves as surrogate guide" (Shaffner 10). For example, in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, though the main character Jude is throughout a lower class proletarian intellectual, he nevertheless clings to an abiding aesthetic sensibility born out of an idealization of the University city of Christminster:

"It is a city of light," he said to himself, "The tree of knowledge grows there," he added a few steps farther on. "It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to. It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion." After this figure he was silent a long while, till he added: "It would just suit me." (Hardy 66)

Similarly, in Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus's epiphanic coming of age is informed by a grandiloquent aestheticism, testimony to the appreciation of education and art that informs his journey to manhood:

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do.
I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether
it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I
will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as
freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for defence
the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and
cunning. (Joyce 247)

Even in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, which is mainly concerned with Paul Morel's close

bond with his mother and his subsequent difficulties in consummating a satisfactory relationship with a woman (Miriam or Clara), there is a distinctly English sense, in the backdrop, of a pervasive aestheticism: "He was quite a clever painter for a boy of his years, and he knew some French and German and mathematics that Mr. Heaton had taught him. But nothing he had was of any commercial value....[he had the] gaze of an artist" (Lawrence 130, 238).

This distinct aesthetic sensibility of English *bildungsroman* provides a focal point for discussing the departure of American coming of age texts from the European genre, because, with the exception of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, an aesthetic sensibility and prioritization of the fine arts are absent from American coming of age literature. Instead, there is the reflexive reaction against education and civilization, most viscerally present in Huck Finn:

...so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd 'a' known what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't 'a' tackled it, and ain't a-going to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before. (Twain 283)

The absence of an aesthetic sensibility in American coming of age protagonists indicates a reordering of values and beliefs in the American nation, a shift in ideology rooted in the founding political dispositions of the country and the vast natural wilderness of the frontier. From the beginning of the republic, the peculiar American set of civic and intellectual/theological virtues have been consistent and pervasive enough to facilitate a discussion of a distinct, American practical sensibility and coming of age text³.

The framers of the American Constitution formed the United States government with a basic supposition in mind: that humanity is innately self-interested, especially

regarding possessions and property. In a defense and advocacy of the U.S. Constitution, *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison concludes that diverse interests and factions "are thus sown in the hearts of man," and that "the most common and durable source of factions, has been the various and unequal distribution of property" (Madison 44). Instead of attempting to eradicate faction, a task the authors of *The Federalist Papers* saw as futile, the founders instead sought to encourage faction, hoping that a diverse and widespread body of competing factions would effectively cancel each other out and preclude the possibility of any single dominant faction securing intransigent political power.

This founding political disposition of the young U.S. republic, besides setting a standard for cooperative commercialism, established a precedent for notions like moral center and manner of life when compared to previous European ideologies of virtue and national purpose. In *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke*, Thomas L. Pangle considers the American founders' reordering of the virtues and emphasizes how a nation's conception of virtue ultimately determines the importance it places on education, the arts, and literature.

The role of virtue, both in its classical formulation and in its numerous modified derivatives, figures prominently in Pangle's text. He argues that, in the classical sense, virtue was accorded the highest status and was linked directly to an ideal of moral perfectibility: "the coordination of reason and passion in a natural synthesis" (Pangle 55). Since virtue was so prized, the political historian and the artist shared the responsibility

of examining and writing about virtuous men. Their vocation in many ways was "To explore as well as to celebrate the characters of such men" (56). Specifically, regarding the link between virtue, the arts and education, "in the classical understanding, virtues are the central focus of the fine arts, and the arts play a crucial role in politics, as the place of public inquiry into, judgment of, and education in the virtues" (56).

A symbiotic relationship thus develops in the classical republic between politics and the arts: each entity influences and affects the other. But since the idea of virtue changed and evolved in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries with the advent of new philosophical-political thought (Machiavelli, Locke, Hume⁴), the founders of the U.S. Constitution relegated the arts to a secondary niche *below* politics and technical-commercial education, dissolving the former interdependence between politics and the arts:

The Founders' conception of the intellectual virtues is dictated by their incipient vision of a technological and intensely commercial, if also agricultural society.... The nature of education—a central theme of classical republican political theory—is a topic circumvented by most of the other Founders. The meager reflections that are recorded indicate that what was intended was above all a place for the training of sober and eminently practical public servants of a commercial and agricultural society—a civil equivalent, as it were, to West Point and Annapolis.... (76–7, 87)

The founders' Lockean-influenced conception of virtue, which tended "to treat virtue (or piety) as an important *instrument* for security or ease, liberty, self-government, and fame" (73), diminished the perceived importance of "the intellectual and theological virtues" and, subsequently, their kindred counterparts, "the fine arts, especially poetry" (85). American notions of virtue instead began to move closer to newer "attendants and offspring" of

classical moderation--"Frugality, Industry, and Lawfulness" (89) which preceded an inevitable implementation of "religion and morality as prosaic, reasonable, and simple as possible" and a gradual assimilation of "largely utilitarian, and unheroic or unfanatical" (86) virtues.

The ideological shift of the virtues toward a sweeping national practicality gradually filtered down to American citizens, especially through the writings of prominent statesmen and philosophers. Benjamin Franklin and Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, each in his own way, drew a portrait of an industrious, self-reliant man who, because of his practicality, better serves the expanding nation. In *The Autobiography*, Franklin considers how one may utilize the new, American rationalization of virtue for self-reform: "It was about this time that I conceiv'd the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection" (Franklin 1383). Franklin further demonstrates the enveloping pragmatism in American education and daily life by discussing his use of a list of Thirteen Virtues and a chart to facilitate proper, fastidious attention to individual strengths and weaknesses of virtue. Franklin's teleological practicality culminates in his "little book," where he "allotted a Page for each of the Virtues" (1386) in order to eliminate his "bad Herbs" (1387) one by one, and engender the progression toward "a clean Book after a thirteen Weeks daily Examination" (1388). Pangle expands upon Franklin's position in a summation of how a seemingly sober and practical life can lead toward a paradigmatic belief in joint individual-national growth:

Fancy foreign imports are to be curtailed, lavish expenditures discouraged, a simpler life encouraged; the principal reason, however, is not that indulgence and vanity are intrinsically evil, or obstacles to higher pursuits; their principal reason is rather that through such a policy individuals and the nation

as a whole may grow more prosperous, safer, and stronger in world trade--and thus in the long run may enlarge gratifications or at any rate the power to procure gratifications. (Pangle 93)

Even Emerson, despite all his starry-eyed mysticism and belief in human perfectibility, argues how an education of practical "self reliance" must serve *both* the individual and the rising, self-reliant nation. Emerson's seemingly individualistic foundation is constantly undermined by his insistence on an adherence to "a true prudence or law" that "recognizes the co-presence of other laws and knows that its own office is subaltern" (Emerson 221-2). Essentially, for Emerson, prudence precludes enthusiasm and unrestrained individualism; it unites "Our Yankee trade" with men and scholars (228) and facilitates a nationwide acceptance of "prudence" and "Nature" as "a perpetual counsellor" (228). Having linked American rationality and prudence, Emerson goes on to discuss how every person's industrious contribution will ultimately benefit the nation as a whole: "a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views" (146).

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his travels through the United States in the early nineteenth century, observed and confirmed the American subordination of the fine arts, demonstrating that: "In America everyone finds faculties unknown elsewhere for making or increasing his fortune. The spirit of gain is always eager, and the human mind, constantly diverted from the pleasures of the imagination and the labors of the intellect, is there swayed by no impulse but the pursuit of wealth" (Tocqueville II 35). Tocqueville further links the emerging American practical-commercial zeitgeist with a burgeoning

pantheistic worldview, a philosophical system "most fitted to seduce the human mind in democratic times" (32) because of the American levelling of society and "equality of conditions" (7). Toqueville goes on to suggest that in such a societal condition "the human mind seeks to embrace a multitude of different objects at once, and it constantly strives to connect a variety of consequences with a single cause [pantheism]" (31).

The notion of a pantheistic American practical sensibility (as opposed to the European *bildungsroman* aesthetic sensibility) demonstrates a common motif in American coming of age literature. Instead of an understanding of the value of the classics and an appreciation for the foundations of a liberal education, American coming of age protagonists are much more likely to be adept at hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking, or tracking. But this is not to suggest that these protagonists acquire all their education in the natural world. The coming of age character usually has had a general education: reading, writing, mathematics, science and perhaps religious instruction. Even Huck Finn, the most ignorant and wild American coming of age protagonist (the character closest to Rousseau's "Noble Savage") knows how to read and write. But any rigid, institutionalized instruction the American coming of age protagonist receives is supplemented with another practical lesson in the natural world. For example, in Maclean's "A River Runs Through It," the narrator comments upon his education of both practical skills and conventional lessons: "...in a typical week of our childhood, Paul and I probably received as many hours of instruction in fly fishing as we did in all other spiritual matters" (Maclean 2).

An enduring practicality within the natural world is thus a pre-requisite for the coming of age protagonist's life-education and epiphanic ruminations. That practicality

is often passed on from father to son through ceremonial rites of passage. And the skills and lessons acquired while fly fishing or deer hunting resonate over a lifetime, with as much or more power than a childhood spent studiously learning Latin and Greek. Nick Adam's retreat to the isolated, natural realm of fishing and camping in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" is one of many examples that could be cited:

He walked along the road feeling the ache from the pull of the heavy pack. The road climbed steadily. It was hard work walking uphill. His muscles ached and the day was hot, but Nick felt happy. He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him. (Hemingway 179)

Further, the practical sensibility of the American coming of age protagonist serves as an anchor for independent thinking and subjective realization when the boy must move beyond the ceremonial realm of hunting or fishing to a world he never made. Wherever his journey takes him--whether it is down the Mississippi and into the heart of the Calvinist, antebellum South, or whether it is through the cold rivers and mountains of frontier Montana where a lifetime of trout fishing only reveals that "It is those we live with and love and should know who clude us" (Maclean 113)--the American coming of age protagonist's basis for action is some practical reason. For example, when Huck pretends he is a ghost in an effort to fool and tease Jim, his impracticality--his penchant for playing pranks--turns on him as he recoils from Jim's bitter chastisement and realizes the consequences of his imprudence and questionable actions:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't every sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way. (Twain 90)

While American coming of age literature depicts the natural world as locale of education for the protagonist, it also reveals, first through nuance and innuendo and then through outright admission, a notion of a disintegration of ceremonial rites of passage linked to the retreat of the frontier and the natural world. It might be the sound of "that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes" (Faulkner 185) in Faulkner's "The Bear," or the simple declarative statement: "This is the way forests were in the olden days. This is about the last good country there is left" (Hemingway 89); in both cases, the message is unmistakable: the natural world is vanishing and along with it, ceremonial rites of passage and the American practical sensibility.

To a large extent, given the founding political dispositions of the United States which established a precedent for a practical sensibility, the passing of the natural world was inevitable. Given the vast expanse of terrain to the west, stretching out to the Pacific, it was practical for the Americans to desire an expansion westward until the frontier was closed. The next chapter of this thesis will foreground the American literary appeal to practical, ceremonial rites of passage in the natural world by an anthropological exploration of overt, formalized markers of passage in select, non-Western societies. Chapter Three will consider the emergence and dissolution of distinct American rites of passage and will emphasize the indissoluble relationship between outdoor, formalized rituals of transition and the natural world. The final chapter will return to the inevitable passing of the natural world, in an attempt to chart the dilemmas and problems of modern coming of age protagonists, the irrevocable disintegration of the natural world, and the

related ceremonial rites of passage.

Chapter II: Ceremonial Rites of Passage

Humans progress through a sequence of biological stages of life: "infancy, childhood, adolescence, young and old adulthood, senescence, and finally death" (Fried 13). While anthropologists and sociologists have noted variety in the definition and conception of these stages within disparate cultures and societies, there is a consensus that "no reliable observer has ever described a human society that did not have some ceremonial ways of marking such transitions" (13). Arnold Van Gennep was the first to define and summarize ceremonial events marking a transition from one phase of life to another. Van Gennep coined the term "rites of passage" to describe succinctly "ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (Van Gennep 3). Social identity and responsibility thus figure prominently in Van Gennep's definition of rites of passage. Ceremonial rites help mark and define positions in a society so that the individual can recognize and act accordingly by recognition of his/her current social role and obligations. In the male cults of New Guinea, for example, ceremonial rites of passage reinforce "social integration" and celebrate "the unity and power of *men*" (Keesing 22). For at least one culture of Papua New Guinea, the Bimin-Kuskusmin, "the *only* passage to...manhood is through the successive stages and ordeals of the male initiation cycle" (Foole 107). Similarly, among the !Kung hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari desert, a boy's status as a man is predicated upon his successful killing of a large animal (Fried 74-5). Overt, ceremonial rites of passage consequently provide accessible criteria for what actions a boy must perform to

become a man. Social identity and responsibility are pragmatically infused through tasks and duties, while awkward, fumbling notions of maturation are practically nonexistent.

But while biological maturation ineluctably leads to the necessity of rites of passage (for example, in Papua New Guinea, the transition from adolescence to adulthood follows from a series of initiation rites), the rites themselves are conscious constructs of a particular culture. Besides the common recognition of biological change and maturation, there are no universal threads within various rites of passage that link disparate cultures and societies. For example, the anthropological supposition that the actual onset of physical characteristics of puberty does not engender or affect adolescent rites of passage indicates that each society interprets ceremonial transition regarding maturation and sexual awakening subjectively. Anthropologists Martha and Morton Fried explicate the variation of adolescent rites of passage in response to puberty:

Moving back to puberty, we will see a considerable variation in the timing of the rituals over a period of some ten years during which the onset of sexual functions is believed to begin. In many cultures the relationship between puberty and sexuality remains latent; the connection is not made and certainly not stressed. This tends to be the case with such complex societies as our own. We are likely to attach pubertal significance to school graduation or a first automobile license rather than to the first signs of sexual capacity. (Fried 25)

Thus, since puberty and sexual development do not *specifically* precede or influence rites of passage, there is evidence to argue that each culture invents or borrows rites of passage based on its own particular interpretation of the environment, the needs of the community, or the cosmos. There is no global commonality existent in rites of passage except perhaps among similar societies: "simple hunting societies...simple farmers...complex industrial societies" (24). Further, rites of passage connect with a

people's "statements of their own distinctiveness, expressions of their identity (rather than as timeless truths of a closed cosmos)" (Keesing 16).

Rites of passage are thus a particular culture's ceremonies to facilitate and ease passage from one phase of life to another. This essay is principally concerned with male adolescent rites of passage and the relationship between rites of passage, social identity and responsibility. It is my intention to explore how a deeper, cross-cultural understanding of rites of passage facilitates a comprehensive and multi-layered textual interpretation of American coming of age literature. Consequently, in an attempt to achieve a general, interdisciplinary perspective, I will be examining more ceremonial, non-Western rites of passage (with the rituals of manhood in Papua New Guinea as a template) to elucidate the operative realities and problematics of American rites of passage as depicted in the country's literature.

In linking overt, ceremonial rites of passage predominantly with non-Western cultures, I am relying in part on Solon Kimball's formulation that "The continued expansion of an industrial-urban civilization has produced extensive changes in our social system. Prominent among these have been increased secularization and the decline in the importance of sacred ceremonialism" (Kimball xvi). Since ceremonial rites of passage help define social identity and responsibility by providing "anchorage" so that the individual can learn "where he is located in social space and where he is to start on a social map" (Cohen 37), it is vital to note the Western world's relative disregard for the importance of ceremonial rites of passage. This lack of acknowledgement serves as foundation and harbinger for future individual dilemmas involving maturation, identity,

and social duty.

Alternatively, societies emphasizing ceremonial rites of passage of adolescence avoid the blurring of the boundaries between adult and youth and the subsequent ambiguous dissolution of identity. In the various male cults of Papua New Guinea, initiation rites, quite definitively, turn boys into men through a process of ostracization, ridicule, physical beatings and, in some cases, homosexual interaction. The belief that "boys are soft and feminine by nature, that they will not grow and become strong, hard and manlike without the ordeals of initiation" (Keesing 16) figures prominently in New Guinea male cultism. As such, since "biological maleness is tenuous" (Herdt 82), there is an underlying cultural belief that emphasizes how ritual initiation, not biological maturation, *creates* manhood. And since manhood can be created, by extension it can be taught. Thus, there is a progressive guideline to New Guinea rituals of manhood, both for the instructors and for the adolescent initiates. The rigors of initiation—from "genital mutilation and piercing of the nasal septum" to "scarification...and nosebleeding" (Keesing 8)—all viscerally serve to displace boys out of their comfortable, former indolent child status and brutally enforce the necessity of understanding pain, sacrifice and responsibility in relationship to manhood.

Among the Awa of Papua New Guinea, for example, an early initiation rite of boys involves a forced restriction on food and water:

They are told that this restriction on food and water is to inure them to the pangs of hunger and thirst they will experience in the future when doing difficult garden work, hunting pigs, traveling long distances, or participating in warfare. They are reminded that adults have undergone these hardships in the past to provide sustenance and protection for their dependents and that the initiates

must also be self-sacrificing as they grow and take on adult responsibilities. (Newman 248)

Awa initiates also must undergo purgings, a series of ritualistic beatings whose purpose is to teach "social responsibility within the patriclan" (252). The beatings are punishment for the boys' past childhood docility and inability to defend the group against previous attack and, simultaneously, they provide instructions "regarding both their obligation to act responsibly toward clan members in the future and their duty to become strong enough to help defend the group against attack from the outside" (253).

Upon completion of initiatory rites, Awa boys are fitted with applicable "body ornamentation" (250) to mark overtly their progress through maturity and toward manhood. These symbols of successive maturation not only solidify the initiate's social identity by constantly reminding him he is gaining status, but also serve as constant reminders to the group that he has undergone a change, with all the new privileges and responsibilities befitting his new position.

Similarly, among the Tikopians, a Polynesian culture inhabiting one of the westernmost islands in Melanesia (Fried 20), various ceremonial rites of passage concretely mark and ease a boy's transition to manhood. First comes a "*mataki ramanga*," a fishing expedition—a boy's first opportunity to engage in man's work—where a boy's successful contribution (paddling as a member of the crew) is duly recognized and rewarded by "a celebration" (62). To become a man and fully enter Tikopian society, though, a boy must undergo a far more tumultuous rite of passage: "the superincision of his penis" (63). Community wide formal preparation along with the boy's observation of various dietary taboos precede the penis superincision, indicators of the rite's significance in individual

and communal conception. When the day of the rite arrives, people respond emotionally, "weeping and moaning" (64), illustrating the communal recognition and shared meaning of the bittersweet marriage of pain and passage that unite to formalize the final transition to Tikopian manhood. The excruciatingly painful characteristic of the rite also contributes to its defining status as isolated, epiphanic moment of passage:

Now the cut is made lengthwise on the front portion of the foreskin two inches in length from the tip of the penis. The tool is a razor; of old it was the shell of a bivalve, and many strokes were required to complete the operation, rendering the process so excruciatingly painful that it was only performed on much older boys. The young man's *tuatina* took him to a secluded spot in the forest, far out of earshot, to save him the humiliation of having others hear his terrible screams. (66)

Once the procedure is completed and the penis heals, "the initiate is considered an adult...and may participate fully in all adult activities" (67).

The anthropological case studies of the Awa and the Tikopia, as two representative non-Western societies, convincingly demonstrate the operative reality and function of ceremonial rites of passage for male adolescents. In both societies, boys *must* undergo a series of initiations to be formally accepted as men. Incorporated within the rites are constant lessons and reminders of adult responsibility and duty. From a heightened sense of communal responsibility emerges a notion of social identity. With rites of passage facilitating a partial construction of identity through group responsibility, nascent, troublesome ontological questions are, in effect, already answered for the boy. Ceremonial rites structure a paradigm that precludes isolation and loneliness, twin pandemics of our modern, sprawling commercialist, solipsitic society because, in many cases, there is no alternative to male rituals of transition. Boys *must* complete the

initiation cycle or repudiate their claims to "proper marriage and parenthood, as well as rights to divine, grow taro, hunt large game, engage in warfare, fend off witchcraft and sorcery, sacrifice to ancestors, and perform certain other activities" (Poole 107). In the eight case studies of initiation rites in *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*, the only description of uninitiated men is the following cursory dismissal: "uninitiated men are held to be weak, irrational, vulnerable and essentially female in character and bodily substance" (107). Based on the textual evidence and citations, I am led to believe that most boys succeed through New Guinea initiation rites with a satisfying knowledge of self and community.

It is my contention that, without ceremonial rites of passage, boys are left to grope toward private, personal conceptions of manhood on their own, with only inconsistent, unregulated, eclectic guidance of adults—guidance that, especially in our society, is profoundly restricted and handicapped by the stringent vocational demands of a techno-industrial, commercial society. American literature provides a fertile repository for expanding a discussion on rites of passage. Since many classic American texts concern young protagonists—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, for example—the nation's notions of maturity and rites of passage are writ large in its literature. American literature depicts many facets of male adolescence, but I am principally concerned with two recurring character types, boys who grow up with ceremonial rites of passage and boys who grow up without them. In the former category, texts like William Faulkner's *The Bear* and Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It" appeal to a notion of male education, identity formation, and induction into manhood

through ceremonial rites of passage. Both stories offer a modified translation of non-Western ceremonial initiation rites in that, in the American context, rites of passage are more regional and local, serving a particular family or a specific group of friends and family instead of an entire village or community. Nevertheless, American male ceremonial rites of passage, like hunting or fishing, retain enough characteristics of ritualistic forging of manhood to justify discussing them as initiation rites. Maclean and Faulkner, for example, both conflate the acquisition of outdoor skills—fly-fishing, hunting—with the formalized initiation into manhood. A tangible, natural world thus figures prominently in the American paradigm of male rites of passage. With the advent of a full scale techno-industrial society, however, the natural world irrevocably passes into "vanished America" and male ceremonial rites of passage soon follow.

In *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America*, Joseph Kett demonstrates the adult response to youth before and after industrialization and indirectly depicts the consequences of a society with a receding frontier and disintegrating ceremonial rites of passage. Kett argues that in pre-industrial America, the language of age was amorphous and "broad" (Kett 11), subordinated to the more concrete agrarian question of when a young man could fully enter the work force. Thus, in early America, "physical size, and hence capacity for work, was more important than chronological age" (11), an indication that the marriage of genetics and economic necessity forced a quiet rite of passage. But with the advent of industrialization, new vocations emerged, and physical size was no longer the exclusive prerequisite for work. Kett further notes how industrialization "made the teen years conspicuous" in that it "demanded that families eager for their children to

rise in the world take steps that would segregate their young people from the world of casual labor and the dead-end job" (171). Thus, industrialization, besides eradicating the natural world and the ceremonial rites of passage associated with it, isolated adolescence as a distinct social age group. Subsequently, along with a perception that "adolescence should become a universal experience" (211), adult sponsored youth organizations arose to fill the void of receding rites of passage and structure middle-class youth.

William Graebner, in his socio-historical text, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era*, discusses adult social engineering projects which arose in the post-World War II world to fill the void of structured rites of passage and how, in the end, these various youth organizations failed to fulfill the needs of a myriad of youth subcultures. Graebner's text, then, is a logical continuation of Kett's conclusion and an invaluable aid in studying adolescence in a specific time and place. Graebner's essential point of departure is the notion that "the history of youth" is "the story of disparate subcultures, united by age but in conflict over class, race, ethnicity, and gender" (Graebner 6). As such, he demonstrates how local or national organizations like the YMCA or the Catholic Youth Organization reached only certain segments of the youth population. Instead of adults actively participating in the lives of their children and attempting to fashion new rites of passage, social engineering was the preferred course of action, such as a "dress code for public schools" (99). Graebner argues that social engineering was not an effort to facilitate youth transition to maturity, but a "search for a society that would retain its historical social character and yet seem democratic and comfortably homogeneous" (129). Perhaps sensing the insincerity of adults, Buffalo

youths recoiled from adult organizations and attempted to discover an alternate social identity in music, clothes, gangs, clubs, fraternities, and sororities. Graebner concludes by emphasizing how a universal, "transcendent process of growing up" is unattainable when set against postwar "class, racial, and ethnic divisions" (129).

Graebner's essay, on one level then, elucidates the historical backdrop of youth in postwar America. As we explore the failure of social engineering projects to provide young men with an initiation guide to maturity, we can better understand the incessant searchings of modern fictional characters like Holden Caulfield, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, and Sal Paradise. Holden Caulfield's desperate, fumbling search for something to believe in beyond the decorous confines of Pencey Prep and the adult world, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty's frenetic, impassioned car rides across and beyond the border of the country, and "Rabbit" Angstrom's inability to let go of the memories of his high school basketball triumphs are examples from American literature of some of the consequences of growing up in a world without a guiding structure of ceremonial rites of passage. In one anthropologist's formulation:

There is no evidence that a secularized urban world has lessened the need for ritualized expression of an individual's transition from one status to another... The critical problems of becoming male and female, of relations within the family, and of passing into old age are directly related to the devices which the society offers the individual to help him achieve the new adjustment. Somehow we seem to have forgotten this —or perhaps the ritual has become so completely individualistic that it is now found for many only in the privacy of the psychoanalyst's couch. (Kimball xvii)

Without ceremonial rites of passage and with only unsatisfying youth organizations ostensibly to turn to, these characters wander through adolescence and adulthood, never

quite realizing where one stage ends and the other begins. But they search--in themselves, in the exploits of their past and in their land. Their failure to discover a fixed reality to suit their needs and to formulate a paradigmatic definition of manhood indicates the need of a resuscitation of ceremonial rites of passage.

By extrapolation, Graebner's assessment appeals to a more honest, reciprocal adult relationship with youth and seemingly provides for the modern American protagonist. By studying ceremonial rites of passage in a homogenized environment--from the forging of male identity in Papua New Guinea to the rites of hunting and fishing in American literature--we can learn from other societies and literature in an attempt to forge new rites of passage to suit our contemporary, postmodern, heterogeneous, industrial condition. While American class, ethnic, and racial factors must be accounted for, there is no reason to believe that we cannot formulate new initiation rites. As we move away from the past emphasis on gender specific ceremonial rites of passage, we may well look toward the egalitarian, information superhighways and virtual boulevards of the cybertech age to supply and guide us toward reformulating and restructuring rites of passage.

Chapter III: Of Rivers, Mountains, and Big Woods: Coming of Age on the Frontier

American coming of age texts set in the frontier are as diverse and varied as the sprawling, multiform landscape they depict. From the sparsely settled shore lines of the Mississippi to the picturesque boughs of the Big Bottom to the transcendent waters and looming mountains of the Montana Bitterroot Country--individual prose writers have illustrated the myriad facets and numerous shades of American rites of passage. Some young male protagonists, like Ike McCaslin, learn the ethos of responsibility and humility that facilitates an enduring maturity through a strict, supervised marriage of outdoor skills and ceremonial initiation--formalized hunting, in his case. Others mature spiritually through a less formal, day to day interaction with compassionate adults, like Huck in his friendship with Jim. Regardless of the specific method of maturation, in all cases, the male protagonists learn that with adulthood and spiritual growth comes a greater responsibility. Once they have assimilated the new-found responsibility, the protagonists usually find acceptance, either in a select, all-masculine, ritualized circle or in the larger social-communal matrix.

Taking into account the variations in emphasis and methodology in frontier coming of age texts, the question then becomes: what elements in these texts prefigure this relatively similar spiritual climax and contemplative denouement? I will be discussing four American frontier coming of age texts--Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (with an emphasis on the Ike McCaslin stories: "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn"), Norman

Maclean's *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, and Ernest Hemingway's 'Nick Adams' stories, and one contemporary text, Stephen King's *The Body*, which offers a modern appeal to frontier rites of passage--in an attempt to formulate a tentative answer. Of these texts, I will foreground Maclean's collection of stories and Faulkner's Ike McCaslin stories. I am privileging these texts because, in the case of Faulkner, "The Bear" summarizes the other coming of age texts. Regarding Maclean, I am motivated by the dearth of criticism and by the desire to justify the inclusion of "A River Runs Through It" as a legitimate American "classic" coming of age text.

In an attempt to facilitate a structured, functional close reading of these texts, I will first demonstrate a few of the salient constants within the texts. It is my hope that such an approach will create a general foundation of textual commonality and thus preclude unnecessary repetition during the examinations of the specific texts. A common starting point will also facilitate a recognition of how some coming of age texts emphasize a certain mood or feature of the frontier experience, while others depart radically and explore alternate, if related, concerns. By ordering the texts as I do, I am not attempting to formulate a rigid sequential or chronological listing (if one exists, it is coincidental). Instead, I am arranging the texts with regard to the extent and size of the frontier as depicted in each text: thus, I will first be examining the texts where the natural world is immense and still relatively unchanged by humanity; then, the texts where the natural world is gradually receding; and finally, the texts where the natural world is all but gone and where the protagonists have to travel great distances to discover a locale untouched by humanity.

The first constant in frontier coming of age texts is an abiding practical sensibility, the all-encompassing intuition of outdoor skills and pragmatic necessities that the young protagonist must learn and master. In his essay about "A River Runs Through It," Wallace Stegner comments that:

A raw society...offers to growing boys mainly a set of physical skills--riding, shooting, fishing, packing, logging, fire-fighting--and a code to go with them. The hero, the admired and imitated person, is one who does something superlatively well. To fail at a skill, if you try your best, is unfortunate but respectable; to fail in nerve or trying is to merit contempt. (Stegner 155)

These physical skills are often conflated with initiation rites as the older men who are the masters of the various outdoor skills become teachers of more than sportsmanship—just as the young boys become apprentices and initiates of matters beyond the specific outdoor skill at hand. In Faulkner's "The Bear," for example, Ike McCaslin's assimilation of hunting skills is paralleled by his ritualistic (re)forging of his identity:

It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. It was not even strange to him. He had experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams....Then for two weeks he ate the coarse rapid food—the shapeless sour bread, the wild strange meat, venison and bear and turkey and coon which he had never tasted before—which men ate, cooked by men who were hunters first and cooks afterward; he slept in harsh sheetless blankets as hunters slept. (Faulkner 187–8)

The adults in these texts ceremonialize the passing on of outdoor skills in an effort to supplement and temper the mastery of a physical skill with suggestive guidelines and structure. Ideally, the wisdom of a master craftsman will serve as a stencil over the

outdoor skill for the boy-initiate, a support that will enable the boy to utilize the lessons of the natural world in all areas of his life. In "A River Runs Through It," for example, it is the conflation of the ordered "four count rhythm" (Maclean 2) of a fly-fishing cast and the patient instruction of his Scottish minister father which allow the narrator ultimately to come to terms with his brother's violent death and conclude that "we can love completely without complete understanding" (112). This process of adult guidance alongside the instruction of practical outdoor skills engenders a satisfying and abiding maturity; it gives the boy a notion of responsibility and humility, and it allows for a lifelong contemplation and appreciation of the natural world. Education through a merging of outdoor skills with adult advice also universalizes coming of age and rites of passage on the American frontier. Since living in the natural world, regardless of specific frontier locale, demands a general mastery of all outdoor skills, young protagonists end up performing relatively similar tasks in their formative years--fishing, hunting, logging, tracking, etc. Without disregarding the anxieties that accompany each young man's subjective epiphanic passage to adulthood, there is a distinct feel and impression in these texts of a shared conceptualization of manhood based on a simplistic code of the outdoors.

But a notion of universal rites of passage is dependent on adult supervision; otherwise, without adult guidance and filtering, boys perform and assimilate outdoor skills with only a corresponding surface code of conduct. I am indebted here again to Wallace Stegner and his discussion of outdoor skills and the unspoken code of conduct that emerged synonymous with the rise of American frontier societies. One of Stegner's

defining points is that the outdoor code is not enough:

Unaccompanied by other more humane qualities, skill can produce a bully...or a tinhorn....The code goes beyond skill to character; for those who subscribe to it, it defines a man. A man...is neither mouthy nor finicky; he is stoical in the face of pain; he does not start fights but he tries to finish them; he does what his job and his morality tell him to do. But he cannot get by on mere skill. He needs something else, some decency or compassion that can only be learned from such sources as the boys'...father. (Stegner 156)

Thus, another constant in American frontier coming of age texts is an appeal to reciprocal, productive relationships with adults, bondings that, at their best, can teach the intricacies and subtleties of humility and decency. Sam Fathers, the runaway slave Jim, and Norman Maclean's father all serve in some capacity as spiritual overseers for boys and young men. Their methods for supplementing the various protagonists' outdoor skills vary considerably. Jim, for example, doesn't set out to instruct Huck formally (unlike Sam Fathers or Maclean's father), but by befriending him and showing him compassion and humanity on a daily basis, he nevertheless sets in motion a process of moral metamorphosis that reverberates through Huck and eventually changes his life.

The difference between boys who receive adult supervision alongside of their assimilation of outdoor skills and those who do not is immense. If one subscribes *only* to an outdoor code of conduct, one is left with an unending practical sensibility, a world view that allows for the *boundless* rational exploitation of nature and unguided pursuit of self-interest through a mastery and dominance of nature. Huck's father, for example, for all his faults, is a competent woodsman. As Huck says: "...we fished and we hunted, and that was what we lived on" (Twain 32). But Huck's father is also a brutal drunkard who

physically abuses his child at every provocation. His pure, practical sensibility only serves self-interest; he utilizes his hunting and fishing skills to satisfy his appetite for alcohol: "Every little while he locked me in and went down to the store, three miles, to the ferry, and traded fish and game for whisky" (32).

Essentially, then, the practical sensibility of American coming of age protagonists is wholly instrumental--deeper instruction and wisdom of adults provide the morally sensitive direction to the instrumentalization of the natural world, and enable boys and young men to apply the conscience and advice of older men to moral, personal, political, and social dilemmas. The subsequent split in practical sensibility settles around the related notions of property and entitlement. For hunters like Ike McCaslin and fisherman like Norman Maclean and Nick Adams, who all learned at an early age of the beautiful yet ineffable and amorphous relationship between humanity and nature, there is the universal sentiment: "we did what we had to do and loved the woods without thinking we owned them" (Maclean 226). For the numerous elder Finns and loggers and developers who have never been instilled with a serene, transcendent appreciation of the natural world for its own sake, however, there is only the inevitable prioritizing of nature as endless commodity to make way for the onrush of businesses, lumber companies, and various other agents of a growing commercial nation.

The splintering of practical sensibility into an exploitative versus an appreciative conception of nature draws attention to the most vital constant in these texts: the existence of a natural world. All the other recurring elements of frontier coming of age texts--practical sensibility, ceremonial initiation rites, an understanding, communicative

relationship between boy and adult--are subordinate and *only exist* because of a tangible, natural realm. The frontier is much more than rugged and decorative backdrop in these texts; the wilderness is the matrix which unites and gives meaning to men, boys and their outdoor tasks. The natural world provides the raw material for education as well as a locale where men can express affection and camaraderie without fear of weakness of embarrassment. Only by dropping the tough, masculine visage of the frontier world can older men pass on the gentler attributes of adulthood: compassion, humility, grace. As Maclean notes in his essay "Teaching and Story Telling," nature was the common ground where love and admiration between fathers and sons could be expressed:

In our family, men folk did not go around saying they loved each other. In our family, nature was a medium of our love, a carrier of it, an object of it, a cause of it. We loved each other because we loved the same sights and sounds and rivers, because we recognized, not only that we were parts of it but that all of us in some ways were masters of it--swinging an axe, building our log cabins, leading ducks on the wing, noting Caddis flies hatching from the bottom of shallow water in early September, and just leaning on the oars at sunset. And we knew nature was often the master of us, and we loved both nature and ourselves because of that.
(Maclean 94-5)

Maclean's conflation of the natural world as an ideal realm for masculine companionship and difficult to articulate expressions of love offers a functional explanation of *how* older men pass on the humbler, gentler lessons of adulthood to boys on the frontier. But Maclean's analysis only accounts for the fathers and sons who share a reciprocal love of each other and the natural world. Unmentioned are the men and boys who have no love for one another or nature to balance their mastery of outdoor skills: the

uninitiated supporting characters in Maclean's own stories--the "bait fishing bastard" of a brother-in-law Maclean must tolerate out of regard for his wife or the ruthless logger Jim whose sawing "pace was set to kill" the young Maclean (Maclean 123).

In addition, the split in practical sensibility is not a balanced one. The men of pure practical sensibility who mature without adult guidance or an instilled respect of the natural world vastly outnumber their more contemplative and compassionate counterparts. For every Ike McCaslin who attempts to preserve the sanctity and existence of the natural world--by not shooting a doe, for example--there are a dozen Roth Edmonds who continuously defy the unspoken regulations of hunting by using a shotgun instead of a rifle or by shooting a doe instead of a buck. The triumph of pure, practical sensibility thus sets in motion the inevitable, irrevocable dissolution of the natural world and the closing of the frontier. All the texts under consideration either anticipate this closure or depict it as it is occurring. The final constant is thus a shared anticipation or rendering of the receding natural world.

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is one of the earliest texts in the American canon to portray a boy's supervised spiritual education in the natural world. The Mississippi River and its sparsely settled shorelines of the early-nineteenth century provide the frontier, raw components for an apathetic orphan's moral reform. Huck Finn begins in the text as a rougher, coarser-edged Tom Sawyer. Though Huck does not really belong with the Widow Douglas who has adopted and attempted to "sivilize" him, he is still, like Tom, a child of the Calvinist, antebellum South. As such, when the story

opens, Huck has already begun to internalize, albeit problematically and without conviction, the spiritual doctrine of Calvinism and its complementary justifications for slavery. It is not until Huck's double escape from his father (the sinner in the Calvinist faith) and the widow (the saved) that he is able to extricate himself from the bonds of cultural conventionality and begin to pull away from an incipient assimilation of the superstructure of belief and conduct passed on to him by the Widow and Judge Thatcher. When Huck discovers Jim hiding in the woods, he takes a first step in a new direction, one that will result in his gradual (re)education from nature and a humane runaway slave. To emphasize the sense of beginning in Huck's radical departure, Twain formalizes the meeting of the young ruffian and the slave by having Huck promise not to tell anyone of Jim's runaway status: "I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest *injun*, I will. People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don't make no difference. I ain't a-going to tell, and ain't a-going back there, anyways" (Twain 50). Huck's vow is integral to his development in the text, not only because he keeps his word and never betrays Jim, but because his promise blends into a bond with the older slave and serves as his unofficial ceremonial marker of initiation into a larger world where egalitarianism and friendship reign instead of slavery, property, and dogmatic religion.

Albert E. Stone usefully summarizes just how Huck's journey with Jim constitutes a social initiation:

But Huck Finn is much more than an acute observer of the seedy side of the antebellum South. His journey with a runaway slave involves him deeply with an order that is aristocratic, slave-holding, and "cultured," as well as shackly and shiftless.

This introduction to the whole range of Southern life—which a vagabond boy in a small town north of St. Louis would not normally know—constitutes Huck's social initiation. If by "initiation" one means a maturing experience which teaches a young person what it means to be an adult, this social introduction of Huck's is the most profound and, as it turns out, the most permanent change he undergoes. (Stone 147-8)

As an initiation, Huck's social and personal realizations are tempered and aided by a benign adult—Jim. And while superficially Huck seems to be more intelligent than Jim and, in a sense, more wise (Huck can read, Jim is very superstitious), Twain does not let us forget that, Huck's claim "you can't learn a nigger to argue" (Twain 85) notwithstanding, Jim is a man and Huck is a boy (or young man). Jim has the intangible wisdom that only emerges from living—from working as a slave since birth, from having children, and from having experienced sex. All the subtle and overt distinctions between men and boys, even between a black male slave and a white boy, invert an apparently simplistic power dynamic between the pair and dislodge Huck's superior knowledge from any association with adulthood or maturity.

Early in the text, Huck confirms his status as a puerile boy with a lot to learn, when his overzealousness for playing a trick on Jim blinds him to a danger of the natural world:

I went to the cavern to get some, and found a rattlesnake in there. I killed him, and curled him up on the foot of Jim's blanket, ever so natural, thinking there'd be some fun when Jim found him there. Well, by night I forgot all about the snake, and when Jim flung himself down on the blanket while I struck a light the snake's mate was there, and bit him....That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there and curls around it. (Twain 59)

Huck's response to the snake incident is crucial; for the first time, he expresses a willingness to accept responsibility for his actions and mistakes. To be sure, he is not willing to accept complete responsibility yet. After chastising himself, he threw "the snakes clear away amongst the bushes" (59) so Jim would not know his actions precipitated the incident. But the scene indicates that Huck is learning and it is a sign of things to come; the original self-rebuke prefigures all of Huck's later resolutions and epiphanic proclamations. The stirrings of change and responsibility emerge within Huck as a direct result of his interaction with a piece of the natural world. In a sense, Huck learns the rationality of responsibility not because it is inherently good or bad as a trait, but because, simply, in the natural world, for every action there is an appropriate, and often unwanted, consequence. Education through observance and understanding of the natural world becomes contrasted with the education of the shore and civilization Huck has fled.

Jim complements Huck's inchoate fumbling with the notions of reliability and dependence by showing him, intentionally and unintentionally, that people can be hurt—physically and emotionally—by the careless, irresponsible actions of others. Jim does not become angry with Huck following the snake bite because he never believes that the incident was anything but accidental. But even though Jim is ignorant regarding the truth in this scene, the fugitive slave still imparts to Huck a sense of the consequences of one's actions. By braving a four day swelling from the reptile's venom, Jim demonstrates the fine line between health and sickness, imparting to Huck a sense of mortality and a reason for maintaining responsibility and pragmatic caution in the wilderness.

Following his loss of the raft, Huck plays another trick on Jim, this time insisting that the fog and his separation from Jim were all just a part of Jim's dream. Unlike the snake incident, however, Jim sees through the deceit in Huck's fabrication and bitterly chastises the boy:

En when I wake up en find you back ag'in,
all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could
'a' got down on my knees and kiss yo' foot,
I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout
wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid
a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what
people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's
en makes 'em ashamed. (Twain 90)

Jim's berating of Huck, as vitriolic as it is, contains just enough of a reminder of the bond and friendship Jim feels for Huck to allow Huck to learn *while* feeling the sting of a well-deserved castigation. Jim's compassion and humanity ultimately reach Huck, enough so the boy is able to synthesize a mind set which allows him to apologize and "humble" himself "to a nigger" (90). These incidents in the text--where Huck is influenced exclusively by Jim and the natural world--serve as defining foundation, a structure Huck will later call upon as he reflects over the larger ramifications of his journey with Jim.

Two complementary scenes in the text--both involving Huck's reactions to Jim's feelings for his children--further demonstrate the extent of Huck's education by Jim in the natural world. By examining the scenes alongside one another, we can identify the presence of two Hucks in the novel: one at the beginning of the text who has not yet assimilated the verities of friendship and responsibility, and a later, more contemplative Huck who has stared deep into his past and witnessed again and again the reaffirming love Jim has shown him. In the first scene, when Huck hears Jim discuss his motivations

for buying his wife and children out of slavery, Huck can barely contain his horror, so great is his distaste at Jim's bold, upstart words: "It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared talk such talk in his life before....It was according to the old saying, 'Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell'" (93).

In time, Huck rethinks his conditioned, reflexive condemnation of Jim, realizing that not only had the runaway slave showed him nothing but friendship, but that his feelings for his family were genuine: "He [Jim] was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n" (155). Once Huck begins to identify the capacity for love and compassion as something that transcends an individual's racial identity, he is finally prepared to accept Jim as a loving person and not as a runaway slave. Huck ponders Jim's kindness, his easy mirth and laughter, his trusting nature, and how Jim would "do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was" (209) and decides that saving a friend is worth defying the code of the conventional and going to hell: "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (210). When Huck tears up the confessional letter reporting Jim's whereabouts to Miss Watson, he accepts full responsibility for the first time in his life. There is no place to throw the snakes this time, only the wide open, vulnerable expanse of the rite of passage to maturity. And no matter what Huck does later in the text, his maturity is permanent: one cannot take back a drawn-out, ruminative struggle with responsibility and obligation anymore than a sexually experienced person can become a virgin again.

If Huck's declaration of epiphanic splendor is famous, so too is his moral relapse in the subsequent "Evasion" chapters. Numerous Twain scholars have responded unfavorably to the last ten chapters of the text, charging Twain with changing the novel's "mode from satire to burlesque, the prevailing tone from seriousness to farce, the characters from flesh and blood to pasteboard" (Gerber 9–10). Those who support the ending have argued that the last ten chapters put "Huck back in proper perspective" (10) and that the "Evasion" sequence extricates his believable, limited maturity from a potential mawkish, unrealistic moral perfectibility⁵. Considered in the light of rites of passage, the ending of the text is crucial because Huck's moral relapse demonstrates that a *temporary* bond between a compassionate adult and a boy is insufficient to effect permanent, all-encompassing change. Huck does learn a lot from Jim and, for a brief time, maintains the deep ethos of responsibility. But Huck's education is incomplete, unpolished; as such, he is still susceptible to relapses and stumblings in moral judgement. Indeed, Huck is the prototypical case in American prose of arrested development: just as Jim begins to fill the role of a "father figure" (Oehlschlaeger 122) to Huck and pass on the value of friendship and responsibility (it is noteworthy that one of Jim's final acts in the texts is his saving of Tom Sawyer, a final demonstration of responsibility and humanity for the young Huck), the text's endgame ensues and Aunt Sally emerges as the adult with the legal claim to adopt Huck, while Jim "despite his paternal caring for Huck on the raft...has no recognized claim as Huck's father" (123). There is no reason to believe Huck's education and moral development would have ceased had he been allowed to continue with Jim in the natural world. Conceivably, Huck would have absorbed

enough of Jim's shrewdness to realize that his childhood friend, Tom Sawyer, is in reality a cruel and vicious boy who cares more about games than people.

But Huck, though he has not reached his moral potential, has learned enough from Jim and the natural world to know reflexively that he cannot let anyone "sivilize" him again, so his decision to "light out for the territory" is not surprising. The text ends with Huck's unspoken plea for a continuation of his education in the natural world from Jim or an adult like him, but his hope is forlorn for, as the text has shown, a humane adult like Jim is very rare in the multitude of base and shifty denizens of the frontier. Huck is much more likely to come across another Duke of Bridgewater or a family similar to the Shepherdsons. Twain's various confidence-men and solely self-interested individuals demonstrate the emergence of a pure, widespread national practical sensibility. Jim and Huck prove that an adult and a boy can rise above the schemes of personal aggrandizement and the thoughtless exploitation of nature. The fact that they are vastly outnumbered in the text, however, indicates the particular friendship they form and the natural world they discovered it in will both inevitably become anachronisms in the incipient, practical sensibility of a rising commercial empire.

If Twain leaves open the slight possibility for Huck's establishing another reciprocal friendship with a humane adult, then William Faulkner takes the offering as far as it goes, extending the adult-boy wilderness bond to pit the purity of ceremonial hunting rites and the natural world against the inevitability of change and the abiding taint of a land where slavery was practiced. The pivotal Faulkner character closest to these concerns is Ike McCaslin; in the trio of stories, "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta

Autumn," we follow him through three stages: first, a boy learning the ways and mores of the hunt; then, a full hunter, grappling with his tangled legacy of slavery and miscegenation; and finally, an old man, observing the remains of the wilderness of his youth and the less than adept young hunters who will soon take his place.

Like Huck, Ike matures and acquires a heightened sense of responsibility from both the natural world and a gregarious adult. But unlike his young precursor, Ike undergoes an education that is ceremonial and overt; he learns to hunt in stages as an initiate with the requisite tests and markers of passage. The hunt serves as an apprenticeship for Ike; it is the formalized initiation "which would prove him worthy to be a hunter" (Faulkner 186) and allow him to participate in "the yearly-pageant rite" of the bear hunt. Hunters thus comprise a select society of men who represent a constant reminder to Ike of what he can become: "It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and the hardihood to endure and the humility and the skill to survive" (184).

And it is these men, the hunters, who must pass on their knowledge and belief system of the wilderness to boys. The half-black, half-Indian Sam Fathers is Ike's spiritual father; he is the elder hunter who, by his skill and status, wordlessly demonstrates to Ike the egalitarian code of hunting. In town one might be a lower class citizen or an idiot, but in the woods, with a measure of skill, courage and humility, one is only a hunter. When Ike completes his first kill in the cycle of hunting initiation by shooting a deer, Sam ceremonially "marked his face with the hot blood....joining him and the man forever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy's seventy years and

then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth" (171, 159). The blood bond between Sam and Ike strengthens the already functional relationship of hunter and initiate; the blood-rite publicly gives Ike status, recognition that he has ascended as a hunter and is worthy to bear the marks of his triumph. But Ike's joining with the elder hunter also signifies the beginning of responsibility and respect—to the spiritual father who is willing to pass on his knowledge and skill of the outdoors and to the deer and every other animal in the natural world, without which there would be no hunting: "*I slew you; my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death*" (334).

With Sam's guidance, Ike learns appreciation for the woods, the proper balance of fear and resolve: "Be scared. You cant help that. But dont be afraid. Aint nothing in the woods going to hurt you if you dont corner it or it dont smell that you are arraid" (198-9). But Sam's counsel does more than teach Ike how to hike through the wilderness without a compass or how to kill a bear; Sam emphasizes, again and again, the importance of humility: "He [Sam] taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward. Then he would talk to the boy..." (164). However, the most important hunting lesson of all, the hunter's confrontation with the bare essence of the natural world, Sam cannot teach Ike; it is the final rite of the initiate and Ike must undergo it alone. Ike's solitary departure into the woods is his attempt to transcend "the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted" (198). But even though Ike forgoes his gun, he realizes that he has not shed enough: "It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted" (199). It is not until

he relinquishes the final ornaments of hunting and civilization that Ike is finally able to stare into time and recognize the ineffability of nature as a performance staged for his benefit:

...the wilderness coalesced. It rushed, soundless, and solidified--the tree, the bush, the compass and the watch glinting where a ray of sunlight touched them. Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins.
(Faulkner 200-1)

Ike's incipient understanding of the undefinable and unknowable in the natural world finalizes his education as a hunter, an outdoor craftsman who has not only mastered the wilderness skills and advice of his mentor, but one who has transcended the limits of practical sensibility by admitting to an inevitable lacuna in his experiential universe. This growth in acuity allows Ike to see through the hunt and nature as one-dimensional signifiers; he comprehends that behind everything, even something as seemingly eternal as the natural world and the hunt, is the inevitability of change:

It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn't know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something...
(216)

It is true that Ike's perception and insight are rare; physically and transcendentally,

he surpasses all the other hunters in "The Bear." But that is not to suggest that only an individual like Ike can escape the pitfall of a pure practical sensibility; essentially, the acquisition of outdoor skills accompanied by adult guidance provides every hunting initiate with a sense of respect and awe of nature. Whether or not the boy chooses to expand or retreat from that paradigm when he matures is up to him, but at least he has the foundation to begin with. That is why Boon, even though he lacks the skill to hit anything with a rifle, is a hunter and Roth Edmonds, who uses a shotgun and shoots does, is not. Boon, like Ike, has the twin qualities of "pride and humility," notions learned from supervised initiation in the natural world⁶. And Faulkner clearly intimates that this initiation foundation cannot be transferred to the schoolroom; to illustrate, he even goes so far as to transplant terms associated with the classroom and university experience and recontextualize them as metaphors in accordance with the natural world: "If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater" (202).

It is this 'education' within the natural world which prepares Ike for the struggles he will face as an adult. Everything from his first blood-rite to the deaths of Old Ben and Sam Fathers serves as a fount of collective moral wisdom and guidance from which he can draw. Part IV of "The Bear," which interrupts the linear flow of Ike's hunting initiation, projects "the meaning of the hunt backward and forward in time" (Utley 3) and depicts how Ike responds to the newfound knowledge of his antebellum heritage of

slavery, miscegenation, and cruelty. The subsequent dilemma Ike faces is tumultuous because his guilt and disaffected ruminations are not moods he can puncture or eviscerate with a rifle shot. Part IV of the story ultimately asks whether an all-masculine outdoor initiation cycle can provide a boy with enough guidance to confront and resolve far-reaching, personal and cultural problems. After reading the McCaslin family ledgers and ruminating at length over his ancestry, Ike eventually realizes that "This whole land, the whole South, is cursed" (266) and he subsequently repudiates his claim to the McCaslin land.

As at least one Faulkner critic has pointed out, on the surface, Ike's response to the taint of his ancestry seems lackluster⁷. Following his repudiation of the McCaslin land, Ike pays off the monetary legacies to the black descendants of Lucius McCaslin (Tennie's Jim, Fonsiba, Lucas) and then passively withdraws from society, living alone and isolated. But such a condemnation of Ike fails to account for the historical and cultural realities surrounding the character and the text. Before Ike rejects his claim on the McCaslin land, he struggles repeatedly over the paradox of property and the fallacy of entitlement: "I cant repudiate it [the McCaslin land]. It was never mine to repudiate....because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realised, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing" (245-6). In theory, Ike's dilemma is cyclical and unending, but in practice he realizes that through an act of "irrational bravery" (Uteley 179), similar to the demonstration of courage often performed by hunters in the natural world, "he is free to repudiate his heritage" and attempt "to live a life free

from the obsessions of property and the taint of slavery" (179).

Ike's gesture is courageous and heroic: by refusing to accept the entitlements and gratuities of an ancestry linked with slavery, he illustrates a moral maturity and ethos of human responsibility worthy of his mentor Sam and the lives of the numerous animals he slew. As Part IV is set in the story *within* Ike's initiation rite, it further demonstrates that overt, ceremonial rites of passage give Ike the guiding structure to make his decision and live by it. But the taint of slavery hovering over the South also raises the question of the essential validity of an all-male, predominantly white hunting initiation; Part IV of "The Bear" layers and undermines the purity of the hunt and initiation rites by providing "an abrasive disruption of the idyllic nostalgia previously accumulated" (Howe 125). The looming inevitability of change that Ike first senses in the forest when he encounters Old Ben is finally given an explanation: the hunt emerged and belonged, especially in the South, to a white, patriarchal regime which sanctioned slavery. As such, for the South to progress collectively and to recover from old wrongs, the bastions and locales of exclusive, white male power must pass away. The natural world must absorb the common guilt of an entire region for the South to come of age in its own way and separate itself from the bondage of the past.

This is not to suggest that the legacy of southern slavery is a direct cause of the dissolution of the natural world in "The Bear." Indeed, the counterpoint to Ike McCaslin's coming of age is a detailed depiction of the triumph of pure, practical sensibility and the subsequent evisceration of the wilderness it engenders. The death of Old Ben symbolically foreshadows the imminent disintegration of the natural world and the

emergence a new mechanized, techno-landscape: "a new planning-mill already half completed which would cover two or three acres and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails red with the light bright red of newness and of piled crossties sharp with creosote" (Faulkner 303). The hunter in Ike screams at the sacrifice of his beloved woods, but the human in him knows that, on some level, if the South is ever to move beyond the guilt of slavery, then the natural world and the all masculine ritualized societies associated with it must go. In "Delta Autumn," the story immediately following "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner elaborates on the incipient theme of necessary change in "The Bear" by demonstrating Ike's inability to accept the sexual union of his white nephew and his black niece: "*Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now!* He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: 'You're a nigger!'" (344). Ultimately, it is the niece, a black woman who has never participated in a hunt or an outdoor initiation rite, who illustrates to Ike the gap in his moral paradigm: "'Old man,' she said, 'have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?'" (346).

In *Go Down, Moses*, William Faulkner presents a tangled interpretation of American rites of passage, the natural world, and the inevitability of the passing of the wilderness. While Faulkner recognizes the spiritual assets of moral maturity and responsibility that emerge from overt, masculine outdoor initiation rites, he simultaneously comprehends the tainted legacies and sins of the fathers to which these ceremonial rituals were indissolubly linked. As such, Faulkner recognizes the need for a radical shift, a

clearing of the slate, and a closing of the frontier to beget the implementation of a non-gender or-race specific matrix of moral guidance. But even Faulkner is unconvinced as to the possibility of a new order replacing the purity of the natural world. At best, "Delta Autumn" is a proposal without a solution, a substitution of a platitude for effective initiation rites. As the various peripheral characters in *Go Down, Moses* illustrate—from Roth Edmonds to the men whose "hunting clothes and boots...had been on a store shelf yesterday" (215)—pure practical sensibility is not guided by sentiments, platitudes, or moral centers but by an unguided, unregulated will to push forward to the end of the frontier.

While Faulkner elevates his depiction of ceremonial rites of passage to encompass larger cultural concerns, Norman Maclean focuses on the personal experiences of one man looking back at his idyllic coming of age and life as an adult in frontier Montana. Maclean's memoir style and the pastoral innocence of the historical Bitterroot Country extricate his fiction from some of the cultural entanglements—specifically slavery and the white man's guilt—that Twain and Faulkner responded to and blended into their coming of age texts. As a result, the reader is able to concentrate exclusively on the private life of the narrator (modeled after the author's) and how the ceremonial rites of passage of his youth provide moral structure for problems and crisis in all areas of his life: work, family, leisure, marriage, education, religion. Of the three stories in *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, two relate the adolescent experiences and ruminations of Norman Maclean as he works for the United States Forest Service ("Logging and Pimping and "Your Pal, Jim" and "USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Whole in

the Sky"; the third ("A River Runs Through It") spans a lifetime, shifting between Maclean's formalized introduction to fly-fishing as a boy, his struggles as an adult to understand and help his brother, and his faraway reflections as an old man on how the rites of his youth resonate through seventy years. Individually, each story illustrates how formalized initiation and the acquisition of a specific outdoor skill facilitate a structured transition to adulthood; together, the collection merges specific rites and demonstrates how ceremonial rites of passage are fused into the matrix of the Western American frontier and how, at their best, they offer an open-ended, malleable structure of support that extends far beyond a boy's adolescence. Further, the trio of texts demonstrate the ideals and the limits of ceremonial rites of passage, illustrating how, to a boy like Norman Maclean, structured rites instill notions of responsibility and resolve that last a lifetime, and how, for a boy like Norman's brother Paul, ceremonial rites are not enough to teach moral culpability or to prevent an early, violent death.

In the title novella, "A River Runs Through It," a Scottish minister uses fishing to impart spiritual lessons to his sons and guide them toward adulthood in frontier Montana. Fishing becomes an extended initiation rite of manhood that fills the spiritual void of disintegrating religious piety: "In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" (Maclean 1). Like all those who pass through initiation rites in the natural world involving the mastery of outdoor rites, Norman and Paul must first learn competence of the physical techniques and accoutrements of fishing: the rod, the wheel, the cast, the bait. But the Maclean boys are instilled with more than rudimentary knowledge of a craft; their father ceremonializes their instruction and, from the start,

identifies fishing with the recognition of art, calling it: "an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o'clock" (2). As such, there are strict guidelines to the rite that must be followed and adhered to if the boys are to become fishermen:

But it wasn't by way of fun that we were
introduced to our father's art. If our
father had his way, nobody who did not know
how to fish would be allowed to disgrace a
fish by catching him....My father was very
sure about certain matters pertaining to the
universe. To him, all good things—trout as
well as eternal salvation—come by grace and
grace comes by art and art doesn't come easy.
So my brother and I learned to cast
Presbyterian style, on a metronome. (3, 5)

The strict, formalized structure that Reverend Maclean establishes around the instruction of fly fishing does more than teach his sons the patience and fortitude necessary to be adept fishermen; it wordlessly and continuously demonstrates a life ethic: that one should work diligently, take pride in honest, hard labor, and strive for beauty through perfection of mechanical certainties: "As for my father, I never knew whether he believed God was a mathematician but he certainly believed God could count and that only by picking up God's rhythms were we able to regain power and beauty" (2). The rite of fishing consequently structures manhood and identity; the Maclean boys know they are fishermen and a select brand of men—similar to the collective ontological conception of "hunter" in *Go Down, Moses*—when they have mastered their father's lessons and picked up the water's pantheistic rhythms. With the accumulation of the skills of fishermen come new discoveries and deeper insights, ineffable markers of passage and spiritual maturity:

Maclean would have us see fishing as a rite, an

entry into "oceanic" meanings and eternities compressed into moments, epiphanous "spots of time," the *mysterium tremendum*. Entering the river to fish its dangerous waters is to fish eternity, and to unite in love with those few persons who also obey the exacting code. (Simonson 162)

The transcendental potentiality of fly fishing, coupled with the ceremonial instruction of his father, engenders a deep moral maturity in the young Norman Maclean. Like Ike McCaslin, Maclean acquires a wisdom in the wilderness that serves him well throughout his life. In "Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'," for example, when the teenage Maclean works a summer in the forest service as a logger and is "challenged" to saw as a "gyppo" (Maclean 117) partner with an industrious but tough lumberjack, he remembers the lessons of his youth, summons resolve and stoicism, and accepts: "I...knew I was being challenged. This was the world of the woods and the working stiff, the logging camp being a world especially overbearing with challenges, and, if you expected to duck all challenges, you shouldn't have wandered into the woods in the first place" (117-8). Even though Jim, a "Jack Dempsey at the other end of the saw" (123-4), intends to intimidate and break the spirit of his young partner, the teenage Maclean internalizes the tension and does his work: "...I had spent over a month twenty-four hours a day doing nothing but hating a guy....Yet I would have taken a punching from him before I would ever have asked him to go easier on the saw. You were no logger if you didn't feel this way" (124, 127).

The teenage Maclean's determination and resolve enable him to last the summer sawing with Jim and to earn his partner's respect. Once Maclean realizes he has earned acceptance, he reevaluates his partner and notices that while Jim is still a "direct

descendant of a Scotch son of a bitch" (118), he is also another spiritual mentor in the natural world, a teacher who, by example, demonstrates to his younger, ingenuous partner the toughness of the woods and life and the sensual delight of sex and pimping: "...it occurred to me that maybe what he had been doing this summer was giving me his version of graduate school. If so, he wasn't far wrong" (132). The teenage Maclean's introduction to logging and pimping in the USFS illustrates the interdependency and cumulative structure of outdoor initiation rites. His father and fly fishing give the adolescent Maclean enough skill and guidance to reach a young adulthood and a nascent, incipient maturity. Logging and Jim supplement the fly fishing initiation by providing a test of character in another area of the natural world. Norman's ability to utilize the wisdom he learned from one outdoor skill and translate it into a functional code of ethics when working at another is his greatest strength; it allows him to survive and adapt in the natural world, and it also gives him a sense of testing and character. Just as Norman perceives when he is being challenged by Jim, he also knows when he has succeeded and has passed through a rite of maturity. Thus, ceremonial initiation rites engender not only notions of responsibility and morality, but also instill a greater cognizance of individual, epiphanic moments of transition.

Maclean's other story about the forest service, "USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Whole in the Sky," depicts a young adult's emerging ability to recognize bare moments and scenes of life in a wider, abstract context. The story begins like "Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'," with a somewhat older Maclean working another summer for the USFS, facing another challenge, this time from the seasoned mountain

man, Bill Bell, who sends Maclean to post an isolated fire-watch station on Grave Peak for chastising the camp cook. But the similarities end there. While Maclean again summons a combination of resolve and stoicism to do his job well "in spite of rattlers, grizzlies, and lightning storms" (Stegner 157), in "USFS 1919" his summer work goes beyond measuring up to an adept woodsman. With the experience of logging behind him, an older and wiser Maclean is prepared for the next initiation sequence in the natural world and begins to fumble with the notion that "life every now and then becomes literature—not for long, of course, but long enough...so that what we eventually come to mean by life are those moments when life, instead of going sideways, backwards, forward, or nowhere at all, lines out straight, tense and inevitable, with a compilation, climax and, given some luck, a purgation" (Maclean 140).

Norman's emerging clairvoyant ability to detach his perceptions from the empirical universe anticipates the close of his initiation cycle; with a heightened sense of transition, he is better able to identify events like "the act of Cleaning Out the Town....this autumn rite of the early Forest Service" (202), when the Forest Service crew wanders into the nearest town and attempts to hustle and fight the locals, and recognize his place within the social nexus of the Forest Service: "And at the end we banded together to clean out the town—probably something also that had to be done for us to become a crew. For most of us, this momentary social unit the crew was the only association we had ever belonged to, although somehow it must have been for more time than a moment" (227). After bonding with the Forest Service crew, Norman's initiation sequence is at last complete: he learned notions of responsibility and morality through the marriage of

parental instruction and fly fishing, he survived a challenge in the woods from a tough sawyer, and he discerned moments of transition and change in his own life. At the end of "USFS 1919," Norman Maclean is a man, comfortable in his identity as a competent fisherman and woodsman and prepared for the multitudinous challenges and vicissitudes of life that await him.

Maclean's initiation into manhood in the natural world prepares him for difficulties beyond the wilderness, both in his marriage and in his ability to accept his brother's tragic death. For example, in "A River Runs Through It," when Maclean's wife, Jessie, suggests that he take her brother Neal fishing, Norman agrees, even though Neal is a "bait fishing bastard" who violates "everything that our father had taught us about fishing by bringing a whore and a coffee can of worms but not a rod" (79). Neal represents the polar opposite of Norman, a man of pure practical sensibility who has had no ceremonial initiation in the natural world and, consequently, has no respect for fishing or timeless rites. As Wallace Stegner notes, the reward for Norman's resolve with Neal is "acceptance" (Stegner 157) as Jessie realizes what Norman has endured for her and exchanges her love with him: "Without interrupting each other, we both said at the same time, 'Let's never get out of touch with each other.' And we never have, although her death has come between us" (Maclean 85).

Norman's relationship with Jessie underlies the complexity of women's roles in a seemingly all-masculine world of fly fishing and ceremonial rites of passage. In "A River Runs Through It," women dialectically infuse and influence a society ostensibly ruled and controlled by men. For example, Norman's mother fills a necessary, auxiliary

role in the ex post facto ending of the fishing rite:

She knew how to clean fish when the men forgot to, and she knew how to cook them, and, most importantly, she knew always to peer into the fisherman's basket and exclaim "My, my!" so she knew all that any women of her time knew about fishing although it is also true that she knew absolutely nothing about fishing. (12)

But women fill more than a peripheral sphere in Maclean's vision of frontier Montana⁹; they are powerful and discerning in their paradoxical submission to and domination of their men. Old Rawhide, the woman Neal brings fishing and then has sex with, for example, though she is "a fisherman's whore" (76), is still "strong" and "very tough" (77). It is the "strength in her legs" (77) which supports a drunken Neal after the two have been discovered sleeping on a sandbar by Norman and Paul. And though both Norman and Paul detest Neal, they can do nothing, since Neal "was untouchable because of three Scotch women" (79). Norman comprehends and accepts the abiding power of the feminine running under the surface and feeding into the structure of a male dominated frontier society. The feminine supplements his ethos of humility and compassion from an alternate direction, and he is able once again to layer and complement his ceremonial, outdoor experiences.

But even with a boyhood of formalized initiation and an acceptance of the feminine, Norman is still unable to understand and help his brother Paul: "...if boyhood questions aren't answered before a certain point of time, they can't ever be raised again....It is a shame I do not understand him" (9, 31). Norman struggles in vain toward an understanding of Paul because he knows that, while fishing, Paul is "a master of an

art" (6). But even with his deft skill, Paul cannot escape a self-destructive addiction to gambling, fighting, and casual, tawdry sexual liaisons. Paul occupies a unique place in American coming of age characterization; he is not a man of pure practical sensibility (he acquires a transcendent respect for nature and is even closer to its bare ineffability than Norman), but he doesn't assimilate enough of his father's instruction to achieve a deep practical sensibility like Norman either. Paul is caught between the two extremes, fluctuating and turning, unable to settle and rest. In the end, the incompleteness kills him as he is "beaten to death by the butt of a revolver" (111). Norman never fully comes to an understanding of his brother or why he died, but he is able to submerge the inarticulate pain of loss by fixing on bare slices of time, memories of Paul as "beautiful" and as a "fine fisherman" (112).

Eventually, Norman channels the memory of his brother into his own fishing. By extending the ceremonial rites of his boyhood to absorb the lives of "those I loved and did not understand when I was young" (113), Maclean utilizes fly fishing as a lifetime companion and metaphysical portal to a deified, transcendent realm:

Then in the Arctic half-light of the canyon, all
existence fades to a being with my soul and
memories and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River
and the hope that a fish will rise.

Eventually, all things merge into one, and
a river runs through it. The river was cut by the
world's great flood and runs over rocks from the
basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless
raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some
of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters. (113)

If Maclean depicts a narrator looking back on a 'vanished America' and "beautiful

world...when all the beer was not made in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, or St. Louis" (62), then Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams matures just as that 'beautiful' world is vanishing; Nick is old enough to have experienced ceremonial rites of passage in the wilderness, but young enough to witness the beginning of the full dissolution of the natural world. In his childhood, Nick, like Huck, Ike, and Norman, learns a set of outdoor skills from a concerned adult. As an older Nick ruminates over his youth, he recalls what he learned from his father: "he loved to fish and shoot exactly as much as when he first had gone with his father. It was a passion that had never slackened and he was very grateful to his father for bringing him to know it" (Hemingway 258).

The natural world gives Nick a sense of purity and stability, an abiding structure that he can return to in times of disillusionment and angst. In "Ten Indians," for example, it is the familiar sights and sounds of nature which enable Nick to put in perspective the pain of a failed adolescent relationship: "In the morning there was a big wind blowing and the waves were running high up on the beach and he was awake a long time before he remembered that his heart was broken" (33).

But Nick's initiation in the natural world is not without its problems. While Nick's father expertly teaches him fishing and shooting, the parent also passes on to his son his own apprehension and diffidence about women and sex: "His father was as sound on those two things [fishing and shooting] as he was unsound on sex" (258). As a result of observing his father, Nick develops a reaction of unease and fear toward sexual relationships; to compensate, Nick relies exclusively on the outdoor skills and masculine codes of his youth. By honestly depicting how a masculine initiation cycle can foster

deep-rooted feelings of misogyny and mistrust, Hemingway confronts the major stumbling block besetting American male protagonists coming of age in the natural world: the trepidation of the feminine. In effect, Hemingway's Nick Adams stories provide the grim underside to the male pose depicted in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Twain "blurred adolescence back into boyhood to avoid confronting sex" (Fiedler 272), or in the Ike McCaslin stories where Faulkner virtually ignores women and their influence on men. Further, the Nick Adams stories provide a counterpoint to "A River Runs Through It"; Nick's rough, insensitive views of women are markedly similar to Norman's brother's. The coarse, unyielding Nick Adams who tells a woman after sex, "Come on, get dressed, slut" (Hemingway 228), shows the respectful, compassionate view toward women, exemplified by Norman Maclean, is achieved in spite of, and not because of, ceremonial rites of passage. Nick's inability to configure women comfortably in his world view anticipates his later crisis in reconciling women and sex with fishing and the natural world.

On the surface, Nick resembles other American coming of age protagonists. He draws from the experiences and collective moral wisdom of the ceremonial rites of passage of his boyhood to carry him through tumultuous times. For example, in "Now I Lay Me," while recuperating from serious wounds suffered in World War I, Nick recalls images of his boyhood fishing experiences in an attempt to submerge the horrors of war and retain his sanity: "I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind" (144). But even when he is reaching out to the

ceremonial rites of his youth for a touch of the purity of the natural world, Nick cannot help but introduce his reservations about women and create a dichotomy between the all male world of wilderness rites and the amorphous, unknowable feminine world:

Finally, though, I went back to trout fishing,
because I found that I could remember all the
streams and there was always something new about
them, while the girls, after I had thought about
them a few times, blurred and I could not call them
into my mind and finally they all blurred... (153)

When Nick returns to the United States after his tour in the war, his incipient fear of women and sex quietly explodes as he finds himself jaded and disaffected, unable to continue in a relationship with his lover, Marjorie: "He went on. 'I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside me'" (204). "The Three Day Blow," which logically follows "The End of Something" in place and time, complements the breakup story and provides reasons for Nick's retreat from Marjorie and the feminine. Between Nick's war experiences, his ingrained feelings toward women, and the advice of his friend, Bill, who reminds him that "Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched" (213), Nick is unable to find an adequate reason to stay in a relationship; he would much rather get drunk with Bill, who, unlike the woman he so resents, does not want anything from Nick.

In "Big Two-Hearted River," a solitary Nick departs for an extended fishing trip in an attempt to resolve the crisis in his life by (re)discovering the stability and purity of the natural world. Nick begins by recalling the ceremonial rites of his youth. His focus is repetition and reduction; his actions are rhythmic and simple, revolving around eating, fishing, and sleeping. Nick performs the fishing and camping activities repeatedly in an effort to lose himself in the bare existence of basic tasks of life; by doing so, he hopes

to exorcise the demons of war from his subconscious:

Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling....Inside the tent the light came through the brown canvas. It smelled pleasantly of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. (183-4)

But though Nick's method is sound, repeated fishing casts cannot in the end shield him from the one factor that prevents his spiritual recovery in the wilderness: the taint of a receding natural world. For example, Nick's memory of a previous fishing trip serves as an abrasive disruption of the idyllic repose he desperately seeks: "Years before when he had fished crowded streams...Nick had again and again come on dead trout, furry with white fungus....Nick did not like to fish with other men on the river. Unless they were of your party, they spoiled it" (192). The image of dead, furry trout littering a shore line matches Nick's observation of the burned out town of Seney at the beginning of the text. In both cases, the presence of humanity intrudes upon his solitude and natural retreat. In effect, Nick is trapped within a diminishing circle of the untainted, natural world; advancing on all sides is a taint that is not pollution but the thousand-headed behemoth of pure practical sensibility.

As Hemingway's Nick Adams stories recount the emergence and quiet disintegration of both the character Nick and the wilderness he matured in, Stephen King's "The Body" offers a modern appeal to the old notion of coming of age in the wilderness. In "The Body," King attempts to reclaim a notion of universal rites of passage by jolting his characters out of the comfortable facade of a small 1960s town and placing them in a relatively untainted realm: nature. As such, King demonstrates the

lacunae in the emerging suburban malaise of America by illustrating the rare, but still potent, pockets of the natural world: "In those days it was still possible to walk into the woods and lose your direction there and die there" (King 296).

For King, nature still figures prominently in maturation and transition; it is a matrix that is at once perilous and wondrous, a realm where boys can recognize what it is to become men. And as the four boys in the text stumble through the Maine wilderness in an attempt to discover a dead body, they gain intimations of friendship, the ineffability of nature, their strengths, and change:

Unspoken—maybe it was too fundamental to be
Spoken—was the idea that this was a *big* thing.
It wasn't screwing around with firecrackers or
trying to look through the knothole in the back
of the girls' privy at Harrison State Park. This
was something on a par with getting laid for the
first time, or going into the Army, or buying your
first bottle of legal liquor...(398)

But even with a sustained wilderness backdrop, "The Body" is still a long way from following the ceremonial initiation rites depicted by Faulkner and Maclean. Though King attempts to evoke a sense of universal coming of age, the lack of supervising, considerate adults in the text forces the four boys to assimilate everything they experience privately. While the boys discover the body of a dead adolescent boy (402) and share a confrontation with their own mortality, after the experience fades, each boy must absorb and interpret the event in his own way. Without adults, there is no hierarchy of right or wrong or structure of wisdom and collective experience. King recognizes the need for adult guidance and attempts to extricate the text from this problem by imparting one of the boys, Chris Chambers, with wisdom beyond his years:

"I wish to fuck I was your father!" he said
angrily.... "It's like God gave you something,
all those stories you can make up, and He said:
This is what we got for you, kid. Try not to lose
it. But kids lose *everything* unless somebody
looks out for them and if your folks are too
fucked up to do it then maybe I ought to." (377-8)

King's characterization of Chris, however, comes across as forced, an attempt to meld all the wisdom of a Sam Fathers or Jim into a twelve-year-old boy. But even if, in potentiality, Chris could fill the role of a humane adult, King still fails to extricate the splintering of a notion of universal rites of passage into blurred moments of personal awakening. Even the narrator of the text, Gordon Lachance, as he begins his poignant and bittersweet look back into his youth, comments on how the most important things in life are impossible to share with anyone:

The most important things are the hardest things to say. They are the things you get ashamed of, because words diminish them--words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out...And you may make revelations that cost you dearly only to have people look at you in a funny way, not understanding what you've said at all, or why you thought it was so important that you almost cried while you were saying it. (289)

King's "The Body" ultimately asks whether the natural world still provides a locale for a structured coming of age. The lack of a network of adult guidance and supervision, and the subsequent lack of ceremonial instruction and ontological markers of passage, however, foredooms the text before the question can even be asked. But "The Body" is significant as a coming of age text precisely because of its status as a failed representation of a universal coming of age in the natural world. First, "The Body" illustrates the impossibility of going back to nature to reclaim the lost rites of youth. Second, the text

serves as a point of a departure for a discussion of the widespread and intense problems modern coming of age protagonists in an urban environment will share. If it is difficult to discover a notion of universal rites of passage even in a fading natural world, then it is hardly possible in a city. This is not to suggest that "The Body" chronologically precedes modern coming of age texts, or even that King was the only American author to attempt to reanimate the theme of coming of age in the natural world. Instead, "The Body" functions as a text of transition: it depicts the end of one literary tradition--the American coming of age in the natural world--while simultaneously complementing and recalling another--the maturation in the city. Finally, "The Body" demonstrates that considerate adults and formalized instruction are just as significant to structured maturity, if not more so, than the natural world. Thus, conceivably with a new matrix to take the place of the anachronistic natural world *and* the return of concerned, patient adults, new rites of passage can still be formulated. The fourth chapter of this thesis will demonstrate the plight of the modern coming of age protagonist and question whether it is possible to break from the cycle of urban isolation and personal, ambiguous realization and retrieve some version of a universal coming of age.

Chapter IV: He Who Is Alone: The Modern Coming of Age Protagonist

With the close of the frontier and the national emergence of an industrial-commercial infrastructure, American coming of age authors began to transform and blur the meanings of rites of passage and male initiation. This adjustment was caused by the dissolution of the natural world and the subsequent uneasiness brought on by an exclusive interaction with a fully formed secular and technological environment. In these texts, the natural world, if it is mentioned at all, is relegated to a subordinate position in the boy-protagonist's development. Gone are the various outdoor skills that characterized early American coming of age literature (hunting, fishing) and pervasively linked boys with adults and the wilderness. Also gone are these boys' spiritual overseers (Sam Fathers, Reverend Maclean) who ceremoniously passed on their knowledge of a physical skill while also imparting to the boy-apprentice a sense of responsibility and respect for people and nature.

In this chapter, I shall survey the modern¹⁰ coming of age text—from early twentieth-century texts like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* and *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, and Bret Easton Ellis' *Less Than Zero*--and explore the state of the boy-protagonist who matures without structured initiation rites or the assistance of concerned adults. I shall demonstrate the far reaching effects the disintegration of the natural world and outdoor ceremonial rites of passage has upon the modern coming of age protagonist.

Essentially, without overt, formalized initiation rites, boys are forced to come of age on their own by groping through confused, inarticulate, fumbling moments of realization and understanding. The lack of humane adult role models and a superstructure of guidance directly anticipates not only specific, later dilemmas in the boy-protagonist's life regarding responsibility and duty but also the larger crisis of ontological confusion, existential panic, and urban isolation.

Throughout my survey, I will emphasize Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and White's pair of autobiographical novels. I have chosen to focus on Salinger because his protagonist, Holden Caulfield, quintessentially demonstrates the many anxieties besetting the modern coming of age protagonist. Of course, Holden is in no way emblematic of all American young men struggling with maturity (for all his problems, Holden does not confront the demeaning poverty or the relentless racism that Bigger Thomas faces). But by studying Holden as the adolescent representative of the straight, white upper middle class of postwar America, I think we can better discern the alternative plight of a character like White's unnamed narrator, a protagonist who, as a young man attempting to accept his gay identity and sexual awakening, complements and extends the difficulties Holden encounters. Like Maclean's, White's fiction has suffered from a relative critical neglect. Further, White's texts succinctly depict the looming prioritization of biological development and sexual awakening in the modern coming of age protagonist's formation, as well as the subsequent interpretation of the loss of virginity as the dominant rite of passage in adolescence. Finally, White's texts, by transforming and merging a predominantly straight American literary tradition with its emerging gay underside, offer

a template of inversion which precludes the possibility of a single adolescent protagonist voice dominating coming of age categorizations and boundaries. White's gay narrator, along with other dispossessed characters—Bigger Thomas or the bums in *On the Road*, for example—thus provide some protection against the critical essentialism that sometimes characterizes studies of the sort I am attempting.

In addition to examining modern coming of age texts, I shall also briefly consider two texts about adult men—Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*—in an effort to facilitate a concise recognition of the extent of the consequences of an unstructured, unsupervised adolescence. Further, by linking modern coming of age protagonists with the men they could conceivably become, I am hoping to illustrate the expansiveness and intertextual potentiality of coming of age criticism.

Just as coming of age texts set in the natural world share a number of distinct, recurring themes and motifs, their modern counterparts also contain a significant number of common elements. The first constant in the modern coming of age text is the presence of a post-industrial city. Whether the modern coming of age protagonist matures on the densely populated streets of New York City, the snow covered and wind-blown alleys of Chicago, the neon-lit and garish boulevards of Los Angeles, or on the long road in between, permanently en route to these cities, his story occurs in a predominantly urban setting. Of the rare occasions when the protagonists travel into the wilderness or a facsimile of the natural world, they are inept and confused. An example from *The Adventures of Augie March* concisely illustrates the point:

In Renley's shop I had sold sports equipment, but

the only hunting I had ever watched was in the movies, apart from having seen my brother shoot at the rats in his yard with a pistol....I'd be damned if I could get myself into Thea's excitement about catching snakes. It was too extreme a way of making out, with that vigor that couldn't be satisfied in ordinary pursuits. If she had to go and catch these dangerous animals by the throat with a noose, and keep them and milk their venom from them, okay. But I knew at last that definitely there was one thing that was not for me. (Bellow 334-5, 385)

Even when a modern coming of age protagonist enters the wilderness accompanied by an adult, as White's character does on a summer fishing trip in *A Boy's Own Story*, the experience is still lackluster and empty, another reminder of the irrevocable loss of the natural world and the impossibility of rediscovering it by codifying the wilderness into a convenient weekend or season pass: "Once we were in Kentucky the handsome man, mustached and cologned, took us out fishing in a rented boat. It rained. No one caught anything. A strict silence had to be maintained when the man cast his rod as though blessing the waters" (White 73).

Since the remaining pockets of the natural world are too sullied by humanity and civilization to allow for productive developmental experience (the modern coming of age protagonist is unable to perceive the metaphysical serenity of the ineffable, inexplicable wilderness), it follows that characters like Augie March and White's unnamed narrator turn away from nature and look for guidance elsewhere. But their urban alternative does not provide them with consistent, humane adult interaction or a ceremonial initiation to facilitate a structured passage to adulthood. Instead of the quiet, transcendental infinity of Maclean's Big Blackfoot River, the modern city is much more likely to be a bastion of commercialism, self-interest, and inhospitability:

Suddenly I found myself on Times Square....and right in the middle of rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair of New York and its millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves, the mad dream--grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City. (Kerouac 89-90)

The fully formed modern city is the logical endpoint of pure, practical sensibility; the city is the locale and abode for the descendants of the loggers, hunters, and trappers who exploited and cleared the frontier for the secularized expansion of commerce and the ceaseless, subsequent appropriation of wealth. Kerouac's nightmarish vision of New York City confirms the presence of the founding Federalist dispositions of practicality, self-interest, egalitarianism, and commercialism in twentieth-century American life. But the passage, by its conflation of the teeming population of New York and a zealous acquisitiveness, beautifully caught in the list of gerunds at the end of the sentence, also recalls the forebodings of Alexis de Toqueville who, a century before, had warned of the dissonance, solipsism, and meaninglessness inherent in the industrious, urban environment:

Americans, as their energies were absorbed by commerce, would more and more exhibit a syndrome of apathetic withdrawal into petty personal spheres, preoccupied with material comfort, and the promotion of narrow and dependent economic interests, their egalitarian spirits deformed and dwarfed by an inner dependence on amorphous, mass *public opinion*. (Pangle, paraphrasing Toqueville 98)

The dynamics of a self-interested, apathetic urban populace thus figures prominently in the modern protagonist's development. Since the city does not provide the same developmental matrix as the natural world--which fostered a genial, reciprocal

relationship between boys and adults--boys are left strictly with their own undeveloped faculties to make sense of the world and their place in it. By beginning *Less Than Zero* with a traffic metaphor, Bret Easton Ellis demonstrates the pervasive inhospitability of urban life and extends the analogy to encompass his protagonist Clay's incapability of reaching out to and intimately communicating with people: "People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles. This is the first thing I hear when I come back to the city" (Ellis 9). In *The Catcher in the Rye*, not only is Holden unable to "merge" with people; he is violently disgusted and depressed by the city and human behavior:

Broadway was mobbed and messy....Everybody was on their way to the movies--the Paramount or the Astor or the Strand or the Capitol or one of those crazy places. Everybody was all dressed up, because it was Sunday, and that made it worse. But the worst part was that you could tell they all *wanted* to go to the movies. I couldn't stand looking at them. I can understand somebody going to the movies because there's nothing else to do, but when somebody really *wants* to go, and even walks fast so as to get there quicker, then it depresses hell out of me. (Salinger 116)

In *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder*, which, despite the suggestive title, offers an engaging and literate account of one man's turn to bodybuilding in an attempt to escape from the anxieties of urban life by using "Muscles as merit badges of armor" (Fussell 139), Samuel Fussell elaborates on the emptiness and distaste that characters like Clay and Holden experience in the city by factoring in the reactions to and the effects of "urban dissonance" and violent crime:

As soon as I admitted it, the facts and figures came tumbling out of my mouth. The rapes, the muggings, the assaults, the murders. Those were the majors, but the minors were just as bad. I

felt trapped by the teeming populace, dwarfed by skyscrapers, suffocated by the fumes from factories and expressways.

"Urban dissonance," my friends called it, the inevitable result of the great flux of cultures and tribes, languages and races that make up the city. Too many people, too little space. The result: noise, stench, subway riders pushed in front of trains-- all unavoidable byproducts of "modernism." (20-1)

Of course, the city itself is not the major stumbling block in the modern boy-protagonist's maturation. While solipsism, urban loneliness and depression, and Sartrean existential nausea are all symptomatic outgrowths of city life, it is the vocational and personal demands cities place on adults which do the most to precipitate an inevitable brooding solitude in the young protagonist. In most cases, adults are so preoccupied with their vocations--earning money like White's narrator's father in order to purchase "power" and "the thirty tailor-made suits, the twenty gleaming pairs of shoes...and the two Cadillacs that waited for him in the garage" (White 5), or raising a family of three with "work-reddened" hands (Bellow 6) like Augie's mother--that, ultimately, they do not have the time or the expertise to provide structure and guidance for their children. With stringent limits on parental attention, then, the nascent, urban solipsism of a modern coming of age protagonist becomes exacerbated. It is one thing for a character like Holden Caulfield to walk pensively through the streets of New York City and arrive at a number of disquieting conclusions; it is far more significant that he has to ruminate over his observations on his own without an understanding adult to guide his frustration or suggest a possible resolution for his angst. The emerging isolation of the boy-protagonist thus parallels another constant in the modern coming of age text: the transformation and loss of functional adult-boy relationships.

Instead of the calm, patient fathers and adept spiritual godfathers of older coming of age texts, adults (and fathers especially) become shadowy, absent, and ineffectual in the modern formulation. Augie March, Amory Blanc, and Bigger Thomas have no father; White's narrator and Clay, both of whose parents have divorced, live with their mother and only see their father on the occasional weekend or at dinner across a restaurant table. Even in *The Catcher in the Rye*, a rare modern coming of age text where the traditional domestic family structure is intact and the father is present, Holden's parents are still amorphous; his mother only appears briefly to admonish his sister Phoebe for smoking a cigarette and his father hardly figures at all in the novel. All we really learn about the character of Holden's father is that he's "quite wealthy, though. I don't know how much he makes—he's never discussed that stuff with me—but I imagine quite a lot. He's a corporation lawyer. Those boys really haul it in" (Salinger 107).

Thus, a notion of domestic absence figures prominently in the incompleteness of the modern coming of age protagonist's development. Clay's first observation of his home after returning from college illustrates the domestic emptiness the modern coming of age protagonist regularly experiences: "Nobody's home....There's a note on the kitchen table that tells me that my mother and sisters are out, Christmas shopping" (Ellis 10). One is tempted to use the familiar *absent father* term, but such labelling, even insofar as it accurately codifies family dynamics in modern American coming of age literature, suggests irrelevant psychological resonances and potentially creates a gender specific dichotomy by assigning "blame" to either the father (for abandoning the family) or the mother (for failing to provide necessary support and guidance to male children). Instead,

let it merely be said that the consistent lack of a reliable father figure in these texts is the first signifier of a larger, dysfunctional domestic sphere which, in the end, is inadequate for the modern boy--protagonist's moral and spiritual growth. *Both* fathers and mothers are equally culpable in failing to provide a superstructure of wisdom and guidance for their children. Whatever exclusive role and abilities fathers once had in structuring their sons' maturation in the wilderness apart from women, they have long since abandoned the formalized rites of the natural world and the unspoken wilderness code of conduct. Thus, just as Bigger Thomas rejects his mother's religious piety, Clay finds nothing of interest or importance in a typical interaction with his father:

My father's offices are in Century City....It doesn't bother me that my father leaves me waiting there for thirty minutes while he's in some meeting and then asks me why I'm late....It also doesn't really make me angry that at lunch my father talks to a lot of businessmen, people he deals with in the film industry, who stop by our table and that I'm introduced only as "my son" and the businessmen all begin to look the same and I begin to wish that I brought the rest of the coke. (Ellis 42)

The lack of parental ability and desire to establish a structured code of conduct and pass on the accompanying gentler characteristics of adulthood (humility, compassion, and grace, for example) to their children anticipates another common thread in the modern coming of age text: the widespread abdication of parental responsibility. As adults in these texts realize the difficulties involved in providing guidance and resources and maintaining supervision of their children, they subsequently look to new social institutions and adult professionals for assistance in imparting spiritual wisdom to their sons. As

Christopher Brookeman elaborates in his essay on *The Catcher in the Rye*, the American abdication of parental responsibility was a response to the dynamics of modern society:

As modern society developed its diverse industrial and administrative systems, such institutions as the church, the ancient universities, and the family began to cede power and responsibility for educating and controlling children to others. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the dominant role of the family has been steadily supplanted, though not entirely replaced, by a whole range of institutions such as the school, the college, the firm, and the state bureaucracies. These institutions became places where the young future professionals of the middle and upper classes experienced an extended period of training and socialization. (Brookeman 59)

Thus, the secondary and prep school, as well as summer camp, become convenient locales to send boys for "molding" (Salinger 2) and to promote their continuous interaction with strong "male role models" (White 144). Similarly, figures like the high school teacher, the athletic coach, and the psychiatrist become the new spiritual overseers of boys and young men.

To some extent, these institutions and adult guardians *do* provide a new nexus of adolescent support, giving the young protagonist a sense of social identity, companionship, and initiation. For example, in *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blane discovers social acceptance through "sports" because he learned "that it was the touchstone of power and popularity at school" (Fitzgerald 16). Likewise, when Amory attends Princeton, he "smoothly" slides into an "orgy of socialibility" by way of his admission in the Cottage Club fraternity (71-2). In *A Boy's Own Story*, it is by way of the Eton prep school that the young narrator is able to join in an unspoken social alliance

with other students and begin to make new friends and radically expand his social horizon:

What I was doing in those spring months was once again steeling my social nerve. I was becoming popular—not in a big way, of course, but as a bit player. I started smoking cigarettes in order to join the Butt Club, a coterie of fascinating disreputables who'd obtained parental permission to meet for fifteen minutes after lunch and dinner and for half an hour before bedtime to smoke. (White 176)

At the prep school, the narrator also comes into contact with "Mr. Beattie" (205), a part-time jazz instructor, and a new, hip, iconoclastic adult role model whose "black suede shoes," "limp...handshake," "strong, almost rancid sexuality," and "way of grabbing his crotch and holding it" (207) all combine to dislodge the narrator from an impasse in his homosexual stirring and encourage him to act on his desires and seduce Mr. Beattie. Though the narrator's liaison with the jazz teacher does not free him from the self-disgust he feels about being gay, it does start in motion his willingness to engage in sexual affairs with men which, over time, as gay life begins to emerge in the disco clubs and backroom bars of America, allows him to accept his gay identity and hug a friend like a brother on the night of the "Stonewall Uprising...our Bastille Day" (BR 199).

But if the new adolescent support structures in modern America foster notions of social unity, identity and responsibility in young men, they are, ultimately, transitory and hollow. Because, as Holden Caulfield trenchantly notes, the prep school and similar social institutions of the time categorize youth in terms of class, appearance, athletic prowess, and intelligence: "...everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddamn cliques....And they had this goddamn secret fraternity that I was too yellow not to join.

There was this one pimply, boring guy, Robert Ackley, that wanted to get in. He kept trying to join, and they wouldn't let him" (Salinger 131, 167). In effect, then, the prep school is merely a training ground for a select group of self-interested individuals. It does *not* "take the place of...parents" (French 108); instead of universally structuring the diverse and contrasting personalities and ethnicities of American youth, it only supports those who hold the requisite amounts of ability, charm, and money: "Holden's commentaries on the value of the system of Pencey Prep lead him to conclude that the whole vision of the school as a cooperative caring family is a mask for an actual ideology of intense competitive struggle between its individual members" (Brookeman 61).

That is why even modern youth organizations like athletic teams, which are the closest in operative composition and function to outdoor initiation rites, still fail to structure a moral, abiding coming of age. Though the modern boy-athlete, like the hunting or fishing apprentice before him, begins participation in sports with an undeveloped level of skill and expertise and only acquires talent and ascends in status by heeding the instructions of an adult, the coach, ultimately the markers of success and passage he gains are short-lived and lackluster—like "Rabbit" Angstrom's basketball "B-league scoring record" that only lasts four years before it is broken and people forget him (Updike 11). Unlike an Ike McCaslin's slaying of a deer and blood-ritual with Sam Fathers which never loses its potency or influence, a modern protagonist like Rabbit's exploits on the basketball court endure only so long as he is an active member of that select circle. There is no provision for the modern coming of age protagonist when someone breaks his particular scoring record and takes his place, forcing him to move out

of the select sphere and graduate into the (by comparison) drab, ordinary routine of daily existence.

A large part of the reason for the descent of social organizations like the athletic team and the prep school into ceaseless competition and ephemeral self-aggrandizement is the new adult overseers of the modern age. Conceivably, even within an urban framework, if adults emphasized character over competition, then these social organizations could rise to fill the void of outdoor initiation rites. But, beyond the regularized mouthing of platitudes, adult overseers in the modern coming of age text are not concerned with character; indeed, they are barely concerned with the boys it is their duty and charge to nurture. Consequently, the adult-boy relationship in the modern world never evolves beyond a teacher-student superstructure of authority and obedience. Whether it is an inevitable consequence of the distance between adults and youths brought together only through an abdication of parental responsibility and a commercial contract (adult instructors and professionals are paid to structure the adolescence of other people's children), or simply an unveiling of the self-absorption and commonness of American adults in the modern age, adult overseers in these texts come across as far too petty, disinterested, cruel, abstract, preoccupied, and even immature to be capable of helpfully guiding young men toward adulthood.

For example, in *A Boy's Own Story*, when the narrator attends a summer camp, all he formally learns is "military discipline....our camping activity, beyond nature hikes and swimming lessons in a chlorinated indoor pool, consisted of nothing but drill and inspection" (White 97). Further, the adults the narrator encounters at camp, instead of

teaching him new skills and demonstrating a humble code of conduct, exploit the campers to fulfill their own sexual desires—rubbing some boys during lights-out inspection (98), and showing others (including the narrator) "some 'art photographs'...all of a naked young man on a deserted beach" (105). Similarly, when the narrator begins to see a psychiatrist in a medical effort to treat his homosexuality, he encounters an adult figure who "was not a good listener. He was always scooping up handfuls of orange diet pills and swallowing them with a jigger of scotch" (168). By the end of *A Boy's Own Story*, we learn that not only was the narrator's psychiatrist an incompetent doctor and adult role model, but also an individual who could not manage his own life: "Dr. O'Reilly, who of course turned out to be a speed freak, had a breakdown one day and had to be hauled off to a clinic for several years" (216).

Not all adult figures in these texts are unqualified and unwilling to offer support to adolescent boys. But those that do care in some capacity and attempt to provide structure are either incapable of articulating their advice so boys can apply it to their lives, or are hypocritical, maintaining a moral facade in front of boys but acting selfishly when removed, in their personal lives and among other adults. For example, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, while Holden's history teacher Mr. Spencer talks to Holden about the latter's academic failure and dismissal from Pencey Prep, the instructor "cannot answer the one question that Holden plaintively asks—'Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they?'" (French 111, quoting Salinger 21).

Similarly, at the nadir of his depression, when Holden phones and desperately turns to his former English teacher Mr. Antolini, "even this well-intentioned man fails

as abysmally...to provide what the boy needs" (112), offering a solution that is far too intellectual and prosaic for the exhausted Holden instead of a simple "gesture" (113) of support. Thus, while an adult like Mr. Antolini possesses the drive and compassion potentially to help a character like Holden, he lacks the acuity and ability to formulate a response in a simple means by which adolescents can understand. Salinger, in addition to demonstrating Mr. Antolini's lack of insight, also leaves us a number of ambiguous signifiers about the teacher's character. While we know that Mr. Antolini was "the only guy that'd even gone *near* that boy James Castle" (Salinger 195), his sincerity is compromised by an addictive, compulsive personality—he drinks highball after highball and "smoked like a fiend" (186)—his marriage of convenience, and the sexual "advance" he makes at Holden. While Salinger "does not provide enough evidence to confirm or deny" (French 113) the status of Mr. Antolini's action in the dark beside Holden, the often-discussed scene is useful for analysis because it "casts doubt on the wisdom of his advice...for, if he had perceived the depth of the boy's disturbance, he would have done nothing that might puzzle or upset him" (113). Mr. Antolini's ill-chosen monologue and his equivocal flirtatious advance are thus only the first two indicators of the vast distance between adults and adolescents in the modern coming of age text; what the scene with the English teacher anticipates, and what is vitally at stake, is the possibility that adults in the modern age are so insensitive and removed from the plight of adolescents that their entire value system—their wisdom, knowledge, and expressive language—is inadequate for intimately communicating with the young.

While Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini are significant adult figures because of their

inability to communicate intimately their affection and sincerity to adolescents like Holden, Updike's Marty Tothero (Rabbit's ex-basketball coach) is noteworthy as a failed adult overseer because he does not live up to the moral standards he formally establishes for his basketball players. Superficially, Tothero is adept at expounding responsibility and demonstrating to his players "the three tools we are given in life: the head, the body, and the heart....and the *sacredness* of achievement, in the form of giving our best" (Updike 61-2). But while Tothero is capable of forming a surface bond with adolescent basketball players based on a set of oft-quoted platitudes and an athletic-choreographed code of conduct, his structure of advice and support is ultimately implicated by his own actions: "The students at Mt. Judge knew, most of them that Tothero played around....who before scandal had ousted him from the high school had a certain grip on local affairs" (21, 196). Tothero confirms his status as a less than perfect adult role model when an adult Rabbit comes to him (after abandoning his pregnant wife) and asks for "advice" (44). Though his ex-coach insists to Harry that "when you wake up the two of us have a serious talk about this crisis in your marriage" (45), all Tothero can ultimately offer to his former player is a place to sleep and a morning introduction to a prostitute. Rabbit's eventual affair with the prostitute (Ruth) mirrors his coach's infidelity and demonstrates that, besides offering only inadequate and poor guidance to boys, modern adults also pass on their own weaknesses and defects of character.

In reaction to the indecipherable guidance and cryptic, often less than moral behavior of adults, boys in the modern coming of age text recoil and withdraw from adult stewardship, preferring the isolation of their own immediate and relatively honest (if

skewed and imperfect) world views, to the distant and questionable adult alternative. But without a trusting and voluntary acceptance of adult assistance, boys become forced to assimilate their adolescence and transition to adulthood *exclusively as participators*. Lacking formalized initiation rites and an adult support network, these boys never receive an explication of maturity from an informed, reliable source. As such, they are not able to conceptualize adolescence and adulthood concretely, as separate stages of development marked by specific rites of passage which prefigure change, status, and responsibility. Instead, for them, adolescence and adulthood meld together, with little or no recognition on the part of the modern coming of age protagonist where one phase ends and the other begins. Without a clairvoyant ability to perceive life as a series of developmental stages, the original meanings of rites of passage and coming of age (as linked to formalized initiation rites and ceremonial markers of passage) become blurred and transformed. Boys begin to recontextualize the old, anachronistic notion of a "universal" coming of age; rites of passage, in the modern (re)formulation, become merely personal awakenings or private epiphanies—for example, Holden Caulfield's realization at the carousel that "you have to let...kids...grab for the gold ring" (Salinger 211) which prefigures his understanding of the impossibility of maturing as a "catcher in the rye" (173), or Augie March's discovery that "I have reached the conclusion that I couldn't utilize even ten percent of what I already know" (Bellow 472) which sets in motion his resolution, "All I want is something of my own" (473).

The only recurrence in these texts which approximates a "universal" rite of passage is the boy-protagonist's sexual awakening and consequential loss of virginity. Because

sexual growth is paradoxically both linked to *and* separate from biological development, it occupies a unique sphere in the modern coming of age protagonist's formation. While sexual maturation is inevitable insofar as boys will develop the physical capability for sexual intercourse, sexual activity is not. As such, in these texts, biological development, as it precedes and foreshadows sexual participation and entrance into the adult world, becomes reinterpreted as a modern rite of passage; modern coming of age protagonists must pass through a rite of sexual initiation before they can shed the troublesome ontological title of *virgin* and become men.

Holden Caulfield, for example, conceptualizes sex as a vital signifier of passage; he knows he is a "virgin" (Salinger 92) and that his first sexual intercourse will mark his entrance into a confusing, "fascinating," and "crummy" (62) adult world. The fact that Holden maintains that "Sex is something I just don't understand" (63) as an explanation to rationalize his own clumsy sexual experiments and lack of success in losing his virginity, as well as his trepidation in having sex with a prostitute, both underscore his fervent belief that the first sexual intercourse *should be* a rite of passage and a quintessential moment in a man's life.

Similarly, in both *A Boy's Own Story* and *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, White's narrator perceives the close relationship between sex and entrance to adulthood. Unlike Holden's inchoate conclusions, however, White's narrator's ruminations are more complex and expansive. Instead of conceptualizing the first sexual consummation as the pivotal rite of passage, the narrator recognizes the long, tangled, multi-layered process of sexual initiation; with each new sexual experience and contemplation, he learns and understands

more of the innuendoes of his gradual (sexual) ascension to adulthood. For example, when reflecting about an early adolescent sexual encounter, the narrator's descriptions are limited to the sensual:

As I went in him, he said straight out, as clear as a bell, "That feels great." It had never occurred to me before that sex between two men can please both of them at the same time. (White 29)

As the narrator matures and begins fully to assimilate the consequences and nuances involved in his sexual experiences (and in the sexual act in general), he expands the focus of his speculation and eventually realizes the pervasive link between sex and all areas of the adult world:

...the world is governed by a minority, the sexually active, and that they hold sway over a huge majority of the nonsexual, those people too young or too old or too poor or homely or sick or crazy or powerless to be able to afford sexual partners....Sex now seemed a strange thing to me, a social rite that registered, even brought about shifts in the balance of power, but something that was more discussed than performed, a simple emission of fluid that somehow generated religious, social and economic consequences. (167, 198)

Finally, as the narrator begins consistently to act on his homosexual desires, he recognizes how the sexual act can affect and even dominate identity. White describes one of the narrator's sexual experiences—a liaison with an older, experienced, humane gay man—as an unofficial initiation into a new, mysterious, gay subculture:

I worried about what he was going to spring on me, but he kissed me and massaged my shoulders and back with surprising strong hands, then he explained step-by-step what we were about to do. Always the good student, I responded competently... (BR 39)

The narrator's semi-formalized introduction to gay sex anticipates his subsequent entrance into the larger adult sphere of gay life. After stopping at "a gay coffee shop" with some older gay men and noticing the reaction of "open disgust" from a "table of straights" (46), the narrator realizes that his homosexual desires figure prominently in other people's conception of his identity: "For the first time I'd crossed the line. I was no longer a visitor to the zoo, but one of the animals" (47). But sexual participation does not just make the narrator conspicuous to others; his gay sexual awakening also strongly informs his own conception of identity. By "cruising...every free minute between classes" (48) for possible sexual trysts, the narrator's gay sexual desires and encounters consume and become his identity. While it is true to some extent that the homosexual nature of the narrator's sexual awakening leads to a greater conflation of sex and identity, his conception of sex as an extended, lengthy initiation sequence with subsequent ontological effects applies to all modern coming of age protagonists—gay, bisexual, and straight.

To a large extent, then, sexual initiation becomes the definitive rite of passage in modern coming of age texts—facilitating a subjective adjustment in the boy-protagonist to account for the loss of virginity and subsequent assumption of adult status. But the intensely *private* nature of the sexual act—in conception, operative reality, and reflection—suggests that it is hardly a "universal" rite of passage. Just as each coming of age protagonist varies in temperament, sensibility, and personality, each also differs in sexual mood, sensitivity, and orientation. Thus, the sexual initiation of an Augie March, characterized prosaically as "a transaction" (Bellow 130), is worlds apart from the homosexual anxieties besetting James Baldwin's character David in *Giovanni's Room*, or

the uneasy diffidence Holden Caulfield experiences when faced with the possibility of losing his virginity to a prostitute. Sexual initiation is thus only a rite of passage on a personal, subjective level. To be sure, it is the most momentous and clearly marked transition in the young boy-protagonist's life, but it is still only one private act of passage. The coming of age protagonist cannot conflate sex to encompass all aspects of maturity, just as the sexual act alone cannot impart to him any sort of guidance or responsibility.

Since sexual initiation alone does not provide enough support to facilitate a structured, universal coming of age, and adults in the modern age are not a viable alternative for guidance, the characters in these texts attempt to compensate for the inadequacies and confusion surrounding their maturation in the most immediate and desperate fashion. If the modern coming of age protagonist cannot learn enough from sexual initiation to understand and adapt to his environment, and if he cannot turn to an adult for assistance, then he can at least attempt to flee from his anxieties and escape. The escape motif in modern coming of age literature usually centers around the actual physical flight of the protagonist from one subjectively perceived imperfect reality to a longed for, impossible, new fixed reality. For example, Holden Caulfield's weekend foray in New York City is his attempt to escape the phoniness of Pencey Prep and the adjoining adult world and discover an abiding realm of childhood innocence and universal benevolence where the taint of a "fuck you" (Salinger 201) does not exist. Alternatively, escape occasionally involves the protagonist's immersion and addiction to alcohol and drugs in an attempt to anaesthetize himself into accepting the confines and monotony of

a vacuous environment. Like Clay of *Less Than Zero*, who feels that "Nothing makes me happy" (Ellis 205), protagonists turn to drugs and the search for the ultimate sensation in an effort to supplement the morally and spiritually empty support structures they encounter in their homes. If, alone, Clay and characters like him are too confused and vulnerable to conceptualize and accept the dynamics of adolescence and maturity, then at least with marijuana or cocaine they can grow up stoned. Of course, the escape motif in American literature did not originate in the modern coming of age text. As Sam Bluefarb helpfully explains in his study of the subject, the theme of escape was linked to the earliest political and cultural dispositions of the country:

The presence of escape, or flight, in the modern American novel has long reflected a dominant mood in American life....The element of escape thrusts back to early American beginnings and beyond to the European past and the flight from Europe itself; mass escape in America...reached its high tide in the opening and settling of the frontier and the conquering of the wilderness...the Virgin Land--the American West. This move into the West was perhaps the high point of escape from the older civilization, from an older, perhaps even an effete, way of life.
(Bluefarb 3)

Bluefarb begins his study by examining the rise of American frontier societies; he comments that "The opening of the frontier gave the phenomenon of escape in the modern American novel its peculiar American stamp" (7). He continues by speculating that, even with the closing of the frontier--which precluded the continued possibility of cross-country escape--"the urge to escape...continued to exist as if the frontier were still there and all hope had not been abandoned" (3). Thus, even without a tangible frontier to flee to, modern characters (and coming of age protagonists especially) still retain the

impulse and determination to attempt to escape from the confines of their environment.

Besides Holden and Clay, Bigger Thomas, Augie March, and Baldwin's David are three other young characters who in some way attempt to escape from a stifling, intolerable fixed reality. Though Bigger accidentally kills Mary Dalton, the murder signifies a conscious awakening of escape, indicating to him that he has found a means, albeit a violent and destructive one, of introducing meaning into his life and fleeing from the hopelessness, poverty, and racism of the ghetto: "He felt that he had his destiny within his grasp. He was more alive than he could ever remember having been; his mind and attention were pointed, focused toward a goal" (Wright 141). Conversely, like Holden, both Augie March and David attempt to escape physically from their respective cities, Chicago and New York. David's sojourn takes him across the Atlantic, to a bohemian and sexually tolerant Paris; his escape culminates when he encounters and begins to fall in love with the Italian bartender, Giovanni. Augie, for his part, journeys through various American cities and eventually into Mexico. During the brief period when he tramps and hitchhikes his way to Chicago after separating himself from his criminal friend Bill Gorman, the text strikingly foreshadows Kerouac's *On the Road*. Augie's various descriptions of the American landscape--from a depiction of an "industrial sub-town" to "boxcars retired from service" to a "tall clapboard hotel" to the "people in great numbers...on the highways" (Bellow 172-8)--all resemble Sal Paradise's ingenuous observations of the back alleys, drifters, and cigarette butts behind dumpsters comprising the underside of America. While Augie never comes to perceive the road like Sal, as an alternative to commercial conformity, there is a nascent enthusiasm in his journalistic

descriptions, signifying that, while the road may not be a way out for Augie, it is a potential escape: "it was a serene warm morning when I went out on the road to start thumbing" (174).

Of course, the various attempts at escape in the modern coming of age text rarely succeed. Holden's flight ends on a psychiatrist's couch, Bigger is apprehended and executed, Clay remains as disaffected and addicted to cocaine at the end of *Less Than Zero* as he was at the beginning, and David, after abandoning Giovanni, returns to the lie of a straight, loveless romance. Likewise, in *Muscle*, bodybuilding fails to provide Fussell with a structured, meaningful alternative to the adult world. In the end, while Fussell realizes that his muscles did function as a sort of proto modern armor, they did not engender the creation of a "rite of passage" (Fussell 139); instead, his great bulk facilitated a submersion of all personal feelings--pleasures, anxieties, enthusiasms, inadequacies:

The physical palisades and escarpments of my own body served as a rock boundary that permitted no passage, no hint of a deeper self—a self I couldn't bear. It wasn't that I was worse than other people. It was that I was just as bad, just as frightened, just as mean, just as angry, and I hated myself for it....Because as big as I'd gotten...I felt that if you could somehow find a chink in my armor and pry apart a muscular pauldron from a gorget, you'd find nothing in that vast white empty space but a tiny soul about the size of an acorn. (247–8)

Further, the various escapes in these texts often merely exacerbate the protagonists' original plight. Holden's stay in New York leaves him as depressed and cynical as he was at Pencey Prep and brings him to the edge of a nervous breakdown. The "queer sense of power" (Wright 224) Bigger discovers after killing Mary Dalton motivates him

to kill again and compound his crime. Clay's addiction to cocaine and his coterie of drug-using friends combine to introduce him to a side of America with absolutely no moral center:

When we get to Rip's apartment on Wilshire, he leads us into the bedroom. There's a naked girl, really young and pretty, lying on the mattress. Her legs are spread and tied to the bedposts and her arms are tied above her head....
"It's..." my voice trails off.
"It's what?" Rip wants to know.
"It's...I don't think it's right."
"What's right? If you want something, you have the right to take it. If you want to do something, you have the right to do it." (Ellis 188-9)

Though Clay internally revolts from the horrors he experiences on his path of escape, he cannot break from a genial relationship with his drug dealer Rip (a mock, twisted manifestation of the old, humane adult spiritual overseer), or turn away from the mesmeric immorality and degradation before him: "But, again, the words don't, can't, come out and I sit there and the need to see the worst washes over me, quickly, eagerly" (175).

Clay's inability to withdraw or evolve from his chosen means of escape (cocaine and the surrounding drug world) concisely illustrates the recurring impasse of the modern coming of age protagonist: he cannot spiritually and morally mature. Since escape is not an effective substitute for an adult supervised structure of guidance, these characters are incapable of fully growing beyond the inchoate moods and impulses of their youth. While they do grow intellectually and sexually, they never wholly acquire mature notions of responsibility, humility, and wisdom. They do not even mature enough to resist the quick, simple alternative of escape.

Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty as well as Updike's "Rabbit" Angstrom are three quintessential modern adult protagonists who mirror the escape attempts of their younger contemporaries. They are the adults the modern coming of age protagonists could very conceivably become, and they demonstrate the far-reaching consequences of an adolescence without formalized rites of passage. These men choose to escape, like the coming of age protagonist, because of a perceived unbearable environment. But they also flee because they are unwilling and unable to articulate or responsibly confront their problems. For example, Rabbit attempts to "run" from "a suffocating marriage" because "he has known adulation and success in his immaturity and has made them an impossible ideal for his adulthood" (Detweiler 37-8) and thus "cannot find at age twenty-six an occupation commensurate with his past days of glory" (Greiner 51). Unfortunately, while Rabbit knows well what he is fleeing from, he cannot express why he is running or what it is exactly that he seeks. All he can ultimately recite is a reiteration of the significance of basketball:

"You don't think there's any answer to that but there is. I once did something right. I played first-rate basketball. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate. And that little thing Janice and I had going, boy, it was really second-rate."
(Updike 101)

Rabbit's reluctance to abandon the romantic ideal of his youth and his growing disbelief in the possibility of resolving the tumult in his marriage demonstrate some of the behavioral effects in men who had no ceremonial rites of passage. Unlike Ike McCaslin and Norman Maclean who, after their respective outdoor initiations, became responsible,

humble, and compassionate, Rabbit remains irresponsible, arrogant, and selfish. And Rabbit is not alone: he is Holden's roommate Stradlater in ten years, or Amory Blanc after the sentimental "pain of memory" subsides and the "waters of disillusionment" (Fitzgerald 255) settle. Rabbit is every modern protagonist who is fleeing in an attempt to introduce structure and meaning in his life. He is running to stand still and, in the end, the effort is not enough as, at the age of fifty-six, he collapses where he began, on a basketball court: "The hoop fills his circle of vision, it descends to kiss his lips, he can't miss. Up he goes way up toward the torn clouds....He bursts from within...and falls unconscious to the dirt" (Rest 420).

Similarly, Kerouac's characters Sal and Dean are also representatives of adult men who never grow up and never abandon their youthful irresponsibility and peripatetic ingenuousness. While, on the surface, *On the Road*, is united by Sal and Dean's enthusiasm for "The purity of the road" (Kerouac 111) and their exhaustive excitement for "the people" and "Life!" (116), Kerouac continuously undermines the moods of exuberance and innocence by sustaining a desperate, "somber undercurrent" (Hunt 15) of escape:

Sal certainly hopes to escape the weary oversophistication of his New York circle and his own depression over recent illness and a failed marriage. Sal's springtime pilgrimage, it should be noted, begins not with adolescent enthusiasm but with adult despair. (11)

In effect, then, Sal is merely a more reckless, ingenuous, side-burned Rabbit; Sal's basketball court of escape and romantic ideal is the road, a locale he can seemingly

escape on ad infinitum. Dean, conversely, subordinates the spirituality of the road in order to fulfill his own self-interest; as Sal relates, Dean "was a con-man" (8) who often manipulated people for his own pleasure and excitement. Further, Dean is emblematic of the irresponsible modern adult character (far worse than Rabbit); Dean has sex with numerous women, but never considers the consequences of his actions or the feelings of his lovers or the children he fathers. All that matters to him is the next great thrill on the road. But if Sal, at least, discovers a deeper, dazzling array of emotion and sensation—enough so that he eventually comments "the road is life" (Kerouac 175)—his flight on the highways and into the midnight streets of American cities still descends into cynicism and disillusionment:

Where is Dean and why isn't he concerned with
our welfare? I lost faith in him that year....
I felt like a speck on the surface of the sad red
earth....I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even
a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so
drearly, a "white man" disillusioned. (142, 148)

Sal ultimately fails to discover an abiding sense of meaning in his adult trek on the road because, like Rabbit, he believes in the possibility of resolving "the dilemma" between self-definition "by social convention" and "individual belief" (Greiner 50). As Donald Greiner claims, "There is no answer to the clash between the social contract and individual need" (60), but modern protagonists like Sal and Rabbit cannot accept notions of futility or impossibility because they were never forced to abandon the immature mind set of their youth. While ceremonial initiation rites would not necessarily give Sal or Rabbit the ability to transcend the unsolvable dilemma, formalized rites of passages would impart notions of humility and grace, which would facilitate an acceptance of the

inevitability of a given situation and motivate these men to act responsibly and dispassionately.

The collective impulse to escape among modern coming of age protagonists and their adult counterparts confirms the vacuity and limits of the modern American secularized sphere. I propose that, by re-establishing a network of adult supervised, formalized rites of passage, we can reintroduce a structure of guidance and spiritual wisdom for adolescents and diminish many of the problems resulting from an unregulated maturation in an impersonal, inhospitable urban environment. While the irrevocable passing of the natural world figured prominently in the subsequent modern loss of guidance and adult support in cities, the close of the frontier and the disintegration of outdoor, ceremonial initiation rites also set in motion the beginning of the end of the white patriarchal superstructure of America and left a seed for a foundation of future ceremonial rites of passage. Specifically, without the universalizing templates of initiation rites and the natural world to draw on in their writings, American coming of age writers focused instead on the numerous vague, personal voices of American adolescents. Eventually, various coming of age authors began to write of the disenfranchised and dispossessed—the angry and frustrated Bigger Thomases of America's ghettos, the millions of American women no longer complacent about their place in a happy home, the bums and unambitious non-conformists tramping along on the road, or the numerous gay men, finally beginning to come out of a straight country's closet of ignorance—and for the first time include these new adolescent voices and stories in the coming of age canon. This shift in tolerance allowed American coming of age literature to mature in

its own way—by shedding the veils of innocence, bigotry, propriety, and squeamishness—
—and recognize all the ignored voices of American people that were always present but
never before accepted other than as a subordinate echo of the predominant white male
voice. That is why in his memoir *Becoming A Man: Half A Life Story*, gay author Paul
Monette begins his story by illustrating his own silenced childhood identity: "Everybody
else had a childhood, for one thing....Or that's how it always seemed to me, cavedropping
my way through twenty-five years, filling in the stories of straight men's lives" (Monette
1).

This egalitarian emergence and acknowledgement of these heretofore submerged
voices has finally engendered the beginning of the elimination of the *Taint* Faulkner
identified, the taint of slavery and basic human wrongs melded into wilderness initiation
rites, and has confirmed that the passing of the natural world was necessary for the
possibility of an implementation of newer, egalitarian rites of passage. Since the
assimilation of these diverse voices forces an egalitarian acknowledgement, if not an
acceptance, in American readers of the myriad cultures, ethnicities, and subcultures in the
nation, it serves as a disruptive wedge in the old, singular American coming of age
literary tradition. We can, quite simply, no longer force these protagonists to remain
silent, in their respective closets, homes, and ghettos.

By melding this acknowledgement and sensitivity into the old template of
ceremonial rites of passage, we can tolerantly begin to construct newer, approximate
markers of transition for our contemporary diverse, heterogeneous society. We know
from modern coming of age literature that adults must figure prominently in whatever

structure we establish, and from the classic coming of age texts, we know a neutral matrix, like nature, is necessary for the passing on of the gentler attributes of adulthood. Perhaps the matrix we seek is closer than we think, and possibly adults are already a part of it--perhaps all we need do is look toward the egalitarian information superhighways and cyberpunk boulevards of the computer age. The various news groups and bulletin boards of the Internet, not to mention the emerging World Wide Web, already serve a multiplicity of interests and tastes. With some adaptation, could this format not be mended to service reciprocal, tolerant adult-child relationships? And the very format of the Internet is constructed upon an egalitarian premise--gender, race, and sexual orientation are inconsequential. Of course, the technology is still new and, consequently, there are abuses. In the end, the Internet will prove as beneficial or as destructive as we make it: if we opt for the path of least resistance and recall the convenience of pure, practical sensibility, the Internet will merely become another simulacrum of the modern city--full of masks, facades, and lonely, peripatetic people. However, if we have the ambition, a variant of the old deep sensibility of an Ike McCaslin, we can transform cyberspace into a realm of humane communication and structure for children, adolescents, and adults alike and, in the process, reestablish American ceremonial rites of passage.

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N o t e s

1. For a critical survey of the various English alternatives to *bildungsroman*, see James Hardin's introduction and Jeffrey Sammon's article, "The Bildungsroman for Nonspecialists: An Attempt at a Clarification," in *Reflection and Action*. Also useful is the introduction to Jerome Buckley's *Season of Youth*.

2. For reasons of space, in my discussions of background European *bildungsromane*, I shall be limiting my examinations to British *bildungsroman*. I am aware of how important the European precursors and counterparts are--Goethe and Mann, for example--but I concluded that the distinct aesthetic sensibility in English *bildungsroman* provided a tenable point of departure for discussing specific American coming of age texts.

3. Since the American coming of age text differs substantially from the European *bildungsroman*, I will henceforth restrict my use of the term to the European model. With the exception of the relative age of the protagonist and the skeletal thematic similarities, the American texts I shall be examining bear little resemblance to their European counterparts. I will not expend critical energy attempting to formulate an all-encompassing definition for the American genre; I shall instead remain consistent with the term I have been employing, *the coming of age text*, in the hope that what it may lack in concreteness, it will make up for in functionality.

4. For elaboration on the ideological shift in the conception of classical virtue, see Pangle's *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism*, especially chapter 7, "The Modern Rivals to the Classics."

5. For a survey of the criticism on the "Evasion" chapters of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, see Gerber's introduction to *One Hundred Years of Huckleberry Finn*.

6. For critical elaboration on the notions of "pride" and "humility" in "The Bear," see Utley's "Pride and Humility: The Cultural Roots of Ike McCaslin" in *Bear, Man, and God*.

7. See, for example, David H. Stewart's "Ike McCaslin: Cop-Out" in *Bear, Man, and God*.

8. In this study, I will be treating the voice of Norman Maclean the author, the narrator, and the essayist as the same. Maclean

makes little effort to distinguish his life from his fiction. See Wallace Stegner's article "Haunted By Waters," in which he critically justifies the conflation of the various Maclean voices.

9. For elaboration on Maclean's characterization of women, see Mary Clearman Blew's "Mo-nah-se-tah, the Whore, and the Three Scottish Women" in *Norman Maclean*.

10. By the use of the definition *modern coming of age text*, I am merely attempting to provide a functional term which loosely categorizes those texts set in an urban locale as opposed to a natural or frontier environment (the *classic coming of age text*). Of course, it is difficult to determine whether a text is a *classic* or a *modern coming of age text*--William Faulkner's *The Reivers* is one example that could be cited.

11. In my analysis of Holden's interactions with adults, I have drawn heavily on Warren French's *J.D. Salinger*. For an extended examination of Holden's appeal to the various adult figures in *The Catcher in the Rye*, see particularly French's chapter entitled, "The Artist as a Very Nervous Young Man."