

This dissertation has been
microfilmed exactly as received

69-1991

RODEWALD, Frederick Arthur, 1936-
MORAL AMBIGUITY AS A THEME IN THE NOVELS OF
JAMES GOULD COZZENS.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1968
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

© FREDERICK ARTHUR RODEWALD 1969

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

MORAL AMBIGUITY AS A THEME IN THE NOVELS
OF JAMES GOULD COZZENS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
FRED ARTHUR RODEWALD
Norman, Oklahoma

MORAL AMBIGUITY AS A THEME IN THE NOVELS
OF JAMES GOULD COZZENS

APPROVED BY

H. A. Clavin
R. C. Baumbach
Ray R. Male
Robert M. Davis
C. Michael Wells

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE EARLY NOVELS	16
III. THE EXPERIMENTAL NOVELS.	37
IV. TOWARD MATURITY.	54
V. <u>THE JUST AND THE UNJUST</u>	95
VI. <u>GUARD OF HONOR</u>	133
VII. <u>BY LOVE POSSESSED</u>	172
VIII. CONCLUSION	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY	215

MORAL AMBIGUITY AS A THEME IN THE NOVELS
OF JAMES GOULD COZZENS

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In many respects the novels of James Gould Cozzens are antithetical to much of contemporary fiction, and for this reason, many scholars and critics are either hostile or indifferent to Cozzens' ideas and his art. It is, then, almost essential to justify Cozzens as an artist before saying anything about his work. To understand the controversy over Cozzens is to accept the need of further critical examination of his novels.

Although Mark Schorer and other critics had hinted earlier at the possibility that Cozzens might become a major contemporary writer, Bernard Devoto in Harper's "Easy Chair" of February, 1949 was the first to state that Cozzens had made it. "There are a handful like him in every age," Devoto claimed. "Later on it turns out that they were the ones who wrote that age's literature."¹ In attempting to explain the critic's ignoring of Cozzens, which Devoto was obligated to do since the little written about Cozzens and his work was

¹Bernard Devoto, "Easy Chair," Harper's, CIIC (Feb., 1949), p. 73.

in book reviews, Devoto sowed the seeds for the quarrel that bloomed after the publication of By Love Possessed in 1957. Devoto claimed that criticism had deliberately avoided Cozzens because "he is a writer. His novels are written So they leave criticism practically nothing to do."²

Until the Devoto article, Cozzens was relatively unknown, in spite of the fact that he had published eleven novels and numerous short stories.³ Unfortunately, little more is known about him today. His reputation has increased, but biographical material is still quite thin. That which is pertinent is found in the standard literary biographies. Cozzens was born in Chicago, Illinois, on August 19, 1903, to Henry W. and Bertha Wood Cozzens. The family soon moved to Staten Island, where Cozzens grew up. He went to Staten Island Academy, graduated from Kent in 1922 and attended Harvard from 1922 to 1924. In 1924, during his sophomore year at Harvard, Cozzens' first novel, Confusion, was

²Ibid., p. 72.

³On page 480 of the Winter, 1949 issue of the New Mexico Quarterly Review, Stanley Edgar Hyman in his article "James Gould Cozzens And The Art Of The Possible" writes that "'until a decade ago Cozzens wrote a great many short stories for mass circulation magazines like the Saturday Evening Post and Collier's. Insofar as he has never felt they warranted collection in book form, to ignore them would seem to be the kindest critical attitude.'" Although Children and Others, a volume of Cozzens' short stories published in magazines between 1920 and 1938, was published in 1964, Hyman's "critical attitude" is still "kindest." This is not to say the stories cannot help provide insight, but that they are by no means up to the quality of Cozzens' mature novels, which his literary reputation rests upon.

published by B.J. Brimmer and Company of Boston, Massachusetts. No doubt elated by his literary precociousness, Cozzens took a leave of absence from Harvard to work on his next novel, Michael Scarlett, published by Albert and Charles Boni of New York in 1925. Instead of returning to Harvard after his leave of absence, Cozzens went to Cuba as a tutor to the children of American engineers at a sugar mill. In the summer of 1926 he went to Europe; he returned a year later, and in 1927 he married Bernice Baumgarten, a literary agent in the firm of Brandt and Brandt. William Morrow and Company of New York published Cozzens' next two novels, Cock Pit in 1928 and The Son of Perdition in 1929, both based on Cozzens' knowledge of Cuba. Harcourt published S.S. San Pedro in 1931 and The Last Adam in 1933, and has published all of Cozzens' work since then, with the exception of Castaway, published by Random House in 1934. In 1933 Cozzens and his wife moved to a farm in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, where they have lived ever since. He published Men and Brethren in 1936 and served as associate editor of Fortune in 1938. He published Ask Me Tomorrow in 1940 and The Just and the Unjust in 1942. From 1942 to 1945 Cozzens served in the U.S. Army Air Forces. He published Guard of Honor in 1948 and By Love Possessed, his latest novel, in 1957. According to Contemporary Authors, Cozzens is currently at work on another novel. Through the years Cozzens has received the O. Henry Award (1936), the Pulitzer Prize for Guard of Honor (1949), a Lit. D. from Harvard (1952), and the William Dean

Howells Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for By Love Possessed (1960). About himself Cozzens has said,

My social preference is to be left alone, and people have always seemed willing, even eager, to gratify my inclination. I am more or less illiberal, and strongly antipathetic to all political and artistic movements. I was brought up an Episcopalian, and where I live the landed gentry are Republican. I do not understand music, I am little interested in art, and the theatre seems tiresome to me. My literary preferences are for writers who take the trouble to write well. This necessarily excludes most of my contemporaries and I think I would do well to skip the presumptuous business of listing the three or four who strike me as good. I like Shakespeare and Swift and Steele and Gibbon and Jane Austen and Hazlitt.⁴

Devoto's article did not add to this handful of information, but it did apparently awaken an interest in Cozzens. Within a year of the article, material on Cozzens' work appeared in the New Mexico Quarterly Review, College English, and the English Journal.⁵ But interest soon died down, and until the publication of By Love Possessed only four more articles and one dissertation had been written. For the most

⁴The quotation from Cozzens and much of the information in this paragraph come from Twentieth Century Authors by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York, H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 323; the rest of the information comes from the 1955 supplement to Twentieth Century Authors, p. 241; and from Contemporary Authors by James M. Ethridge and Barbara Kopala, (Detroit, Gale Research Company, 1965), Vols. XI-XII, p. 95.

⁵Stanley Edgar Hyman, "James Gould Cozzens And The Art Of The Possible," New Mexico Quarterly Review, XIX (Winter, 1949), pp. 476-497; Granville Hicks, "The Reputation of James Gould Cozzens," College English, XI (Jan., 1950), pp. 177-83; Granville Hicks, "The Reputation of James Gould Cozzens," English Journal, XXXIX (Jan., 1950), pp. 1-7. The Hicks article is identical in both journals; College English will be used in future references.

part, these articles and studies were attempts to explain Cozzens and his lack of critical acceptance or to evaluate him as a novelist. Such a limited amount of critical work indicates that Cozzens still did not have the full attention and respect of the critics and scholars.

The attention, if not the respect, was to come with the publication of By Love Possessed in 1957 and another Harper's "Easy Chair," this time by John Fischer, who subtitled his column "Nomination for a Nobel Prize."⁶ To all intents and purposes Fischer picked up where Devoto left off, made the same general comments on Cozzens and the critics, which had earlier escaped critical anger, and made many more specific accusations, which were not to go unanswered. "The academic critics," Fischer claimed, "have preferred to ignore him [Cozzens] all these years because he does not fit into any of the established literary patterns; and they have, therefore, found it impossible to measure and dissect him with their standard calipers and scalpels."⁷ Fischer suggested that Cozzens' was "a classic mind, operating in a romantic period,"⁸ and launched a full scale attack on the romantic period. It was perhaps unfortunate that Fischer chose to defend Cozzens

⁶John Fischer, "The Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's, CCXV (Sept., 1957), p. 15.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

at the expense of the critics, for the furore that followed has clouded the criticism if it has clarified the issues. For an understanding of the Cozzens controversy, Fischer's condemnation of the romantic period and his praise of Cozzens are essential. Fischer claimed that,

The Standard Romantic novelist of today can be identified by four earmarks:

(1) He habitually writes about exotic characters who are, in one fashion or another, in revolt against society. Witness Faulkner's Popeye and Joe Christmas, Steinbeck's lovable bums, Hemingway's defiant tough guys,

(2) He conventionally portrays such heroes in sentimental terms--

"It is not my hero's fault," the romantic novelist tells us, "that he is an irresponsible jerk. Society made him that way."

And he invites the reader to drop a kindly tear for these scalawags . . . just as the sentimental novelist of the last century asked us to weep over his forlorn maidens.

(3) Usually, though not always, he places his picaresque heroes in a picaresque tale. Such a story need have no firm plot structure; it wanders haphazardly from one incident to another, linking anecdotes, sketches, short stories, and inner musings together with loose and tenuous narrative line. Its setting is often as exotic as the characters. . . and the story ordinarily involves a wholesale helping of lust and violence.

(4) The novelist of this school customarily identifies himself with one of his characters, and uses him as a trumpet to express his own emotions, complaints, and political views.⁹

The difficulty Fischer implicitly slipped into the controversy that was to follow was the choice between what he termed "classic" and "romantic" and the assumption that the recognized novelists were romantics by his definition. Regardless of whether one accepts or rejects Fischer's formulae for the

⁹Ibid., pp. 15, 18.

romantic novel, it is evident that those critics who have defended Cozzens have done so on the basis of his "classicism," his anti-romanticism, although the careful ones avoid contrasts with the romantics. A few sentences from Scholes' article well illustrate this acceptance of Fischer's premise.

It may be that the romantically oriented critic, not finding the kind of emotion he expects or demands in fiction, believes that the Cozzens novel is devoid of all emotion, that the author is not committed, is a mere spectator, like the gods in Arnold's poem "The Strayed Reveller," who observe without feeling, and not like Arnold's poets, who must suffer with those they see suffering. I wish to suggest that this view is wrong, and does Mr. Cozzens a grave injustice. I believe he is vehemently committed in all his mature work, but from a point of view which, because it is anti-romantic and anti-sentimental, is alien to the attitudes of most of us in this romantic and sentimental time.¹⁰

Shifting from the weaknesses of the romantics, Fischer claimed that Cozzens, unlike the romantics,

has been attempting . . . to write an engrossing story about ordinary people, living ordinary lives, in ordinary circumstances.

By Love Possessed carries this series of experiments-in-the-normal a long and brilliant step forward! On all four counts listed above, it is the exact antithesis of the romantic novel.

Its central characters are a group of lawyers and businessmen--middle-class, middle-aged, and respectable--in an American town no better and no worse than a dozen any of us could name Nobody is presented as a rebel against society, or as its victim; these people are society

Of sentimentality there is no chemical trace. You are never asked to weep for any character, or to rage. . . .

This is no loose-woven picaresque tale. It is the most tightly-constructed of novels The style is

¹⁰Robert E. Scholes, "The Commitment of James Gould Cozzens," Arizona Quarterly, XVI (Summer, 1960), p. 130.

equally craftsmanlike. Every sentence has been hammered, filed, and tested until it bears precisely the weight it was designed to carry, and does it with clarity and grace

Not once does the author himself walk into the story. No character is autobiographical, none is a loudspeaker for the author's sermons

. . . Cozzens tells us more than any artist of his time about the life of his day. If your great-grandchild should ever want to find out how Americans behaved and thought and felt in the mid-years of this century, Cozzens' major novels probably would be his most revealing source.¹¹

These are still considered to be Cozzens' strengths: his insistence on writing "social" novels and on treating the middle class, his lack of sentimentality, his objectivity, his tightly constructed plots, and, usually, his clean style.

The immediate response to By Love Possessed and to Fischer's review of it was high praise for Cozzens. Brendan Gill called By Love Possessed "a masterpiece."¹² There was some dissent, but it was dissent tempered with respect.

Benjamin De Mott wrote that although "Cozzens is not a major writer . . . he can almost always be read without a suspension of common intelligence, and to say this is to say a good deal."¹³

But the critical reaction, led by Dwight Macdonald, was not long setting in.

He [Cozzens] is not a "a classic mind operating in a

¹¹Fischer, Harper's CCXV, pp. 15, 18.

¹²Brendan Gill, "Summa Cum Laude," New Yorker, XXXIII (Aug. 24, 1957), p. 106.

¹³Benjamin De Mott, "Cozzens and Others," Hudson Review, X (Winter, 1957-58), p. 623.

romantic period" nor does his novel run counter to "the Gothic extravagance of current fiction"; as I shall show, his mind lacks clarity, control, and form--the typical classic virtues--and his prose is as Gothic as Harkness Memorial Quadrangle (also as unaesthetic). As for the alleged normality of his characters--"ordinary people, living ordinary lives, in ordinary circumstances" with whom the reader "can identify himself as he never can with the characters of an Algren or a Mailer"--they are normal only on the surface; once this is broken through, they are as neurotic and fantastic in their behavior as other current fictional people. The chief difference is that their creator often doesn't realize it. In reality, Cozzens is not so much cool as inhibited, not so much unsentimental as frightened by feeling; he is not logical at all, and his mind is shallow and muddy rather than clear and deep.

.
 The three earlier Cozzens novels I've read, The Last Adam, The Just and the Unjust, and Guard of Honor, were written in a straightforward if commonplace style. But here Cozzens has tried to write Literature, to develop a complicated individual style, to convey deeper meanings than he has up to now attempted. Slimly endowed as either thinker or stylist, he has succeeded only in fuzzing it up, inverting the syntax, dragging in Latin-root polysyllables.¹⁴

From this point on Cozzens became a bone of critical contention, a bone more often gnawed than dissected.

Today the dust has settled a little; a number of competent scholarly articles, three books, and four dissertations have been written on Cozzens, and the issues, if not agreed upon by all critics, are at least clearly in view.

Cozzens' premises have been pointed out by several scholars and critics. Edward Galligan has shown that Cozzens' mature work is based upon belief in the imperfectibility of

¹⁴Dwight Macdonald, "By Cozzens Possessed," Commentary, XXV (Jan., 1958), pp. 37, 40-42.

man, in the limits of human endeavor, in freedom of will or the necessity of assuming free will. Galligan points out that Cozzens believes man is incapable of grasping the conditions of human life in their great complexity and that life itself is a positive good. Galligan says that Cozzens concludes from these postulates that man must do the best he can with what he has and that his best means to this end is his reason, even though reason has limits and is finally inadequate.¹⁵ Such a world view as this, Howard Nemerov has said, is the product of "a mind whose cold temper and grim austerity and firm conviction of despair make existentialists look somewhat cozy and Rotarian, if not Evangelical."¹⁶

On the other hand, Cozzens' detractors have found him unbearably smug. Richard H. Powers claims that "Cozzens' message is that fortunate people are good--unfortunate people are not."¹⁷ He sees Cozzens as a spokesman for racists, reactionaries, and bigots. Agreement on the implications of Cozzens' premises has obviously not been reached.

The controversy over Cozzens' techniques can be clearly followed in the Fischer and Macdonald articles. Fischer finds

¹⁵Edward Galligan, "Within Limits: The Novels of James Gould Cozzens" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, University of Pennsylvania, 1958), pp. 20-47.

¹⁶Howard Nemerov, "Discovery of Cozzens," Nation, CLXXXV (Nov. 2, 1957), p. 308.

¹⁷Richard H. Powers, "Praise the Mighty: Cozzens and the Critics," Southwest Review, XLIII (Summer, 1958), p. 264.

Cozzens a master of plot and precise prose. Macdonald finds him dull and his prose ordinary or agonizingly and uselessly involved. Style and technique, however, have not played a major part in the controversy, in spite of the fact that Macdonald's most vehement objection to By Love Possessed is its prose style. Before the publication of By Love Possessed, as Macdonald indicates, Cozzens' techniques were considered both conventional and acceptable. It should be noted, however, that Cozzens' techniques in By Love Possessed were more "modern" than in any previous Cozzens novel, with the exception of Castaway. The time structure is more intricate, there is more flashback, more introspection, a more involved prose style than in the earlier novels.

The furore over Cozzens appears to center largely around his values. Much has been done to attempt to pin them down and to reveal their implications, and much has been done that will, no doubt, help. Such works as Mooney's and Galligan's reveal Cozzens' premises, his basic beliefs.¹⁸ Hyman and Coxe are concerned with themes.¹⁹ Wiegand attempts to discover to what extent Cozzens' treatment of the professional man is characteristic of the professional man in

¹⁸Henry John Mooney, James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of Intellect (Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), Galligan, "Within Limits."

¹⁹Louis O. Coxe, "The Complex World of James Gould Cozzens," American Literature, XXVII (May, 1955), pp. 157-71; Hyman, New Mexico Quarterly, XIX.

American fiction.²⁰ The Parrish dissertation attempts everything: to analyze premises, themes, characters, style, structure; to evaluate Cozzens and to place him in a tradition.²¹ Bracher's book much more successfully attempts the same analysis.²² Of the full length studies undertaken so far, Bracher's work is by far the most valuable; it is a synthesis of most of the important points made by scholars and critics to date and contains numerous original insights and adequate defenses against some of the more rabid Cozzens detractors.

But a final evaluation of Cozzens has not been reached. The concensus now is that Cozzens is not among Fischer's romantic writers, although I suspect that even that conclusion may be seriously questioned in time. Certainly, Cozzens' techniques have not been those of Faulkner, Hemingway, Woolf, or Joyce, even though he has experimented. Most are in agreement that Cozzens is basically conservative--philosophically and stylistically--although that too has been widely misunderstood in spite of the excellent article by

²⁰William Wiegand, "James Gould Cozzens And The Professional Man in American Fiction" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, Stanford University, July, 1960).

²¹James A. Parrish, Jr., "James Gould Cozzens: A Critical Analysis" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, The Florida State Univ., 1955).

²²Frederick Bacher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959).

John Lydenberg in Critique.²³ Granville Hicks and Maxwell Geismar have found that Cozzens betrays a fatal lack of feeling in his novels.²⁴ But for the most part there are few solid answers to the problems posed by Cozzens, and before these answers may be found more Cozzens needs to be read and much more work needs to be done on the reading. It is my hope to aid in finding some of the answers and in preparing for the final evaluation by analyzing a particular recurrent theme in the novels of Cozzens--the theme of moral ambiguity.

Much of the work done on Cozzens has been concerned with his themes. This emphasis is explained by Mooney:

Only by analyzing all the implications of the human situation in Cozzens' novels can one arrive at a critical ground from which it is safe to infer the novelist's ideas. These ideas, so far out of the central development of most modern thought, are exceptional in our day and are worth, even in Cozzens' minority report, a more clearly and firmly stated discussion than are the purely literary qualities in Cozzens' novels.²⁵

Like most of those who have written about Cozzens, Mooney is more concerned with Cozzens as thinker than as artist. Certainly Cozzens' ideas are important, and those ideas that comprise his themes are doubly important. But in concentrating on the ideas, few have bothered to see how these themes even

²³John Lydenberg, "Cozzens and the Conservatives," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), pp. 3-9.

²⁴Maxwell Geismar, "By Cozzens Possessed," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), pp. 51-53; Hicks, College English XI.

²⁵Mooney, Novelist of Intellect, p. 2.

tangentially affect the art that Cozzens creates.

The theme of moral ambiguity has been noted by many. Hyman hints at it when he points out that one of Cozzens' unifying themes "is the concept of 'earned' morality, the discovery of a moral principle through suffering on its behalf."²⁶ Louis O. Coxe claims that "moral obliquity, the question of salvation by grace or by works, or by neither, the problem of power and its necessity--these are central issues in the work of our best writers and Cozzens takes them as given."²⁷ In a sense, Galligan is working with this same idea when he discusses Cozzens' concern with the complexity of life and with man's inability to understand the complexity and the necessity of dealing with it. Irving Howe describes the theme perfectly when he writes that "Cozzens repeatedly turns to the theme that the accumulation of experience (which in his novels often means learning to get a job done because it has to be done) shatters moral presuppositions--and shatters them to the point where a serious effort to realize the intentions behind them forces one to violate their surface claims and indeed, to engage in what might seem to be dubious combat."²⁸

Briefly a situation revealing moral ambiguity would be

²⁶Hyman, New Mexico Quarterly, XIX, p. 480.

²⁷Coxe, American Literature, XXVII, p. 170.

²⁸Irving Howe, "James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of the Republic," New Republic, CXXXVIII (Jan. 20, 1958), p. 16.

one in which a person's adherence to a universally held generalization would cause serious consequences. Arthur Winner's insistence on the truth being in the open--plain for all to see--and then later his problem of whether to reveal the truth in a specific case is a reasonable example.²⁹

And no one has attempted to explore the extent of this theme throughout Cozzens' novels, to discover how pervasive it is, to what degree it grows or declines from one novel to the next, to discern whether or not it has any bearing on Cozzens' style, his plot structure, to reveal exactly how much of a unifying principle it is in any of the novels, how integral it is for a thorough understanding of Cozzens and how adequate a vehicle it is for a measurement of his growth as a thinker and as an artist. To accomplish this would be to cast further light on Cozzens' work; to attempt this is the purpose of this study. Such a study may also lend needed support to conclusions already drawn, perhaps prematurely in some instances.

²⁹In one sense this theme runs counter to the claims of Bracher and others who have seen Cozzens as a thinker closely allied to 18th century thought in his acceptance of the general--Fischer's ordinary lives of ordinary people. The theme of moral ambiguity, then, might also be a tentative, if tenuous, link between Cozzens and the romantics, who write not about the usual, the normal, the general, but about the unusual, abnormal, and particular--the exceptions that make for the ambiguity.

CHAPTER II THE EARLY NOVELS

If critics have been at odds over the value of Cozzens' later work, they have been almost unanimous in condemning the early novels. In his book on Cozzens, Harry John Mooney completely ignores Cozzens' first four novels.¹ Frederick Bracher does treat them, but he contends that

The four earliest novels--Confusion, 1924; Michael Scarlett, 1925; Cock Pit, 1928; and The Son of Perdition, 1929--are the kind of youthful experiment for which most writers are fortunate enough not to find a publisher. All four books seem confused in intention and weak in structure, but they show nevertheless a real gift for phrasing and a sharp eye for significant detail. No one of them could be called successful, but taken together they represent a remarkable achievement for a man in his early twenties.²

Cozzens himself has concurred: "My first novel was written when I was nineteen, and that, and the next, and the next, were about what you would expect."³

Several critics have been at least curious about the early work, however. Robert Scholes attempts to explain Cozzens' own dissatisfaction with his first novels:

It is not usual for a writer to ignore his own published

¹Mooney, Novelist of Intellect.

²Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 23.

³Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, 1943, p. 323.

works, however bad, and these early Cozzens novels are not technically disgraceful. Why, then, does Mr. Cozzens choose to ignore them? The answer is that they were, in the main, written by a young man who was so different in attitude from the "classicist" of today that he may well be considered another person.⁴

In spite of the major shift in Cozzens' attitude that Scholes sees, others have seen a unity throughout most of the novels. Francis X. Duggan claims that "from his first novel, Confusion, in 1924, to By Love Possessed, in 1957, he has devoted his novels, with few exceptions, to working out a single view of life."⁵ But whatever they are artistically, they reveal much about the man who wrote the later novels.

Cozzens' first novel, Confusion, is about the education of Cerise D'Atrée.⁶ Before she is born, her father, a French nobleman, dies of a head wound he received serving as a commandant of a company of Chasseurs d'Afrique. After his death, his wife Marian begins planning the education of her as yet unborn child. Marian is aided by Leon Tischoifsky, an exiled Russian prince and former lieutenant in D'Atrée's company, and by her sister-in-law, Hortense D'Atrée. The novel moves from scene to scene showing--more often telling--the education of Cerise: her reading, her travels, and her reactions to her environment.

⁴Scholes, Arizona Quarterly, p. 130.

⁵Francis X. Duggan, "Facts and All Man's Fictions," Thought, XXXIII (Winter, 1958-59), p. 604.

⁶James Gould Cozzens, Confusion (Boston: Goodman Brothers, Inc., 1924). In this dissertation all citations from Confusion will refer to this edition.

At the outbreak of World War One, Cerise comes to the United States; she has as her mentor another of her father's former lieutenants, Charles Pelton, an American bachelor of wealth, polish, and good background. At the time, Cerise is fluent in English, Spanish, French, Italian, and German. In addition, she can read Latin and Greek, and she is an accomplished athlete. As Tischoifsky informs Pelton, "we have spent years giving her such an education as not one person in a thousand gets."⁷ But Cerise lacks contact with the world; Tischoifsky says, "Marian and I prided ourselves on keeping advanced ideas away from Cerise, in keeping her out of the world today Now you see Cerise stripped of all protection except the unreliable slowness of experience to divulge the full force of disappointment."⁸

In Miss Parke's school for girls in Lincoln, Connecticut, however, Cerise's experience--a limited and genteel kind--and her search for her place in the sun, for a permanent meaning to her life, begin. Through terse, disconnected scenes, she rejects religion, art, wealth, knowledge, love, and finally life itself. At the end of the novel, Cerise wants to be a writer, is in love with Blair Boughton--her distinction is that her physical being is in love with him, while her mind is a thing apart--and has been off-and-on religious. Her

⁷Ibid., p. 210.

⁸Ibid., pp. 210-11.

next to last decision is to marry Blair, although she is aware that such an act is not the final answer to her quest for the permanent. Her last decision, lying in bed after the automobile accident that has killed Blair and seriously injured her, is to yield herself to death, in the face of the impermanent, impure, and imperfect that would await her in life.

Cerise's search for value gives the novel its title. In her quest for the permanent, for lasting values, she finds only confusion. There are moments of acceptance on her part, but they are ephemeral, and confusion returns. The note is sounded early in the novel by Hortense D'Atrée, a polished woman who oversimplifies everything. She tries to reassure Marian about Cerise's future:

"You know roughly what you want the child to be, and fate has a smaller part in men's affairs than men sometimes think. Man's fate is that he is a man; all turmoil and confusion must arise from that fact, not from blind intervention. The impossible never happens and when things are made impossible--they are continually--it simply doesn't happen."⁹

As far as Cerise's confusion is concerned, Hortense D'Atrée is partially correct. Certainly her confusion seems to be the result of her mortality; however, her death or at least the auto accident causing it happens while she is asleep; indirectly Cerise's happiness and life are lost as a result of a war, Hortense's impossibility.

The moral ambiguity involved in Confusion is incidental;

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

it certainly is not a major theme. Cerise in her pursuit of an abstraction states the theme toward the end of the novel when she tells Pelton:

"but you can't go through life just looking at external beauty. There ought to be some sort of moral beauty which isn't marred by the ridiculous or the clumsy or the inane. And you just don't find it. Each one of us has irradicable meannesses and flaws. And then things happen in such a way. Life isn't an abstract thing, it's the concrete lives of millions of human beings. When you build on life you build on a sort of quicksand."¹⁰

But though this statement gets at the problem of moral ambiguity, it is not a clear statement of it. Furthermore it is a general statement, and even this is not developed through action. Cerise's search for a "moral beauty" is not the same as moral ambiguity; neither is it developed more through theory than through experience. There is no character faced with the moral difficulty of violating an accepted truth or winning some happiness or justice from an act which violates it. Though related integrally to the theme of moral ambiguity, Confusion does not explore the ambiguity; rather it establishes it.

Cozzens' style in Confusion is frequently murky--his diction includes for no particular effect such terms as "hebetude" and "rescission." The novel is plotted chronologically with no notable skill even in the selection of scenes. What unity the novel has is provided by Cerise's

¹⁰Ibid., p. 338.

search, which is frequently obscured.

Cozzens' second novel, Michael Scarlett, appears to have been a bid for popularity.¹¹ It is a fictitious account of an imaginary hero and a few historical characters in a historical setting. Much like Cerise, Michael Scarlett, a young 16th century English nobleman, is seeking for values and meaning in life. Scarlett, living on his father's estate at the beginning of the novel, flees to the Queen's court in London with Lady Ann Shelton. The Lady is in love with Michael but promised to another. After meeting the Queen and the Earl of Southampton, Michael leaves London for Cambridge, where he is made aware of the religious issues of the times by his fellow students Marlowe and Nashe. Like Cerise, Michael is an impractical idealist. Aiding Nashe in his chivalrous and humane gesture of rescuing a whore from a Puritan mob, he is partially responsible for a riot that ensues. With Marlowe and Nashe he flees to London, where he learns that his father is dead and that he himself is now Lord Dunbury. Michael takes as his headquarters the Golden Asse and as his retinue Marlowe, Nashe, Donne, and Jonson. Next, Michael wins the support of the populace by saving the Earl of Essex's life in a duel with some Puritans, but his anti-Puritan drama, produced by Shakespeare's company, incites a riot, and Michael is forced to go into hiding at

¹¹James Gould Cozzens, Michael Scarlett (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925). In this dissertation all citations from Michael Scarlett will refer to this edition.

the house of the merchant Cob to avoid the consequences of royal anger. He becomes enamored of Cob's wife, Delia, who falls in love with him, in spite of the fact that her husband has already elicited her promise to show Michael all favors that he may get Michael's signature on a charter. Donne reveals to Michael how he has been gulled, and Delia commits suicide in her despair over Michael's anger. Michael is next blamed for imposing an embargo on ships coming to England, and popular sentiment turns against him. Bidding a final goodbye to Lady Ann, now married to a baron, Michael returns to the Golden Asse to assist Nashe in his escape from the authorities who seek him for the murder of a Puritan whom Nashe accidentally killed in a prank with Jonson and Marlowe. Michael is killed in the fray, and the whore he helped Nashe rescue, now a religious fanatic, is left to laugh and mumble incoherently over his body.

Michael Scarlett can by no means be considered a successful novel. Cozzens labored to get the Elizabethan idiom, and in many places the dialogue is hard to follow. Finally there is a lack of single mindedness on the part of Cozzens. Scarlett takes up too little of the book and is thrown into the background by the more flamboyant Marlowe, Nashe, Donne, and Jonson. Nor is Michael Scarlett artistically effective. It is true that the tone of the dialogue is frequently richly Elizabethan, but this is almost its only virtue. Characters are developed little more than they

are in Confusion; Michael himself is not the rounded character that Cerise is. Nor is Cozzens successful in carrying through the theme that he obviously intended to unify the novel. Halfway through the novel the theme is stated:

"He's [Michael Scarlett] like us all," said Southampton pensively, "once he was dazed, not knowing what he wanted; like he knows what he wants now, but as ourselves, can't tell if what he wants be worthless or no."¹²

If Southampton is right, the reader never knows it because what Michael wants is never clear. Lady Ann Shelton and Mistress Cob disillusion Michael with love. Marlowe and Nashe disillusion him with religion. His abortive drama disillusions him with letters, and politics he never understands. It is evident that possible sources of values--love, religion, art, politics--are not clearly sufficient for Michael nor for his friends (Donne, who has a mystical experience, is the sole exception). This theme, much like that of Confusion, is obscured and almost forgotten, in the numerous episodes extraneous to the story of Scarlett.

The moral problem that Michael faces--and this is the only clear conflict in the novel--is whether to remain loyal to his irresponsible friends, or to aid the Queen. Simply because he does not understand the political issues, Scarlett chooses to stand by his friends, although the reader must conclude this for himself since Michael merely meditates the problem and never voices his conclusion.

¹²Ibid., p. 158.

Suppose then, by chance, my support shall embrace half a populous city, making a public issue out of my private preference. Then ought I to restrain myself, show cold to them who were amiable to me, whom I value? Not credible; I would do dishonour to my friendship were I might, accidental and unsought, to alter it Now an I could inhibit bloodshed or civil strife by disowning Tom and Marly, would not my justice to the mass outweigh my cut to the single? Like my weight is much exaggerated, Michael concluded hopefully.¹³

Here, for the first time, Cozzens poses a clear moral issue. Michael doesn't know how to answer it because he doesn't know how to go about solving the problems of England, even though he wants to. Then too he isn't sure that he has the power to do so. The one thing he is sure of is the friendship of "Tom and Marly" and his decision is to remain faithful to them. Unfortunately, this conflict is only a minor part of the novel and is never allowed to develop, in spite of the weight given to it. The reader sees it clearly, and the author ignores it to recount escapades of Jonson and Donne.

If Confusion attempts to establish the condition of total moral ambiguity, as I have suggested earlier, then Michael Scarlett is in some ways an extension of that condition. Perhaps it is no accident that from Confusion Cozzens turned in his second novel to a period when "the new philosophy calls all in doubt" and all coherence is gone. Michael, like Cerise, flounders in his quest for a "moral beauty," but unlike Cerise, Michael has a specific problem to solve in moral ambiguity: to be faithful to one's Queen

¹³Ibid., pp. 180-81.

or to one's friends. Admittedly, this problem is minor in the novel, even though Cozzens probably intended the problem to give the novel unity. Michael Scarlett lacks the unity of Confusion, but it does extend, if but tentatively, the problem of moral ambiguity as a theme.

Cozzens' third novel, Cock Pit, is a story of the sugar industry in Cuba.¹⁴ Cozzens divides the book into three parts: "The Cane," "The Mill," and "The Company." The central characters are Ruth Micks and her father Lancy Micks, the Chief Field Engineer for a sugar company owned by Don Miguel Bautizo. The thin thread of action is Lancy's attempt to save the sugar fields leased by Bautizo to Baria Sugar, a company Bautizo hopes to take over by keeping it from fulfilling its lease. Micks has no knowledge of Bautizo's plan, and when in the latter part of the novel he discloses information embarrassing to Don Bautizo but which Micks himself doesn't understand, it is Ruth who uses the information to keep Bautizo from having her father killed.

Mingled with the story of the Mickses and the sugar industry are various minor plots and minor characters. There is Nortz, the Mill engineer, who has for years had a platonic love affair with Mary Fletcher, the wife of Roy Fletcher, Administrator of the Bautizo Company. Nortz falls briefly in love with Ruth, who encourages him to return to Mary.

¹⁴James Gould Cozzens, Cock Pit (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1928). In this dissertation, all citations from Cock Pit will refer to this edition.

The Ruth Micks plot is more complex. In a sense, she is a twenty year old Cerise D'Atrée, except that she is not without experience. She is completely self-reliant, physically capable of taking care of herself, and mentally capable of making her own choices. She is extremely sensitive and takes a lover (the extent of Ruth's relationship with Ramon, the somewhat effete young Cuban aristocrat, is never completely clear) out of pity for him.

The function of the other characters in the novel is either to reveal the workings of the sugar company or to act as foils for the qualities of Ruth and her father. Lancy Micks appears to represent a physical part of life; he is simple, rugged, and barely verbal. Nortz represents the emotions; he has the sensitivity of the skinless. Britten, the banker, is almost totally cerebral. All of the characters provide contrasts with each other and in part with Ruth Micks, who seems to be Cozzens' idea of the complete person and who responds to all three men.

The morality of Lancy and Ruth presents an interesting contrast. Lancy is incorruptible. Fletcher says of him, "he'd dress down God Almighty for being dishonest about too much rain."¹⁵ Micks has been tentatively warned by Britten about Bautizo's scheme. Micks is suspicious if unconvinced; still he insists on doing his job, even though in doing it

¹⁵Ibid., p. 35.

so well he is aware that he may be crossing the designs of Bautizo. Lancy's honesty makes him incapable of resolving the problem at the end of the novel (he doesn't know why someone has tried to ambush him). Britten tells Ruth, "your father is a fool in some ways . . ." "Honest people are always fools, Mr. Brit," Ruth replies.¹⁶ It is Ruth Micks, then, aware of her father's being a fool because he is honest, who is the complete human or almost superwoman. She has the physical stamina to watch a man being beaten to the edge of unconsciousness at her orders, that she may get information about Bautizo's plans for her father. It is Ruth who is shrewd enough to force Bautizo's hand with this information. And it is Ruth who is sensitive enough to handle Nortz and send him back to Mary Fletcher with his pride still intact. Micks, although the most admirable person in the novel, is not capable of resolving the problem; he is even "a fool in some ways." It takes a Ruth Micks to get results, to solve problems.

Cock Pit must be said to skirt the theme of moral ambiguity. Micks, the incorruptible, is not put in a position of difficult choice. The choice he has is almost totally personal, affecting almost no one but himself. He can yield to an indirect pressure from his employer and lose his job, but even such a choice as this is never fully developed. No one else is involved in Micks' decision except

¹⁶Ibid., p. 250.

the sugar company that Bautizo wants to absorb. Being the man that he is, Micks really has no choice--he must be honest in such circumstances. Had the circumstances been changed, moral ambiguity might have become a problem, but that is not the novel that Cozzens wrote here. Nor does Ruth have a clear cut moral issue that controls the novel. She is faced with moral choices--she can be insensitive to Nortz and Ramon or lead them on; she can be insensitive to a Mexican killer or see her father murdered. Ruth, in the last instance, really has no choice; she clearly chooses to have the killer beaten until he gives her the information she seeks. She leads Ramon on that she may have something concrete with which to discourage Nortz. In submitting to the love of Ramon, Ruth inculcates in him some of her own sense of purpose and independence. But the implicit generalizations that Ruth violates are clearly subordinate to generalizations of more strength--the life of an honest man as opposed to the agony of a murderer. Nor can these choices that Ruth makes be considered central in the novel; they are necessary for the plot, but they are not examined closely either by Cozzens or by Ruth. Such choices cannot be said to make up the theme of the novel, even if they are a part of a theme.

Unsatisfactory as such a resolution of the novel is, Ruth is at least an active character, as Cerise and Michael Scarlett are not. In other ways too, Cock Pit is superior to the earlier novels. Cozzens' style is pared more; his

movement is still straightforward but with a clearer purpose, excepting those scenes devoted to portraying the sugar industry. There is a great deal of dialogue, and if it doesn't always ring true, it is not stilted. The deliberate shift in focus from chapter to chapter, while imperfect, is a decided improvement. The conflict of the novel is evident from the beginning. And if there is no satisfactory unifying theme, there is a unifying plot, something the earlier novels lack.

The last of the early works, The Son of Perdition, is another novel about Cuba and to some extent, the sugar industry.¹⁷ In one sense, Perdition is Cozzens' first total attempt at moral exploration. The principal characters are the Monagas: Vidal, Osmundo his son, and Nida his daughter, all native inhabitants of the little seaport of Dos Fuegos; Oliver Findley, the son of perdition, the American tramp in Cuba; and Joel Stellow, United Sugar Company Administrator General. Minor characters of importance in Dos Fuegos are Pepe Rijo, figurehead mayor; Quintin Mederos, a superstitious old man; Cuchita Hervas, a witch; Fray Alejandro, priest, Dr. Palacios, physician and friend to Stellow. Like Cock Pit, Perdition is a novel of community, but Perdition is more comprehensive and finely plotted.

The first of the six parts of the novel is almost

¹⁷James Gould Cozzens, The Son of Perdition (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1929). In this dissertation, all citations from The Son of Perdition will refer to this edition.

entirely from the point of view of Pepe Rijo and begins in the morning of the last day of the novel, June 1. All of the characters are introduced and most of the action of the novel has already taken place. There are a few flashbacks to pick up relevant information, to give meaning and interest to the characters. At the same time, the reader is only aware that from Pepe's point of view, bad things have happened on this day of June 1.

The second part of the novel goes back in time about five months. It is concerned almost exclusively with the Monagas. Vidal, the old man, has created value from his own integrity, will be obligated to no one, expects nothing from anyone who is not a male Monaga. Osmundo Monaga is less than his father. He is the natural man, without regard for others. He sees the world as belonging to those strong enough to take it, and he sees the strong under no obligation to the weak. The second part reveals Osmundo's primitive affair with his sister, a promiscuous hedonist who relies on witchcraft and treachery to achieve her stupidly mundane ends, and concludes with Findley's encounter with Nida aboard a train on the night of May 31.

Part three, focusing on Findley, begins on May 28 and, like the second part, concludes on the night of May 31, aboard the train with Nida.

In part four Cozzens gathers together the threads of the first three parts by relating the events in Dos Fuegos

on May 31. Quintin Mederos decides to poison the witch Cuchita who, Mederos believes, is trying to kill him with the evil eye. Palacios and Fray Alejandro attempt to save, respectively, Cuchita's life and soul after Mederos has poisoned her. Nida and Findley spend the night in the Monaga house. Osmundo, who arrives home with his father early the next morning from a fishing trip, suspects Nida of being unfaithful to him, and in his anger he reveals the truth to his father.

Part five begins with Stellow's arrival in Dos Fuegos on the morning of June 1 to discover that Vidal Monaga has pushed his son overboard into a school of barracuda because Osmundo did not understand how to be a Monaga. Through Dr. Palacios, Cozzens explains how Stellow, the machine who evaluates everything by its utility, developed into a manifestation of United Sugar.

Part six continues in time from part five and reveals the closeness of the relationship between Stellow and Vidal and shows Vidal's refusal to allow Stellow to do anything for him except turn him over to the authorities.

Such a summary cannot explain the part that Findley plays in the action. In part he is revealed to be the cause of all the evil that has befallen Dos Fuegos' inhabitants. Nor can such a summary indicate properly the characters' personification of qualities. The Son of Perdition

is a kind of moral allegory.¹⁸ Each character is a separate moral entity, and Cozzens appears more concerned with the characters' moral representations than with the characters themselves.

The novel closes with Findley's laughter over Stellow's inability to help Vidal Monaga. As Administrator General, Stellow has the power of life and death, and he offers Vidal life; Vidal refuses "because of justice."¹⁹ Findley's reaction (he overhears Stellow's conversation with Vidal) makes clear the morality of Stellow's offer and the dignity of Vidal's refusal:

The mounting mirth of it surged over him; the laughter of the heart seeing the great joke of the machine; the machine's inhuman beauty, the reason and might of the machine, confounded so inevitably by the rooted folly, the poor stubborn pride of man.²⁰

Though the problem of moral ambiguity manifests itself in the close of the novel, it doesn't appear to be central to the novel. It is evident in Stellow's freeing of Mederos, a confessed murderer, and in his attempted freeing of Vidal,

¹⁸Perdition is in several respects reminiscent of Hawthorne. One instance of parallelism may be seen when Pepe Rijo thinks about a picture in a nearby town, "where the Devil was shown in death agonies, disemboweled by S. Michael's spear point. With due regard for S. Michael, the archangel was obviously a fool. One did not slay the Devil so easily. The Devil persisted, death-defying," page 29. This scene is reminiscent of the one in Chapter XX of The Marble Faun where Miriam comments on a picture by Guido of Saint Michael subduing Satan, "No, no; I could have told Guido better But the battle never was such child's play as Guido's dapper Archangel seems to have found it."¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 303.

²⁰Ibid., p. 303-04.

another confessed murderer, that moral ambiguity is at work. But what must be noted is that Quintin accepts his freedom much like a grateful dog, still filled with fear. Vidal, on the other hand, rejects his freedom, not because he doesn't believe in what he has done, but because it comes into conflict with an authority that he recognizes, an authority outside himself. And he knows too that the law cannot take from him his dignity, as perhaps Stellow's offer of freedom could. In his dignity, Vidal's justification for murder is found. In Mederos' fear and ignorance, his justification is found. Neither is a criminal morally; both are criminals legally.

Stellow's attempt to dispense justice is perfect, as Findley recognizes. To do anything to poor, stupid Mederos would be criminal; Stellow sets him free. Stellow too, knowing Vidal's integrity if not his motive, is correct in offering him his freedom. But Vidal "in the poor stubborn pride of man" recognizes that he is caught like Orestes between two laws, and he accepts his position. He obeys the law of Monaga and kills a disgraceful son; in doing so, he breaks the law of man, and perhaps another law of Monaga, and he subjects himself to it. Vidal accepts the fact that he must die and justly die for being true to his inner law. If this is the central moral conflict of the novel, it is late in revealing itself and so cannot act as a unifying theme.

But The Son of Perdition is a better novel than it is

usually given credit for being, even though it is not in the vein of the later, mature work. Characters are not deeply developed, but then their function is probably moral rather than psychological. The style is easier without being terse, as dialogue is likely to be in Cock Pit. The novel's unity is, like that of Cock Pit, found in plot, but unlike Cock Pit, Perdition achieves unity in exploring the moral principles of characters. Perdition too has a more elaborate structure than any earlier novel, although it is plot that determines the structure. Moral ambiguity is certainly more in evidence, even if it isn't the organizing principle and theme of the novel.

Frederick Bracher says that Confusion and Michael Scarlett "have similar heroes and a common theme: a glittering, accomplished youth, at odds with society, is finally defeated by a world which does not measure up to the standards he demands."²¹ Bracher recognizes, however, that Michael Scarlett's major theme "is the conflict of responsibilities."²² Francis X. Duggan claims that the major theme of Confusion is the imperfectibility of man and that the germ of this theme is present in Michael Scarlett.²³ Neither critic makes

²¹Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 27.

²²Ibid., p. 28.

²³Duggan, Thought, p. 605.

any reference to the theme of moral ambiguity. However, I suggest that both Confusion and Michael Scarlett are books about young people seeking for permanent values, seeking truths or rules by which their lives may be ordered. They fail to find them and in a sense choose suicide. Bracher seems almost to concur in this interpretation when he says of Michael Scarlett, "a secondary theme recalls Cerise d'Atrée. Michael can find nothing to do worthy of his magnanimity."²⁴ In a sense then, both novels conclude with the crisis of the existentialist faced with the absurdity of the world--to continue or to quit. These early Cozzens heroes quit, commit suicide almost literally. The point here is that both novels are indirectly concerned with moral ambiguity in that they pursue the generalizations from which moral ambiguity comes into being. Later Cozzens heroes will have passed these crises, will have found their generalizations and will come into conflict with them.

Of Cock Pit and The Son of Perdition little has been written. Scholes claims that in Cock Pit, "the reader's sense of the way things happen is outraged by a work which is half novel and half adventure story," and that The Son of Perdition doesn't have "the central interest of a superior youth to unify it," although he does concede that it is more complex than the earlier works.²⁵ Hyman says of The Son of

²⁴Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 28.

²⁵Scholes, Arizona Quarterly, p. 135.

Perdition that its "central opposition of human values to industrial values is vividly realized."²⁶ Though both novels play with the problem of moral ambiguity, they cannot be said to have even minor themes involving moral ambiguity. But they do present some interesting moral problems that anticipate a developed theme.

In general, Cozzens' techniques--diction, style, character, plot, structure--improve from novel to novel, even if as Bracher says, "all four books seem confused in intention and weak in structure."²⁷ But the theme of moral ambiguity is peripheral at best in the early works. It cannot be said to be more conscious in one novel than in another, nor can it be related in any way to style or structure since it is not a unifying principle.

²⁶Hyman, New Mexico Quarterly, p. 478.

²⁷Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 23.

CHAPTER III THE EXPERIMENTAL NOVELS

The Son of Perdition and Cozzens' next three novels, S. S. San Pedro (1930), The Last Adam (1933), and Castaway (1934) are considered by various critics to fall within a period referred to as Cozzens' middle, transitional, or experimental period. Scholes is alone in including The Son of Perdition and The Last Adam.¹ Regardless of the controversy over where a period begins and ends in Cozzens' development, it is quite clear to all critics that S. S. San Pedro and Castaway are set apart from the rest of his novels. Both works are brief and are referred to as novelettes or novellas. Scholes and Howe refer to both of them as experiments.² Hyman calls them transitional.³ Bracher says S.S. San Pedro is a "skillful tour de force" and Castaway is transitional.⁴ However, this is where agreement about the novels ends.

S. S. San Pedro is a story about the sinking of the

¹Scholes, A.Q., pp. 134-35.

²Ibid., p. 134; Howe, N.R., p. 15.

³Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 493.

⁴Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 48.

S.S. San Pedro, and according to the critics, it is based on the Vestris disaster, which occurred on November 13, 1928.⁵ The novel begins with the San Pedro preparing to sail from a pier in Hoboken with a cargo of automobiles and gold and over a hundred passengers. The Captain is Clendening, an old man in declining health. The chief second mate is Anthony Bradell, the hero only if the novel can be said to have one. The other significant characters are Miro, the Brazilian quartermaster; MacGillivray, the chief engineer, and Dr. Percival, an ominous spectre who leaves the boat before it sails--said by Hyman to be a devil-figure.⁶ Percival is the first to note that while the ship is still in harbor it has a list to it. The first day at sea the ship encounters a squall that does considerable damage and causes loss of life. Shortly after the squall, it becomes obvious that the ship should be abandoned, but Clendening falls victim to some illness that affects his reasoning, and refuses to issue the order to abandon the ship. The ship's other officers, hypnotized by habit into obeying their captain, refuse to countermand the Captain's orders. Through incessant delays, boats are lost and the lives of the passengers and crew are increasingly threatened. When it is too late to save most of them, the Captain sees Bradell's head

⁵Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 34.

⁶Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 483.

smashed by a swinging boom and orders Miro to take Bradell into one of the lifeboats with the passengers, finally authorizing the men to abandon ship. Bradell awakes for a moment in the lifeboat to see the San Pedro go under.

In most respects, S.S. San Pedro is a better book than the earlier novels. The prose is cleaner and simpler, and there is a better balance between dialogue and narration. Characters are not fully developed primarily because the novel doesn't demand it; it is, finally, the story of the ship's disaster.⁷ Point of view shifts from character to character, with Miro's viewpoint one of the most crucial. It is Miro who looks upon the rules of the white man with disinterest. It is Miro too who recognizes the essential conflicts between order and disorder, obedience and initiative or will. Viewing the final preparations for the ship's sailing, Miro notes that

Things were tight, smart, going as they should go.

It was, in Miro's idiom, a matter of tela. Integrate with the Spanish sense of tone, texture, woven firmness was the untranslatable value of a plan, a sustained argument underlying a mode of behavior. It was wide enough to include that beautiful gift of the white man, the disciplined coöperation, speed, and precision of people quick and certain about their duties. This abstraction was the last, perfect pleasure, epitomized by Mr. Bradell in attention alert and quiet above, but, in addition, that a man might know he was good flesh as well as blessed spirit, there were the white uniforms against the sky, the sharp stripe of

⁷The fact that the San Pedro itself is the protagonist in the novel probably explains Hyman's objection to "wooden" characters. See page 478 of his article in N.M.Q.

color in the rolled signalflags, the smell of hot tar, hot metal, hot salt, of steam and oil and warm wet hemp.⁸

Miro's tela here is a system that includes both the abstraction of the spirit, the plan and the human behavior in accord with it. With the abstract terms of "disciplined coöperation, speed and precision" are the concrete images of heat and color that represent the physical, integrate with the abstract. This is the order of the white man that Miro recognizes and respects. And he is visibly impressed with it not only in moments of harmony but when it is threatened by the forces of nature and the ship's officers await the irregular and infrequent orders from the Captain, who rarely leaves his cabin.

Unnoticed in the door behind, Miro considered them one after another. They were all tired, yet they were alert too, quiet and composed, but obviously mystified. One could deduce that they were here because they had been ordered up. They had not been told why; they had not been told what to do. No one spoke; they simply waited. It was, in its inept, mute, rather bewildered way, magnificent, and Miro appreciated this. Here was a very superior form of tela, a splendid, passive morale, the supreme ability to remain motionless and to appear calm; to stand endlessly ready for no one knew what.⁹

Miro can see the magnificance of such discipline, the adherence to a principle which is in opposition to every instinct in the ship's officers. Their lives and their training have successfully conditioned them to accept orders, and at the

⁸James Gould Cozzens, S.S. San Pedro (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1931), p. 16. In this dissertation all citations from S.S. San Pedro will be from this edition.

⁹Ibid., pp. 95-96.

risk of life they accept this principle. Up to this point obedience is a virtue that maintains discipline and order, even if it is somewhat "inept." And it is with admiration that Miro, and perhaps Cozzens too, views such behavior under stress. But Miro ceases to accept the totality of such a code finally. He sees where it becomes a gross defect, where it ceases to be tela.

In his [Miro's] ears repeated and repeated the mechanical "Yes, sir," "Yes, sir." It lost all alacrity, all smart and competent obedience. The phrase hammered and hammered. Under the senseless impact, the framework of observation--the vital initiative, the intelligence to see clearly and do quickly--cracked, crumbled to dust. Discipline, directed cooperation, ceased here to have any virtue. Habit betrayed the will and debauched the brain. Physically, the lips might stiffen with reluctance, the voice almost fail, but the mind in its extremity knew only one reply. To disaster, to stupid folly, to terrible peril which might yet be averted or resisted; to the advance of death itself, the mind acquiescent, drugged with a phrase, answered only, "Yes, sir."¹⁰

MacGillivray, the chief engineer, also realizes the problem and attempts to get Bradell to see it.

"We're doing everything we can," said Anthony.

"We--"

"You are like hell!" roared MacGillivray. "Who's in command? The old man? He's dead to the world. Had him on the phone an hour ago and he didn't know what he was talking about! Why don't Driscoll take over? Why don't you take over? Are you so damn dumb you think you're going to float forever?"

"He's the master on this vessel," said Anthony. "As long as he's on the bridge giving orders, in the deck department we obey them. When we're ordered to abandon, we'll abandon. Meanwhile we keep our mouths shut."¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 98-99.

¹¹Ibid., p. 125.

The moral ambiguity involved in the problem may be somewhat difficult for the layman to appreciate, but it is acute for the military man or the seaman. His training is based entirely upon the principle of behavior exemplified in Bradell's response to MacGillivray.

There is moral ambiguity in the problem faced by Captain Clendening as well. The Captain is implicitly warned by Dr. Percival at the beginning of the novel that he is old and quite mortal. There is the possibility that the Captain's illness is brought on by Percival's visit, as a matter of fact. His illness may be a paralysis of will brought on by the fear of his responsibility as Captain of the San Pedro. If the ship is in distress and the crew is ordered to abandon, then Clendening is left alone on the sinking ship, which virtually insures his death. It is this possibility that suggests itself as the reader follows Clendening's constant attempts to contact nearby vessels by wireless. Clendening's moral problem is seen clearly after he has finally ordered the crew to abandon ship.

Left alone, Captain Clendening was quietly aware of death like a man beside him. He thought of his lungs bursting with sea-water, a final agony of suffocation. This his body recoiled from, his gullet tightened, bitter saliva filling his mouth. He looked about carefully, as though there might be somewhere he could go; but it was a minute, never-completed gesture, for a habit of thought, an automatic pride, interrupted him. He was exposed, on the bridge; people could see him. The slugging of his heart, too large now for his chest, he could not control, but that was hidden. He knew perfectly how he had to die, and they did, too. He wished that they might for a moment face it; he would like to know--he was distracted, not ironic--

if death would still seem so proper, so necessary,
to them.¹²

Posing the problem in this way, Clendening questions another axiom of the sea, the necessity of the captain's going down with the ship. Cozzens attempts to show the magnificence of this act even if it is but a futile gesture. And the final scene with the Captain reveals this attitude.

Deliberately, his hands heavy and inaccurate, he buttoned his bridge coat, tugged it into place. He made some motions to smooth the wrinkles from the sleeves, brushing the gold braid. After several uncertain efforts, he picked up his uniform cap, and this, too, he brushed off, hitting it with his numb hand once or twice. Then he put it carefully on his head, brought the visor down, a stiff, somehow heartening, line across his vision. He stood as straight as he could, supporting himself when necessary on the rail.¹³

Clendening's dignity is an important commentary on the conflict in the novel. The moral choice that he has, to accept death and order the ship to be abandoned or to struggle for his life at the expense of death for the others, is present only if Clendening acts rationally and can rationally control the ship. However, if he is physically ill--and this seems to be what Cozzens asks be believed--then the choice is not his to make.¹⁴ Regardless of such speculation, Clendening accepts the code of the sea to the extent that he chooses to

¹²Ibid., pp. 128-29.

¹³Ibid., pp. 129-30.

¹⁴The "slugging of his heart" and "his numb hand" suggest that Clendening is the victim of a heart attack or stroke.

die with the ship, even though "his body recoiled from the idea."¹⁵ He refuses to go against the principle in its way every bit as irrational as that adhered to by Bradell and the other officers. The difference is that Clendenning's adherence brings on his own death and the officers' brings on the death of many.

The position of the officers is difficult. If the Captain does indeed know what he is doing, which they all seem to doubt but almost refuse even to discuss among themselves, then any attempt they make to countermand his orders is mutiny. If and only if he is no longer capable of commanding the ship, they are justified. But there is no one willing to assume the responsibility for concluding that the Captain is incapable, partially because such a conclusion is totally foreign to the officers' experience and training and partially too because they themselves are not certain. The result is acceptance of the principle and the destruction which follows. It must be pointed out, however, that this problem is never explored explicitly in the conscious minds of the officers. Only Miro seems conscious of it in the novel, and of course MacGillivray's comments make it clear that he is aware of it, even if it isn't perceived in his stream of thoughts.

Though there is an absurdity in such resigned acceptance,

¹⁵Cozzens, S.S. San Pedro, p. 129.

there is an edge of glory to it as well. Cozzens' attitude may very well be that expressed by Francis Ellery in Ask Me Tomorrow. Attempting to explain what his novel is about, Ellery says to Miss Robertson:

"Well, it didn't amount to much as a war, and that's part of the point. The causes and so on don't matter a great deal. On October 8th, 1879, the Peruvian turret ship Huascar--it was the only ship they had that was any good--commanded by a Rear-Admiral Grau who had previously had several small successes, was caught off Angamos--I want to call the book 'Action off Angamos.' It was hopeless, but they put up such a fight as you wouldn't believe . . . ironic, but also heroic. I don't think I can explain."¹⁶

There isn't much of a fight aboard the San Pedro, but the situation is ironic in that by adhering to the principle designed to promote order, chaos is brought about; still the acceptance of the code by Clendening and his officers is heroic if foolish. Unlike Ellery's novel, however, there is stupid, unnecessary disaster and tragedy in the situation aboard the San Pedro.

If S.S. San Pedro is different from the early Cozzens novels, Castaway is radically different from those that both precede it and succeed it.¹⁷ Mr. Lecky, the only person in the novel, comes into consciousness in the basement of a department store. The time is 5:15 by his watch, which has stopped. As he ascends the stairs, his first thoughts are to search for a weapon and to look for an enemy. In his

¹⁶James Gould Cozzens, Ask Me Tomorrow (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1940), p. 15.

¹⁷James Gould Cozzens, Castaway (New York: Random House, 1934). All citations from Castaway will refer to this edition.

ascent, he finds a knife and later arms himself further with an axe. On the eighth floor, he finds a shotgun, which he finally manages to load, for Mr. Lecky is almost totally incompetent. Once he is armed, his next thought is to find food and shelter. Food is several floors down from the eighth floor, and after eating Mr. Lecky faints from the exhaustion of his exercise on the stairs. When he regains consciousness, he returns to the eighth floor and makes a hiding place where he spends the night. The next morning, he decides to move to the ninth floor where the furniture department is located so that he will have better accommodations. There he fortifies a lavatory for his new hiding place. In search of candles--always armed now with his loaded shotgun--he descends to the basement where he is frightened. He returns to his new hiding place and sleeps, after worrying about homicidal maniacs and his isolation. When he awakes, he descends to the food store where he encounters what turns out to be his Dopple-gänger, whom he shoots and injures.¹⁸ With the shotgun, Mr. Lecky pursues the idiot through the store.¹⁹ Finally, Mr. Lecky wounds the idiot badly, and when the idiot faints from his wound, Mr. Lecky cuts his throat to still the terrible sound of his breathing. From this time

¹⁸Bracher establishes the idiot's relationship with Mr. Lecky on page forty-one in The Novels of James Gould Cozzens.

¹⁹"Idiot" is the term used throughout the novel to refer to Mr. Lecky's double; "Chapter Five" is titled "The Idiot Hunt," for example.

on, Mr. Lecky concentrates on living more luxuriously in "his" department store. But he still lacks the fundamental mechanical dexterity to profit from the wealth of his store. He burns himself while trying to heat a can of soup, for example. Nor is the wealth of the store enough to bring him peace of mind; he drinks witch hazel to escape his isolation. He is frightened by the sound of a bell ringing in the store. Finally, Mr. Lecky descends to the basement, searching for the cause of the ringing bell. Almost there, he checks his watch, which still shows 5:15 but which is now running. Mr. Lecky finds the body of the idiot and turns the face over;

Mr. Lecky beheld its familiar strangeness . . . What this could mean held him, bent closer, questioning in the gloom; and suddenly his hand let go the watch, for Mr. Lecky knew why he had never seen a man with this face. He knew who had been pursued and cruelly killed, who was now dead and would never climb more stairs. He knew why Mr. Lecky could never have for his own the stock of this great store.²⁰

The most obvious thing about the story, perhaps the only obvious thing, is the similarity between it and Robinson Crusoe. Cozzens' title invites this comparison as does his epigraph to chapter one, quoted as follows:

. . . how infinitely good that Providence is, which has provided in its government of mankind such narrow bounds to his sight and knowledge of things; and though he walks in the midst of so many thousand dangers, the sight of which if discovered to him, would distract his mind and sink his spirits, he is kept serene and calm

²⁰Cozzens, Castaway, pp. 180-81.

by having the events of things hid from his eyes . . .²¹
 Perhaps in this epigraph Cozzens has revealed the purpose of the book. Perhaps Castaway is a twentieth century retelling of Robinson Crusoe just as William Golding's Lord of the Flies is a retelling of Coral Island, with both of the later books re-examining the assumptions of the earlier ones.²²

Applying Castaway to the epigraph is not foolproof, but there are similarities. Mr. Lecky can never be said to be sincere and calm, but he is relatively so until the final pages of the novel when he discovers the meaning of the idiot. And we may conclude that this discovery does sink his spirits--"he knew why Mr. Lecky could never have for his own the stock of this great store"--and distract his mind--"his hand let go the watch," a symbol of order and coherence, and "he knew . . . who was now dead and would never climb more stairs,"--an obvious reference to Mr. Lecky himself. "The many thousand dangers" that Mr. Lecky walks in the midst of are all created in himself, by himself. It is his stupidity that almost blinds him when the can of soup he is heating explodes. It is the idiot of his own being or imagination who threatens him, created out of Mr. Lecky's own fear of a homicidal maniac.

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

²²Castaway was compared to Robinson Crusoe in the early reviews. See, for instance, those by David C. Tilden, N.Y. Herald Tribune, Dec. 16, 1934, pp. 15-16, and Fred T. Marsh, N.Y. Times, Nov. 25, 1934, p. 17.

Perhaps too Cozzens is commenting ironically on Defoe's statement: ". . . how infinitely good that Providence is, which has provided in its government of mankind such narrow bounds to his sight and knowledge of things." For here is Mr. Lecky amidst a wealth of things and in complete ignorance of how to survive with the ease of his eighteenth century archetype. It is his limited "sight and knowledge" that brings about his destruction, if he is truly destroyed. And it appears to be his self which is Providence. Certainly Mr. Lecky is the instrument of his own destruction.²³

²³Hyman, on page 483 of his article in N.M.Q., maintains that the idiot is a devil-figure and that "(perhaps poor Mr. Lecky is a God-figure, and the novel represents the dubious battle long ago joined)." However, to me the clearest interpretation of Castaway is that it is an exploration of human isolation, and the passages below from Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1956), pages eight and nine, beautifully explain Castaway.

"This awareness of himself as a separate entity, the awareness of his own short life span, . . . the awareness of his aloneness and separateness, of his helplessness before the forces of nature and of society, all this makes his separate, disunited existence an unbearable prison. He would become insane could he not liberate himself from this prison and reach out, unite himself in some form or other with men, with the world outside.

The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed the source of all anxiety . . . Thus, separateness is the source of intense anxiety. Beyond that, it arouses shame and the feeling of guilt. . . .

The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity, because the panic of complete isolation can be overcome only by such a radical withdrawal from the world outside that the feeling of separation disappears--because the world outside, from which one is separated, has disappeared."

Regardless of such speculation, there seems to be no clear-cut, obvious theme other than that of man's inability to thrive in isolation, even amidst the plenty of a twentieth century department store. Probably the most ingenious if not ingenuous examination of Castaway is that of Alastair Fowler, and the soundest and richest is Mooney's.²⁴ However, the theme of moral ambiguity is notably absent in the plot of this novel in spite of the fact that Mr. Lecky faces a moral choice when he first encounters the idiot.

Mr. Lecky waited, unable to make up his mind. To shoot down a fellow-being, deliberately, from concealment, was an act which his habit of thought held to be atrocious. He could not look forward to the sight of blood--or, possibly more to be dreaded, the sound of suffering--with composure. . . . A moral squeamishness aggravated the distress of shock and fear.²⁵

But it is evident that such "moral squeamishness" is not a significant moral problem to Mr. Lecky. He or Cozzens and perhaps both consider it nothing but an impetus to his "shock and fear." Nor is there any remorse or sense of moral guilt immediately after the killing of the idiot.

Washing in the lavatory [his fort], his hands did not incarnadine more than a minute's flow of water. Here, where no one could take him, force out his guilt, and kill him for it, Mr. Lecky felt no more remorse than Cain, his prototype.²⁶

²⁴Alastair Fowler, "Isolation and Its Discontents," Twentieth Century Lit., VI (July, 1960), pp. 51-64; Mooney, James Gould Cozzens, pp. 17-26.

²⁵Castaway, pp. 80-81.

²⁶Ibid., p. 117.

Whatever the point of the novel, moral ambiguity in the killing of the idiot is not it, unless an implicit query the book seeks to answer is the nature of man--his propensity for good and evil--and even here it must be noted that Cozzens' answer is not a question but a clear cut negative.

Whether to agree with Bracher that Castaway is "a brief and unsuccessful excursion into fantasy" or with Hyman who thinks it "by all odds his most successful work, and . . . one of the most impressive books published by an American in our time" is not really the point of this study.²⁷ What is relevant is the generally accepted idea that Castaway is atypical of Cozzens in every respect other than the premises lying behind it, and there are those who think it atypical in this respect too. Mooney, for instance, claims that "Castaway in its emphasis upon the alienation of the individual, thus appears unique in the body of Cozzens' work."²⁸ Mooney is the first to observe also that there are stylistic similarities between Castaway and By Love Possessed.²⁹ Hyman points out a difference in structure between Castaway and Cozzens' other novels: "its allegory translates readily into half-a-dozen frames of reference (centering around a ritual of rebirth)."³⁰

²⁷Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 48; Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 478.

²⁸Mooney, James Gould Cozzens, p. 25.

²⁹Ibid., p. 26.

³⁰Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 479.

Scholes believes that both S.S. San Pedro and Castaway, "are curiously outside the world of moral choices and consequences."³¹ Castaway may be, but S.S. San Pedro certainly is not. It is moral choice that determines the outcome of S.S. San Pedro. Nor is fate the theme of S.S. San Pedro, as Duggan suggests.³² It is true that Dr. Percival is an ominous figure foreshadowing death, a figure remembered by Bradell as he is being rowed from the sinking ship. And the ship may be "fated" to sink, but it is also true that the loss of human life could have been averted by an earlier order to abandon ship, an order not in the hands of fate, except indirectly, but in the hands of men. And Miro is quick to note this. The conflict of order and chaos so apparent from the beginning of the novel is definitely linked to the problem of moral ambiguity. It is paradoxical that the generalization "obey the captain," the function of which is to insure order, is the very means of bringing about disaster. This linking of themes indicates a new awareness on Cozzens' part of the central problems his novels were posing.

Such an awareness when coupled with several other innovations apparent in the experimental novels almost forces the conclusion that Cozzens reviewed the earlier four almost abortive attempts at novels and decided to begin over again.

³¹Scholes, A.Q., p. 134.

³²Duggan, Thought, p. 606.

Duggan notes that it is S.S. San Pedro that marks "a first stage in the development of his [Cozzens] prose style."³³ Howe observes that "in S.S. San Pedro . . . Cozzens showed a notable gift for disciplined narrative."³⁴ It might also be pointed out that Anthony Bradell is the first of Cozzens' "prig" heroes, that both novels cover short time spans, unlike the earlier novels and much like the later ones. Both novels have tighter structure and greater density.

Of these two experimental novels, S.S. San Pedro works consciously with the theme of moral ambiguity in a way the earlier novels do not. Castaway in all probability does not exploit this theme, but as Bracher says, "what it is intended to mean is impossible to say with certainty."³⁵

³³Ibid., p. 606.

³⁴Howe, p. 15.

³⁵Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 41.

CHAPTER IV TOWARD MATURITY

The Last Adam (1933), Men and Brethren (1936), and Ask Me Tomorrow (1940) are not homogeneous in any respect. However, they precede in time Cozzens' last three novels, those usually referred to as his "mature work," and they immediately follow, with the exception of The Last Adam, the novels previously referred to as "experimental." They are handled together here because they share a mixed critical reaction and lack consensus as to their significance--justifiably so, I think, in every instance except Ask Me Tomorrow. Although they are not atypical as are Castaway and S. S. San Pedro, they do continue experimentation in structure, theme, point of view and style--all of which are fairly consistent in the mature work and in Ask Me Tomorrow, which is atypical of the mature work in that it is somewhat autobiographical, is not concerned with a professional ethic as a theme or the profession itself as a frame. Then too the novel is reminiscent of the "sensitive youth" of the immature novels and departs from the later works in its looseness of time, place, and action. These novels then are clearly separated from the mature works in the variety of their characteristics; they are separated from the apprentice works by their complexity; and from the experimental works by their conventionality.

The Last Adam is about the town of New Winton, Connecticut, and the reactions of its people to a typhoid epidemic and to the town physician, Dr. George Bull. Bull is the protagonist of the novel and is a focal point for attitudes of the many characters. The scale of characters ranges from the Bannings, Bull, and Janet Cardmaker--who represent a traditional aristocracy--through the Bateses and Henry Harris, down through the Tuppings and Clarks and finally to Mrs. Talbot at the very bottom of society. There is variety within class. Janet Cardmaker, for instance, though of the oldest family, smokes, runs a farm, wears hip boots and a homemade fox fur jacket, and has been Bull's mistress for years; Mr. and Mrs. Banning, on the other hand, are the epitome of substantial, wealthy, responsible, decorous people.

Superficially, the novel is constructed on time, the one month and one day from Tuesday, February 17, to Tuesday, March 17, and it is limited in place to New Winton, Connecticut. However, there appears to be a more subtle structure underlying the whole.

To begin with, there is a dualism that runs throughout the novel, providing conflict and theme. Bull, the man of action and the practical physician, is opposed to Banning, the man of contemplation, and to Dr. Verney, a new methods physician. Harris, the shrewd selfish manipulator, is opposed to Herring, the professional social conscience. Mamie Talbot, the servant girl of the Bannings who dies at the beginning

of the novel is opposed to Virginia Banning, her peer who dies at the end of the novel (Mamie is Bull's patient; Virginia is Verney's). And Mamie's mother, Mrs. Talbot, is opposed to Mrs. Banning: the poor and the rich.

But structure is developed too through what must be called philosophical ambiguity, philosophical observations made usually by May Topping, the New Winton switchboard operator, and worked out concretely through the action of the novel. For example, Cozzens begins a segment of his first chapter:

Now it was really dusk. New Winton's street lights would any minute now wink on. May could imagine a man in the power plant, miles and miles away down the next valley, looking out a window and saying: "It must be getting pretty dark in New Winton." He would throw a switch. At once, all around the green here, lights jumped up. In New Winton itself you couldn't do anything about it. Forty miles away they decided whether you needed light or not. Or perhaps a machine took care of it all, turning itself on by a clock with nobody paying any attention. May wasn't, actually, much interested in that event. Purely mechanical things didn't interest her.¹

It is evident here that Cozzens is having May question basic truths. New Winton is a microcosm, and it is a microcosm that relies on an outside source for its light, a source that May doesn't understand, a Power beyond her visibility and understanding. And the Power may be so remote that it is not sure whether or not New Winton needs light.

¹James Gould Cozzens, The Last Adam (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1933), pp. 10-11. In this dissertation, all citations from The Last Adam refer to this edition.

May continues to question basic truths or to contemplate basic problems when she wonders about the pattern of events and about final causes.

Facts were facts, and May didn't mean to do anything but face them and make the best of whatever misfortunes they implied. Still, she couldn't help seeing-- the same turn of mind which made her patient in reading so many books made her patient in reflection-- that there had been a point in every course of events (and usually countless points) at which the littlest, most incidental change in any one of a hundred interlocking details of time, place, or human whim, would have turned the whole present into something entirely different.²

And May continues her speculation by applying a particular series of events to the pattern. Since it is May's speculation that dominates the ambiguity of the abstract, she appears to be the philosophical spokesman of the novel, and events in the novel exemplify her observations. Finally, May sums up the results of her philosophizing and in doing so establishes the philosophical tone of the novel and the central conflict and theme.

. . . in any event, she knew by now that thought would not get her anywhere. She might see several points that would look true; or at least, look more likely to be true than several others; but how could she tell, knowing so little?³

Here May concludes that epistemology is not a very general thing after all, but totally dependent upon experience.

The entire novel is a working out of the speculations

²Ibid., pp. 11-12.

³Ibid., p. 200.

of May Topping: on causes, death, reality, and truth. But perhaps most important to the novel is the idea that May and everyone else "might see several points that would look true; or at least, look more likely to be true than several others; but how could she [or anyone else] tell, knowing so little?" Such abstract ambiguity is counterpointed in the novel with concrete problems of moral ambiguity that amplify and exemplify this theme, which though perhaps not pre-eminent is central.

In general, the novel is concerned with Bull's professional integrity, with whether or not he has satisfactorily performed his duties as a doctor. The community's evaluation of Bull's responsibility for the typhoid epidemic depends upon the individual choices that Bull himself has made.

Early in the novel when Mrs. Talbot tries to get Bull to visit her dying daughter Mamie, Bull is not to be found; he is with his mistress, Janet Cardmarker. Later in the novel, when Bull is being attacked by the people who want to oust him as Public Health Officer, the point is made that Bull should have been with the dying Mamie. Bull himself admits to Janet that he should have been, but he qualifies his statement:

"Not that I could have done anything short of an oxygen tent, or some such nonsense they think up to milk the paying customer--but I could certainly have saved myself a lot of dirty looks."⁴

⁴Ibid., pp. 172-73. Harry John mooney is probably

This particular passage necessarily involves a minor theme so integrally related to the problem of professional moral responsibility that it must be mentioned here.

Throughout the novel Bull is bothered by "scientific progress" in medicine. There are times when he ridicules the innovations of Verney; he tells Janet:

"You ought to see Verney's place. Nurses sitting around in uniform making urinalyses. Half a ton of fluoroscopic machines. Verney telling all the women to get undressed for a thorough examination. When he's through, he has a four page record. Nine cases out of ten, he doesn't know a thing he couldn't have found out by feeling a pulse and asking a couple of questions. Talk about the occult! But everybody thinks when he's written down so much he must know something; . . ."⁵

But there is still serious doubt in Bull's mind, and he occasionally has misgivings, When he takes a blood sample to Verney to test it for typhoid bacilli and sees a glimpse of Verney's equipment, he wonders if he wasn't born a little too soon. This theme of the questionability of the advance of science is present in the novel, but its function, though integrally related, is subordinate to Bull's moral responsibility as a doctor. If science has something that Bull is

accurate in his interpretation of this event:

"As in many other moral situations concerning Dr. Bull which arise in the novel, Cozzens here seems to share George Bull's conviction. Mamie Talbot would have died, we are made to realize, whether the doctor came to see her or not; therefore the question of the doctor's having been with his mistress when he might have been with his patient instead begins to seem irrelevant. George Bull, we quickly recognize, is a man who operates completely outside of any conventional system of morality." pp. 28-29.

⁵Ibid., pp. 173-74.

not abreast of, then human life may be in the balance. Bull indicates this when he points out that the only thing that would have done Mamie any good would have been an oxygen tent; he neglects to discuss his obligation to have one.

There is also some question about the death of Joel Parry's son who dies of peritonitis as a result of Bull's diagnosing his appendicitis as a belly ache and prescribing castor oil. Bull makes no attempt to exonerate himself of the guilt, but he does indicate that there are circumstances that must be considered in his guilt. Bull's diagnosis is in keeping with his generalization that symptoms of belly ache usually indicate belly ache. The fact that an intern diagnoses the boy's illness correctly is explained by his examining the patient two days after Bull sees him and minutes before the boy's death.

Diagnosis itself is part of the problem of professional moral responsibility and plays an important part in the development of the novel. It is Bull who identifies the epidemic as typhoid, although he is put on the track by his aunt who says she can smell it. When Bull talks to Verney about the probability of typhoid, Verney is skeptical; his patient, Virginia Banning, has the same symptoms as the other victims in New Winton, and Verney has diagnosed her illness, as Bull has his patients' illnesses, as flu. When the blood specimen shows the presence of typhoid, Verney's energies are redoubled to save Virginia Banning. In spite of the care

given her, she dies. Cozzens is no doubt showing that regardless of Verney's new methods the patient fares no better than does Mamie Talbot, Bull's patient, who is left alone to die.

Finally, there is the question of whether Bull is responsible for the typhoid epidemic. As Health Officer, he is responsible for checking the source of the town's water supply. What apparently has happened is that some excessive snows and unseasonable thaws caused erosion near a latrine in a construction camp. The water containing the typhoid bacilli finally entered the reservoir supplying the town. It is Bull's job among many others to see that no refuse is deposited in the reservoir. It is not a matter of neglect on his part, however, since he wonders about the possibility of fecal waste from Parry's cows draining down into the reservoir and fines one of the Bannings' employees for leaving refuse in the area of the reservoir, primarily to irritate the Bannings.

Such choices that Bull faces professionally are finally a part of the total examination of Bull and the decision faced by the town as to whether he should be retained as Health Officer. But Bull's relations with the town are further complicated by his almost flaunting his relationship with Janet Cardmaker. Here too one might think is a moral problem, but since neither Bull nor Janet is dissatisfied with the relationship, it is not a relevant moral issue.

Although he believes it made no difference, Bull concedes that he should have been with Mamie Talbot when she died. Likewise, he concedes that he, in effect, killed Joel Parry's son, but his defense is that in most circumstances, the symptoms indicate a belly ache. His early diagnosis of Geraldine Bates and the others hit by typhoid is wrong too, as is Verney's diagnosis of Virginia Banning's illness. This, no one seems to blame him for and isn't even an issue; yet it is the same as the mistaken diagnosis in the Parry case. The difference appears to be that Parry's son dies because of the mistake and that probably the typhoid would have killed those it did whether it was diagnosed accurately or not. These are the circumstances surrounding several events that lead to a general dissatisfaction with Bull. And they are also "several points that would look true; or at least, look more likely to be true than several others," depending on whether they are looked at from Bull's point of view or from Mrs. Talbot's or Joel Parry's.

The final question to be resolved is Bull's innocence or guilt in the pollution of the reservoir. Is it the responsibility of the Interstate Power and Light Company whose latrine drains into the reservoir? If the company had not occupied the camp when it did, the reservoir would not have been polluted. Is it the responsibility of Henry Harris, whose property the camp occupies? Had he been more concerned about the buildings, drainage would not have been

a problem. Is it fate which brings on a heavy snow and a quick thaw that drains the camp area? Had it not snowed so much before the thaw or had it not thawed so quickly, the bacilli would never have reached the reservoir. Or is it Bull's responsibility?

Again there is a concrete series of events like the links in a chain that bring about a particular crisis. This chain is the concrete particular to exemplify May Topping's abstract observation early in the novel:

. . . there had been a point in every course of events (and usually countless points) at which the littlest, most incidental change in any one of a hundred interlocking details of time, place, or human whim, would have turned the whole present into something entirely different.⁶

And this is evidently supposed to be the answer to the question of responsibility over the typhoid epidemic. The citizens don't oust Bull as Health Officer, nor do they exonerate him. Another series of events occurs to leave the issue unresolved.

Public sentiment against Bull culminates in the town meeting when he confronts the people and challenges them to fire him. Henry Harris, seeking to defeat Bull's opposition only because he has a long standing grudge against them, turns the tide by defending Bull. There is nothing to indicate that Harris is Bull's friend or that he seeks

⁶Ibid., pp. 11-12.

justice; Harris is Harris's friend and an enemy of the Bannings. His defense of Bull brings up the question of responsibility for the reservoir, and he suggests that he may be responsible since the construction camp was on his property. But the most telling blow is his statistical defense of Bull's practice.

"In the vital statistics of this state, over a period of twenty years, the death rate per thousand in New Winton has never in any year ranked poorer than tenth lowest, out of one hundred and sixty-nine Connecticut towns listed. That means that you could name at least one hundred and fifty-nine places in this state every year for the last twenty years where life and health was less secure than here. One year could be an accident, but twenty consecutive years?"⁷

From this point Harris quickly moves into a political speech against the Bannings who represent for the Democrat Harris a Republican opposition. Harris's speech is rebutted by Matthew Herring who points out that an agricultural area is naturally going to be healthier than an urban one. He asks for a vote on the resolution that Bull be dismissed, and the chairman fumbles to find the resolution. This fumble is the last straw for Robert Newell, a violent man who has seduced the Clark sisters and paid for their abortions. Newell, who stands up noisily, "had meant only to say that he was going home, but aware now of the delicate balance, his violent, destructive instinct was to bring it down."⁸ He speaks out first against those who initiated

⁷Ibid., p. 284.

⁸Ibid., p. 287.

the resolution against Bull and then in Bull's defense, though, as Cozzens points out, only to exercise "his violent, destructive instinct." Harry Weems, a bootlegger, routs the opposition by suddenly calling for a vote of confidence in Bull, and the meeting breaks up.

But there is no vote of confidence in Bull and he is not exonerated. Nor is he blamed by Cozzens. This is simply the irresolution with which such a problem of responsibility should logically be met. Furthermore, it is intentionally ironic that the people who bring the problem to such a fitting conclusion should first of all do so unwittingly and secondly should do so unmotivated by moral principles. Harris, totally selfish; Newell, a brute; and Weems, a ne'er-do-well bootlegger, are the forces who bring about a kind of impersonal, bland justice that is perfect for the situation. Unlike Matthew Herring, who sees what appears to be true, these men are aided by a fate that causes Bates, the chairman, to fumble for the resolution.

The role of chance and fate is evident throughout the novel. Mamie Talbot dies at the beginning of the novel; Virginia Banning at the end. In between the two deaths, Joe Topping, who has been paralyzed for years, regains the use of his limbs by being infected with the typhoid bacillus.

In The Last Adam Cozzens has written his first community novel and his first novel of the professional man. Like other earlier novels, The Last Adam involves the themes of

fate and moral ambiguity, but to a greater degree than the earlier novels. However, it must be noted that although the problem of moral ambiguity is something the entire novel moves toward, it is not something the novel moves from concretely. Rather than beginning with a concrete moral problem that must be resolved, the novel begins with an abstract moral problem posed by May Topping in regard to seeing the truth, and the novel moves not toward a solution of this problem but an exemplification of it in the question of whether or not Bull should be discharged from his duties as Health Officer. The individual moral choices faced by Bull are faced in a time preceding the action of the novel as in the death of Joel Parry's son, or they are problems to be resolved after the fact, such as Bull's speculation on his being present at Mamie Talbot's death.

Men and Brethren is similar to The Last Adam in its tight structure--it takes place within twenty-four hours and within the same community. And both novels are about professional men. But unlike The Last Adam, Men and Brethren is limited in point of view to Ernest Cudlipp, the Episcopal priest. Cudlipp is primarily a man of action, a rationalist who had his early days of preaching a kind of liberalism in the Church, days that he now finds embarrassing to remember. His early views and activities are remembered with disapproval and extreme suspicion by the church hierarchy; his repentance they know nothing about. As a rationalist,

Cudlipp is extremely suspicious of emotional fervor in any of its manifestations. He says of those arguing for celibacy in the church:

Those aloof, pallid, chronically constipated mystics with their Deeper Insight! Those robust, cold-bath-taking young men who knew Jesus personally--used to go to school with Him, in fact! "I hate to think of it," Ernest said sincerely.⁹

And he says about piety in young men:

"I'm an experienced clergyman, and you don't find experienced clergymen enthusiastic over pious youths. Our sinful nature isn't as simple a matter as that. When it seems to be, you're safe in treating it as a form of frustration, an unwholesome attempt to get out of wrestling with your angel. In twenty years I've seen two, possibly, three, exceptions."¹⁰

Cudlipp is a rationalistic conservative, and it is his viewpoint which pervades the novel.

There is almost no plot to Men and Brethren. During the twenty-four hour period of the novel, Cudlipp is faced with a series of problems involving parishioners, friends, superiors, and himself. John Wade is a young poet who lives with Cudlipp and who has culminated an affair with Mrs. Geraldine Binney, whom he has made pregnant. Mrs. Binney has temporarily left her husband and children to be with Wade. Her husband and family are unaware of her affair and her pregnancy. Lee Breen is a successful actor who thinks of

⁹James Gould Cozzens, Men and Brethren (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), p. 120. In this dissertation, all citations from Men and Brethren will be from this edition.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 82-83.

joining the Catholic Church to find "happiness." His wife Alice is in love with Cudlipp, or thinks she is, and is thinking of divorcing her husband. Lulu Merrick, evidently an old flame of Cudlipp's, is now a derelict who periodically flees her nursing home for the city where she hopes to open a tea parlor that will bring her fame and security. Mrs. Hawley is one of Cudlipp's congregation who is dying and wants the last rites of the Roman Church. Jimmy Jennings is a parishioner who has been jailed for violation of the Sullivan Law. Wilbur Quinn is the politically liberal ministerial student who helps Cudlipp with the Vicarage; Mr. Johnston is the former missionary to Alaska who has been assigned to Cudlipp; Dr. Lamb is the rector of St. Ambrose and Cudlipp's superior; Father Carl Willever is an old acquaintance of Cudlipp's and a member of the monastic Order of the Holy Trinity. In dealing with these people and in some instances helping them, Cudlipp encounters numerous problems of moral ambiguity.

With Wade and Mrs. Binney, for instance, Cudlipp must decide the extent of his responsibility. Hoping that he can influence Wade and change him, Cudlipp is torn between throwing Wade out and allowing him to remain in the Vicarage. Cudlipp's choice is to let Wade choose, and Wade chooses not to return. Cudlipp, with only a moment's hesitation, solves Mrs. Binney's problem by arranging for her to have an abortion.

Cudlipp's handling of Wade and Mrs. Binney is in a sense

a problem in ethical choice. He abrogates his responsibility for Wade and accepts responsibility for Mrs. Binney. Wade has been offered the choice of returning to the Vicarage and behaving himself or getting out. Cudlipp feels forced into this position because Wade's irresponsibility has caused disruption, grief, and pain in the lives of others; furthermore, his taking up with another woman before the first has recovered from him indicates that Wade is not going to accept responsibility. Cudlipp never questions his choice for Mrs. Binney, nor his right to make such a choice. She is obviously emotionally incapable of choosing and Cudlipp knows that her lover no longer cares for her; he assumes from what she tells him that her husband, who knows neither about the pregnancy nor her affair with Wade, still loves her, and Cudlipp prepares her for her return to her family, who will never know about the abortion.

Any ambiguity in such choice must be found by advocates of, for Cudlipp anyway, a strange kind of love. As Cudlipp tells Alice Breen,

"Drunkenness and fornication are in their nature wrong and the Church condemns them. As incidents, they aren't serious, they're simply stupid and mischievous. If you didn't romanticize them into 'getting a little tight' and 'sleeping with that nice kid,' you'd see their intrinsic dreariness."¹¹

¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

Cudlipp, of course, doesn't romanticize but stands in favor of marriage as a social institution opposed to the disruption of order which fornication brings about in such instances as that of Mrs. Binney's, whose misery is a result of her romantic love for John Wade.

There is a particular relevance in Cudlipp's statements for Alice Breen, who attempts to involve Cudlipp in another moral choice. Alice is married to an unbearably shallow egotist, and she has sought out Cudlipp to discuss divorce. Here too is a beautifully ambiguous situation. Mrs. Breen's husband doesn't love her, indeed can't love anyone; she knows him to be shallow and doesn't like him; they have no children.

Cudlipp's advice is that she stay married to her husband, not because he is against divorce, but because as he tells Alice, "you'd miss him."¹² Cudlipp doesn't even recognize the Breen's marriage:

"If I suggested that the reason you find your marriage unhappy--if you really do--is that it never was a marriage, but only a compact for fornication with Lee, you'd think I was either insulting, or benighted, or both."¹³

Cudlipp sees the Breen's problem as a secular one, "a compact for fornication." Alice is not choosing between her husband and another man, and since the Breens have an emotional investment in each other, Cudlipp believes it is better for them to remain married.

¹²Ibid., p. 234.

¹³Ibid., p. 235.

For Lulu Merrick, now an alcoholic and worn out, Cudlipp assumes responsibility. He takes her in, feeds, her, and gives her a bed. He refuses to consider her request to stay in the city and plans to take her back to her nursing home, which he realizes is depressing for her. Cudlipp rejects Lulu's plea to remain in the city because he doesn't think she can fend for herself. She gets away from Wilber Quinn who is returning her to the nursing home for Cudlipp and is killed when she falls or leaps between the pier and a moving ferry.

Another moral problem is posed by young Jimmy Jennings, a delinquent jailed for violation of the Sullivan Law. He is an old offender and Cudlipp never decides what to do with, for, or to the boy.

With Mrs. Hawley, who is dying and apparently wants reassurance that goes beyond Cudlipp's knowledge, Cudlipp has little trouble. Since she was born a Catholic and has requested the last rites from the Roman Church, Cudlipp sends for the Catholic priest, even though Mrs. Hawley has been a communicant of the Anglican Church for years. Facing the problem of comforting her, which never arises, Cudlipp decides with no feelings of guilt:

A large, sentimental, and infantilely religious woman, Mrs. Hawley would require comfort in the form of convincing detail about the Heaven supposed to be close behind her present miseries. . . . If she were really sick, really dying, commonest compassion demanded a promise of these cheap elegances--¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., p. 106.

Cudlipp is aware of the same form of insincerity in him when he comforts Lulu Merrick:

Ernest could hear his voice, glib in the habit of admonition. Practice made his manner and tone ring professionally true, not to be questioned. In part he could excuse his insincerity by his kindness. How cruel and useless to face facts, to be honest with Lulu, to let her see that things were not merely as bad as in her dejection she thought, but far worse--worse than she had the intelligence, or perception to realize unassisted. Yet, of course, he spoke, too, to spare Ernest, to delude her into hoping, no matter for what, so long as it got her quietly off his hands and away to a place where she could realize her despair without bothering him--¹⁵

In the situations of both Mrs. Hawley and Lulu Merrick, Cudlipp withholds the truth simply because he has decided that the truth cannot help these people at this particular time. The ambiguity is clear, but Cudlipp makes nothing or almost nothing of it. Cudlipp has behind him the authority of the Church with its body of belief and dogma. He relies on this when it is helpful, using it as a security for those in need of it.

Still another problem rich in potential ambiguity is that posed by Lee Breen, who is thinking of becoming a Catholic and who wants Cudlipp to talk to the priest and decide for him. Cudlipp refuses the responsibility because he knows Breen's shallowness and is out of patience with his seeking the Church to find happiness. Just as Cudlipp refuses to professionally counsel Alice because her marriage to Breen is not a true marriage in the eyes of the Church,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 132.

so does Cudlipp refuse to aid Breen, since his joining a church would not be a spiritual union but a rationalization of his own selfish wants.

The moral ambiguities that Cudlipp encounters with his superior Dr. Lamb are the most fully developed, primarily because each of them requires a fundamental questioning of the spirit behind the dogma as the other instances do not.

The first problem Cudlipp has with Dr. Lamb is over the advisability of allowing a Rabbi to lecture the congregation. Dr. Lamb concedes that Cudlipp is right, "Canon Twenty-three . . . authorized to permit Christian men . . . to speak on special occasions . . . "should read "godly men."¹⁶ But he refuses to allow Cudlipp to assume responsibility for the Rabbi's appearance. Instead, he assumes the obligation of telling the Rabbi that he cannot come, which Cudlipp evidently would not do, not because of Canon Twenty-three but because Lamb feels that Cudlipp would set himself up for censure from the Bishop and perhaps dismissal. Dr. Lamb further reveals that such action on Cudlipp's part would hurt Lamb politically in the church because the Bishop whom he "detests" and with whom he hopes one day to be able to contend as an equal would use Cudlipp's indiscretion against Lamb.

Cudlipp's second disagreement with Dr. Lamb occurs over

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 95-96.

Father Carl Willever, an Anglican monk who has resigned from his order because of his order's emotional response to his arrest on a charge of homosexuality, a charge to which he admits his guilt. Willever's first reaction is to leave the order and the Church, and Cudlipp encourages him to stay in the Vicarage until he decides what to do. Lamb strongly objects on the grounds that Cudlipp is endangering the Church, that to harbor Willever is to cast suspicion on Cudlipp and through Cudlipp on the entire Church hierarchy. Cudlipp's argument is that no one ever need know and that Willever deserves his protection because Cudlipp's conscience, which he feels to be at one with the Church's teaching, encourages him to protect Willever. As Cudlipp tells Lamb,

"Certainly I don't believe that any human act so far separates a man from the Church that it becomes right or necessary for a priest to wash his hands of the matter. That a sinful man ceases to be a Christian may be part of certain Protestant teaching. I don't think it has ever been part of ours--"¹⁷

This problem and the demands made upon him over the twenty-four hours push Cudlipp and try him, and in a kind of dejection if not despair, he wonders about his work; in doing so he comes up against the same problem faced by Willever--whether or not to remain in the Church. Cudlipp solves his own problem by accepting Lamb's admonition that

"The parish you serve has first claim on both [Cudlipp's good name and reputation]. Your position makes it an integral part of the parish's, the whole Church's reputation."¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 221.

Cudlipp accepts this, knowing it may be a compromise on his part, and urges Willever to return to his order even though Willever may no longer have his faith. Willever is indignant. He accuses Cudlipp of hypocrisy; he suddenly and literally sees the light, and in an emotional fervor leaves to return to his order. The contrast here is obvious. Both men decide to remain in the Church, but Willever's decision is based upon emotional response; as a matter of fact, his entire religious experience is emotional. Cudlipp's decision is based upon expediency and reason, as was his decision to enter the Church to begin with. Discussing his possible resignation with Alice Breen, who thinks he should not resign, Cudlipp says,

"I don't think I'd better, either. It would inconvenience me a great deal. Nowadays, I'm ready to temper my independence with consideration, deny myself the satisfaction of cutting a figure, and obey. But it's still up to me to decide whether any particular obedience is sinful, whether it would greatly harm a person I ought to help."¹⁹

Among his reasons are his debts to the man at the restaurant where he eats. Cudlipp feels that he has no right to ask him to absorb the consequences of his decision to leave the Church. So, he resolves to temper his independence with consideration and remain, though he knows he has no future in the Church hierarchy.

Finally, Cudlipp's decision is rationally enforced by

¹⁹Ibid., p. 230.

the parable of the talents, the note on which the novel concludes: "Take your talent and employ it."²⁰ And it is this thought which appears to unify the incidents throughout the novel and to determine Cudlipp's choice in each problem he encounters. He lets John Wade go because he has been ineffectual with him and because he can better use his talents elsewhere. He encourages Willever to remain in the order because, regardless of the sterility of the order, Willever is important to it and cannot better employ his talents outside. Mrs. Binney's talents lie not in the waste of a romantic interlude with John Wade, but with her family; thus the abortion. Lulu Merrick is used up, incapable of good because she has no talents left, and Ernest fails to see in her death any horror. Nor is he concerned that Mrs. Hawley seeks her final rites outside the Anglican Church, for her talents too and her capacity for goodness and productivity are no more.

If there is a central problem it is one of the talent, of value, and through it Cudlipp learns that as Dr. Lamb says, "the Church hasn't so many men of parts that we can afford to waste them."²¹ And implicit is the idea that Dr. Lamb the compromiser, Wilber Quinn the political liberal, Mr. Johnston the missionary, Carl Willever the monastic, and Ernest Cudlipp the "original" all have their places and all perform valuable functions.

²⁰Ibid., p. 281.

²¹Ibid., p. 99.

Whether or not the parable of the talents is the central problem the novel seeks to examine, certainly moral ambiguity is not a dominant theme. The mere presence of ethical problems is no indication that moral ambiguity is present. Unlike The Last Adam which appears to use moral ambiguity at least as a minor theme--and perhaps as a major one--to elucidate and exemplify a philosophical concept, Men and Brethren uses such problems to reveal something of the life of a minister. Few of the problems examined are developed, probably for the simple reason that Cudlipp's calling and his temperament and character mitigate against his perceiving many of the problems of moral ambiguity.²² When he does perceive them, he solves them through dogma and authority, and when he comes into conflict with authority, he yields to it. Finally, Cudlipp leaves the impression that such problems don't matter much anyway, that what is important is work.

Those who insist on labeling Men and Brethren a "professional novel" are certainly justified. It is fundamentally the novel of a minister, what he thinks and what he does. In this respect, it characterizes part of Cozzens' maturity. Like the mature works, Men and Brethren has a professional man as a center, but unlike them it is not a novel of community, and most important it is not a "reflective"

²²On page fifty-five, for instance, Cudlipp thinks "everyone was in fact exactly what he looked like, granting that you had the experience to know what you saw."

novel with a central moral problem. The reflective note is sounded on occasion, as it is in the monologues of Herbert Banning in The Last Adam, but it is not dominant, as it must be in the novel of moral ambiguity.

Ask Me Tomorrow is a novel about Francis Ellery, a young writer forced by economic necessity to take a job as tutor to young Walter Cunningham, whose mother is a wealthy American widow travelling about Europe. In time, the novel covers about three months and in space several points in Switzerland and Italy. The novel begins with Ellery leaving his convalescing mother in Florence to meet the Cunninghams. On the train, he finds Faith Robertson, an aspiring opera singer known to his mother, whom he rather half heartedly tries unsuccessfully to seduce. Once with the Cunninghams, Ellery's problems begin. A conflict of loyalties develops between his job--his responsibility for the asthmatic Walter Cunningham crippled by polio--and his desire for Lorna Higham, a young woman Ellery has fallen in love with before the novel opens. And finally, there appears to be a conflict within Ellery himself over the desirability of making his claims on Miss Higham--his desire for her opposed to what would be good for her.

These conflicts are prepared for and pointed up by minor incidents that occur throughout the novel, and they are central in pointing up the moral development or growth of Ellery. Ellery himself is one of the most fascinating of

Cozzens' characters. He is the first fully developed prig hero and the most completely developed character in Cozzens' first nine novels. In a few scenes opening the novel, Cozzens reveals Ellery to be selfish, lacking in courage, embarrassed, an ass, incompetent, fastidious, ill at ease, humiliated, vain, totally self conscious, humorous, intelligent, and highly sensitive. And this is the Francis Ellery who attempts to seduce Faith Robertson. Both of them have been drinking and Ellery wants very much to forget that his freedom will end the next day when he is to join Mrs. Cunningham and Walter. After observing to himself that he is "pretty drunk," Ellery thinks,

But it was impossible to put much reproach in the admonition. The immediate sense of pleasure, of being invulnerably committed to the principles of pleasure without fatigue or disgust, made reproach absurd. It would be absurd, having stumbled into this rich state of enjoyment to want it changed, or to find fault with it, or to leave it any sooner than he had to. It occurred to him that going to Montreux tomorrow was not strictly necessary--at least, not until tomorrow night. Nothing was more easily missed than a train connection. The evening would simply extend itself through the next day²³

Choosing then to be late to begin his job with the Cunninghams, Ellery shirks his responsibility to the Cunninghams to follow his own pleasure. His reason numbed by drink, Ellery's passions win out in the choice he makes, if not in the act itself, because he suddenly, stupidly, angrily refuses to

²³James Gould Cozzens, Ask Me Tomorrow (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), p. 47. In this dissertation, all citations from Ask Me Tomorrow will refer to this edition.

persuade Miss Robertson further and realizes too that the martinis have made him ill. So chance works in Ellery's favor by working against his passion and self indulgence. He can then begin working for the Cunninghams under no handicap or prejudice.

Ellery's first moral choice to be made while working for the Cunninghams comes when a letter from Lorna urges him to persuade Mrs. Cunningham to visit Cap D'Ail where Lorna and her friend, Gwen, will visit Lorna's aunt, Miss Imbrie. Ellery knows that he cannot suggest such a move to Mrs. Cunningham, but "if Francis could not press the plan he wanted, he ought at least to hold up or block any plan that he did not want." And so Ellery continues suggesting and attempting to manipulate Mrs. Cunningham. Grindelwald, a Swiss ski lodge, is decided upon despite Ellery's feeble manuevers, but Ellery is given a vacation to visit his mother over the Christmas holidays. When Mrs. Cunningham is so generous, Ellery is filled with remorse over his attempted machinations; he even finds it clumsy trying to serve two masters, but he continues to do it. That the Cunninghams leave for Grindelwald when they do is the result of Ellery's allowing his rage to overcome his reason in talking to the proprietor of the hotel who is so angered that he allows Mrs. Cunningham to suggest to him that she will not remain in his hotel.

Ellery's next choice is faced at Grindelwald where he

meets Miss Poulter, a professional hostess who invites Ellery to skate with her after everyone else has gone to bed, and she hints "of more, and more complete, satisfactions possibly to come later."²⁴ Ellery is outraged that she assumes him eager to "lay her," but rejects her only because he realizes later that Mrs. Cunningham has decided to go to Cap d'Ail after New Year's and that he will see Lorna there when he returns from visiting his mother. The only observation to be made here is that Ellery's reason is again lost to his passion and that the ignobler passion loses to the nobler, or the weaker to the stronger.

In Cap d'Ail, things come to a head. Appearing in town before Mrs. Cunningham, Ellery assumes that she will not be in until the following day and goes to Miss Imbrie's villa where he remains until almost midnight. When he returns to the hotel, he finds a telegram from Mrs. Cunningham informing him that she will arrive at seven thirty p.m. In short, Mrs. Cunningham is now in the hotel and Ellery was not there to meet her; by assuming when she would arrive, he neglected his responsibility and chose to follow his own desires, being near Lorna.

Within a few days, Ellery has the opportunity to go with Miss Imbrie's group to a party a few miles from Cap d'Ail. Lorna's friend, Gwen, and Miss Imbrie leave the

²⁴Ibid., p. 160.

party early, and Ellery attempts to find transportation back to town for himself and Lorna. A Young American artist at the party, "Goody" Kirkland, who is having an affair with a Mrs. Hartpence, insists that Ellery drive his car back down. When Ellery asks how he is to return the car, Kirkland tells him to drive Gwen and Lorna up to his place near Eze on the following day.

"I--" began Francis, for this was insane. He couldn't possibly go to Eze tomorrow afternoon--unless, of course, having the car he used it first to take Walter up to show him the Ligurian trophy at La Turbie--after all, an educational thing to do. Lorna and Gwen might go along, too. Afterward they could run over to Eze and deliver the car. Walter would be enchanted.²⁵

Here, Ellery realizes the insanity of such a proposal; yet he takes it up in his desire to mix business with pleasure. It gives him a way back home with Lorna and it gives him an opportunity to be with her the next day. He rationalizes by managing to work Walter into his plans, but again Ellery's error in judgment is in assuming that his plans will be in accord with Mrs. Cunningham's.

Ellery gets back to the hotel just shortly before his tutorial session with Walter. He isn't aware of it, but according to what Mrs. Cunningham tells him later, he is not mentally alert enough to be directing Walter's studies. Ellery explains the situation about the automobile to Mrs. Cunningham who wonders if the responsibility of having

²⁵Ibid., p. 250.

someone else's car does not bother Ellery, but, of course, it does not. He convinces her that he should take Walter, Lorna, and Gwen on the trip to see the Ligurian trophy and to return the car. And this part of the expedition goes well, even though Ellery has been told that some very old friends will be at the hotel to dine with Mrs. Cunningham and Walter at six thirty that evening. When Ellery's group arrives at Kirkland's, Ellery finds several guests there, two of whom he concludes are "fairies" and Kirkland's mistress, Emily Hartpence, who is drunk. At five thirty and after a few drinks, Ellery decides that he must get his group back to Cap d'Ail, but he discovers that Kirkland has gone and should be back shortly. When Kirkland has not returned at six o'clock, the drunken Mrs. Hartpence, in tears over Kirkland's alienation of affection, offers to drive them down. Ellery accepts, insisting that he drive. At six fifteen on the way down, the car has a flat tire. When Ellery replaces it with the spare, the spare too is flat. When he finally gets back to the hotel, it is after eight o'clock, and Mrs. Cunningham is quite upset.

It would be easy to exonerate Ellery, as he himself tries to do by claiming that he couldn't know they would have a flat tire, but his judgment is defective in allowing himself to involve Walter with people like Kirkland, Mrs. Hartpence, and "the fairies." If one is to be responsible, one cannot very well rely on people who are not responsible.

Kirkland doesn't leave Ellery out of malice, but out of thoughtlessness. Mrs. Hartpence is not responsible for the first flat tire, but she is indirectly responsible for the two spares being flat. And finally, Ellery himself is responsible for relying on these people. If he alone were involved, there would be no particular problem, but Ellery is not a free agent, a fact which he accepts intellectually but which he fails to act upon.

On the following day, Mrs. Cunningham decides to give Ellery another chance after first accusing him:

"Francis, I think you mean to be responsible. But it is so much a matter of judgment. I must depend upon your judgment so much. I think you are impulsive; and sometimes I think you look at things from your own standpoint a little too much. I don't think you have the habit of looking at things from other possible standpoints--from mine, for instance. Unless you can put yourself in the place of the person to whom you feel responsible, I don't think you can be very successful in satisfying that person. I have to have someone who can do it . . ." ²⁶

Mrs. Cunningham has posed the problem beautifully. Ellery has a tendency to look at things too much from his own standpoint, he is self-indulgent; his self-indulgence is finally irresponsibility when it conflicts with other standpoints, which he is paid to consider. His judgment is defective because he is "impulsive," not allowing his reason to dominate. And so he makes mistakes, and the mistakes are evidence of his conflicts--reason and passion, self-indulgence and responsibility.

²⁶Ibid., p. 280.

But Ellery assures Mrs. Cunningham that he can be depended upon when Walter is with him, and Mrs. Cunningham gives him another chance, in part out of belief in Ellery's abilities and in part out of the belief that she has perhaps been overly critical and somewhat unjust to him. And so the final scene is set.

When Ellery, Walter, Lorna, Gwen, and Kirkland arrive at Peira Cava for Walter to ski, they are already running behind schedule. Ellery, looking ahead now, phones Mrs. Cunningham to tell her they may be a little late getting back, which she readily understands. But in getting out of the restaurant to go skiing, Ellery finds Mrs. Hartpence, who has followed Kirkland to her car. Mrs. Hartpence is still or is again in tears, and Ellery stays to help her and allows Walter to go to the ski slope by himself. When Ellery finally gets to Walter, it becomes evident that Walter is suffering the first stages of an asthma attack. Ellery gets him back to the hotel, phones Mrs. Cunningham, and sends for a doctor. He manages quite well, and a local physician relieves Walter just short of suffocation.

But Ellery makes some startling discoveries about himself while Walter lies ill. He wonders how all of the care that has gone into keeping Walter well can "go for nothing."

. . . and if you asked how; why, this was how. It was perfectly simple. One rainy afternoon last fall in Paris Mrs. Cunningham made up her mind about engaging Francis, and after that it was only a matter of time, while they moved closer and closer--from Grindelwald to Cap d'Ail; and Thursday night Francis met Kirkland.

It was getting really close now. On Friday, for the first time, someone (Gwen, Francis guessed) dropped the fatal name, Peira Cava. On Saturday Walter talked of nothing else. On Sunday, with a can of ski wax and his extra socks in his pocket, he went there; and--²⁷

Here Ellery assumes responsibility for what has happened. He knows that Walter's attack is part of a chain of events which began with Ellery and which became more and more probable as Ellery involved himself with others who were even more irresponsible than he himself. Immediately following Ellery's speculation on the chain of events, he concludes:

"All right," Francis said to himself, for with the piling up against him of the odds or omens (I look'd toward Birnam and anon methought the wood began to move. . .) the heart resisted, the mind struck back in anger. "All right. Even so. Even so, God damn it, I will do something. I will make this doctor--"

In the silence there was no response, no help, no reassurance; but he expected none.²⁸

So Ellery commits himself to "do something" which is rather futile since there is nothing he can do but wait for the doctor to appear. But he verbally commits himself and his commitment is to responsibility. No longer will he try to serve two masters. When others are at stake, Ellery will not be self-indulgent.

But this course of action also affects Ellery's hopes of marrying Lorna. In a sense, he can make no claims upon her as long as he is to be responsible for Walter. His decision is made when Mrs. Cunningham suggests that they

²⁷Ibid., pp. 320-321.

²⁸Ibid., p. 321.

talk about "plans." Ellery thinks to himself:

They put the question to you fair: woul't weep? woul't fight? woul't fast? woul't tear thyself? woul't drink up eisel? And what did you say? You said: I loved her very much, her face was charming. There was something about her I wanted. Maybe it was her soul; maybe it has a coarse name. But on the whole, no. I will not weep, fight, fast, tear myself, nor drink up eisel.²⁹

Ellery's references to his feelings for Lorna in the past tense indicate that he has rejected his passion. His reasons are not ignoble in spite of the way that he has phrased the questions about his passion. Earlier in the novel he analyzes Gwen's feelings about his love for Lorna:

Gwen opposed disorder, all kinds of disorder; and Francis would certainly bear watching. Out of affection for Lorna, Gwen had been friendly; but now, still out of affection for Lorna, she listened to the messages of that extra sense, no doubt telling her that this had gone too far; that more of the man-made disorder, actual and impending, lay in what he was doing with Lorna. Gwen believed in love, all right--but not sentimentality, which would never be sensible; and not passion, which upset everything.

Gwen kept her eye on the main point. As well as a girl who had a right to something called romance (not quite so frenzied as in Romeo and Juliet, not quite so fatuous as in a new musical comedy), Lorna was a valuable investment. She was a work of reason and order, the finished product of invested money, a good deal of it, well spent to feed and clothe and educate her; of invested time, twenty odd years of patient shaping by precept and example to fit her with special skills and accomplishments to keep house and raise children, not any old way, but in the style to which the sort of man she was meant to meet and marry would be accustomed. This fortunate man had conditions to fulfill; and one of them--not, to Gwen, mercenary at all, not snobbish at all, just orderly and reasonable--was to lay on the line the cash to take up this invest-

²⁹Ibid., p. 337.

ment. Then it would be time enough for him and Lorna to begin worrying about whether it was the nightingale and not the lark.

The thought was sobering, one of those thoughts he tried to put aside.³⁰

Here Ellery realizes the responsibility involved in loving someone. He realizes that passion by itself is no justification for marriage, that passion alone is irresponsible. Ellery realizes--"the thought was sobering"--that he is disorder in Lorna's life, and that a disordered life may have romance, but it is not very productive. In a sense, Ellery's rejection of Lorna is for her own good, and of course for his good as well, as he realizes still earlier in the novel when he contemplates his passion for Lorna:

He looked at her face, and hunger, the wild imperative wish, consumed him. He wanted her; and not merely in terms of coverture and access. He wanted all that, and he looked at her body, distracted because he could not even touch it; but in his mind he saw the sexual connection as a step, means to a vital emotional end. It was the entering wedge to be pushed home until, sooner or later rendered by pleasure beside herself, she let all go, convulsively gave up to him the something more, he did not know what, that, over and above her body, have from her he must.

He thought he must. In that longing, while it lasted, there was no choice; and in that helplessness, Francis saw with surprise (it was naturally not the first time; but he often forgot or made fun of it) that all the self-devotion and all the obscenity of love in literature or in court records was comprehensible. He understood. Men who could not stop their longing did crazy things. Through ardent temperament, or extreme constancy of mind, or, perhaps usually, through a thickheadedness that formed few thoughts and so did not easily replace one with another, some wretches, remarkable for their grossness or their

³⁰Ibid., pp. 332-33.

delicacy, loved their women night and day. Frantic all the time, what would you stop at? She could despise or cheat you and that would be all right. She could be a nun or a motion picture actress and you would be fool enough to love her. She could be married to Simone de' Bardi; she could be a dirty old worn-out tart; she could be dead; while you, lacrimans--the word was sniveling, Francis remembered; and he recoiled--exclusus amator, groveled through the hopeless days or years, still loving, still locked out. Shaken, Francis thought: "To hell with that!"³¹

At the beginning of this analysis, Ellery is aware of the passion he feels for Lorna. But such a passion as that depicted at the close of the quotation is infinitely degrading to human dignity, and Ellery fittingly and firmly rejects it. Finally, he chooses reason. His reason tells him that he cannot afford Lorna, not for himself but for herself. He cannot do right by her by marrying her; therefore, in fairness to her he must let her go, because Ellery has finally decided to assume responsibility for the future; he has decided that he will do something which reflects upon tomorrow.³²

All of Ellery's conflicts are moral--responsibility to self or to Mrs. Cunningham, responsibility to self or to Lorna Higham; his passion or the welfare of Walter and Lorna. Here in Ask Me Tomorrow Cozzens has made the problem of moral ambiguity central to the development of the novel and has

³¹Ibid., pp. 230-31.

³²My view of Ellery's choice is in sharp contrast to that of Scholes who says on page 137 of his article in A.Q. that Ellery "is presented with caustic irony in the process of allowing his weaknesses to deprive him of a woman he loves."

built his entire story on a moral conflict that is central to the novel. The point of view is that of Ellery; Ellery is the central character, not merely a focal point about which the action and other characters revolve.

The unity of point of view and theme in Ask Me Tomorrow clearly shows progress beyond the earlier work, and as in The Last Adam and Men and Brethren, the characteristics of maturity consistently become more frequent, although individually each novel lacks enough of the total characteristics to be considered mature work. Collectively, these three novels have all the characteristics of the mature work of Cozzens, something the entire body of work up to this time does not have.

Men and Brethren is definitely a novel of the professional man as are all of the mature works, but it is not, like the mature work and The Last Adam, both novel of the professional man and novel of the community. Ask Me Tomorrow is not a novel of community and is about the artist rather than the professional man. Then too, as Bracher notes, Ask Me Tomorrow is a comedy of manners, a genre totally different from the other Cozzens novels.³³

In structure and plot the novels are disparate as well. The Last Adam and Men and Brethren are unified in place and time, if the one month time span in The Last Adam is limited

³³Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 48.

enough to be considered unified. Ask Me Tomorrow covers several countries in Europe and over three months in time. Ask Me Tomorrow has a central character, as does Men and Brethren, but it also has a basic conflict--Ellery's choice of reason or passion and responsibility or self-indulgence--that Men and Brethren lacks. Ellery is the center of Ask Me Tomorrow in a way that Cudlipp of Men and Brethren and Bull of The Last Adam are not; the latter two may be central, but the initial conflicts are not theirs. The mature work has unity of time and place and a central character with the principal conflict. Point of view shifts in The Last Adam, which is somewhat atypical of the mature work and of Ask Me Tomorrow and Men and Brethren.

Characters become more fully developed as Cozzens approaches the mature work. Early reviews of The Last Adam criticized the novel for lacking "the pleasurable surprise of detail and individuation," and for lacking "a profoundly human understanding, based in a final and complete self knowledge."³⁴ Bracher says of Bull that he is "a unique type among Cozzens' characters: a man we are expected to admire chiefly for his appetite and vitality."³⁵ The reviewers said of Men and Brethren that "Ernest Cudlipp

³⁴Quotations are taken respectively from The Nation, XXXVI (Feb. 8, 1933), p. 156; and from The Saturday Review of Literature, IX (Jan. 21, 1933), p. 389.

³⁵Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 50.

is the same at the end of the book as he was at the beginning, only more so," and that the theme is "what life does to a man who has already matured in a special way."³⁶ So characterization in The Last Adam is atypical and in both The Last Adam and Men and Brethren the main characters are static. However, Mark Schorer noted a major difference in that Men and Brethren "is essentially a novel of reflection, the first in which Cozzens concerns himself with a problem that cannot be resolved on the physical level."³⁷ The reviewers of Ask Me Tomorrow, with one exception, disliked the book, but one reviewer at least referred to the novel as a "portrait," which indicates strength of characterization.³⁸ And Louis Coxe has said of Ellery that he "is certainly as comic, near-tragic and appealing a hero as the modern American novel has produced."³⁹ The character of Ellery may be radically different from that of the heroes of the mature work, but like Cudlipp and the mature heroes and unlike Bull and earlier heroes, Ellery is essentially "reflective," and he is more complex than any Cozzens character before 1940.

³⁶Quotations are taken respectively from Dorothea Kingsland, N.Y. Times Book Review (Jan. 19, 1936), p. 6; and from R. P. Blackmur, The Southern Review, I (Spring, 1936), p. 895.

³⁷Mark Schorer, "A New Parish," New Republic, LXXXV (Jan. 15, 1936), p. 289.

³⁸Edith H. Walton, "The Portrait of an Egotist," N.Y. Times Book Review (June 16, 1940), p. 7.

³⁹Louis O. Coxe, "A High Place," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), p. 50.

The style of the three novels undergoes some change, primarily because the characters become more "reflective." The passages of involved sentences, with elaborate qualifiers and parallel constructions and parenthetical interjections, increase in frequency from the one or two of Herbert Banning's meditations to the many of Ellery's.

There is an integral relationship between the style, which is reflective or contemplative, and the characters that evolve throughout these novels, and this relationship extends to theme, structure, and point of view. With a central character such as Ellery in Ask Me Tomorrow, the author is justified in developing his story around the conflict Ellery faces and treating that conflict from Ellery's point of view. Furthermore, such conflict forces the character into moral choices which, if developed, force the writer into a more contemplative or reflective style.

That these three novels move more and more toward a central conflict involving moral choice is evident in the novels themselves and in the comments of critics. Bracher has observed that "Francis Ellery of Ask Me Tomorrow moves from the hypersensitive pride of the young and talented toward the discriminations of moral realism,"⁴⁰ which implies a central development in the character resulting from the moral choices he must make. The choices faced by

⁴⁰Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, p. 281.

Ellery are left to him alone to decide, unlike most of Cudlipp's choices, which are accounted for by his reliance upon authority. In The Last Adam the crucial choice is not Bull's but the town's--what it will do with Bull as Public Health Officer.

It seems evident then that Ask Me Tomorrow, in important respects, represents a culmination of important characteristics of Cozzens' work. It is a novel involving a central reflective character faced with a central conflict involving moral choices, a statement that cannot entirely be made of the earlier novels but which can be made of the mature work.

CHAPTER V THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

Cozzens' next novel, The Just and the Unjust (1942),¹ was better received by reviewers than anything he had done up to that time. There were those who disagreed with his message, but there were few who denigrated his ability. Since that time, critics have been consistent in praising it above the earlier work. Hyman admits to its "depth and breadth"; in his early article on Cozzens, Bracher included The Just and the Unjust among Cozzens' major novels; Duggan too rates it among Cozzens' best works.²

Perhaps the most precise reason for regarding the novel highly has been established by Harry John Mooney:

Even upon the novel's first publication in 1942, it was apparent that with The Just and the Unjust James Gould Cozzens had moved into new territory, and was working with a larger and deeper vision of society. . . . What marks the novel as being so distinctly the first of Cozzens' major works is, in fact, the vigor with which it insists upon going beyond the immediate persons and scenes which constitute its subject matter in order to interpret the issues and ideas which both bind and divide society.³

¹James Gould Cozzens, The Just and the Unjust (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942). In this dissertation, all citations from The Just and the Unjust will be from this edition.

²Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 497; Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 49; Duggan, Thought, p. 615.

³Mooney, p. 75.

In virtually every respect, The Just and the Unjust is considered superior to the earlier novels, and only a few critics such as Hyman and Fiedler see Castaway as superior.⁴

The novel is held together, in part, by the trial of Stanley Howell and Robert Basso, being tried by the State of Connecticut for the kidnapping and murder of Frederick Zollicoffer, an illicit distributor of narcotics. Defending Howell and Basso are Harry Wurtz, a flamboyant attorney, and young George Stacey. The judges are Horace Irwin, President Judge, and Thomas F. Vredenburgh, Judge presiding. The prosecution is represented by Martin Bunting, a district attorney, and Abner Coates, assistant district attorney. The novel opens with docket entries from May 31, 1939 through June 13, 1939, the opening day of the trial, and closes about midnight two days later.

Although a good portion of the book is taken up with the trial, which is in several respects integral to the novel, in one sense the trial is a structural device. It dominates Chapters I, II, IV, and VII, and takes up much of Chapters VI and VIII. But the novel is primarily about Abner Coates, the protagonist whose point of view the novel follows, and interwoven through each chapter is material relevant to Abner's conflicts.

Abner's first appearance in the novel establishes one

⁴Hyman, N.M.Q., p. 497; Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1960), p. 461.

of his conflicts and a major theme.

A few minutes before Abner began his opening address Tuesday morning, Nick Dowdy, the crier, counted four hundred and eighty-three spectators. Those in the upper rows had little chance of hearing anything intelligible; but seeing them lean forward, cup their ears, strain to hear, Abner could not help straining in response, enunciating with tiresome care, speaking slowly.

It might be argued that so long as the jury heard, it did not make much difference whether the spectators, whose only business was their curiosity to see a spectacle rare in country courts, heard or not. It might be argued that providing spectacles was not now, or ever, the office of a court of law. Good in theory, in practice these arguments overlooked the fact that spectators made anything they watched a spectacle, and those who performed public duties before an audience became willingly or unwillingly actors, and what they did, whether they wanted it that way or not, became drama. Involuntarily an actor, Abner could not be unconscious of his audience's expectations, nor unaware that his audience was finding the performance, of which he was part, a poor show compared to what true drama, the art of the theater,⁵ or the motion picture, had taught them to expect.

Implicit here is the idea that the court is the world. Willingly or unwillingly the characters involved are actors.

Abner Coates is "involuntarily an actor," and as the action of the novel unfolds, it is made clear that Abner seriously considers ceasing to be an actor, because "acting" may very well compromise his idealism or his integrity. Also to be noted is Abner's awareness of the audience. When he finishes his speech, he tells "Marty" Bunting, the district attorney:

"I didn't know whether anyone could hear me."

"I could hear you all right," Bunting said. "If

⁵The Just and the Unjust, pp. 8-9.

I could, they could." It was apparent that he meant the jury. Without further pause he got back to business.⁶

Abner is too aware of being an actor; he cannot do it naturally; he is too conscious of those who watch, the spectators, not just conscious of himself in the courtroom before the spectators there, but conscious of himself in life and the people in life. This heightened self consciousness in his role makes Abner only an actor, not a participant. Thus participation in the community of man is an essential theme of the novel, and Cozzens establishes it early in the novel. At first, Abner refuses to participate until society accommodates itself to his idealism or integrity. Abner's idealism, the "theory" referred to in the paragraph, is what separates him, makes him self conscious, keeps him from participating in life--"practice"--and it is based upon absolutes that cannot be achieved or worked with in reality--"fact." As Mooney notes, "like so many other characters in Cozzens' fiction, Abner Coates finds his principles less satisfactory than he had supposed them to be simply because, in practical situations, they are not only indefensible, but actually lead Abner into absurdity."⁷ Thus the novel is about the realization on Abner's part that the mature man must participate, must act, not just contemplate, and that he cannot participate under ideal circumstances because ideal

⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁷Mooney, p. 86.

circumstances don't exist. Instead of the ideal, there is the real, and the real is not clear cut, definite, absolute. There is no simple choice between good and evil; the choice is between evils or goods. And this problem Abner faces is, by the end of the novel, magnified into the problem of mankind. It is appearance versus reality or the moral ambiguity involved in any particular choice of action.

Abner's problem is illustrated by his conflicts. Bunting, the district attorney, has decided to take a job with the state office, which will leave open his job as district attorney. Abner wants the job, or thinks he does, but he does not like the idea of being indebted to Jesse Gearhart, the man who controls the Republican party in the almost completely Republican county. Abner also wants, or thinks he wants, to marry Bonnie Drummond, but he has previously stipulated that she must give up her job, which she must keep to support her irresponsible mother and three younger half brothers. Abner's problem with Bonnie is made more difficult by the fact that he cannot expect to be able to support her under his conditions if he does not take the job of district attorney, a job which Gearhart's influence and Abner's abilities virtually assure him of getting. These two decisions or choices are central to the novel, because Abner's solving them resolves the ethical impasse he creates for himself and allows him to join the community of man.

But Abner's resolution of these problems is brought

about by a number of minor issues which illustrate to him that the certainty he insists upon at the beginning of the novel does not exist. There is the mess made of a case by a senile justice of the peace named Foulke. There is the pending trial of a young man named Mason, who is charged with manslaughter. There is the arrest, confession, and conviction of Sam Field, a high school teacher who in the secrecy of his office has fondled high school girls. And there is the Blessington will, which Abner must plead for. Each of these minor events contributes to Abner's realization that there are no moral absolutes. Mooney describes the situation well:

Cozzens recognizes that events and situations combine in ways which man often cannot trace to leave him an area of choice far more restricted, and thus more difficult, than he would ideally desire. There are no obvious choices for the simple reason that the obvious, to men of intelligence, cannot involve choice. Yet, significantly enough, even the intellect offers poor support under the rigorous pressures of circumstance. Man seems to reason on the basis of ideal situations, so that, confronted by the actual, he finds himself ill-prepared for decision. It is to illustrate this point that Cozzens . . . probes . . . the dilemma of the individual who is forced to choose between two courses neither of which is clearly right.⁸

Abner's choice is much more than simply whether or not he should run for district attorney and marry Bonnie Drummond. And his solution to these problems comes about from the education he gets from the minor issues in the novel. His first realization that choice is not simple comes in the Foulke episode.

⁸Ibid., p. 79.

A man named Williams beats his wife and she files charges against him with the justice of the peace, Earl Foulke. Foulke, who "as well as preposterous in appearance, . . . was stupid and officious," submits a transcript of the beating as an assault and battery case to Bunting and Coates.⁹ Once the transcript is submitted, it is the responsibility of the district attorney's office to prosecute. But after Foulke submits the transcript, which ends his jurisdiction, he accepts Williams' plea of guilty and fines him ten dollars. Abner points out that a justice of the peace cannot pass sentence on an assault and battery case and cannot prosecute Williams.

"Prosecuting him for what?" said Earl Foulke.

"For assault and battery, of course. For beating his wife up."

"What evidence you got?"

"His wife's evidence. What else? What did you swear the warrant out on?"

"That was then," Earl Foulke said. "Now, why, she isn't going to give evidence against him. Changed her mind. No case against him. That's why I--"

Such a change of mind was common, even customary, in these cases. In exasperation, Abner said, "Why should he plead guilty, then?"

"Now, Ab," Early Foulke said, "he beat her up. Blacked her eye; everything. He hadn't any right to do that. I told him he'd have to plead guilty. I wasn't going to let him off, like nothing happened. They stopped in to see me after lunch today. Anyone could see she didn't want to go on with it. She'd have to testify in court, a lot of trouble, scandal, all that. See?"

"Well, of course we can't make her testify," Abner said. "She can withdraw her complaint--"

⁹The Just and the Unjust, p. 65.

"Of course," Early Foulke said with alacrity. "What I told her myself. She just didn't think it out. So what I said, I said, 'Lookit here, Amy. He beat you up bad and he can't do that. So I'm going to fine him for that. If, 'I said, 'you agree not to testify against him, we'll settle this right now.' So I said to Williams, 'You got to plead guilty, so I can fine you. That's only fair to Amy, if she says she won't testify. Now, you make up your minds.' So I left them in my office awhile; and they said they agreed."

"You mean," said Abner, flabbergasted, "that Mrs. Williams was ready to testify, and you told her that if she wouldn't, you'd fine him ten dollars, discharge the case, and save her a lot of trouble?"

"She was still kind of mad, Ab," Earl Foulke said defensively. "You got to look at it from her standpoint. She got a pretty good beating. But if she goes up to court, testifies, and maybe he has a jail term, why, what about her? First she gets beat up; then she has all that embarrassment; then maybe for a couple of months, or however much, she gets no support. Punishes her more than it punishes him."

This sudden deviation into sense astonished Abner; but Marty was right; something clearly ought to be done about Earl Foulke . . .

In law, of course, it¹⁰ was true that it didn't matter why Foulke did it.

The situation poses a nice problem for Abner and the law. If the due process of the law insists on carrying out judgment on Williams, the offender, Mrs. Williams in addition to her beating is going to be further punished by the embarrassment of the court proceedings and lack of support from a husband who is in jail. On the other hand, as Foulke points out, it would be unjust to allow Williams to go entirely free—he has, after all, committed a crime and should pay for it. But the law cannot legally make him pay without adding further injustice to Mrs. Williams. Foulke insists

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 65-66.

on coming as close to what is right as he possibly can; the only difficulty is that in striving for justice, he exceeds his authority and proceeds illegally. The law, on the other hand, could not dispense justice in this instance without aggravating the injustice to the offended party. Abner's speculation on this case is revealing:

That Foulke, the old fool, meant well, that he had effected a probably just disposal of the Williams case, with no real harm to anyone, and much trouble saved the Commonwealth as well as Mr. and Mrs. Williams, would not weigh with Marty. Marty would say--and it was true; it was the truth that all experience confirmed; it was, in little, the exemplar of the greatest and hardest truth in the world: the good end never has justified, and never will justify, the wrong, bad, or merely expedient means--that the law, whatever it might be in this case, would have to take its course, and Foulke would have to take the consequences.¹¹

Abner sees what Foulke has done as just but illegal. Bunting will be concerned only with its illegality, which will jeopardize Foulke. The cost of justice in this instance is injustice to another. Abner, in attempting to extricate Foulke, explains to him that he must undo what he has done and must claim that he didn't understand the limits of his authority. But once he has extricated Foulke, "Abner paused, aware that if what Earl Foulke had done was misprision of felony, what he himself was doing might very well be called misprision of misdemeanor, at least."¹² In

¹¹Ibid., p. 67.

¹²Ibid., pp. 67-68.

this one instance then, justice jeopardizes the name and reputation of two public officials and is furthermore not finally justice, because the Williams case must after all revert to the district attorney's office for proceedings. Abner's reactions to the situation are again revelatory.

Anticipating with some discomfort the old man's thanks, the well-intended but necessarily offensive thanks for his humanitarian gesture, but also for his not-wholly-straight-forward decision to keep a counsel that was not his to keep, but Marty's; and which he could keep only because Marty trusted him, Abner had been ready to cut Foulke short, . . . about to say that Mr. Foulke was wrong if he thought Abner wanted him to do anything, or cared what he did, Abner could see suddenly that old Foulke, the old fool, was not in fact wrong at all. Who else but Abner volunteered to get Foulke out of his predicament? Abner himself was the only one who could make Abner suppress those worse than asinine, those definitely illegal, acts of telling Williams he had to plead guilty and telling Mrs. Williams that she must not give evidence; and if Abner did not do it because he wanted to, why did he do it?¹³

So the question of law becomes a question of responsibility. Abner has assumed responsibility for "the old fool." In doing so he has violated the trust of his friendship with Bunting and the public trust of his office which makes him vulnerable. Abner notes too that his responsibility, whether he likes it or not, is the result of his will--his doing what he wants to do. From the law's point of view--Abner supposes Foulke's--his behavior has been humanitarian. Continued treatment of the law in such a manner

¹³Ibid., p. 68.

as Abner's will necessarily render the law ineffectual and will bring about social disorder. However, occasional transgressions the law itself is strong enough to endure. This is the same issue in the sentencing of Howell and Basso. The jury has defied the letter of the law by acting from humanitarian motives which evidently have something to do with capital punishment and perhaps too a concern over the letter of the law that demands a charge of murder in the first degree for participating in a kidnapping in which the person kidnapped is murdered. Bunting's immediate response, a response which Abner finds irrational but understandable since it is given in the heat of anger, is that city criminals will now invade the county to perpetuate their crimes because the juries in the county will not convict. Bunting's concern is that the law once flouted will continue to be flouted. At any rate, Abner is forced to see in the Foulke episode that justice and the law are sometimes in conflict. He does not miss the ambiguity of right and wrong; it is the first of several lessons which destroy finally his insistence on abiding by an absolute.

A situation almost the opposite of that posed by Earl Foulke is the Blessington case.

Like Santa Claus, old Blessington meant to use his position as a gift-giver to reward those who were good and to punish, by leaving them nothing, those he considered bad. In life Herbert Blessington had often been described as an eccentric; a short way of saying that he was a stubborn, vindictive, selfish, and unreasonable old bastard. He had never married, and

his heirs were four sisters. Each of them had at one time or another served as his housekeeper, the service ending in a violent quarrel; so that at the time of his death, Herbert Blessington was not speaking to three of them; and to the fourth, who was then caring for him, he spoke as little as he could. Probably he would have quarreled with her as soon as he got better, if he had got better.

However, in the legal meaning, Herbert Blessington was of sound mind; and the will, drawn up by Bill Fuller the Childerstown Trust Company's attorney, was, naturally, in order. It provided that the estate be held in trust for the fourth sister, Elvira, on condition that she never live with the others, and never make them any gifts. That was the old man expressing his own malicious intent; but, next, Bill Fuller had plainly taken a hand, and told Herbert Blessington that he was running a legal risk; for a clause followed providing that, in event of the court holding the condition invalid, his estate was to go to Peck College, . . . ¹⁴

Abner's job is to plead for Peck College by showing the legality of the will in general and the illegality of the condition forbidding the fourth sister to live with the others or make them gifts. The situation is made more acute by the fact that the sisters "who had done everything they could for him [Blessington], were poor as dirt and desperately needed the money."¹⁵ It is futile to blame Fuller for creating the bad situation; Abner is well aware that Fuller made the will in good legal conscience to represent the needs and to protect the interests of Blessington, whom Fuller despised. At the same time, in remaining true to his profession and in protecting the interests of his client by adding the second bequest in the event the first condition is voided, Fuller makes it possible for injustice to occur.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 256-57.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 258.

Abner's problem, if it may be called that, is what to do with the Blessington case. He accepted it before he was fully aware of the conditions. He knows that it will probably be easy to win the bequest for Peck College, which he has been hired by a state senator to represent. If he wins the case, the old ladies--two spinsters, one widow, and onw with an invalid husband--are destitute. When he voices his reluctance to pursue the case, which he is verbally committed to, Fuller explains that if he didn't take it someone else would, which does not really solve Abner's moral problem. He is committed to the case; the law is on his side, but justice is with the fourth sister. Abner decides, not liking it, to represent Peck College. His father explains the situation as he sees it:

" . . . It's provided by law, primarily by statute, that one of a man's rights which the courts shall protect him in, is the disposal of his property after his death according to his intentions expressed in an attested will. It is a very important right. It is part and parcel of human freedom and dignity. Just as the jury must be free to find against the evidence, we have to hold that a man must be free, if he has the legal capacity to make a will, to make an unequal, unjust, and unreasonable will.

" . . . You've been saying in effect, that you'd like to devise a better and juster disposal of Blessington's goods. You have no right to do it. The Court has no more right. The point for you is not whether you personally think the will just and good, but whether you can dispassionately and disinterestedly submit to the Court reasons in law and equity that bear out what you feel to be the testator's intention to leave the money to the clients you represent."

" . . . Granted that Blessington intended an injustice (and remember, that is an opinion; you and most other people may hold it, but it remains an opinion), would you say to me that the law ought to betray its

first great principle and pay off one injustice (a matter of opinion) with another injustice (a matter of indisputable fact)? I think not."¹⁶

For Judge Coates, Abner's choice has little meaning. Abner must uphold the law, which he needn't feel guilty about, since the law is made to preserve freedom. And as the Judge points out too, freedom does not work one way; it is freedom to do right or to do wrong. He points out too that a satisfactory solution to the issue, one that would result in justice for the old ladies, would be at the cost of an injustice to Blessington and at the sacrifice of the principle of freedom which is the basis of the law. This affair then, like that of Earl Foulke, shows that although the law allows inequity it does so at the cost of preserving itself as a system that will usually effect a kind of justice. With this, however, Abner is not satisfied. He doesn't like being caught between two opposing principles of good. He agrees with his father on the principles involved, but he is dissatisfied with the application of those principles to himself. "It isn't what the law should do; it's what I should do." . . . "I'd like to do what was right."¹⁷ The point is that he cannot do right in this case and he finally realizes it. Doing right in such a case would mean upholding the law, fulfilling Blessington's wishes and being just to the old ladies. Right, in such a situation,

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 431-32.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 432-33.

is impossible: the conflict between the law and freedom and ethics is in this instance incapable of resolution.

One case that does appear to result in justice is that of Sam Field, the high school English teacher, who persuades some of the girls in his classes to submit to his caresses and to pose nude for photographs he makes of them. It is evident to most of the people involved in the case that Field is mentally disturbed. And every effort is made on the part of Bunting and Coates and Judge Irwin to get Field through the forms of the law and to sentence him without creating a furor. For one thing, Field is not a criminal; for another, the girls involved in the case deserve some protection from publicity. For still another, the girls were not wholly innocent of provocation. Field pleads guilty to the charges against him; Coates questions the girls enough to disclose the extent of Field's indiscretion and Irwin sentences him to a year in the state reformatory, an institution for first offenders which evidently concentrates more on mental and social rehabilitation than on punitive measures. In this instance at least the law is allowed to come closer to justice. But if the law comes closer to justice, it is the result of softening on the part of Abner and those who administer the law. The problem such a softening poses for Abner lies in the interpretation of his action by the opponents of Rawle, the high school principal, who holds him responsible for Field's behavior. Abner's actions here may be seen by

some--Maynard Longstreet, the editor of the local paper, for instance--as a sell out, the very thing Abner is so careful to protect himself from in initially refusing to aid young Mason for Jesse Gearhart, because going easy on Mason may be seen as a blot on his integrity. Everyone knows of Abner's courtship of Bonnie and of Bonnie's employment by Rawle, who in turn owes his position to Gearhart. To get justice for Field, Abner is compromised in the thoughts of others.

One other case, one that is pending when the novel closes, is that of Mason, the son of a senator. Mason, according to the highway patrolman who observed the accident, is guilty of negligence at the wheel of an automobile, negligence resulting in the death of the man driving the car that Mason's car collides with. It is generally agreed between Abner and Mason's attorney that if the boy is guilty as charged he should receive a suspended sentence, which appears to be just, since the boy was not drunk and is otherwise of good character. However, the Mason case is more interesting in the effect it has upon the relations between Abner and Jesse Gearhart, since Gearhart is doing what he can for the boy because the boy's father is politically important and has asked Gearhart to help him. Abner is concerned that the issue is not on the up and up, that Gearhart is trying to use his influence to corrupt justice and the law. These are the minor issues then that bear upon Abner's personal conflicts and choices.

Abner's basic problem is what to do with himself. When the novel opens, he is thirty-one years old; he is an assistant district attorney; he has ability. He is unmarried and has an agreement of sorts with Bonnie Drummond, whom he has known since childhood. Abner is not irresponsible, but neither is he committed; he is more passive than active, waiting for indecision to decide him in a positive course of action. Abner himself is cautious and in no hurry to commit himself. Others are not so patient with him. Abner's father tells him, "I wish you'd get settled. It's time you did,"¹⁸ and Bunting tells him,

"I thought your idea was--I mean, that you had it pretty well settled in your mind that you'd go on being a hick lawyer, if Harry wants to call it that. I mean, marry and settle down, and maybe in the end get a judgeship--they seem to run in your family. I don't say it amounts to a lot. You won't get rich and you won't get famous; but you have a good life; one that's some use, and makes some sense."¹⁹

Implicit here is the idea that Abner's life is not necessarily a good life because it will not necessarily make sense or be of some use if Abner does not get settled. The impression left is that Abner is uncommitted, has not accepted responsibility.

Perhaps unconsciously Abner's scruples about committing himself to Gearhart are rationalizations to prevent him from the serious task of commitment. Even though he concedes that

¹⁸Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 165-66.

he wants the job, these scruples play a major part in his reluctance to accept it. As Abner tells his father, toward the end of the novel,

"I'd like to do what was right. Who wouldn't? Maybe that's only one of those deliberate noble actions you don't think much of. It has something to do with how things look, what people think of me." He paused. "Jesse told me your Senator Perkins said you wouldn't worry so much about what people were thinking of you if you remembered that most of the time they weren't. I'm not so good on come-backs. It took me until now to see what was wrong with that."
 . . . "What's he mean? Does he mean that most of the time there's nobody looking, so you can do what you want? I don't give a damn whether anybody is looking or not. I'm looking. I care whether I look like a louse. Certainly I care what people think of me. They may only do it for ten seconds once in ten years, but I still care."²⁰

Abner's scruples extend beyond public opinion. They enter primarily into his own choices of right and wrong. The ideal for choosing or making judgments is reasonable doubt, which Judge Vredenburg defines for the jury in the trial of Howell and Basso.

"Reasonable doubt is a doubt that arises out of the evidence or lack of evidence. It is such a doubt as would make a reasonable man in the conduct of his own affairs and in a matter of importance to him, pull up, hesitate, and seriously consider whether the thing he thinks of doing is right and wise. It must, however, be a real and substantial doubt; not, for instance, the idle reflection that nothing is perfectly certain in this life. It is a doubt that bases itself on serious gaps or loopholes in the evidence; that persists actively and positively. It is the doubt of a man who has heard and considered all the contentions of the prosecution, and yet who is not satisfied that the defendant must have done what he is charged with doing."²¹

²⁰Ibid., pp. 432-33.

²¹Ibid., p. 371.

Here Vredenburg postulates the abstract ideal that Coates has been struggling with in his relationship with Gearhart. This ideal is made as practicable as possible by the exclusion of "idle reflection that nothing is perfectly certain in this life." But even with such qualifications there is no certainty, and potentially there is great ambiguity, as Abner discovers in trying to decide on the issues that determine his choices. For Abner to have a simple choice of whether to run for district attorney, there must be a simple Jesse Gearhart. Abner "simply" doubts the integrity of Gearhart.

Abner had never liked Jesse, but he had not always disliked him. As Republican county chairman, Jesse was for years accustomed to consult with Judge Coates; and Abner had early taken Jesse, and Jesse's relative or local importance, for granted. The county had been Republican for almost a generation. This meant that the Republicans were entrenched in power; they had all the jobs. Having all the jobs meant having also an increasing monopoly of the ambitious, able and experienced men. Ambitious men could see the situation; able men could not expect to get anywhere with the Democrats; and as for experience, a Democrat could never be elected, and so could never get any experience.

Abner had seen how this worked. He had done a good deal of speaking for the party ticket at elections since he had been in office on Marty's appointment. The Republican candidates for whom he spoke, though no great shakes perhaps, were invariably and obviously better fitted for the office they sought than their Democratic opponents. It was simple enough to say so; and to point out why; and Abner was glad to do it, when some lodge, or Loyal Republican Club, wanted a speaker. Few of these gatherings were so small or so insignificant that Jesse Gearhart did not manage to be on hand, if only briefly; and when Jesse was there, he was at pains afterward to thank Abner and to congratulate him.

It seemed an odd thing to dislike a man for; but Abner knew that was how and when he had begun to dislike Jesse. At college, where he had done some debating, and at law school, Abner had learned that he was not a gifted speaker, just as he had learned that he did not

have to be gifted in order to make a sensible and adequate speech. When Jesse told him he was wonderful, Abner did not know what to reply. If Jesse really thought so, Jesse was a fool; if Jesse did not really think so, he must imagine Abner a fool. Furthermore, Abner did not like Jesse's--well, the word was presumption, in acting as though Abner worked for Jesse, when in fact, Abner did what he did because Marty asked him to; and because he himself believed that the public interest would be better served by the Republican candidates.

These grounds for disliking Jesse were not good nor reasonable; and Abner made every effort to conceal his feelings. To conceal them was not, however, to be rid of them. Abner supposed that his mental process was the ordinary one; but, just as concealing dislike did not cure dislike, recognizing a shifty piece of rationalization did not end the process of rationalizing.²²

Abner is able to recognize that his feelings for Gearhart are not rational. He probably further recognizes that the "presumption" he dislikes in Gearhart is the challenge to his own integrity--~~integrity~~ integrity in the sense of independence and separateness--in that Gearhart is trying to ally Abner to a cause outside himself. Abner, like the independent voter, wants to have his cake and eat it too. Ideally, his concern with the principle involved is commendable. But as Bunting points out to him, it just will not get the job done.

"There is always theory and there is always practice. If you think you're going to change that, you're wrong. Theory is where you want to go; practice is how you're going to get there."²³

Such a distinction Abner refuses to accept. He realizes that Gearhart has always had the best men elected, but he dislikes his method of getting them elected. He dislikes the structure

²²Ibid., pp. 86-87.

²³Ibid., pp. 281-82.

behind the system, which leads him finally to conclude in a conversation with his father that he has chosen not to run for district attorney because he does not like politics, for which his father commends him with reservations.

"I never liked politics myself. I don't mean I thought I was too good for it. Or if I did, it was when I was very young. Men act through self-interest; and if they do things you wouldn't do, you'd better not assume it's because you have a nobler character."²⁴

This is, of course, Abner's entire problem. He holds himself aloof because he does not want to jeopardize his integrity and because he fears that even fairness in evaluating Jesse Gearhart will be misconstrued by others to mean corruption in him. When Abner justifies his first rejection of Gearhart's offer, he uses his dislike of having to work with politicians as his excuse. His father reproves him:

"If you want to get away from them, you'll have to get away from human society. There wouldn't be any society without them. It's attempted every now and then. Some so-called reform movement made up of people who aren't politicians sometimes wins an election. Either they learn how to be politicians pretty quick, or they don't last. I'm not sure we could do without Jesse."

"I know," said Abner. "There seems to be a certain amount of dirty work that has to be done; and somebody has to do it. But I don't have to be the one."

"I've known Jesse to do things I wouldn't care to do," Judge Coates said, "but I've never observed a human activity in which the practice is the same as the theory. Perhaps the laborer is worthy of his hire."²⁵

The Judge begins by pointing out that politicians are necessary for the functioning of society, a condition that Abner

²⁴Ibid., pp. 430-31.

²⁵Ibid., p. 242.

is forced to accept. But Abner refuses to see that there is any obligation on his part to deal with them. They represent the dirty work done for society, and Abner refuses to get his hands dirty. He refuses to commit himself, which is truly one way of solving the problem. The Judge reminds Abner of the same thing that Bunting reminds him of: theory and practice are not the same thing. Abner's theory is fine, but it won't work; the best that man can hope for is that theory is approached by practice, and men like Gearhart make this possible.

This is, in part, illustrated by the trial of Howell and Basso, a picture book trial from the point of view of the prosecution. The testimony of two participants in the kidnapping, one of whom, Howell, is himself on trial, establishes clearly that Howell and Basso were participants in the kidnapping and that the kidnapping resulted in the murder of Zollicoffer. Judge Vredenburgh directs the jury that if the defendants are found to be participants in the kidnapping, they are to be found guilty of first degree murder. Theory and certainty are given a serious setback when the jury refuses to convict Howell and Basso of first degree murder and finds them guilty of murder in the second degree.

Whether such a sentence is justice or not is another question. It is definitely not what the law requires; it is definitely not legal justice. The question must lie then

in the ideal justice of the law. Are those people implicated in a kidnapping who have no intention of murdering the person kidnapped and who do not actually kill the man kidnapped implicated to the degree of murderers? Perhaps not. The jury flouts the law unknowingly, but it does not challenge justice. Vredenburgh is outraged at the finding of the jury; Judge Irwin chastizes them in his kindly way, but Judge Coates, maintaining again the difference between theory and practice, points out that

"The law lets you arrange an opportunity for a suspected thief to steal so that you can catch him. I don't think right feeling can ever stoop to it. Compounding a felony is an indictable offense; but a man feels, just the same, that he has a right to forgive those who injure him, and no talk about his duty to society will change that feeling. In a case of larceny, it may be no defense in law that the party from whom the goods were stolen, himself stole them; but the feeling of the average man does in part defend it by saying it served him right to lose what didn't belong to him. It is held that drunkenness does not aggravate a common law offense any more than it excuses it."

He shook his head. "Depending on the circumstances, it may do either. Most people would feel that committing perjury drunk was not so bad as committing it cold sober; while committing an involuntary manslaughter drunk would be worse than committing it sober."²⁶

What the Judge attempts to get Abner to see is that there is no moral certainty in law or anywhere else. Vredenburgh, in a sense supporting Harry Wurtz's contention that capital punishment is not justified, cites two cases in which first degree murder should not have been the finding of the jury,

²⁶Ibid., p. 428.

but his contention is that the findings could have been different within the structure of the trials themselves. He refuses to argue the point about capital punishment because for him it is not the issue. He works with what he must work with--a law that requires it in given instances. This same principle is manifest in Bunting's admonition to Abner when Abner refuses to accept Jesse Gearhart's offer to run Abner for the office of district attorney.

Bunting tells Abner,

"Standing off and saying you don't like the way things are run is kid stuff--any kid can work out a program of more ice cream and less school and free movies and him telling people what to do instead of people always telling him--"

Abner said, "I don't want any more ice cream, thanks."

"Maybe you don't; but what you're saying is the same damn thing. If things were run according to your ideas instead of the way they are run, it would be much better. Who says so? Why you say so! . . ."

"What I say is," Bunting said, "until you have some responsibility, do something besides kick, or try to heave in a few monkey wrenches, you aren't going to know what you're talking about. Sure, one way to get rid of the rats is burn down the barn! That's brilliant. Wait until it's been up to you for a few years, until you've had to decide, until you've seen how few of those brilliant ideas turn out."²⁷

Abner is taken to task by his father in the same way. "'Don't be cynical,' Judge Coates said. 'A cynic is just a man who found out when he was about ten that there wasn't any Santa Claus, and he's still upset.'²⁸ What it boils down to is that Abner won't commit himself at first because of the way

²⁷Ibid., pp. 365-66.

²⁸Ibid., p. 434.

that he sees things. He sees Jesse Gearhart as a politician who manipulates public offices, and Abner does not approve of a system that works this way.

But Abner is made to realize the errors in his thinking. As Bonnie fills out the form for a marriage license, Abner thinks over his decision to marry:

He was, in fact, a little frightened by the irrevocable step he had now taken, and had now made Bonnie take. He did not doubt that it was a good step, and the right step; but just as when in Jake Riordan's office, he had committed himself to Jesse, he was now obligated to wonder whether he was embarking on more than he had the abilities to manage. This was a large order, too. The commitments were not only similar, but linked to each other. He committed himself to Jesse, and so gained a free hand to commit himself here; and the two together must break up the pattern of life which he was used to and knew how to manage.²⁹

Abner's problem with the choice of running for district attorney is one of responsibility within the structure laid down by politics. Abner implicitly tells himself it is not the responsibility he minds but the responsibility within that framework. He is forced to conclude that if he is to work, he must work within that framework, and once he has convinced himself of the irrationality of his feelings about Gearhart, whom he still does not like, he accepts the responsibility.

Abner saw with confusion that he knew nothing at all about Jesse. He knew the face that he had just thought of as phlegmatic; and he knew a half a dozen stories or parts of stories--or even, mere epithets: Van Zant

²⁹Ibid., pp. 386-87.

saying in passing, but positively, "he's another son of a bitch." They were all more or less defamatory, the relations of Jesse's enemies; but out of them Abner manufactured his idea. He had not even troubled to see whether the idea squared with the evidence of his senses, whether his picture of Jesse corresponded with what he could see. The picture was that of the politician of popular legend, tough, cynical, and corrupt; yet if Abner asked himself when he had noted these qualities in Jesse, he could not answer. He had certainly never seen Jesse in that well-known room, little and smoke-filled, trafficking in offices, dividing booty, making deals with similar scoundrels at the cost of the just and the upright. Indeed, when you considered this familiar figure, a difficulty presented itself. How did such a man, who must by definition be disliked on sight and distrusted by everyone, win himself a position of power?³⁰

Abner's realization that he doesn't know Gearhart, then, prepares him to work as district attorney. He is made to realize that if Gearhart asks him for anything, he alone will give or withhold. Gearhart is not buying him; Gearhart is asking or will ask Abner to support him when Abner thinks he can. This agreement is never phrased, but it is exemplified in Gearhart's asking Abner, before Abner has consented to run for office, to defend the superintendent of the school board who is being attacked as a result of the Field episode. Abner cannot logically see how the superintendent is responsible for Field's indiscretion and consents to represent him, knowing that the superintendent is holding a job that Gearhart got for him. If Abner can defend a man under these circumstances, he will have no difficulty with Gearhart. Gearhart is not asking Abner for injustice; he merely wants

³⁰Ibid., p. 299.

Abner to do what he can do within his conscience. Abner is indignant because he thinks Gearhart is trying to get the Mason boy out of the manslaughter charge. When Jake Riordan, who is to defend Mason, asks Abner why he will not run for office, Abner replies:

"This Mason business. I don't care whose son he is--" Abner was aware, as he said it, that it was a silly thing to say, or at least a silly way of saying what he meant. He sounded self-righteous.

Jesse said, "Well, Ab, you wouldn't say he wasn't entitled to a defense, would you?"

"He's entitled to just what everyone else is entitled to. No more. No less."

"What's he getting?" said Jake. "More or less?"

"I don't know yet. That's what I may find out."

"If you mean what I'm going to do for him," Jake said, "why, I'll tell you now, if you want. We haven't any evidence, except his own statements. If it seems at the inquest tomorrow that it was his fault, I'll advise him to plead guilty. When it comes up, I'd plan to introduce character witnesses; and I'd ask the judge not to send him to jail. I don't think he ought to go; and I don't think the judge will think he ought to go. Do you think he should?"

"No," said Abner, "there'd be no point in that."³¹

The utter reasonableness of Riordan and the realization that Gearhart or any other reasonable man of authority will do what he can for those he favors but that such attempts to do what they can need not be in motive or in practice any attempt to compromise either the law or those who uphold it allow Abner to conclude that his integrity is not really at stake.

But this is but part of his problem. He may satisfy himself as to his integrity, but satisfying the world about

³¹Ibid., p. 356.

him, the spectators in the courtroom and in the world, is another matter. Maynard Longstreet, who runs the local paper and wants the resignation of Rawle, the superintendent of schools,

. . . turned his head, looking back at Abner morosely. "So they got you in it, too," he said. "Jesse said you'd represent Rawle, or whatever the hell, if they had a hearing. Did he ask you to?"

Abner said, "He didn't ask me not to."

"I get it," Maynard said. "I didn't at first, but I do now."

Maynard's derisive, wise look did not make clear just what he got; but it was clear enough that, rummaging in his store of local information, Maynard had put together links for a chain of interest that bound Abner to Mr. Rawle, though on the face of it they hardly knew each other.

Perhaps Maynard remembered suddenly that Mr. Rawle's secretary was Janet Drummond, who was related to the Coateses, and furthermore was supposed to be Abner's girl. Perhaps, because he knew that Jesse was going to run Abner for district attorney, he figured that in exchange, Abner was naturally expected to help bolster up Rawle, and so maintain Jesse's influence on the School Board.

Maynard was right.

Those were the facts--Bonnie was his girl; Jesse was going to run him for district attorney; so Abner could see that he stood convicted in advance of any implications those facts might have. It was not possible to be above the reasonable calumny of a suspicious man's suspicions; and dismayed for a moment, Abner remembered his father saying, "You know whether it's a bargain or not. You know what you take and what you give."

The point, driven unexpectedly home, checked his annoyance and eased his embarrassment. Abner saw that he really did not have to say anything. He said, "Do you?" and went into court.³²

Abner is made to realize that if he is to work, even though he retains his integrity, he is subject to the misunderstanding of the world at large, which has only "facts" to go on. Abner

³²Ibid., pp. 395-96.

realizes, as well as May Topping of The Last Adam, that the facts don't tell you much, that they look different depending on the point of view of the person looking. Abner is consoled because he has made no bargain with Jesse, but he is the only one who can ever know that. His conscience can never be known by anyone else, and it is his to live with. That his problem is not resolved totally by his father's remark is evident when on the next to the last page of the novel he confesses to his father that he cares what people think about him, even if they look at him only once in ten years.

So, regardless of his inability to discern finally what his true motives are, Abner commits himself to run for the office; in doing so he commits himself to the community of the responsible.

His decision to marry Bonnie Drummond is a similar commitment decided upon after much of the same kind of agonizing that is evident in his decision to run for district attorney. The truly committed man accepts the responsibility of his job and of his family; for Cozzens these two spheres of activity seem to be the essential bases of a social structure. Only after Bonnie has filled out the marriage certificate does Abner explain to himself his reluctance to commit himself to marriage. Reflecting on the changes to be made in his life, Abner observes:

Living it, the life had seemed to Abner vaguely unsatisfactory; but when he put an end to it there were obvious good points to be remembered. For one

simple and artless item, it never mattered when he got home; and though there was rarely or never anything to keep him out and the freedom was useless, he could feel himself being shut in; one after another the ways out closing. Until this afternoon he had also been free to say what he thought about Jesse; but he was not free any longer. As Marty said, he could not stand off and talk in his new position. If he did not like the way things were, he could no longer merely make a complaint; he himself would have to work a plan out, implement it, and take the responsibility if it failed.³³

What has bothered Abner has been the effect commitment and responsibility will have upon his freedom. He has avoided both commitment and responsibility. He explains the situation between Bonnie and himself early in the novel, in answer to his father's question about whether they had a "row."

"No," said Abner. "The situation is the same, however, She thinks she has to keep her job. So--" He shrugged.

"Yes, I know," Judge Coates said. "Somebody's got to support her mother and the children. Could you do it?"

Abner said, "I'm sure I don't know, Father. I haven't figured it out. She says she won't have it that way. I don't think she even knows what you're giving Cousin Mary now."

Judge Coates said, ". . . There have been cases where a girl got married and went on working."

"I'm afraid this won't be one of them," Abner said.³⁴

Perhaps unconsciously Abner has made his relationship with Bonnie impossible. He does not know if he can support a wife, the wife's mother and three young children. He does know that he will not have his wife work. Bonnie must be responsible for her mother's family since her mother is totally irresponsible. There can be little sympathy for Abner in such a situation. It seems evident that he does not

³³Ibid., p. 387.

³⁴Ibid., p. 43.

really want to get married. In truth, he must feel somewhat the same way about marriage that he feels about the job of district attorney. He does not want it under the conditions that exist, which means tentatively that he does not want it or them badly enough, as Jesse tells him about the job and as Bonnie implicitly understands by refusing Abner's proposal at various times. But, just as he learns to accept what he cannot avoid in the job, so he learns to accept what he cannot avoid with Bonnie; to have her he must accept her and her responsibilities with her. Abner does so and he does so rationally, knowing the difficulties awaiting him. Only after Abner reaches his decision rationally, does his emotion confirm his decision.

. . . and suddenly he remembered what he had forgotten-- that if he suffered losses, he would have inestimable gains, the charms of her mind and body so joined that there was no distinguishing them. Both troubled his senses and both exalted his heart. Answering the repressed, the unformed, query that must all along have been in his mind, Abner thought: I would take any damn job. It seemed to him right that he should.³⁵

The unformed query is whether Bonnie is worth it, whether she is worth the commitment, and perhaps the question too is whether the job and Abner's commitment to it are the results of his need for Bonnie. To have Bonnie he must have the job. Also realized after the fact is that it now makes no difference; any job would have sufficed if he could have Bonnie.

A certain ambiguity here suggests that Abner's commit-

³⁵Ibid., p. 388.

ment to the work is predicated on his commitment to Bonnie, that love of another precedes in time and importance the commitment to humanity in general, the humanity represented by the work. As the Judge explains to Abner at the end of the novel,

"There'll be deaths and disappointments and failures. When they come, you meet them. Nobody promises you a good time or an easy time. I don't know who it was who said when we think of the past we regret and when we think of the future we fear. And with reason. But no bets are off. There is the present to think of, and as long as you live there always will be. In the present, every day is a miracle. The world gets up in the morning and is fed and goes to work, and in the evening it comes home and is fed again and perhaps has a little amusement and goes to sleep. To make that possible, so much has to be done by so many people that, on the face of it, it is impossible. Well, every day we do it; and every day, come hell, come high water, we're going to have to go on doing it as well as we can."³⁶

The subject of Judge Coates' speech is the endurance of the human being. For him, it is a miracle that man continues to be. That miracle is the result of work and the assumption of responsibility. Abner is now a part of that world and he has joined it by relating himself to Bonnie, which is an emotional attachment, and to his job, which is an involvement through the intellect. The two are truly bound together as Abner realizes.

If the dominant themes in The Just and the Unjust are commitment and responsibility, they are predicated upon the theme of moral ambiguity. Abner Coates does commit himself

³⁶Ibid., p. 434.

to Bonnie Drummond and through her to his work, and to mankind, and in committing himself he assumes responsibility. But Abner must first work with himself to achieve such commitment. His commitment and responsibility come only after intensive questioning of the state of the world. He concludes implicitly that there is no absolute that can tell him what he must do, that the theory he advocates is not in evidence and that for it to be he must work to make it so. He learns that choosing may be a choice not between good and evil but between two evils. He learns that such choices cannot be determined by some absolute such as the law, which "aims at certainty," but by his own fallible self. Nor can he know when he makes a choice that the choice is right. He may feel that it is right as in his emotional affirmation to his decision to marry Bonnie, but he cannot know; knowing depends upon the future and the future is unknowable.

So Abner decides, as the rational man must, to accept uncertainty, to accept ubiquitous moral ambiguity and to work within it. His acceptance of responsibility does not mean that he refuses to see ambiguity or that he accepts an absolute; it means that in spite of the ambiguity he will act, not in accord with an absolute but in accord with his own conscience. Abner's commitments may be regarded as final, but this does not mean that he has all of the answers. Every day will continue to bring new problems that must be

solved and each problem will be a matter of judgment and a matter of moral ambiguity. This is the world Abner chooses to work within; it is the condition of man and Abner accepts it.

These ideas and themes are evident in the title and in the epigraph of the novel. The title probably comes from Matthew 5:44,45: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, . . . for he ["Father which is in heaven"] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The epigraph, "Certainty is the Mother of Repose; therefore the Law aims at Certainty," is a self contained statement by Lord Hardwicke. Between them, these two statements show the central conflicts of the novel.³⁷ Matthew is logically unacceptable because there is no longer a faith that accepts God's ways to man. In contrast to the ideal--turn the other cheek--of Christianity, which has practically never been more than theory, has been the practice of the legal system, which, now that the age of faith is no more--if there ever was such an age--must bear the burden of finding justice. The importance of justice lies in the security it provides for the individuals in a society. It is evident that the legal system is then responsible, directly or indirectly, for a part of that security so

³⁷In spite of the fact that Cozzens' choice of title was The Summer Soldier, which illustrates better the theme of commitment, the published title is immediately relevant to "the issues and ideas which both bind and divide society," as Mooney says on page seventy-five of his book.

essential to society. The law aims at certainty because certainty allows repose, the calm so essential for order and harmony. But the law cannot achieve certainty; there is no knowing; events must of necessity remain ambiguous. The problem for the individual is acute. Sometimes he must act and he must act on what he thinks is true; otherwise there is a paralysis of will, which if universal would destroy order. Erich Fromm comments on the situation:

One kind of smokescreen is the assertion that the problems are too complicated for the average individual to grasp. On the contrary it would seem that many of the basic issues of individual and social life are very simple, so simple, in fact, that everyone should be expected to understand them. To let them appear to be so enormously complicated that only a "specialist" can understand them, and he only in his own limited field, actually--and often intentionally--tends to discourage people from trusting their own capacity to think about those problems that really matter. The individual feels helplessly caught in a chaotic mass of data and with pathetic patience waits until the specialists have found out what to do and where to go.

The result of this kind of influence is a twofold one: one is a scepticism and cynicism towards everything which is said or printed, while the other is a childish belief in anything that a person is told with authority. This combination of cynicism and naivete is very typical of the modern individual. Its essential result is to discourage him from doing his own thinking and deciding.

Another way of paralyzing the ability to think critically is the destruction of any kind of structuralized picture of the world.³⁸

The problem of the individual is acute--he may revert to authority, the law in this case, or he may become a cynical relativist: no certainty, therefore no right or wrong, it is

³⁸Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1941), p. 250.

how you look at it. Since both alternatives are disruptive in their logic, an illogical or irrational conclusion must be found, not necessarily to accept the findings of the law but to work with the structure of the law since it strives for certainty. At the same time, the individual must be aware of the imperfection and lack of certainty he is forced to work within.

This seems to me to be the overall problem of the novel, the place of the law and its function in our society. It is a system--a system working to maintain repose or order; yet it is imperfect and is not to be taken as a final authority; here the responsibility must rest upon the individual, as Fromm insists. It is to be noted that Judge Vredenburgh's final statement to the jury places the burden on them: "You will render that verdict that your reason and your consciences approve."³⁹

Ideally too, the law provides a structure or rationale for a code of individual behavior or judgment since in one sense life is a process of judging ourselves or our peers. The law itself will not suffice, for it concerns itself as it must with generalization, which for the individual will not prove totally reliable in given instances of human behavior--again, moral ambiguity. But in establishing judgment on the presence or absence of "reasonable doubt" the law provides a basis for moral judgments.

³⁹The Just and the Unjust p. 378.

What the novel appears to develop is the idea that injustice is regrettable but that it will be. It is a problem man cannot solve totally yet man must be concerned ("I care," says May Topping of The Last Adam). But it is also apparent that the injustice is primarily the result of human imperfection; the law is the work of man and so is imperfect. But it is still a system that works and works reasonably well for the preservation of order. The questions of law and justice, right and wrong, appearance and reality, practice and theory, ends and means, real and ideal are all questions of moral responsibility and in the absence of certainty frequently questions of moral ambiguity. And The Just and the Unjust deals particularly with such problems.

The Just and the Unjust shows the presence of those qualities characteristic of the mature work: unity of time and place; a fully developed reflective character with primary conflicts or choices involving moral ambiguity; use of professional status of the central character to provide a structural device and use of minor incidents within the profession to illustrate universal themes of moral ambiguity, responsibility and commitment.

The relatively high critical esteem for The Just and the Unjust has been briefly noted at the first of this chapter, and the solitary opinion left to refute concerning moral ambiguity in The Just and the Unjust and the novels that follow it is that of Duggan, who insists "although the

crises the protagonist faces are products of misdirected or opposing wills, he is not concerned with their moral or voluntary aspects."⁴⁰ Certainly the first part of Duggan's statement is acceptable, but it is to be hoped that this chapter has successfully pointed out the evidence of responsibility, commitment, and moral choice in The Just and the Unjust.

⁴⁰Duggan, Thought, pp. 609-10.

CHAPTER VI GUARD OF HONOR

The reviews of Guard of Honor were mixed when the novel appeared in 1948. Diana Trilling claimed it was "perhaps the most tedious document of the war effort that has come my way."¹ Brendan Gill, after praising the novel highly, pointed to Cozzens' "failure to commit himself beyond irony."² Gill was one of many who found the book praiseworthy and Diana Trilling was apparently alone in her totally negative review of the book. Since the early evaluations of the novel, Guard of Honor has become highly respected among Cozzens' mature works. Mooney has said, "Of all James Gould Cozzens' novels, Guard of Honor, with its highly sophisticated view of human discipline as it is embodied in the complicated cross-currents of a huge Army Air Force base, is probably the most complex."³ And Duggan has said,

The tension sustained in that book [Guard of Honor] between the folly and weakness of man and man's persistent vitality and strength, together with its accurate rendering of externals, makes it a more satisfying work, a true image of the subject depicted

¹Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review," The Nation, CLXVII (Oct. 30, 1948), p. 501.

²Brendan Gill, "Books," The New Yorker, XXIV (Oct. 9, 1948), p. 128.

³Harry John Mooney, James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of Intellect, p. 99.

and of man's ambiguous station. It is still the best of Cozzens' novels.⁴

In mingling praise with irritation, the early reviewers beautifully pointed up the issues that are still being fought in the Cozzens controversy.

Guard of Honor takes place during three days in 1943 at an air base in Florida. The novel is divided into three parts, each part comprising the action of one of three consecutive days. In general, the novel is panoramic and closer in structure to The Last Adam than to Cozzens' other mature works. Cozzens alternates point of view from limited omniscient, to that of Colonel Ross, to that of Captain Nathaniel Hicks. The scope of the novel indicates that Cozzens' primary concern was with depicting non-combat military life during the war, and Cozzens' own comments in a letter to his English publisher reinforce this conclusion.

I wanted to show that real (as I now saw it) meaning of the whole business, the peculiar effects of the interaction of innumerable individuals functioning in ways at once determined by and determining the functioning of innumerable others--all in the common and in every case nearly helpless involvement in what had ceased to be just an "organization" (I think it ceased to be that when it grew past the point where one directing head could keep the whole in mind) and became if not an organism with life and purposes of its own, at least an entity, like a crowd. . . .⁵

The panoramic is well fitted to such an over-all purpose, and at the same time, reinforces Cozzens' other themes, for

⁴Duggan, Thought, p. 614.

⁵Ludwig, Princeton Univ. Library Chronicle, p. 7.

instance the theme Mark Schorer saw when he said in his review of the novel that its "real concern . . . is power, the hierarchy of power, and the responsibility of power."⁶

Any novel about the military must concern itself with hierarchy, since the military is hierarchical. The hierarchical and the panoramic, however, make this particular novel impossible to summarize, since in trying to give the entire scope of the "organization," Cozzens has brought in hundreds of characters and numerous plots. The most important figure in the military hierarchy of the novel is General Beal, a young major general in the command of AFORAD--Army Air Forces Operations and Requirements Analysis Division. Beal is hot from the wars and is given his administrative position preparatory to a command in the field; in short, he is on trial. If he can handle AFORAD, he will get the job. Beal's Air Inspector is Colonel Ross, a former judge and veteran of the First World War who sees his job as picking up after the General, taking care of him, keeping him fit. Much of the novel is revealed through Ross's point of view and through that of Captain Nathaniel Hicks, a thirty-eight year old former magazine editor whose military assignment is with AFORAD Special Projects Directorate. Hicks' office analyzes and writes reports on any

⁶Mark Schorer, "You're in the Army Now," N.Y. Herald Tribune Book Review (Oct. 10, 1948), p. 4.

ideas or devices being considered for war use. Hicks himself is engaged at the first of the novel in writing a report on fighter tactics.

There are hundreds of other characters in the novel and almost all of these are seen in relation to the whole and many as entities outside the hierarchy. Cozzens carefully examines the personal problems of many characters and the relationship of the personal problems to the total war effort. As Mooney has said, "Guard of Honor is the largest of Cozzens' novels in its cast of characters and the most subtle in its examinations of the various relationships existing among them."⁷ It is probably the relationship between the individuals and the war as well as the interrelationships of the characters themselves that best poses the problem of moral ambiguity and that in turn causes some of the critical disapproval of Cozzens.

As the reviewer for Time magazine noted about Guard of Honor, "The point he [Cozzens] insists on making is that the world is far too wrapped up in different points of view for any one of them to be entirely true, that 'the Nature of Things abhors a drawn line and loves hodgepodge.'⁸ The reviewer might well have gone on to point out that the one thing the human mind cannot stand is the lack of drawn lines; regardless, the point is well made and implicitly supports

⁷Mooney, p. 102.

⁸"Human Odium," Time, LII (Oct. 25, 1948), p. 110.

the presence of moral ambiguity in the novel.

The very fact of the war is in itself a situation contributing to the moral ambiguity of the novel. Early in the novel, Nathaniel Hicks analyzes his feelings and compares his situation to that of Major Post, a one-armed fighter pilot Hicks consults about his fighter tactics manual.

Though the pressure was mildly applied in AFORAD, Special Projects, it was firm. The dismaying sense of it, perhaps the one common denominator in the various feelings of several million men caught up in a war, of the steady, in the exact sense, preposterous, compulsion, oppressed the mind. It reversed the accustomed order and reasoned expectation. Pulled constantly up in blank amazement, a man must ask himself what in God's name he was doing here. The answer Nathaniel Hicks needed was one beyond or behind the accessible and obvious answer, that there was a war on, and since he would probably be drafted anyway, he might as well volunteer; or any feelings about the merits of the contest (which, in a way, did not matter; once the contest began the only issue was beat or be beaten, and this easy choice could command almost anybody's best endeavor quite as well as zeal for right and justice, or the heady self-gratulations of simple patriotism).

These, the accessible and obvious explanations of how you came to be where you were, involved only motives and choices of your own. They hardly seemed good enough to settle the disquieted mind's question, or to still that primary amazement which recognized that it was preposterous. Major Post must find it preposterous to have no left arm. Major Post had always had two arms, in very much the sense that Nathaniel Hicks had always, or at least since he left college, had a rational life, a job of his own choosing which he did very well, a wife and children at a place that he had bought, though not yet finished paying for, in Connecticut; and every motive or choice would have continued him along those lines. Both he and Major Post regarded their present circumstances with dismay and incredulity--not exactly sorry for themselves; not necessarily complaining; but deeply and disturbingly aware that this they would not have chosen.

Here was nothing they had elected to do and then did. This was done to them. The dark forces gathered, not by any means at random or reasonlessly, but according

to a plan in the nature of things, like the forces of a storm; which, as long as heat expanded air and cold contracted it, would have to proceed.⁹

Hicks then, experiencing the one common denominator of the millions caught up in the war, notes that "here was nothing they had elected to do." The situation Hicks and the others are in is not in accord with their wills, has been thrust upon them, and is to each preposterous and irrational. Such a situation reverses "accustomed order and reasoned expectation," by which men like Hicks have learned to govern their lives. To a certain extent war is seen as an event negating choice and rendering moral ambiguity irrelevant by its presence, and it may also be seen as one force in conflict with the moral will of the individual. But within such circumstances, the individual still has opportunity to choose. The relationship between the specific problems of the individuals in the novel and the war is seen in part in the problem of marital fidelity, a condition involving moral choice. Several people in the novel discuss the theory of fidelity; Hicks' point of view is simple:

Though 'twas an angel, 'twas a she! Let irregularly into your life--oh, my God, the trials and tediums, the disgusts and annoyances, the quarrelings and repinings, with which she would quite justifiably plague you when, having enough, you thought of withdrawing! A short course in the dear school kept for fools would learn you that Peace, O Virtue, Peace is all thine own!¹⁰

⁹James Gould Cozzens, Guard of Honor (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), pp. 28-29. All citations from Guard of Honor will be from this edition.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 264.

Hicks' theory of fidelity is sharply contrasted with that of Mrs. Ross who explains to the Judge, her husband, the danger of men such as Hicks being separated from their wives.

"He'll always end by deciding it isn't a matter of what he does, it's a matter of what she knows. He is wrong, of course. Either you see why, or you don't. It is a matter of falsifying a relationship, which has to be a kind of common trust, between two people. If he is, in the very exact phrase, untrue, and she doesn't know it, he may think he's getting away with something. He isn't. He has made it no longer a common trust. He's made an unstable arrangement of ignorance on one side and deceit on the other."¹¹

Mrs. Ross's view is that marriage is indeed based upon common trust and that infidelity is a violation of that trust and therefore a violation of the integrity of the other partner in that union. Hicks contemplates and respects this same attitude in Captain Andrews, who shares an apartment with him, but such a view is not his. At the same time, Hicks is rather complacent in his assurance that he is safe from temptation. But circumstances work against him and he falls. His ego is bruised when a project that would take him back to his wife for a few weeks is taken from him. He is made to believe that the war will go on for an indefinite period of time. He witnesses the death of seven paratroopers. He feels compassion for Lieutenant Amanda Turck, a WAC officer, and he takes too much to drink. The most moral of intentions are brought to nothing under the circumstances. Lieutenant Turck too is brought to her seduction through a

¹¹Ibid., p. 282.

series of stresses that she finds almost unbearable. Her weekend away from duty is ruined when her reservation at the hotel is cancelled. She is accused of homosexuality. Her good friend rejects her.

Captain Hicks must be held responsible for his behavior; his is a moral lapse, but the circumstances that work against him, some within himself it is true, but for the most part those exerted by the pressure of the military and the war, are found too much for him, and to some degree, he must be excused if not forgiven. What is most important to understand is that Hicks' moral lapse is the result of the circumstances of war. Hicks does not want to be unfaithful; as Eisinger put it, "It is almost against their mutual wills that they thus act, as if the circumstances of their particular time and place had simply taken charge."¹² The circumstances Eisinger refers to are those made by the war that Hicks is involved in. Hicks takes his job seriously, as seriously as he can, considering the possibility that his project will probably be obsolete before it is finished. When General Beal first offers him a chance to do some work on putting an article together publicizing AFORAD, Hicks does not like the idea, he sees it as unimportant, certainly not as important to the war as is his manual on fighter

¹²Chester E. Eisinger, "The American War Novel: An Affirming Flame," The Pacific Spectator, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1955), p. 285.

tactics. But he is extremely disappointed when the General decides to discard the project, which would require him to go East and confer with magazine editors, for then Hicks realizes that he has been planning to use some of the time given to him to spend with his family. He is faced with the moral issue of accepting the General's rejection or trying to further his project to publicize AFORAD for his own selfish purposes. Morally, his choice should be to content himself with the rejection of the project, but Hicks presses for the article. Later, under the influence of liquor and shortly before he and Lieutenant Turck go to bed together, Hicks claims that he is glad the project has been killed, that he was wrong to look after his interest in this way.

In part, what Cozzens is showing in this episode is the conflict that every man must feel when his aims work against those of a greater cause, in this case the war. What is good for Nathaniel Hicks is not necessarily good for the war, and depending on one's loyalty, the question has greater or lesser significance. In a sense, Hicks is in the same position that Francis Ellery was in: both are trying to serve two masters, and the result is confusion, but the point is made, I think, that war is a most unnatural situation affecting everyone, that conflicts of interest are inevitable, and that in a way no one is to be blamed for them. As Edward Weeks put it in his review of Guard of

Honor, "the story is packed with episodes which momentarily accentuate the motives of the individuals and the ruthless driving power of the machine of which they are such tiny cogs."¹³ The pressure on the individual in such circumstances is very great; in a way it is especially great for those like Hicks who hold non-combatant positions, who cannot see that they are contributing anything solid and substantial to the war effort.

No one in the novel is exempt from this conflict of interest with the possible exception of General Nichols, described by General Beal's wife as a headquarters hatchet-man. He alone is able to keep his eye on the one objective of winning the war. Lieutenant Edsell, the professional liberal, is never seen doing anything he is supposed to be doing. Lieutenant Colonel Caricker, Beal's "hot-pilot" sidekick, gets fouled up in several ways. General Beal gets his feelings hurt and sulks like a schoolboy; which certainly does not contribute to anything.

There are occasions too when the war simply puts a man in a situation of personal choice that is morally ambiguous. General Beal, for example, earlier in the war is in command of a group of men being quickly decimated by Japanese air power in the Pacific. As Ross reconstructs

¹³Edward Weeks, "The Atlantic Bookshelf," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 182 (Dec., 1948), p. 108.

the situation:

. . . there had been a problem to face and a choice to make, and General Beal could know that he had not fallen down on it. About the second week in March they asked for a volunteer to take one of the last flyable P-40's and try to get to Mindanao with a packet of sealed papers. That man, if he made it, would be out of this; while everyone else was lost. It was not a good chance, God knew, but it was a chance. It was the only chance any of them would ever get. The answer, while not easy, was simple. That a P-40, in the condition of those they had, could ever make Mindanao was hardly possible. If the likelihood of its getting there was greater with one pilot than with another, that pilot must go. He must take the one chance, he must leave his surviving friends to the Japanese; he must escape, if he could, to life and health, to food and comfort; to honors and promotions. Lieutenant Colonel Beal was fully qualified to name that pilot, and it was necessary for him to name himself.¹⁴

If the choice here appears clear and simple, it is not. It may be simple to Beal, but it will not be clear to others.

Picking himself meant publicly concurring in the opinion, only decent when others held it, that no one approached him in skill and resource. Moreover, he must privately go on reiterating the unbecoming boast, giving himself specific instances of his clear superiority, since it was the only final answer to the hesitant, sickening query of his own heart. His heart knew how it longed not to die, and how little it regarded any face-saving argument that this escape might be more dangerous than not escaping. Perhaps so; but what pilot there, if the chance were offered him, would refuse it? Lieutenant Colonel Beal knew, too, all that, at that moment, was being bitterly felt and heatedly said about a more illustrious officer, only last week required, by direct orders, and by a sense of the duty that his high estimate of his own abilities imposed on him, to make his getaway. Colonel Beal must accept the certainty that the story of how he gave himself orders to go would pass from contemptuous mouth to contemptuous

¹⁴Cozzens, Guard of Honor, pp. 20-21.

mouth, not only then and there; but for the rest of his life--or, if tomorrow a flight of Zeros jumped him, or his rickety engine conked out above the Sibuyan Sea, as long as any survivors of Bataan lived. Still, it was simple. Colonel Ross realized that Lieutenant Colonel Beal's temperament and training fitted him to state the problem; and, in this happy case, you could guess what the conscious mind, with its concept of duty, unreservedly replied: I can; while the secret image, every man's fond, fantastic idea of himself, whispered low: Thou must.¹⁵

Beal, then, like everyone else, is pulled by opposing forces and put into a situation in which he cannot win. Later in the novel, Beal, evidently unconsciously smarting from the story that "would pass from contemptuous mouth to contemptuous mouth," is almost paralyzed by what he no doubt construes as cowardice and loss of manhood: his act of freezing at the controls of the plane he is piloting. In choosing to fly out of his desperate situation, Beal's situation is much like Abner Coates's. They themselves can know what they have bargained for, but no one else will ever know and some will always suspect their motives. If Beal, the professional soldier, is confronted with a conflict of interests, others in the novel are confronted even more so.

The alternative to conflict of interest seems simple: become a cog in the machine. But the fact is that humans are humans and not cogs; they can function sometimes on a part time basis as cogs, but not all of the time. Nothing is

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 21-22.

more unmilitary and uncoglike than Lt. Amanda Turck not performing in a military capacity and the same may be said of most of the characters. Becoming a cog is especially difficult when the machine is so complex that the cog cannot see any relation between his function in the machine and the end product of the machine--winning the war. Furthermore, winning the war or the contemplation of the end product undermines the functioning of the man as human as is evidenced by Hicks' demoralization resulting from his thoughts on the war and his subsequent infidelity.

So the very situation the novel is concerned with becomes a moral problem for those involved: to what extent can the individual serve in the grand design which is not his design and has nothing to do with his design?

As Schorer has pointed out, it is Colonel Ross, Beal's Air Inspector, who is the moral center of the novel.¹⁶ And it is to Colonel Ross and his problems that the reader must look to find the themes of Guard of Honor.

Ross's problems are many and without exception are the problems of General Beal. The problems are immediately Ross's by choice, for he tries to save Beal as much work as he can, and they are his because Beal refuses to deal with them after he becomes unnerved at the controls of his plane, an act which he sees as a loss of manhood. The system forces

¹⁶Schorer, N.Y. Herald Tribune, p. 4.

Ross to handle the problems. Beal is not an administrator; he is a warrior. He is not expected to administer beyond picking good administrators to handle the work for him. If his administrators fail him, Beal's superiors conclude that he cannot pick reliable men and is himself defective; the responsibility is finally his. At the same time, it is understood that he can afford to be impatient and can be irresponsible if someone will take care of things. To take care of things is Colonel Ross's job.

The messes made for Ross to clean up are none of Ross's making, nor are they of Beal's making. They are the result of the tremendous machine--the military. Ross must clean them up to keep Beal's part of the machine running smoothly. Basically, Ross has three major problems to solve in the novel. He must resolve what to do with Colonel Caricker, who has involved General Beal in a mess with the Negro officers; he must deal with Colonel Mowbray, an almost senile subordinate of Beal's; and he must decide what to do with the Negro bomber squadron that has caused the military some difficulty.

The first two problems remain at the end of the novel because Beal's loyalty to Caricker and Mowbray prevents Ross from removing them. The third problem, that of the Negroes, is quite complex. They have been assigned to Ocanara and Colonel Mowbray has taken it upon himself to assign them separate facilities. Ross explains to Mowbray:

"This Area isn't the state of Florida; this is a United States Military Reservation. You'd better take a look at Army Regulation two-ten-dash-ten. Your new Officers Club is a public building; like all the other buildings here; and unless it wants to move out, it better extend to all officers on duty at the post the right to full membership. There is also an AAF Headquarters Letter on the subject."¹⁷

But Mowbray displays a paper that his office, a prototype of the organization whose function is to impede and obscure through deliberate inefficiency, has not passed on to Beal.

"It says in these exact words: 'The burden of deciding whether or not there shall be some separation in the use of camp facilities is placed on the local command' --now mark this--'with the assumption that local conditions will be taken into account.' I'm taking them into account. There's my authority."¹⁸

Mowbray's assumption is that the Negroes will make trouble, that the Southern white officers will be offended and that a morale problem will be created. Ross's and Beal's immediate reaction is that no distinction will be made between Negro and white officers. But such a reaction will countermand the decision already made by Mowbray, and countermanding decisions is not good for morale. As Mowbray sees it, it is "losing face" with the Negroes.

The situation is further complicated by the threat of protest from the Negroes, who plan to force their way into the white officers' club. This is construed as a threat to authority and morale and indirectly an impediment to the war

¹⁷Cozzens, Guard of Honor, pp. 169-170.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 170.

effort. The machine must be kept functioning as smoothly as possible at whatever cost.

The race problem is complicated too by the hospitalization of Lt. Willis, a Negro pilot who is deliberately knocked unconscious by Lt. Col. Caricker, Beal's co-pilot. During a night flight, Willis' radio was not working and he could not understand landing instructions from the tower. Lt. Willis then landed his airplane ahead of Beal's, an action which almost caused Beal to crash his plane. The incident between Caricker and Willis is misunderstood by Lt. Edsell, who causes a Negro newspaper man named James to be sent to Ocanara. Through further misunderstanding and additional incompetence on Colonel Mowbray's part, James is taken from the air base after he arrives. He reports to a Washington office and Beal is in the difficult situation of being accused of racial discrimination. From Washington comes a directive that Ross interprets to mean:

Paragraph Four said: In getting out of this, you will repair injury to morale by somehow persuading project personnel that the order is acceptable to them. Paragraph Five said: In getting out of this, you will not undermine discipline by causing anyone to imagine that you gave ground under pressure, and so might do it again. Taken together, they said: In getting out of this, you will under no circumstances, by any action of yours, make such a stink that HqAAF, to the detriment of the war effort and to its own great embarrassment and inconvenience, will have to stand on the front porch juggling a red hot poker while it squares enunciated theory with expedient practice. Now added (but only because Major General Beal surely knew it by this time) was: Failure to comply with these orders, for any reason at all, will constitute disobedience and insubordination; so, watch yourself, Mac!¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 222.

The directive from Washington requires that an order be read to the Negro troops and signed by them. Ross takes it upon himself to alter the directive somewhat by not requiring them to sign. The situation is made more acute because after reading the order to the men their attempt to force their way into the white officers' club will be a clear case of insubordination. If Ross's handling of the situation results in further difficulty, Beal will be in trouble, but as Ross notes, if Beal follows the letter of the directive and still has difficulty, he will still be in trouble. Ross thinks they can work better by altering the directive.

The Negroes who attempt entry into the Officers' Club are arrested. Lt. Willis is presented a medal by General Nichols. Willis will receive an apology from Caricker and will take over as commander of the Negro group. At the end of the novel, it is understood that he has his men in control and that there will be no further difficulty. All that remains to be done is to deal with the two Negroes who led the protesting group into the Club. But before the situation is entirely cleared up, Ross discusses the situation with his wife after she comments on her own depressed state of mind.

" . . . it's everything. I blame everything. I worked so long; I tried so hard--then something comes along, I don't know what, and just knocks everything over. What is the use of it?"

Colonel Ross said: "Don't press me on that point. I will not conceal it from you. I often wonder. I was wondering this afternoon. I am an old man; and the

longer I live, the less I know, and the worse I do; and what, indeed, is the use of it? You can't do anything with people; I have been trying all day. I think Colonel Mowbray is a good man, and he is the biggest fool I know. We are having a little trouble with some Negro officers. They feel they are unjustly treated. I think in many ways they are; but there are insurmountable difficulties in doing them justice. The only people who stood up for them were two offensive young fellows, I think principally interested in showing off, in making themselves felt.²⁰

First to be noted here is the ambiguity of character--Col. Mowbray is a "good man" yet a "fool;" Lt. Edsell and his friend are champions of the downtrodden yet "offensive." The ambiguity of character as well as situation is a deliberate part of Cozzens' world view, as is indicated by Cozzens' statement,

"I think a person can be at the same time officious and devoted, self important and self sacrificing, insensitive and sympathetic. Indeed, I think that is exactly what most people are most of the time. I regard it with indulgence."²¹

Col. Mowbray certainly fits the first category and, of course, other characters fit others, but all are inconsistent and have ambiguous motives--in short, they are in this respect realistic. Ross's attention to the ambiguity of character serves as a prelude to the ambiguity of situation the Negroes are in. The situation out of context is simple, black or white (no pun intended). But in context there are insurmountable difficulties that alter a simple choice and make it complex. The insurmountable difficulties are the

²⁰Ibid., p. 285.

²¹Ludwig, p. 7.

morale of the other officers, who unjustified in their bigotry though they may be, are still important to the war effort. Justice dictates that the Negroes should have equal rights as Ross points out, but the war dictates that the war must come first. Justice is not carried out, but AFORAD is still functioning relatively smoothly, which is the primary responsibility of Beal and therefore of Ross.

It is this situation and the solution to it and no doubt Ross's resigning himself to it that alienated some of the reviewers and that has alienated some of Cozzens' critics. Ralph Goodale commented:

The colonel believes that the airforce has more immediate purposes than social reform, and solves the problem by compromise. The ethical view is what sometimes goes nowadays by the name 'paganism'--the conviction that when we have told what a man is we have told everything, and that we add nothing by saying what a man ought to be. This seems to be the author's belief. It is true that Mr. Cozzens withdraws behind an objective treatment, but his more intelligent characters seem to speak for him in this regard. In fact, it seems to this reviewer that they treat the moral imperative quite cavalierly. A novelist with this creed will appear to one who disagrees to misinterpret moral idealism.²²

If by the 'moral imperative' Goodale advocates doing what is 'right' regardless of the circumstances, Cozzens would not agree. He would point out that the circumstances make 'right' sometimes impossible. Indeed this is what he is pointing out in the situation explored in Guard of Honor. To do what is right, to give the Negroes justice may

²²Ralph Goodale, "Sentiment and Paganism," The Christian Century, LXVI (Jan. 5, 1949), p. 21.

seriously impede the functioning of AFORAD, which would in turn impede the war effort and probably result in other injustices. The military's objective is not 'social reform.' What its purposes should be is not the issue. The limits that Colonel Ross has to work within are defined for him and for everyone by General Nichols, who merely observes that "you will not do what you cannot do." Ross explains this to his wife:

"It is quite important . . . if you have to make the decisions. A great many people, maybe most people, confronted by a difficult situation, one in which they don't know what to do, get nowhere because they are so busy pointing out that the situation should be remade so they will know what to do. Whether you like it or not, there are things you can't buck--no matter how much you want to, how vital it is to you. A parachutist who jumps from an airplane cannot climb back, no matter what. Even if he sees he'll be killed when he lands, he can't. Gravity is a condition, not a theory. In our trouble with the colored officers, we also have a condition, not a theory."²³

To this axiom Ross applies the situation of the Negroes. The theory is set forth by Mrs. Ross who claims that, "'there must be many more, a big majority, who feel that a Negro is a human being, and who want to see him treated fairly.'"²⁴

To which Ross replies:

"That big majority may feel that a Negro is a human being all right; but when you add that they want to see him treated fairly, you're wrong. That is not the condition. The condition is that the big majority doesn't mind if he's treated fairly, a very different thing. The big majority does not want him to marry

²³Cozzens, Guard of Honor, p. 439.

²⁴Ibid., p. 440.

their sister. The big majority does not want to insult or oppress him; but the big majority has, in general, a poor opinion of him."²⁵

In short, the theory and the condition do not agree. Ross says, "I don't say this couldn't be changed, or that it won't ever be; but it won't change today, tomorrow, this week."²⁶ And it is today, tomorrow, and this week that Ross is concerned with, that the military is concerned with in the attempt to win the war. If the premise is granted that the war is the most important issue, then Ross's compromise is the best that can be managed. If the war is not that important, then he chooses wrongly. Ross enters the service to aid in the war effort; stopping to try social reform impedes the war effort. There is the added difficulty of making a reform work, for which there is no guarantee. The moral imperative of Ralph Goodale demands that Ross drop everything and right an injustice. But the fact is that the "everything" is more important to more people than is that particular injustice. This is not to argue for its rightness; it is to argue for its being determined by circumstances. As Mooney says of solutions to the problems:

In Guard of Honor, these resolutions are notably accommodations only; i.e., they do not represent the morally proper solutions to the questions raised, but, like Abner Coates's capitulation to Jesse Gearhart in The Just and the Unjust, merely the intelligent man's effort to achieve the happiest solution which the reality of a given situation will allow.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., p. 440.

²⁷Mooney, p. 115.

²⁶Ibid., p. 440.

This too Goodale considers a weakness when he disagrees with what he claims is Cozzens' "conviction that when we have told what a man is we have told everything, and that we add nothing by saying what a man ought to be." This does not seem to be the case in Guard of Honor. No one is objecting to the theory; Ross abides by the theory, sees its rightness and justice and does not advocate total disregard of it. It is simply that in some circumstances theory cannot be practicably adhered to. As Eisinger puts it, "rigid moral codes do not work because they do not cover many exigencies," but he too seems to agree with Goodale's objection when he qualifies by continuing, "Out of these materials, it seems to me, Cozzens forges a realism that recognizes the dynamism of society but perversely defends the status quo."²⁸ But it is made clear by Ross that a Negro ought to have equal rights, ought to be considered a human being. This is not perversely defending the status quo. That a Negro does not have equal rights is a fact, not an argument that he should not have them. Ross says, "'I don't say this couldn't be changed, or that it won't ever be.'" This is no defense of the status quo nor is it a "cavalier" treatment of the moral imperative, it is merely recognition of the fact that the moral imperative is sometimes impracticable. The moral imperative is a theory of human behavior and human behavior does not often agree with that theory.

²⁸Eisinger, pp. 281-82.

Colonel Ross breathed in his breath and blew it out softly. For himself, . . . for mankind, he could feel the same subduing mortification. There never could be a man so brave that he would not sometime, or in the end, turn part or all coward; or so wise that he was not, from beginning to end, part ass if you knew where to look; or so good that nothing at all about him was despicable. This would have to be accepted. This was one of the limits of human endeavor, one of those boundaries of the possible whose precise determining was, as General Nichols with his ascetic air of being rid of those youthful illusions, viewing with no nonsense the Here and the Now, always saw it, the problem. If you did not know where the limits were, how did you know that you weren't working outside them? If you were working outside them you must be working in vain. It was no good acting on a supposition that men would, for your purpose, be what they did not have it in them to be; just as it was unwise to beguile yourself, up there on top of the whirlwind, with the notion that the storm was going to have to do what you said.

General Nichols was indeed wise, young, if he had these points clear in his mind. The not wholly satisfactory idea--that wisdom, though better than rubies, came to so little; that a few of the most-heard platitudes contained all there was of it; that its office was to acquaint you not with the abstruse or esoteric, but with the obvious, what any fool can see--might as well be accepted, too.²⁹

It needs to be pointed out that one of Ross's premises is that action is essential. Once this is understood, his entire reasoning process becomes moral. When theory does not agree with fact, the individual, if he insists upon acceptance of the theory, is paralyzed, incapable of action. Contemplation and theory are no good without action. Thus Ross never thinks in terms other than those of action. If something cannot be acted upon it is futile to contemplate it. It is futile to consider how to get back into the

²⁹Cozzens, Guard of Honor, pp. 532-33.

airplane once the parachutist has jumped and such contemplation prohibits him from action. Work in vain, outside the limits of the possible, is not good. Implicit is the idea that most of the work done or certainly much of that done is in vain, is wasted human effort; also implicit is the idea that order is the result of man's work. The individual in such a situation is again assessed by Ross, who contemplates Nichol's ideas:

To the valuable knowledge of how much could be done with other men, and how much could be done with circumstance, he might have to add the knowledge of how much could be done with himself. He was likely to find it less than he thought.

He--General Nichols, Colonel Ross, . . . every man-- was so sure to find it less than he thought, because by the time he found it, he was less than he was. The drops of water wore the stone. The increment of fatigue, the featherweight's extra in every day's living, which could not be rested away, collected heaviness in the mind just as it collected acid in the tissues. The experience of seeing, of experiencing, briskly undertaken with the illusion of gain, was, of course, a work of destruction. You saw through lie after lie, you learned better than to believe fable after fable, and good riddance, surely! Or was it? When you came, as you might if you worked hard, to finish your clean-up job; all trash and rubbish cleared from the underlying nature of things; not one lie and not one fable between you and its face; what would you do? You had what you worked for, all clear, open for inspection; and were you downhearted?

Downheartedness was no man's part. A man must stand up and do the best he can with what there is. If the thing he labored to uncover now seemed in danger of stultifying him, could a rational being find nothing to do? If mind failed you, seeing no pattern; and heart failed you, seeing no point, the stout, stubborn will must be up and doing. A pattern should be found; a point should be imposed. Was that too much?

It was not. This discovery wasn't new. What to do about it exercised the best minds of sixty centuries; and the results of the exercise, their helpful hints, their best advices, their highly recommended procedures, afforded you a good selection; you had only to suit

your taste and temperament. Once you knew you needed something to keep you operative, playing the man, you could be of good heart. Your need would find it for you, and adapt it to you; and even support you in it, when those who had different needs, or thought they had none, asked if you were crazy.³⁰

Certainly here, Cozzens goes beyond saying what a man is and tells what a man should be by telling us what man's part is--doing the best he can with what there is. Doing the best he can with what there is not is futile and goes for nothing. The things a man may do are many and the patterns he needs are manifold. Once the need is recognized as essential to being Man, the pattern and the work will be found. To contemplate the grand plan gives little if anything. Ross quotes from the first epistle, verse ten of Pope's Essay on Man, lines 289-92 and contemplates

. . . a few recent random contributions to discord, to harmony not understood.

The hulk of Tarfu Tessie [a crashed airplane], stupidly rolled off on the road, spread its stench of rotten blood. Lieutenant What's-her-name--Turck was sick in a paper bag in the plane they just didn't die in; and Sal threw up the rest of the bottle of Scotch and a few things she had eaten on the dining room floor. Nicodemus said: "I hopes I sees you--"; and the Ocanara Sun unfolded to This & That by Art Bullen. Through the hot night, he heard the drunken voices singing in the lighted hotel and got to his feet. Making impudent speeches, the snotty young lieutenants posed as, and were, the two, obnoxious, only champions of the dignity of man.³¹

And Ross continues his meditations, his listing of disharmony over the past two and a half days. His contemplation concludes with the phrase of General Nichols: "We must do it

³⁰Ibid., pp. 533-34.

³¹Ibid., p. 535.

anyway.'"³² A reiteration of the idea that "if mind failed you, seeing no pattern, . . . the stout, stubborn will must be up and doing."

Immediately upon his attempt to draw some conclusion, evidently attempting to create some pattern that will embrace all the disharmony of the preceding two days, Ross's train of thought is interrupted by the sound of sirens announcing that seven paratroopers have drowned in the lake. Such an incident recalls Nichols' anecdote of the parachutist who could not get back in the airplane once he had jumped and evidently reinforces the idea that any pattern Colonel Ross will attempt to superimpose to fit the events will be more of the idle speculation that is so impractical, so theoretical, so contrary to the conditions that exist.

Such an attitude on Cozzens' part has given rise to much of the irritation of critics. Brendan Gill's review, while praising Guard of Honor in general, listed among the defects of its author an "absence of deep feeling" and a "failure to commit himself beyond irony." There is, of course, no way to scientifically prove Cozzens' "commitment" or his "deep feeling," but evidence may be offered. The passage quoted previously when Colonel Ross contemplates the role of man, that man must be doing, it seems to me, is evidence of both commitment and feeling. Feeling is evident if for no other reason than that Ross's conclusion is not

³²Ibid., p. 436.

founded upon reason, or if his conclusion is, his premise is founded upon unreason or emotion. If there is no pattern, if man can find no pattern, what then? The existential choice of life or suicide. Ross's thinking process picks up after the existential choice and works from "life." Man must be doing, he must act, but such a conclusion is not founded upon "absence of deep feeling." The dignity of man and man's part is implicit in the conclusion that man's part is "doing." Total rationality, unqualified by emotion, must lead to the conclusion of absurdity and suicide. It is true that beyond the emotional acceptance of the role of man Ross's thinking is rational, but this does not negate the presence of deep feeling.

What has led people like Gill, probably, to conclude an absence of commitment on Cozzens' part is the presence of moral ambiguity. Both deep feeling and commitment would be obvious in a novel with a hero who agonizes inwardly and outwardly over the choice that he must make and who in his agonizing postulates what he would do if the choices were other than what they are. But this goes entirely against the grain of the Cozzens hero, or the mature hero such as Ross (and it is the lesson learned of the young hero such as Abner Coates) who knows that there is no profit in speculating upon the choice he would make if the situation were ideal. Cozzens' characters, as several critics have noted, are not often put into positions where they can choose

between good and evil. They are always in a position of public trust and responsibility which limits their choices. Where the choice of the individual alone is considered, Cozzens' heroes are likely to be sticklers for the "moral imperative." For example, Mrs. Ross and her husband discuss a choice that he had to make before the war:

"That was when they were trying to get you to enter the primaries. I didn't want you to; because it was certain you'd be nominated, and virtually certain you'd be elected. You being you, you wouldn't have got on in the State House at all. I did what I could, even so, because I saw the idea of being governor appealed to you; and I knew if I argued, it would simply appeal to you more--"

"It appealed to me very little," Colonel Ross said. "If Clark wasn't going to run again, I simply felt for a while it might be my duty. Of those who signified their willingness to run, I didn't see a man who would be willing, or if he would be willing, who would be able, to keep the State Chairman reasonably honest."

"I know," Mrs. Ross said, "and you wouldn't have been able to handle Oswald, either. That's what I had in mind. You don't understand politicians."

. . . "I would have thought that few people understood politicians as well as I do."

Mrs. Ross reached out and patted his hand. She said: "I meant: you don't understand, or at any rate you never want to do what must be done to work with them. In politics the first job is to get elected and stay elected. If you can't do that, nothing else matters; because you won't be able to do it. With politicians, the question is whether they're going to use you, or you're going to use them. I didn't mean they were too clever for you. I think you see through them; but that isn't enough. To use them, you must begin by making them think they're using you. You don't have to warn them in advance--"

"Well, I find that I do," Colonel Ross said. "If I feel it my duty to put an honest man, meaning in that ease, myself, in the State House; my first care will certainly be to see that my man, meaning myself, is honest. A piece of calculated dishonesty, deceiving Oswald or allowing him to deceive himself, seems a poor way to start."

Mrs. Ross said: "You are getting me off the track. It is only that I think you should notice sometimes that you see your duty as what you would personally prefer to do, not what you know would be in the best interests of other people. . . ."33

This incident clearly points to Ross's idealism and his acceptance of the moral imperative in situations where he can afford to exercise them. It is also somewhat ironic that Mrs. Ross accuses Ross of preferring to do what he wants to do rather than what would be in the best interests of the people. For here she is pointing out Ross's own failures to sacrifice the moral imperative, to stick to the conditions rather than deny the theoretical abstraction. And I think there can be little doubt that Cozzens looks upon his best men as men who would not fulfil the office of governor or any other major political office best for the simple reason that they are too good. They are not Nichols enough, not single minded enough to do the best job. We admire the Octavians but we love the Antonys. Cozzens' heroes, again those like Ross, are neither. They are not totally emotional, for therein lies chaos. But they are not personifications of Reason either, for therein lies inhumanity. They are men who try hard to follow the golden mean and therein does not lie greatness. But it is in such a balance that the mass of men can find their pattern and their work. It is by such a balance that democracy functions; it is within such a balance that a sane productive life is feasible.

³³Ibid., pp. 436-37.

But it is the presence of morally ambiguous situations that probably causes readers to see a lack of commitment among Cozzens' heroes. In all likelihood such critics look at the characters in the light of what they should do if the situation were different, not in the light of what is. As Ross explains to his wife, "' In any human situation, even the simplest, there are more variables than any human mind can properly take account of.'"³⁴ And most men have a tendency to disregard as many variables as they possibly can in an effort to find in any situation simple good and evil sides. This point is made implicitly by Captain Andrews, a mathematical genius who breaks the Navy's code. Hicks contemplates Andrews' abilities:

Here was intelligence in the real sense of the word-- not in the misused sense of mere quickness or smartness, or knowing a few things most people had never troubled to learn. This was a strength and clarity of mind so great that it could hold and view simultaneously an infinite number, or at any rate, hundreds, of bare sequences of digits. Each sequence, and each digit, had, too, a limited, but still large, range of allowable random variations. Systematically, one after another, never forgetting and never mixing them up, each of these sequences with every admissable variation on it must be brought forward and set against the five collections of numerals until one sequence was observed to recur several times as a recognizable pattern interpolated among groups of digits without meaning.³⁵

And yet this same mathematical mind so capable of holding a fantastic number of variables believes quite simply that

³⁴Ibid., p. 438.

³⁵Ibid., p. 150.

"You reap what you sow. Nothing would make any sense if that weren't true."³⁶ Shortly after such a statement of his belief. Capt. Andrews is brought up short by his wife's illness and he relates to Hicks a bit of earlier history of their marriage.

"You see, we'd been married a number of years, and we hadn't had any children; really, because a doctor thought she ought not to. . . . Then Katherine went to another doctor some friend of hers knew; and he told her there was no reason why she shouldn't."
 . . . "So I suppose we believed him; or Katherine did, because she wanted to very much. I guess I believed him, too; though I was a little nervous about it. But if I hadn't believed it, I know I wouldn't have wanted to take a chance. Well, at any rate, it wasn't true that there was no reason why she shouldn't. The first doctor was right about that. And it wasn't that the other doctor, the doctor who told her to go ahead, was ignorant or anything. But he was a Catholic, I found out afterwards, I should have found that out first, of course. It just never occurred to me that any doctor would tell a person it was all right to do something, when he knew all the time it had a good chance of killing her."³⁷

Andrews blames himself for his wife's near death, because one of the variables slipped by him--it never occurred to him that. All of Andrews' fine intelligence does not in any way better prepare him for the exigencies of life and of chance than the minds of lesser men prepare them. But Andrews takes upon himself the blame--"I should have found that out first"--because "you reap what you sow."

Capt. Hicks applies Andrews' theory to the state of things.

³⁶Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷Ibid., p. 350.

Was Captain Andrews getting what he worked for? Were there, perhaps, temporary wartime restrictions on getting what you worked for? No. Not if you could face the too-little-faced fact that war really brought you nothing that peace, mere living, couldn't eventually bring. The large-scale operation was what impressed you--some millions of men receiving at the same time through the same historical events their varying allotments of discomfort and disappointment and discouragement; some hundreds of thousands met occasions to dissolve in unthinkable fear or scream in unthinkable pain; some tens of thousands got an early death; but from which of these would a just and lasting peace secure you? Disappointment? Fear? Pain? Death?³⁸

Hicks equates life with war in several respects. The same conditions are in evidence if more intensified, the pace a little quickened. Andrews is bothered that Capt. Clarence Duchemin, a debased hedonist whose current assignment in special projects is testing the use of carrier pigeons, manages to enjoy himself at whatever he has to do.

"Even the jobs he has to do suit him. All this about pigeons' He likes it. He has fun all day long. Of course, you can see that's what he had all day long in his work, whatever it was, representing those hotels. So, it's the same to him. Nothing makes any more sense than anything else. Take all those women he has. What does he get from them?"

. . . The question indicated only, though it indicated accurately, the nature of his dismay at his own life and times, as today developed them. The pandemonium of these days, the wreckage of sense and order, the all-involving débâcle--this, sport to Clarence, was nearly death to Katherine. It could not be right. Captain Andrews did not think life ought to be like this; and Nathaniel Hicks must agree. Though previously persuaded that so life was, and as a result not now surprised or shocked, Nathaniel Hicks, too, could never think so it should be. The times, with their premium

³⁸Ibid., pp. 358-59.

on Clarence's fun all day long, were wrong.

By "wrong," Captain Andrews did not mean "wicked" or "sinful"; he meant ill-advised, ill-considered.³⁹

Here Hicks moves beyond the state of things as they are to postulate what they should be. War is pandemonium, the wreckage of sense and order. And this is life, except as noted before in its pace and intensity. The only person not bothered by it all is Capt. Clarence Duchemin, to whom one day, one lay, is as good as the next. Duchemin is never cast down, never downhearted. He is the natural man, taking his fun where he finds it. The only thing that would upset Duchemin would be the recognition that life is advised and considered, not chaos. Duchemin is quick to note--to the consternation of others--the natural instincts working. This is what upsets Andrews, Duchemin's assumption that everyone is as he is; what Andrews cannot see is that Duchemin is right. His attitude perfectly adapts him to things as they are, but the point is that the way things are is not what they must always be. Duchemin sees his amorality as the state of things and any deviation from it is affectation. Duchemin's amorality fits in well with the "wreckage of sense and order." Nothing makes any more sense than anything else. This conclusion that Andrews condemns in Duchemin is the same conclusion reached by Ross, who like Hicks does not stop there, but goes on to find value. Hicks contemplates

³⁹Ibid., p. 359.

Andrews' view of Duchemin.

What Clarence got, what his lovely little Emerald, what all the others to him just as lovely, sometimes sooner, nearly always later, gave him in long, nuzzling clinches, in an abandonment of rucked-up skirts, in a convulsive fold with lips glued on lips, was not to Captain Andrews's mind bad or disgusting. How could it be? How did it really differ from what he got, what Katherine gave him? But to get it like Clarence with false variety in an infinite sameness, on any hammock on any porch, on any sofa in any parlor, on any bed in any hotel room, had to mean that that was all you ever got. Such fun all night, like fun all day, precluded the use of reason. You were, to be sure, free of reason's bonds and responsibilities and obligations. Once free of those, whether you wished to be or not, you were free also of affection and understanding, of trust and devotion.⁴⁰

Andrews insists on meaning and sense. He maintains that they are there. His is an act of faith in some ways parallel to the faith of Ross. Andrews' faith is almost orthodox religion, and insistence upon a divine plan, a plan that man adheres to, and not to adhere to it is to forfeit reason. Although Ross never even meets Duchemin and does not know of him, Ross sees that things don't make sense, there is "All discord," and if there is harmony, it is "harmony not understood."⁴¹ But Ross, unlike Duchemin, insists on attempting to create harmony and order. Andrews' view is that the harmony is there and that man won't keep it.

With the abrogation of reason, is the abrogation of responsibilities and obligations. If there is no sense, no plan, there is no responsibility or obligation. And with

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 359-60.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 535.

the loss of responsibility and obligation, human relationships become impossible. Captain Andrews' view of infidelity as Capt. Hicks sees it, is the same as Mrs. Ross's.

Presumably, men being men, he [Andrews] must sometimes have thought of being unfaithful to his Katherine; but Nathaniel Hicks doubted if he ever had been. . . . Captain Andrews would probably see it as unfaithfulness not merely to a person, but to the basic human relation, the vital understanding between human beings. This went beyond anything sexual. It was a trust grown up joining two people together, a solidarity of common interest and common effort--the valuable part of any human relation, the thing that makes it agreeable and good, must be the mutual act of faith and trust; your friend does not hurt or humiliate you. It occurred to Nathaniel Hicks that the fact of physical "unfaithfulness" would never be the thing of moment to the average woman--sexual fastidiousness was probably a male concept. It would be, not the fact, but the thought of it, with its implications of people knowing, and always somebody must know, if only the man himself and the other woman. That was enough. He had joined with someone else to make a fool of her. And she was right, surely; and that was no trifle, unless all trust was also a trifle, without security, without confidence, without comfort.⁴²

Such a statement of faith on Andrews' part, as Hicks constructs it, bring Hicks, a rather tough-minded man of reason, close to tears. And it is important to note that Hicks comments at the beginning of his passage that he "would again have to agree with" Andrews. Mrs. Ross adopts essentially the same viewpoint. Ross does not disagree. This view of the basic human relationship is made clear twice in the novel and is refuted by neither events nor characters--I suggest it is a dominant idea in the novel, a premise upon which much of the novel is based.

⁴²Ibid., p. 360.

As the ideal relationship between man and woman is clearly indicated in Guard of Honor, so is the relationship between man and man. At the end of the novel, General Beal explains his situation to Colonel Ross:

" . . . I'm not any master mind; but spell it out for me and I'll pretty often get it. You tell me what you think I don't know; and I'll tell you what I think you don't know; and we'll get there. Only, I want you to pick up after Pop. It isn't really much, it isn't really often; but watch it, will you?"

"I'll try," Colonel Ross said. "An old man like me, a man I knew once--he was a judge, too--used to say: sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Know what that means?"

"Hell, no," General Beal said. "There are quite a few things I don't know."

"Well, in this case it might mean, who's going to pick up after me?"

General Beal slapped his shoulder lightly. "I could take care of that, when it happens," he said. "I'll do the best I can, Judge; and you do the best you can; and who's going to do it better?"⁴³

The sharing of responsibility and mutual interest that each man takes in the other in respect to the end to be gained for all is the affirmation of life. Beal assumes responsibility for Mowbray because he can do it and it does not hurt anyone, even if it inconveniences Ross somewhat. Ross should rest content because he knows that Beal will "pick up" the chips that Ross leaves.

This idea is strengthened when Ross comments on the value of a guard of honor for the dead Col. Woodman.

⁴³Ibid., p. 631.

"It does us good. Ceremony is for us. The guard, or as I think we now prefer to call it, escort of honor is a suitable mark of our regret for mortality and our respect for service--we hope, good; but if bad or indifferent, at least long. When you are as old as I am you will realize that it ought to get a man something. For our sake, not his. Not much; but something. Something people can see."⁴⁴

These then are the positive values and ideals the novel sets forward. Mutual respect and consideration that embraces and accepts responsibility for the purpose of achieving the end through work or service. Such goals are, it is to be admitted, theoretical; however, they are goals; if they are man made and fallible, they are yet the only goals possible in the twentieth century to the man of reason. If circumstances postpone the achievement of those goals, that is unfortunate, but it is no part of man to be downhearted about it. Hicks, who agrees with Andrews' views of marital fidelity, is within twenty-four hours in bed with Lt. Turck. If the ideals are not always possible, they serve nevertheless to give direction and to provide pattern to an otherwise patternless directionless existence.

Again it should be pointed out that such an acceptance indicates Cozzens' commitment and indicates that he goes beyond saying what a man is and tells what a man should be. If such theory is contrasted with fact, with infidelity, with failure, with mistakes, it is simply because infidelity, failure, and mistakes are conditions that must be accounted for in the judgment of one's fellow man, and such judgments

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 594.

are the constant concern of Cozzens' heroes.

As Bracher has said,

. . . the author seems to go out of his way, by dwelling on their limitations, to cut them [Cozzens' heroes] down to life size. But perhaps for this very reason they carry the impact of reality. Middle-aged and unromantic, they are admirable because they have accepted the obligations of maturity; having found some faith to keep them operative, they stand up and do the best they can with what there is.⁴⁵

And as Mooney has said of Guard of Honor,

. . . it is Colonel Ross who . . . enunciates the theme of the novel, for it is he who stands at the center of the complex organism of Ocanara, and who comes to understand the way in which power and circumstances correct and limit each other in accordance with no ideal definition of discipline, but simply in relation to the immutable laws of human existence and the various impulses towards disorder which that existence generates. Consequently, it is Colonel Ross who sees anew that there is something deeply affirmative in man's efforts to correct the failures of the organism of which he forms a part, and who recognizes something heroic in his only partial success.⁴⁶

By dwelling upon the limitations faced by Colonel Ross and Cozzens' heroes in general, Mooney and Bracher point up the ambiguity of human behavior and choice. The limitations force ambiguity by making the ideal impossible or impracticable. Such limitations do not make of man anything less than he is; they offer him, within a set of restrictions, choices that allow him dignity and love and faith. It would appear that the many accusations concerning Cozzens'

⁴⁵Frederick Bracher, Pacific Spectator, p. 62.

⁴⁶Mooney, p. 121.

lack of commitment and his lack of feeling stem from a failure to understand or to accept the basic premise he works from--the moral ambiguity of most situations that man finds himself in. Thus moral ambiguity is central to Cozzens' other themes of order versus chaos; reason versus passion; life versus death; and the dignity of man. What the rational man seeks is harmony and order and it is not to be found in the nature of things. The nature of things is chaos; the morality of things is coherent. What order there is must be superimposed by people like Ross, and that order is necessarily governed as closely as possible by principles of right and wrong. These principles are not perfect because they are not a part of the nature of things, because they are superimpositions; therefore they are not absolutely attainable, but they are the goals for which men strive and they are the guideposts by which men try to live and without them "all chaos is come again." In the Cozzens novel to live with awareness of death is to be committed to life and to work within that awareness is to accept the moral imperative.

Thus the relationship between moral ambiguity and Cozzens' other themes is crucial to understanding Cozzens' work and such a relationship should also clarify a commitment and a morality that some critics either do not see or condemn as acceptance of the status quo.

CHAPTER VII BY LOVED POSSESSED

When By Love Possessed appeared in 1957, John Fischer suggested the book was worthy a Nobel Prize, and few critics were behind him in their high praise.¹ The reaction set in a few months later, led primarily by Dwight Macdonald's article in Commentator.² The controversy that was waged proved little other than that two widely different attitudes toward the novel in general were in evidence. Heinrich Straumann in his article in English Studies shows adequately how entirely subjective most of the critical discussion waged about By Love Possessed really is.³ Those who have bothered to look at the book again after the storm have been less emotional in its praise and in its castigation. If it is not the great American novel, neither is it the ultra conservative document lacking in imagination and genius its original detractors claimed it to be. Straumann indicates that the only legitimate criticism (which is still highly subjective) that may be levelled against the book is its

¹John Fischer, Harper's.

²Dwight Macdonald, Commentator.

³Heinrich Straumann, "The Quarrel About Cozzens," English Studies, Vol. 40 (Aug., 1959), pp. 251-65.

style, which is the basis of Macdonald's attack.⁴ In this respect, Mooney has noted that the style of By Love Possessed is a logical culmination of tendencies prevalent in Cozzens' style as far back as Castaway published in 1934.⁵ Others have noted that By Love Possessed differs in a few respects from the earlier Cozzens' novels, that at most it is a more explicit statement of his beliefs perhaps, but that these beliefs were in evidence in the earlier novels. Such a view is reasonably well founded.

By Love Possessed is the story of two days in the life of Arthur Winner, a lawyer in his early fifties, and it is Winner's point of view that is kept from beginning to end of the novel. During the two days, through Winner's conscious and on one occasion his unconscious mind, Cozzens explores Winner's relations with his family, his friends, his community of Brocton, and his universe. The exploration is in depth and is made so by the various stresses Winner is made to undergo by events occurring within these two days. The initial pressures are not great, the everyday issues of business and family. But by the end of the first day, the stresses become more acute. Ralph Detweiler, the younger brother of Helen Detweiler, a secretary in Winner's law firm of Tuttle, Winner, and Penrose, is charged with rape by Veronica Kovacs, a promiscuous girl about town. Winner is

⁴Ibid., p. 265.

⁵Mooney, p. 26.

asked to defend Ralph and agrees to do so; Ralph's case is made more desperate when Winner discovers that the boy has agreed to marry Joan Moore, whom he has made pregnant. Ralph jumps his bail and Helen commits suicide. The Detweiler episode is one strand of action that is pursued from the beginning to the end of the novel. Another strand concerns the Penroses: Julius, who is Winner's partner, and Marjorie, Julius' wife. Marjorie is a highly neurotic woman with tendencies toward emotional debauches involving liquor, sex, and religion. Her present crisis is over whether she should become a Catholic, a question she hopes Winner, as friendly advisor, will help her to answer. A third strand of action is that provided by Noah Tuttle, contemporary of Arthur Winner's dead father, Arthur Winner, Senior. Tuttle is also Arthur Winner's former father-in-law and a legal expert in financial matters. Winner is concerned that Tuttle may be getting senile and may no longer be competent. This strand culminates in Winner's discovery that Tuttle has been guilty of embezzlement for years. The final and most important strand of action is that provided by Arthur Winner himself, whose story is told through the other stories and by himself as he responds to the actions of others.

The major theme of the novel may be seen in the title itself. John Fischer states it as follows:

The theme of the book is love. Love in all its aspects-- between man and woman, parent and child, friend and friend, individual and community. It is an examination of the rewards and the burdens--sometimes crushing burdens--laid on people possessed by love. And like

all really first-rate novels, it is an exploration of moral responsibility. . . .⁶

Fischer's linking the major theme of love with moral responsibility is no accident, because in Cozzens' work the themes of moral responsibility and moral ambiguity are inherent in the theme of love.

The title of the novel comes from a comment made by Julius Penrose about Helen Detweiler's devotion and sacrifice for her brother, Ralph: "I pity the person; I take her to be mad, possessed by love. Her feelings acted."⁷ For Penrose and for Cozzens, possession is madness, the absence of reason, the dominance of feelings unaffected by reason. And Penrose's attitudes toward passion and reason are seen clearly in his comments on Helen Detweiler's suicide.

"Because of all this virtue, Helen's sorrows, her sufferings, the last full measure of her rash act, put her publicly, in terms of public opinion, unassailably in the right. Everybody must feel that."

Julius Penrose took a sip of sherry. "Yes; I too feel it; but do I think it? An entrance is won to the heart; but to the head? Passion and reason, self-division's cause! I'm afraid I think that this gentle and unspotted soul was and is, has been and now always will be, very much in the wrong. On people as people, I try never to pass judgment--we can seldom know what the real truth about them is. Yet on acts, acts of theirs, I see no reason to hesitate in passing judgment--this is good; this is bad; this is mean; this is kind. On such points, I'm competent, as every man

⁶Fischer, Harper's, p. 20.

⁷James Gould Cozzens, By Love Possessed (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1957), p. 547. All references to By Love Possessed will be from this edition.

is. Like the common law, we secular moralists aren't interested in the why; we observe the what."⁸

In this passage, Cozzens reveals much about the themes of the novel. The problem of judging others Penrose rejects--"we can seldom know what the real truth about them is." Moral ambiguity is evident in any judgment of almost all people because we cannot in truth know what the truth is. We cannot know their motives nor the total complex of ideas and opinions that makes up a motive, but we can judge their acts by judging the effects of the acts on others. It is Penrose's contention that feelings are not to be trusted, that those acting solely from feeling are those acting against reason and against the reasonable, logical, rational world.

Such a world is, in reality, the world of Arthur Winner at the beginning of the novel. The novel begins by stating the theme and Winner's attitude toward the theme.

Love conquers all--omnia vincit amor, said the gold scroll in a curve beneath the dial's right, a nymph, her head on her arm, drowsed, largely undraped, at the mouth of a gold grotto where perhaps she lived. To the dial's left, a youth, by his crook and the pair of lambs with him, a shepherd, had taken cover. Parting fronds of gold vegetation, he peeped at the sleeping beauty. On top of the dial, and all unnoticed by the youth, a smiling cupid perched, bow bent, about to loose an arrow at the peeper's heart. While Arthur Winner viewed with faint familiar amusement this romantic grouping, so graceful and so absurd, the clock struck three.⁹

Winner's reaction to the clock indicates his attitude: his

⁸Ibid., pp. 546-47.

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

"faint familiar amusement" at the "absurd" grouping leaves little doubt as to his superciliousness. Arthur Winner is a rational man, a man with perspective who can look upon the clock and see its absurdity. And no doubt his attitude extends to the statement of the gold scroll. But it is also highly possible that the Arthur Winner who "viewed" the clock is being equated to the peeping shepherd, and like the shepherd Arthur Winner is unaware of the impending arrow of love.

That this is Winner's attitude is seen in his constant admiring recollections of his father, to whom Winner refers as "the Man of Reason,"¹⁰ the rational man governed entirely by his sense, not by his heart, for through the heart lies chaos, madness, disturbance of order. Winner's recollections of his courtship of Hope Tuttle, who became his first wife and the mother of his children--Warren, Lawrence, and Ann--are recollections ironic if sometimes comic, but recollections that chastise the emotions. "By the time Arthur Winner Junior's eye came to cast itself on Hope Tuttle, the resolve to love had made strides."¹¹ Here we see Winner through recollection aware that he wanted love, preparing himself for a state of mind that would allow of love. "He liked Hope's looks; so immediately the resolve to love improved them."¹² Aware now that the state of mind was in

¹⁰Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹Ibid., p. 123.

¹²Ibid., p. 124.

effect, he sees his attachment to Hope resulting from as much his state of mind as from her qualities. And Winner concludes his recollection of his courtship and marriage to Hope:

So many years later, surveying the young states of Arthur Winner Junior and Hope Tuttle Winner, did the mind hesitate, form a query, feel a doubt about what to call their feelings? The doubt was really not particular. It did not reflect on him; certainly it did not reflect on Hope. The gist of the doubt was general; the query only this; All sayings aside, is youth in fact love's season?¹³

The answer not made must be for Arthur Winner a negative, for the love is not mature, not based enough on intellect-- Winner's marriage to Hope lacks the circumspection of Abner's for Bonnie. And Winner's implicit distinction here between kinds of love points to one of the difficulties of the novel. Just as love is explored in all of its relationships, so is love explored in all of its meanings. The stupid indulgence of a Helen Detweiler for a brother corrupted by her feelings is a manifestation of a kind of love, and the animal ruttings of Arthur Winner with Marjorie Penrose shortly after the death of Hope is still another. It is as though all forms of love are and must be manifestations of irrationality. And these are the forms of love that Arthur Winner, observing the clock, can afford to feel so superior to. He, the man of reason, like his father, is not to be caught in the net, shot by the arrow. Love as a general virtue then is challenged from the beginning of the novel--it is a highly ambiguous state of mind, if not of heart.

¹³Ibid., p. 130.

If Winner is in total control of his feelings and sees little ambiguity in love, his other values are relatively black and white as well--in spite of the fact that Winner is a man of some subtlety. The attitudes of others in the novel toward Winner reveal a good bit about his values.

Arthur Winner's mother tells him:

"There's right, and there's wrong; and needing, or not needing, fees hasn't anything to do with it. As you'd be the first to say. If what this man meant to do wasn't right or honest, I know you and Julius Penrose didn't want to appear for him any more than Noah did."¹⁴

Winner's mother is certain of the integrity of the entire firm of Winner, Penrose, and Tuttle. Her black or white reasoning would make Winner's firm a firm of embezzlers at the end of the novel. Winner's moral fastidiousness at the beginning of the novel is such that several characters gently ridicule him. For example, when Winner's mother asks if his family will be present for Sunday tea Winner's Aunt Maud assures Mrs. Winner in the presence of Winner that they will be.¹⁵ If Arthur Winner is a prig, as critics have suggested, Cozzens consciously makes him so. Ruth Shaw, the doctor's wife, says to him:

"Arthur cannot tell a lie! It's nice when you're able to count on something about somebody."¹⁶

And when she attempts a mild flirtation with Winner, who does not quite understand what is going on, she says, "Be off, you

¹⁴Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 79.

caf! You don't know what I mean."¹⁷ And of course Winner does not. He is not an imaginative man at all. He is in many respects rather dull, even if capable of some insights. Like Nathaniel Hicks of Guard of Honor, Winner is confident in his knowledge of the world, and like Hicks Winner is set up for disillusionment by his complacency. Winner contemplates his mother's attitude toward right and wrong.

Matters of principle, she wished to point out, were all settled, all immutable, all clear and simple-- and hardly material for joking. Here was at least one moment when she did not wonder. Being old, she knew! The positiveness, as well as touching, was a little disconcerting when you realized that the things thus known came to neither more nor less than what the girl she used to be had known. Years and years of living had affected no change in the beliefs that were hers when she attained young lady's estate. The convictions of Harriet Carstairs, a properly brought-up miss of eighteen, were hers still. Some singleheartedness, magnificently strong and unswerving, some resolute will-not-to-know, by treating as nonexistent, made nonexistent anything she did not care to know. She was protected from the usual process of experience, from experience's progressive resolving of all things, at first taken to be clear and simple, into their essential baffling complexity. There was, as she said, right. There was wrong. Good was good, and bad was bad. Good people did not do wrong, bad things.

Wrong or bad things were, of course, done; everybody knew that; but, to this grown simplicity of understanding that was also clear and simple. The doers were unfortunate people, people of few advantages or little education, hapless in being too unintelligent to know better. Luella, poor young colored girl, had perhaps abstracted, from a supply she could get at, a bottle or so of sherry not hers. Distressing to think that she would steal--but explicable enough. To Luella's limited mind, the temptation of any opportunity was irresistible. Slips in such quarters could not call in question the honesty and uprightness of the naturally honest and upright.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Ironically enough, Arthur Winner's attitude parallels his mother's. He may feel again a certain superiority produced by his worldly experience, but basically his attitudes are the same as his mother's. Winner, like his mother, has a resolute will-not-to-know. He may probe somewhat deeper in his investigations than she does in hers, but his view and his understanding are quite limited. There is right, and there is wrong, and if he knows that some people of advantages and education are doers of wrong, he nevertheless believes in the honesty and uprightness of the naturally honest and upright, of whom he himself is a member. Winner himself proclaims his place among the naturally honest when he tells Julius Penrose:

"I cannot help what people believe or don't believe. I can only tell you that I have never--" (the voice of one dying said: I've been among the luckiest of men . . .) "I've never found myself in a position--yes; I can say it; I've never in my professional practice--"¹⁹

Here the Arthur Winner who "cannot tell a lie" finds himself forced to qualify and qualify again his natural honesty until he gets to his profession, where he can assert his total honesty. His professional integrity is all that is left to him and this he would keep spotless. He insists upon seeing only the black and white in the proposition offered him by Julius Penrose, who answers Winner's protest of innocence:

"Nor, I can say, have I," Julius Penrose said.
 "No; do not look at me that way. Accessory after the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 561.

fact, if you like, in this matter; but I, too, have never taken nor given a bribe; I, too, have never touched a penny that was not mine; I, too, have never borne false witness, never sworn a man away. Let us congratulate each other;"²⁰

Penrose's argument is that he too is a man of integrity, yet he is willing to compromise his professional honesty to continue the thefts of Noah Tuttle, who, in an effort to sustain or retain the commercial prosperity of a community heavily indebted for a transit lines company that never made money and finally went bankrupt, used individual fortunes entrusted to him to regain the lost money through speculation. In a period of about twelve years, according to Penrose, Tuttle has paid off about eighty thousand dollars, and owes a balance of about a hundred and twenty thousand. He suggests that he and Winner join forces to continue Tuttle's thefts and to pay off the debt. Winner's reaction to Penrose's proposal clearly points to the parallel thinking of Winner's mother:

Arthur Winner said: "Julius, what you seem to be suggesting just isn't possible. There's an honest course; and a course that isn't honest. If you take the course that isn't honest, you're in trouble immediately--"²¹

For Arthur Winner, dishonesty is not possible for rational men because it means "trouble," which is again reminiscent of Capt. Hicks' reason for not participating in extra-marital affairs. As Winner's mother said earlier, "It's absurd to

²⁰Ibid., p. 561.

²¹Ibid., p. 553.

suggest that you, or Julius Penrose either, would ever touch anything dishonorable. I know you wouldn't--any more than your father would have. Or Noah Tuttle would."²² And Winner himself says about his father in answer to Penrose's proposal that they continue the thefts: "'My father would not have thought that way. He'd have pressed, himself, for an audit--'"²³ And Penrose agrees that Arthur Winner, Sr. would have done just that, because it is the honest, easy, reasonable thing to do. But Penrose is quite coherent in defending his dishonest behavior in keeping quiet about Tuttle's thefts.

" . . . recovering from my scare, I found myself rational, able to look at this from all sides. I was free to dismiss self-interest, to do right and fear no man. Whether I'm morally obligated to be my brother's keeper always seemed to me moot. However, my brother's ruiner and destroyer, and for no earthly reason, and for no personal necessity or profit--that I surely have no moral obligation to be. If I'd elected to take the upstanding stand you seem consternated to hear I didn't take; if I'd blabbed my not-exactly-stumbled-on yet unintentionally discovered secret; if righteously horrified, I'd pressed for a C.P.A. audit, the beneficiaries of the Orcutt bequests would have been awarded every cent your father had and every cent you had-- your innocence of the smallest wrongdoing, as you know, notwithstanding. Seeing myself, in your word, safe, I, no longer scared, naturally did not so much as consider such a dastardly act."²⁴

Penrose, drawing his conclusions from the outside--he is not liable because he joined the firm after Tuttle had begun his misappropriation of funds--can afford to be objective about

²²Ibid., p. 13.

²³Ibid., p. 551.

²⁴Ibid., p. 551.

his moral position. To date, he is still not involved; he may plead ignorance of Tuttle's activities and be exonerated. Winner's position is legally different. He was a member of the firm before Tuttle began his activities and as such is liable, regardless of his innocence, and in the event of discovery would lose everything worth money. Since his estate is not a wealthy one and could not cover the one hundred twenty thousand deficit, he would be penniless.

Winner's initial reaction to Tuttle's embezzlement is that Tuttle would have to be crazy to be so dishonest.

Penrose's correction alters the idea but little:

"Not necessarily, not necessarily!" Julius Penrose said. "Emotionally deranged was my preferred term. He would betray himself, sacrifice himself, before he let down, sacrificed, those who had put faith in him. An emotional idea. Ah, what a mess these possessions by feeling may make of lives!"²⁵

And yet it is Penrose who, despite his reason which argues the absurdity of the situation, urges Winner to become a party to Tuttle's embezzlement. When Winner insists that Penrose cannot be held liable and therefore should not involve himself, Penrose replies:

"The law is clear. There is no other view," Julius Penrose said. "But I, also, am human, am not without human weaknesses of vanity and self-regard. I have an--er--honor--" he grimaced--" of my own to pet. I wouldn't, I warn you, feel able to dissociate myself, legally liable or not. If you persist in this quixotism, if you're resolved to ruin yourself, I'll have to join you. . . . I promise you that if you denounce Noah and do not agree to let

²⁵Ibid., p. 553.

me share and share alike in the consequences, I'll have to, . . . denounce my guilty long knowledge of these speculations. Whether it would be enough to get me prosecuted, I don't know; it would assuredly lose me my means of livelihood by getting me disbarred."

"Neither alternative appeals to me in the least. The first--since I'm sure you'd admit me to the first, rather than force me to the second--would cost me a great deal of money. For this loss, hearing on every hand how nobly we behaved would not really recompense me. I am a cripple; I am getting old. Were I neither, it might be different, of course. The easier way, the easiest policy, could then be a calculated risk--possibly worth taking. Given more life expectancy, I might chance it. Honesty, integrity, honor so well advertised, could pay off. Like Job's, my patience might prove worthwhile. I might end up with more flocks, more herds--and even, were I at that age or stage, more sons and daughters--than I had to start with. But such expectancy isn't mine. I'm on the downgrade. Therefore, I ask you not to do this thing to me, Arthur."²⁰

In this exchange Penrose knowingly denies his earlier assertions about his moral obligation to be his brother's keeper, for what he is suggesting is for the benefit of Arthur Winner and the people involved in the funds managed by Noah Tuttle. He further resorts to special pleading in asking Winner not to ruin him. At this point in his discourse, Penrose chooses to commit himself, and his commitment is almost based upon what he would call "emotional derangement." His choice is dictated by his emotions--his love for Winner and Tuttle--even if his emotions are to some extent controlled by his reason. Legally his position is clear. Morally, he is under an obligation, but that obligation is not so great that it asks him to risk his

²⁰Ibid., p. 555.

reputation and his livelihood, which is precisely what he risks when he and Winner become actively involved in Tuttle's transactions. Except in scale the situation for Penrose is exactly that faced by Abner Coates in The Just and the Unjust when Abner could see the dim-witted justice of the peace illegally achieving a justice the law could not achieve.

For Arthur Winner the choice is not easy. In order to ensure the prosperity of many people in his town and in order to ensure the continued prosperity of his immediate family and his aunt and mother and Penrose's family as well, he must forfeit his professional purity, a highly ambiguous moral choice.

The moral dilemma faced here by Winner is beautifully analyzed in the introduction to the textbook, Approaches to Ethics:

In these passages Cozzens reviews a typical ethical dilemma. . . . First of all, what are the facts of the case? . . . a felony has been committed; Winner will be ruined and Tuttle will go to prison if it becomes known; Penrose is not legally implicated, but he chooses to stand or fall with Winner; and Penrose spells out in detail the probable financial consequences for himself, for Tuttle, and for Winner's wife and children. But Penrose also points out a number of other facts that may not be so obvious: no one has been damaged by the embezzlement; no one will be benefited by a denunciation of Tuttle, who is himself an aged and respected citizen. Now notice an important point: when we use such terms as "damaged," "benefited," and "respected," it is by no means clear that we are dealing only with the facts of the case: these terms already involve an element of ethical evaluation. This illustrates the point that, as we try to find out "the facts" of the case, which ought to be the least problematical factors in ethical deliberation, we are gradually led into the area of

values. Nor is this all. Sometimes the answers to questions that are clearly factual are not available; this is especially true when we try to assess the probable consequences of a decision. We know that after we make our choice and act, events pass in large degree out of our control and into the melee of a larger social context--a context in which the consequences of one's act are unpredictable and largely beyond control. Cozzens epitomizes this larger arena in the impersonal workings of the law; it is likely that exposure will be followed by indictment, trial, and judgment.

Second, there is conflict among the principles which Winner lives by; accordingly he must decide which are authoritative in this case. He was imbued from childhood with respect for the law; as a consequence he accepts the principle that the law should be obeyed, even to one's own disadvantage. Merely discussing the question of what to do makes Winner and Penrose guilty of conspiracy to conceal a crime. And there are the still more general principles that one should be honest, that one ought to do what he believes to be right. All these are violated if he protects Tuttle. On the other hand, Penrose formulates for him other principles which he would violate if he were to denounce Tuttle--principles which Winner also accepts: his obligation to his family, indeed to his law partners; to exercise compassion; to "shun immediate evils." These principles, and others, overlap and include each other in a tangle of conflicting demands. . . .

. . . It will be helpful if we stop for a moment to consider the nature of moral principles, or demands. To begin with, they are not merely personal convictions: they are among the rules--usages, customs, norms, mores, as they are often called--that are the institutions in which not only Winner but his entire society live, and on which their common life depends. . . . in a problem such as Winner's, circumstances bring segments of them into question.²⁷

The conflict among the principles that Winner lives by leaves him, if he chooses the course of action offered by Julius Penrose, no rock to which to cling. Throughout the course of the novel, it is made clear that Winner has been deprived

²⁷W.T. Jones, Frederick Sontag, Morton O. Beckner, Robert J. Fogelin; Approaches to Ethics (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 4-5.

of absolutes. He is a sceptic by religious standards and there is no rock to cling to there; instead there is a superficial order that exists for some, such as the faith of the Reverend Trowbridge, a faith to which Winner pays lip service and respect but no more. His family has not been totally rewarding. His older son was without moral judgment and eventually destroyed himself in an airplane. His younger son, as Tuttle points out, is to use the law to his own advantage, "I know about schemes like Lawrence's. Work with cheaters! Not really law. You're peddling influence, or pretending to. Your business is bribery in one form or another--" ²⁸ Through the years, Arthur Winner's sources of faith, like those of Goodman Brown, are stripped from him bit by bit. This is in part why Arthur Winner's two moral lapses occur when they do, if his decision to accept what Penrose offers be considered a lapse. When he discovers Tuttle's embezzlement,

Arthur Winner stood in his continued chill, in a stunned sense of solitariness, as though the early Sunday afternoon world around him had, more than merely stopped, come to a halt, to an end, had dissolved, had withdrawn into space, leaving him on a point of rock, the last living man. He said aloud: "I am a man alone." The silly words, the stilted, sententious sound, jarred him. ²⁹

Winner may conclude that the words are silly, but the situation as far as he is concerned is stated precisely. He is indeed

²⁸Cozzens, By Love Possessed, p. 316.

²⁹Ibid., p. 542.

alone. There is no one to help him with his problem. He is isolated and in his isolation he is terrified until Penrose joins him in his office. Winner's isolation is also apparent to him on the day that his wife dies. In his isolation he is on the edge of adultery with Marjorie Penrose when the telephone separates them. Some weeks later the adultery takes place and probably for the same reasons.

It is true that Winner's terror does not last, but at the end of the novel, when he goes again to his mother's house, he is a much chastened man.

On the mantel, Arthur Winner saw the gilded, the ceaseless ticking clock. In its dead language: Omnia vincit amor, the metal ribband unchangeably declared. Timeless, the golden figures--on feeling's forever winning side, the smiling archer, the baby god; below, the peeping Tom, the naked girl--immobile held their pose; and now--the minutes how they run!--sudden, yet slow and melodious, the unseen mechanism was activated, struck a first silvery stroke, a second, a third, a fourth.

Raised to call back, to answer his Aunt Maud, Arthur Winner heard his own grave voice. He said: "I'm here."³⁰

And this final statement is all that Winner can muster, for the naive Winner, son of Mrs. Arthur Winner, Sr., with such clearly established ideas about what constitutes right and wrong has had his final source of certainty removed from him. The fact that Winner can say he is "Here" is finally in itself something of an achievement; after all, he is now a man of

³⁰Ibid., p. 570.

no illusions. He is no longer able to shirk his behavior and call it the result of temporary insanity--as he has his affair with Marjorie Penrose.

This weight was terrible; yet there was no way to put it off. And so, no knowing how far it would have to be carried, no knowing how long, burdened so, he must daily, hourly, affect to be unburdened. Yes; Julius wasn't wrong. This took courage, this took prudence, this took stoutheartedness. Do I have them? he thought. About that business with Majorie [sic], I could say: That really wasn't I. But this is I. Of this, I am not going to be able to think: I must have been crazy.³¹

Winner's conclusion is based upon the idea that sex is insanity if unalloyed with other feelings, that he can blame sex for his affair with Marjorie, calling it love. But his conclusion to continue Tuttle's embezzlement is also the result of love, not sex, but a balanced sane love, the same kind that Penrose exhibits in undertaking the embezzlement.

In Arthur Winner, Cozzens has presented a man of integrity and propriety, not perfect for he has made mistakes. A prig he must admittedly be in spite of all his many virtues, but Winner is a prig only because he has been lucky. If Arthur Winner holds up his father as his ideal of human behavior, it is because his father was, as Arthur Winner learns, a fortunate man. That his father would not have allowed Tuttle's embezzlement to continue is a fact admitted to by both Winner and Penrose. If Arthur Winner,

³¹Ibid., p. 569.

Sr., the Man of Reason, would have had none of it, it could only be because it was unreasonable. Therefore what Penrose and Arthur Winner propose to do is not just loss of honesty and integrity; it is also unreasonable. Both decide to perpetuate the fraud begun by Tuttle. Both choose the unreasonable course because it is the course of love--not the stupid doting love of Helen for Ralph, or the rutting love of Winner and Marjorie, but a love of one's fellow man--Penrose for Winner and Winner for Aunt Maud and the Reverend Trowbridge and Miss Cummins, his wife to be (their marriage is contingent upon the salary paid by the church and the church's financial prosperity is the result of the Orcutt bequest, which Tuttle manipulates). Thus it is that when Arthur Winner walks through the town of Brocton to his mother's house at the end of the novel he commits himself completely for the first time:

Walking, marching on, Arthur Winner came by the granite bulk of the shut-up First National Bank. Brocton, my Brocton! The courthouse in the trees; the façade of the Union League across the square. Walking, marching on, to his right, now, the building fronts; to his right went by the sober, proper name plate: TUTTLE WINNER & PENROSE ATTORNEYS AT LAW. Over beyond Christ Church's stone-mounded corner opened the vista of Greenwood Avenue, street of his yesterdays. Brocton, my Brocton--yes; and some thousands of other people's Brocton, its ordinary aspects, its well-known sights, owned by each of them--A Jerry Brophy's town, an old Joe Harbison's' the town, now of the Reverend Whitmore Trowbridge, S.T.D., and, following her nuptials, the town-to-be of a little Miss Cummins; the town, now, of a Lower Makepeace Huges, Garret, a respeceter, looker-up-to of honorable men, who knew a good name is to be chosen before riches, and of Agatha, his wife, who

must economize accordingly; the town of a Father Albright in his kingdom, his new yellow brick fortress--city of "Americanism" down there; the town of the tribe whose great name was Revere; the town of some uncertain newcomers called Moore, and Joan, their daughter.³²

Never explicit, it is nevertheless true that Winner's choice is for his town, for his people; his walk through the town establishes his sense of oneness in his isolation. He commits himself to his townspeople, to be of them and with them, and in marching through his town, seeing it with new eyes, he is made aware of the brotherhood of man (in one part of his mind, while another part is very aware of his inviolable separateness), through his new course of action, his dishonest commitment, based upon emotion. Thus it is that Winner at the end of the novel is again looking at the clock can no longer feel its absurdity, can no longer be amused by it, can now see that the archer, the baby god, is indeed "on feeling's forever winning side."³³ And it is to be noted that Arthur Winner has been made a winner, by being won to the side of love, the love that will commit him. At the end of the novel, it is no longer possible to see Arthur Winner as a prig, for he has joined the human race. No longer will his Aunt Maud mock him, no longer will Doctor Shaw's wife ridicule with "Arthur cannot tell a lie," for Arthur Winner is no longer the same man. Reflecting on his

³²Ibid., p. 567.

³³Ibid., p. 570.

past behavior with Marjorie, about which he has concluded that he must have been crazy, Winner now responds:

"I don't know." (I don't know, I don't know, Noah Tuttle mumbled.) In a minute, he thought, in a few minutes, they will face me; I am going to face them. We are not children . . . Julius said. Patient, Julius said: In this life we cannot have everything for ourselves we might like to have. . . . Yes; life which has so unfairly served so many others, at last unfairly serves me--really, at long last! Have I a complaint? Have I, or have I not, been shown a dozen times those forms of defeat which are the kinds of victory obtainable in life? Givings-up--my good opinion of myself; must I waive that? Compromises--the least little bit of crook? Assents to the second best, to the practical, the possible? Julius Penrose said: Be of good cheer, my friend. . . . ["In this business, we're not licked, not by a long shot. We'll come through this." p. 564.]

Agreed, agreed! Victory is not in reaching certainties or solving mysteries; victory is in₃making do with uncertainties, in supporting mysteries.³⁴

Such thinking, such absence of illusion is not characteristic of a prig. Winner's recognition that he is now one of many comes through the realization that life has finally served him unfairly. And in being so served he can find a reason for victory. Winner's announcement at the end of the novel that he is "here" is indeed a victory, a way of saying he has endured if not prevailed. Winner's statement of his presence implies the victory in endurance--mere presence--as well as recognition of the burden of such a victory.

This attitude toward life is quite unromantic. Victory for the romantic mind is usually an intuitive affirmation.

³⁴Ibid., p. 569.

Victory for Cozzens lies in "making do with uncertainties, in supporting mysteries." Arthur Winner is no hero until he comes to this point. Winner before his understanding of Tuttle's embezzlement is a prig, as Macdonald recognized and as Cozzens himself had to realize. He is secure, comfortable, confident, compassionate if somewhat withdrawn--intolerable in some ways and to some critics, unbelievable to others. As Julius Penrose tells Winner earlier in the novel:

"Never believe that afflictions improve character, enlarge the understanding, or teach you charitable thoughts! The man not afflicted, the easy, open fortunate man is the likable man, the kindly man, the considerate man--in short, the man who may have time and inclination to think of someone besides himself. Be virtuous, and you'll be happy? Nonsense! Be happy and you'll begin to be virtuous."³⁵

And this is Arthur Winner before his afflictions; in a sense this is the Man of Reason, his father, throughout his life. And the Man of Reason was aware of his luck, for as Arthur Winner remembers on several occasions:

Arthur Winner Senior, a wasted shape under a blanket, had, on a silent Sunday afternoon, suddenly smiled, had suddenly said: I've been among the luckiest of men. . . . Most of the time mindless, massively drugged, the Man of Reason was briefly revisited by mind; comprehending, for a moment interrupted uncomprehending. Maybe one in a thousand has had it happen to him. Close calls, sometimes; sometimes. I saw that in a minute I might not be able to help myself; but I don't remember ever once having to do what I would have preferred not to do. . . .³⁶

³⁵Ibid., p. 214.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 556-57.

Arthur Winner is not to be one in a thousand; his fate is to be one of the nine hundred ninety nine. He is not offered the opportunity of choosing between simple right and wrong. He is forced to choose between two evils, and this is what implicitly makes man human. Not to face such a choice is to be left without the circle of humanity. Cozzens, like Hawthorne, realizes that man is made human--in the sense of an active, participating being--by participating in evil; in a sense every man, to be a man, must experience what his predecessors have experienced (a psychological equivalent of the biological concept ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny). The Man of Reason is unbelievable in his virtue as is Arthur Winner in his integrity--"Arthur cannot tell a lie."--and Hilda of The Marble Faun is unbelievable and inhuman until she becomes aware of evil and in a sense participates in it. So it is with Arthur Winner, the prig. But the Arthur Winner at the end of the novel can think of his dying father's words and think "And now, all these years later, I know at last what he was talking about. The thrusts of fate! Yes; lucky the man . . ."³⁷ Winner is now forced into a world of ubiquitous moral uncertainty.

As if in answer to the implicit question of how one goes about withstanding the "thrusts of fate," Julius Penrose says,

³⁷Ibid., p. 557

"Is anything a help?" . . . "Well, Marjorie's coreligionists-to-be have a formula. They say: Offer it, or offer it [resentment] up. Possibly useful, one perceives. You set yourself to make believe that all misfortune, all pain, has point or purpose, can earn you benefits. The worse the pain, the better--good, if, or as long as, you can believe so! No go, with me, naturally. The underlying idea of a source of merit--the fawning self-recommendation, the humble currying of favor--repelled me. No; vouchsafe me no vouchsafements! If the supernatural is seen as entering, to curse God and die would always, I can't help but feel, better become a man. So much for a religious attitude. Among the opposed attitudes of irreligion, that one whose complaint is: unfair, unfair, with its feeble indignation and tiresome self-pity, manifestly doesn't become a man either. The becoming thing, in any given situation, is for a man to try what he can do, not just sprawl there whining. He should get up and walk."³⁸

Penrose analyzes his solution to his problem of not being able to walk before he learns to use his canes. His analysis has universal application, however, as well as particular application to Winner's question of how he should bear his burden.

Penrose continues:

"I was impressed by the wanton unfairness of this thing, in those days still generally known as infantile paralysis. Exactly! An affliction reserved for children. An adult, a man past his youth, coming down with it was almost unheard of. Then; why, of all men, me? For my sins? They were many, yes; but look at others I could name to whom this didn't happen. Why should I alone get the dirty end of the stick? All those who find themselves out of luck are, I imagine, subject to such thoughts. We feel very hardly used--and, of course, so we are, so we are! Our resentment's reasonable and legitimate, if that's any help to us. A help to us is, however, just what resentment isn't."³⁹

What Penrose offers first is orthodox religious belief, which

³⁸Ibid., p. 557.

³⁹Ibid., p. 556.

he thinks is fine if someone can accept it but which he and Arthur Winner obviously cannot. Applied to Winner's situation, this means simply that Winner is first asked to look upon his situation as a good--a punishment for his sins, a windfall of trading stamps toward the purchase of his ultimate reward. Next, an alternative of irreligious attitudes is offered--whine or take it. All things considered, it does not take Winner long to choose to live with his burden. What Penrose has tried to get Winner to see earlier is that any man can make a go of it in Winner's earlier situation, that there is no choice, no challenge until Winner must choose whether or not to forfeit his integrity. How to praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue? Winner has not won; he is lucky like his father. And if Winner is honest and cannot tell a lie, it is because, as others implicitly understand and resent, honesty with luck on your side is easy. As Penrose says, "'Honesty's always the easiest policy. Could that be why men so often call it the best?'"⁴⁰

Just as Penrose offers Winner several choices of attitudes toward life--self pity or self sufficiency--so is Winner faced with several alternatives within self sufficiency. Winner faces the alternatives when he is almost driven to anger at Reggie Shaw's medical callousness--"'I'm no lawyer. I'm no policeman. I just pronounce them dead.'"⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 553.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 527.

Winner sees in Shaw's demeanor one front a man may wear for the world.

Here was no more than that opposite truth behind most tough talk--a panicky, impotent little Mr. Moore yelled at himself, with the blustering threat, the loud vaunt, the viperous tongue, hied himself on. Did he sound tough enough? Would someone suspect? Better, perhaps, go further? Better shout louder? Fruitless the effort! The note was ever false. So Reggie meant you to know he was hard as nails? True callousness, cold and contained, true heartlessness, seldom saw occasion to raise the voice. To cry: I don't care would never cross uncaring's mind; uncaring didn't labor the obvious. Sneers, insults, taunts--the voluble bitter tongue's many inventions--were found by feeling, not by unfeeling.⁴²

Winner's initial irritation with Shaw indicates not just an insistence upon decorum but an insistence upon the necessity that a human being feel and sympathize with other human beings in distress. What Winner condemns before he realizes that Shaw's is a protective coloring is that Shaw does not care, does not feel for suffering humanity. Once it is apparent that Shaw's behavior is a mask to keep him from despair, Winner accepts him. Implicit throughout is the necessity that man feel for other men in distress, which is in no way a reversal of Penrose's castigation of possession by feeling. Penrose's attack is not against feeling, but feeling unaffected by reason and the holding up of such feeling for all the world to admire--sentimentality. It must be remembered that Penrose himself is motivated and nobly motivated by feeling. Once Winner is able to pierce

⁴²Ibid., pp. 527-28.

Shaw's mask, he compares his attitude toward life with those of Julius Penrose and Fred Dealey, a judge a few years younger than Arthur Winner.

Not here, the easy stare of contempt, the impetuous accents of a young Fred Dealey rousting to lay with will his lash on those asses (himself included), men. Men's foolies and ineptitudes exasperated Fred, yes; but discouraged by them he wasn't. He'd drive the asses, yet! Not here, the open, illusionless steady gaze, the precise ironic accents, of a Julius Penrose separated, in the rare solitude of an adult mind. from most human beings; with his equipoise of facts envisages and veracities recognized, ready for whatever might come next. Try as hard, or try as long, as you liked: asses don't drive! Sooner or later, you're going to have to take asses as asses are--and life as life is. In virtual freedom from every foolish hope, Julius spoke out the stoic's cheerless--but firm; but manful--word. Now with matter-of-fact grim insight, now with a jest; in scorn of fortune almost impassible, so mostly imperturbable; neither fearing nor favoring; seldom complaining, and when he did, soon silencing himself, he freely said his say. One with hope, one unhoping, those two took strength from true experience (bitter or not) and might be expected to go on taking strength. What terrible, different case was this of Reggie's?"

.....
 What in particular played this late-come havoc? Something complex? Something simple? Something that was both at once, being merely cumulative--One Tom Henderson too many dead on a float? One surgically butchered Arther Winner Senior too many? One too many irrecoverably hemorrhaging Hope Winner? No matter, no matter; univocal was result's result. With a palliative, alcohol (or, looking in dark and desperate eyes, Arthur Winner thought for the first time, a drug?), Reggie evidently doctored his vital wound; and to what avail? For that wound, what drug was vulnerary, in that pain, what poppy would medicine him again to a student's, an intern's, a once-boyish Reginald Shaw, M.D.'s sweet sleep of scientific attitude?⁴³

⁴³Ibid., pp. 528-29.

Shaw's attitude too is the result of experience and like Penrose's attitude it is unhoping, but the answer is that Shaw can take no strength from his experience. His view is just as legitimate as Penrose's or Dealey's. It is not the whine that Penrose objects to; it is a callousness that hides the anguish of the man who sees a world in pain and death. If Winner is right in his surmise that Shaw is taking alcohol or a narcotic to escape, then Shaw is one of those who cannot face reality. His escape is as ignoble to Penrose as the religion his wife is trying to escape into.

"I don't like it, because, to me, it seems a futile little ignominy, a peace-at-any price panic. Silliness in Marjorie isn't new; but this is servile silliness, mean submissiveness. This has the sheer vulgarity of all frightened acts--the cringe of face, the whine aloud for mercy."

. . . "Like it, I cannot! But all that actually, in her term 'hurts' me is seeing a human being so lowered. Cradle Catholic--not born; babies, you might say, are all born protestants--who guesses the priest must know something about religion and leaves all that to him. This is personal. What, Marjorie hears in terror, doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul? Of course, not she alone! This type of terror, though of a womanish cast, is available to men, appears in fact to be true religion's gist."⁴⁴

And Winner should have none of this for his answer. He is to choose between Dealey's and Penrose's attitudes. Either is sufficient because both depend on a recognition of things as they are and both are courses of action involving a dignified human being.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 231.

In recapitulating his alternatives, Winner implicitly answers those critics of Cozzens who insist that he is without deep feeling and cannot commit himself beyond irony:

(Fred Dealey said: I'd really like to be nicer to more people--the stupid bastards!) I must not, because I find fault with myself, start finding fault with everyone. (Julius said: Be happy, and you'll begin to be virtuous. . . .) Virtuous, could you, like Julius, note no more than in passing, note unprovoked, that this age is cheap, this age is maudlin; that today's women must run to religion, that today's men must as well as work, weep--what good was deep feeling when you were quiet about it? How would anyone know you had it?⁴⁵

Throughout the novel, an emphasis has been put upon the irrationality of feeling; feeling leads one quickest to trouble and to difficulty. It is feeling that causes dishonesty--witness Tuttle's emotional commitment to his clients and his dishonesty which he resorts to to save them; witness Penrose's commitment to friendship which brings about his dishonesty. In support of such negative views of feeling there is ample evidence in the discourses of Penrose and in Winner's superiority to the idea that omnia vincit amores. That emotion without reason is bad is a decent generalization, but it is not a universal affirmative for the simple reason that Cozzens is a writer without absolutes. That emotion which is untempered by reason usually leads to distress, but there is an emotion that is in part the solution to existence for those like Penrose and Winner who have

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 565.

had their illusions stripped from them. Man must sympathize with his fellow man--though Penrose would gag over the verbalizing of any such idea--and to sympathize is to love. Such love lacks reason only in the sense that pure reason finally leads nowhere, as May Topping of The Last Adam realizes. Where reason and logic lead, Winner realizes when he contemplates Judge Lowe's question "What's the point of it all?"

Looking where Willard had looked, seeing along the lofty nave in the stained-glass dusk the couple of hundred inscrutable backs of heads, the hats of women, haired skulls of bareheaded men, both enclosing brains, could you attempt to say what was, in any one of them, felt; what was, in any one of them, believed? Some heads of those couple of hundred were older, wiser heads. Did age and wisdom help or hinder a joining without reservation in this practice? How many of them had that faith that overcame the world undamaged by practical considerations, free of the fretful thinking that went round and round--truth can (or cannot?) be indemonstrable and yet existent? It can? To what evident foolishness you have opened wide the door! How right (or, how wrong?), that certain claimed subjective "experiences," certain asserted "revelations," should (alone in all one's small range of knowable things) be exempted from objectivity's everyday tests of true or false. How right? How hard to take! Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. A bit thick?⁴⁶

Here, immediately preceding his crisis, Arthur Winner realizes that he can know nothing. The problem of faith is illustrated for him and he has chosen. But his choice is not within the limits of reason, and so he mumbles at the end of the novel, "I don't know."⁴⁷ His world of super-

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 519-520.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 569.

ficial certainties superimposed over the void of unreason-- the world of fact, of things as they are--has crumbled about him, and one is reminded of Judge Ross's question, where are you when you have stripped one by one the illusions of life from your eyes? This is Winner's predicament exactly and it is a morally shattering experience. The one thing previously left to him was certainty in his profession.

If Arthur Winner begins as a prig, he does not end as one. His experience contributes toward his moral growth. At the end of the novel he is a man with only minimal illusions about himself; every source of faith has been stripped from him and he accepts implicitly an irrational faith in man. If Cozzens is to be seen as opposing the doctrine of progress, opposing feeling, opposing perfectibility, opposing every affirmative that makes for romanticism, he must also be seen as advocating the integrity of the individual. In the spiritual vacuum that Penrose leaves, based on no hope, something must be asserted, and Penrose himself asserts it in the same way that Ross asserts it. Penrose says that man must walk and walk erect. Ross says that when the heart fails you and the mind fails you the stubborn will must be up and doing, that downheartedness is no man's part.⁴⁸ This is, of course, where Winner finds

⁴⁸James Gould Cozzens, Guard of Honor, p. 534.

himself at the end of the novel, not just walking through Brocton, but marching, head erect. His victory is in the face of no victory. His is the victory of Camus's Sisyphus. No purpose, no reason outside of that which is asserted by man himself.

In such a world, there is no absolute and it is the morally ambiguous situation which enables Winner and the Cozzens hero to see the absence of the absolute. Winner's complacency is disturbed only when he is put in a position where he cannot rationalize. He has evaded the issue of his relationship with Marjorie Penrose by referring to himself as not himself, as a man possessed. He has evaded the moral guilt in his highly ambiguous dealings with Jerry Brophy that allow for Ralph Detweiler's case not being prosecuted, a situation which Mooney sees as moral guilt and which Bracher sees as moral expediency.⁴⁹ But Winner cannot evade the issue forced upon him by Noah Tuttle's embezzlement.

Most critics do not believe By Love Possessed to be Cozzens' best novel, and they are no doubt correct in this estimate; however, By Love Possessed is a novel that has been widely misunderstood by those who insist on a simple world of easy choices between right and wrong, by those for whom there is no moral ambiguity, and by those who persist

⁴⁹Mooney, p. 151; Bracher, The Novels of James Gould Cozzens, pp. 261-62.

in their views of what should be to the detriment of what is.

The alternatives offered Arthur Winner are those offered to every man and they are alternatives that are significant in a confrontation with a morally ambiguous choice. For Cozzens the individual's choice should be reality--not the escapes of the Marjorie Penroses or the Reggie Shaws, for they lack dignity. Man's role in this world is as a rational being; only through his reason can he retain his dignity.

In By Love Possessed Cozzens has best answered the charge that he cannot commit himself beyond irony and he has best demonstrated the organic relation between moral ambiguity and the other themes that comprise his world view.

CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSION

From the first hints in Cozzens' early novels, formless and groping, to the complexity and control of his mature work, the element of moral ambiguity has been as increasingly evident as the maturation of style and form. It seems evident that Cozzens' early concern with order, his search for it through the characters seeking solidity, was the basis of the early novels. That the early novels themselves lack form and order argues immaturity and the lack of a coherent world view. The world view, however, matures with the style and structure in the novels since The Last Adam, so that the later work is a coherent statement and an artistic expression of Cozzens' attitudes.

To a great extent, Cozzens' novels follow the pattern of the Romantic mind described by Carlyle's Sartor Resartus: from the Everlasting Nay to the Center of Indifference to the Everlasting Yea--but with important qualifications. They also more accurately follow a statement by Walter T. Stace in his essay "Man Against Darkness." The conclusion to the Stace essay begins as follows:

There is plenty of evidence that human happiness is almost wholly based upon illusions of one kind or another. But the scientific spirit, or the spirit of truth is the enemy of illusions and therefore the

enemy of human happiness. That is why it is going to be so difficult to live with the truth.¹

Cozzens' early novels are concerned with the discovery of this truth, and the theme of moral ambiguity comes into being with its discovery. With the presence of absolutes there is no moral ambiguity. But once the absolutes are destroyed, moral ambiguity is the state of things. From Confusion to The Son of Perdition, Cozzens establishes the absence of the absolute and in the earliest two novels appears to lament its absence.

But Stace, after pointing to the difficulty in learning to live with the truth or in the absence of the absolute, offers at least an alternative, if not hope:

There is no reason why we should have to give up the host of minor illusions which render life supportable. There is no reason why the lover should be scientific about the loved one. Even the illusions of fame and glory may persist. But without the Great Illusion, the illusion of a good, kindly, and purposeful universe, we shall have to learn to live. And to ask this is really no more than to ask that we become genuinely civilized beings and not merely sham civilized beings.²

And here we have the mind of the later novels--The Last Adam and Ask Me Tomorrow. It is clear that the Great Illusion is dead in these novels, but the minor illusions are pursued with a vengeance by the Francis Ellerys and the Geraldine Binneys; the Willevers and Tuppings grope through depressions,

¹Walter T. Stace, "Man Against Darkness," The Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 182 (Sept., 1948), p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 58.

arriving nowhere rationally in their effort to reaffirm the Great Illusion.

When Stace explains or defines "genuinely civilized beings," he offers a clue to the novels of Cozzens' maturity.

To be genuinely civilized means to be able to walk straightly and to live honorably without the props and crutches of one or another of the childish dreams which have so far supported men. That such a life is likely to be ecstatically happy I will not claim. But that it can be lived in quiet content, accepting the impossible, and thankful for small mercies, this I would maintain. That it will be difficult for men in general to learn this lesson I do not deny. But that it will be impossible I would not admit since so many have learned it already.³

The emphasis here must be on the recognition that the minor illusions are minor illusions and no more. Stace does not advocate minimizing them, because they are all that man has, but he must never forget that they are illusions. In forgetting that they are illusions, Cozzens' mature heroes trip themselves in their efforts to walk straightly and live honorably. When Abner Coates and Arthur Winner cling irrationally to the illusion of integrity, they deify integrity. The deity is a comfort and a reason for living; it even provides a form and an order for living, but it is an unreality that impedes when it becomes the Great Illusion. In a remote way, Winner and Coates begin as Andersonian "grotesques" by taking to themselves single verities or

³Ibid., p. 58.

virtues to the exclusion of others and thereby oversimplify the natural complexity of the world.

In his final paragraph, Stace explains in part the purpose of the Cozzens novels:

Man has not yet grown up. He is not adult. Like a child he cries for the moon and lives in a world of fantasies. And the race as a whole has perhaps reached the great crisis of its life. Can it grow up as a race in the same sense as individual men grow up? Can man put away childish things and adolescent dreams? Can he grasp the real world as it actually is, stark and bleak, without its romantic or religious halo, and still retain his ideals, striving for great ends and noble achievements? If he can, all may yet be well. If he cannot, he will probably sink back into the savagery and brutality from which he came, taking a humble place once more among the lower animals.⁴

Stace answers here Colonel Ross's question about where you are when all the illusions are stripped from you. This is where Arthur Winner is at the end of By Love Possessed when he walks, marches through Erocton, a man of the world, not a child with crutches. The threat of chaos seen in the Cozzens novels, the impending disorder averted by the Cozzens hero through great mental effort, is a miniature chaos that threatens to sink back into savagery and brutality those on the microcosm.

The world depicted by Stace is the world of Cozzens. It is the rational mind's evaluation of the state of things. There is no god; there is no purpose; there is no plan existing outside the mind of man himself. Man himself

⁴Ibid., p. 58.

is capable of establishing purpose and plan; but they must be imperfect. The minor illusions that Stace speaks of are sources of joy and comfort, but they are transitory. Stace and Cozzens do not have the capacity for intuitive, mystical affirmation: for them there is no Everlasting Yea of the Romantic. There is an affirmation in both; if it is an affirmation of illusion, it is at least consciously so. The recognition of dignity in walking straightly and living honorably without crutches and props is affirmation too. Cozzens insists on reminding his readers that his characters are mortals subject to bodily functions, ills and weaknesses; in spite of this they retain their dignity and they do it functioning in a world of moral uncertainty.

Cozzens has been criticized for his detachment. His method is said to be "irony" and he is criticized for his inability to commit himself beyond irony. It is certainly true that irony is a vital part of his method, but as James L. Potter has noted:

Like ambiguity and paradox, irony is the result of looking at the world with mature and sophisticated eyes, with the realization that things are often not what they seem, or are considerably more than they seem on the surface. They are the result of the writer's mature vision, which considers experience not in single simple units but as a complex whole whose various parts and facets can enjoyably or profitably be considered in relation to each other. Indeed, the multiplicity which is the basis of irony is inherent in existence, in our experience. . . .⁵

⁵James L. Potter, Elements of Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, Inc., 1967), p. 144.

Potter relates the relevancy of irony to multiplicity and moral ambiguity and successfully defends such a method. It should be equally obvious that Cozzens has committed himself, not in the diction or situations of the intuitive, mystical temperament but in those of the rationalist. The complexity and diversity of the world and the moral ambiguity of it are sufficient for a kind of affirmation, the kind D.E.S. Maxwell sees at the conclusion of By Love Possessed, about which he says:

Cozzens surveys his densely substantiated social landscape through narrative unfailingly tenacious of interest, its composition brilliantly controlled, which expresses a moral vision, in a phrase from the novel itself, "admitting the mystery, awesome and permanent, of life."⁶

The lack of respect for Cozzens' work--or perhaps the lack of critical popularity--stems from the misunderstanding about his lack of commitment. Critics can point to Huck Finn's decision to go to hell as an example of true commitment. And it is certainly true that Huck is faced with a moral dilemma, but it is not a true dilemma. The laws of man that allow slavery are not acceptable--that such laws are acceptable to Huck is irrelevant; the reader knows they are wrong. When Huck violates what the reader knows to be an immoral law, Huck's commitment is clear, but in terms of twentieth century moral choice predicated upon an absence of the Great Illusion, it is a false dilemma. How very differ-

⁶D.E.S. Maxwell, Cozzens (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 6.

ent from the predicament of Colonel Ross in Guard of Honor, who must weigh the rights of man against the lives of men, a true dilemma with no satisfactory answer for the twentieth century reader.

In part too, Cozzens' so-called lack of commitment is the result of his refusal to separate the individual from his society. For some reason--perhaps it is a reaction to so-called Victorianism or perhaps it is a mere extension of the romantic temperament--ours has been a century more concerned with the self within the society than it has been with self and society. There are doubtless periods in a particular culture when one or the other needs to be emphasized. The many sociological tracts of recent years have denigrated the social role of man, have shown his lack of individuality and the loss of that individuality to be pernicious. Although this is the picture one retains after reading The Organization Man or The Lonely Crowd, the point that man has not been totally successful as a social animal is forgotten. The fact that man is more social than individual is, I suppose, evident, but this does not mean that he is more successful as a social being than as an individual. The choice is not one or the other. Man must be both. The individual who is only an individual contributes nothing. He is like Abner Coates at the beginning of The Just and the Unjust, a man who prefers his integrity immaculate and unfettered to anything outside himself. To contribute, man must join society in some way, and he does not have to give

up so much that his individuality is destroyed. Just as the law is designed to protect freedom, in its protection it sometimes hinders freedom. The individual may remain an individual and still function within society and contribute to it. This is what Abner learns. That Abner's commitment is sometimes ignored is the result of the basis of that commitment. Other novelists in a gush of feeling-- and I am not being negatively critical here--rely on the emotional affirmation for evidence of commitment. Cozzens' characters commit themselves rationally and practically. The heroes of other novelists conclude in a state of love of humanity founded upon feeling. When Abner concludes that he will work, his premise that he too loves humanity is implicit, but more important is Abner's basis for his commitment. It is not a mere matter of how he "feels" about mankind. It is a matter of what he is willing to do for mankind. That he dedicates himself not in a passion but in a clear state of mind is even more impressive. If the socio-religious affirmation and revelation of those writers who rely on emotion is more impressive, it is probably less lasting. The almost transcendental experiences of such heroes will fade and flare up, but the rational affirmation of Abner Coates will persist, never reaching the ecstasy of the romantics but never hitting their lows either.

Cozzens' novels explore the nature of man and the nature of his world. For this reason, the mature work,

which is his most articulate expression of his findings, is highly complex in thought and structure. His method since The Last Adam has been to make the situations bear the burden of the themes. His premises, his plots, his characters have all shown evidence of the pervasiveness of the theme of moral ambiguity, which is the logical result of his world view, and the most evident reason for the slowness of Cozzens' acceptance by the critics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Bracher, Frederick. The Novels of James Gould Cozzens. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959.

Cozzens, James Gould. Confusion. Boston: B.J. Brimmer Co., 1924.

_____. Michael Scarlett. New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925.

_____. Cock Pit. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1928.

_____. The Son of Perdition. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1929.

_____. S.S. San Pedro. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931. First printed in Scribner's Magazine, August, 1930.

_____. The Last Adam. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933.

_____. Castaway. New York: Random House, 1934.

_____. Men and Brethren. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936.

_____. Ask Me Tomorrow. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940.

_____. The Just and the Unjust. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943.

_____. Guard of Honor. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948.

_____. By Love Possessed. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957.

Ethridge, James M. and Kopala, Barbara. Contemporary Authors, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1965, Vols. XI-XII.

Fiedler, Leslie A. Love and Death in the American Novel. New York: Criterion Books, 1960.

Fromm, Erich. The Art of Loving. New York: Harper and Row, 1956.

_____. Escape From Freedom. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1941.

Jones, W. T. et al. Approaches to Ethics. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962.

Kunitz, Stanley J. and Haycraft, Howard. Twentieth Century Authors. New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1942.

_____. Twentieth Century Authors (supplement). New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1955.

Maxwell, D.E.S. Cozzens. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964.

Mooney, Harry John, Jr. James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of Intellect. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963.

Potter, James L. Elements of Literature. New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1967.

Unpublished Dissertations

Galligan, Edward. "Within Limits: The Novels of James Gould Cozzens." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, University of Pennsylvania, 1958.

Parrish, James A., Jr. "James Gould Cozzens: A Critical Analysis." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, The Florida State University, 1955.

Wiegand, William. "James Gould Cozzens: And The Professional Man In American Fiction." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of English, Stanford University, 1960.

Book Reviews

Balliett, Whitney. "By Love Possessed," The Saturday Review of Literature, XL (August 24, 1957), 14-15.

Benet, William Rose. "Gruesome Crusoe," The Saturday Review of Literature, XI (November 17, 1934), 285, 289.

Bessie, Alvah C. "Connecticut Town," The Saturday Review of Literature, IX (January 21, 1933), 389.

Blackmur, R. P. "Notes on the Novel," The Southern Review, I, (Spring, 1936), 895-97.

"Books in Brief," The Christian Century, LIX (September 23, 1942), 1154.

Bramble, David. "Cuban Drama," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books, (October 7, 1928), 4.

Britten, Florence Haxton. "A Hard Day in the Vicar's Life," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (January 5, 1936), 4.

Chamberlain, John. "Small Town Life in Connecticut," N.Y. Times Book Review (January 8, 1933), 6, 14.

"Cuban Sugar Planters," N.Y. Times Book Review (October 7, 1928), 28, 31.

Daniels, Jonathan. "The American Ineffectual," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXII (June 29, 1940), 11.

De Mott, Benjamin. "Cozzens and Others," The Hudson Review, X (Winter, 1957-58), 620-26.

"Due Process," Time, XL (August 3, 1942), 76, 80.

"Elizabethan England," N.Y. Times Book Review (November 15, 1925), 8.

- Fadiman, Clifton. "Books," The New Yorker, XVI (June 15, 1940), 113-14.
- Feld, Rose. "It's the Loudest Squeak That Gets the Grease," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (July 26, 1942), 5.
- Gill, Brendan. "Books," The New Yorker, XXIV (October 9, 1948), 126-28.
- _____. "Summa Cum Laude," The New Yorker, XXXIII (August 24, 1957), 106-09.
- Goodale, Ralph. "Sentiment and Paganism," The Christian Century, LXVI (January 5, 1949), 20-21.
- Gorman, Herbert. "Justice in an American Town," N.Y. Times Book Review (July 26, 1942), 1, 18.
- Hays, Arthur Garfield. "Yankees in the Courtroom," The New Republic, CVII (August 17, 1942), 205.
- "Human Odium," Time LII (October 25, 1948), 110-12.
- Hurley, Albert S. "Priest in Manhattan," The Christian Century, LIII (February 5, 1936), 228-29.
- Kingsland, Dorothea. "Men and Brethren," N.Y. Times Book Review (January 19, 1936), 6.
- Kronenberger, Louis. "Ernest Cudlipp," The Nation, CXLII (January 15, 1936), 79.

McFee, William. "'Desperately Interesting,'" N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (September 1, 1924), 2.

_____. "Stephen Crane Redivivus," The Saturday Review of Literature, VIII (September 12, 1931), 117-18.

Marsh, Fred T. "An Urban Crusoe," N.Y. Times Book Review (November 25, 1934), 17.

Meagher, Edward F. "Books," Commonweal, XLIX (October 29, 1948), 72-73.

Paterson, Isabel. "The Web of Communal Life," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (January 8, 1933), 6.

Poore, C.G. "A Strongly Dramatic Tale of Cuba," N.Y. Times Book Review (October 6, 1929), 7.

Prescott, Orville. "Outstanding Novels," The Yale Review, XXXVIII (Winter, 1949), 382.

Price, Martin. "New Books in Review," The Yale Review (Autumn, 1957), 153-55.

Schorer, Mark. "A New Parish," The New Republic, LXXXV (January 15, 1936), 289.

_____. "'You're in the Army Now,'" N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (October 10, 1948), 4.

Shipley, Joseph T. "Confusion Worse Confounded," The Nation, CXIX (July 23, 1924), 100.

"Shorter Notices," The Nation, CXXXVI (February 8, 1933),
156.

Southron, Jane Spence. "A Strong Tale of Catastrophe at
Sea," N.Y. Times Book Review (September 6, 1931), 7.

Stern, Richard G. "A Perverse Fiction," The Kenyon Review,
XX (Winter, 1958), 140-44.

Sylvester, Harry. "Fiction," Commonweal, XXXVI (July 31,
1942), 354-55.

Tilden, David C. "A Department Store Crusoe," N.Y. Herald
Tribune Books (December 16, 1934), 15, 16.

Trilling, Diana. "Fiction in Review," The Nation, CLXVII
(October 30, 1948), 500-01.

Walton, Edith H. "The Portrait of an Egotist," N.Y. Times
Book Review (June 16, 1940), 7.

Warner, Arthur. "Ship's Doom," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books
(August 30, 1931), 12.

Weeks, Edward. "The Atlantic Bookshelf," The Atlantic
Monthly, CLXXXII (December, 1948), 108.

_____. "The Atlantic Bookshelf," The Atlantic Monthly,
CC (September, 1957), 82.

West, Jessamyn. "James Gould Cozzens' Rich, Wise, Major Novel of Love," N.Y. Herald Tribune Books (August 25, 1957), 1.

Woodburn, John. "War: Amateur vs. Pro vs. Children," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXXI (October 2, 1948), 15-16.

Articles

Bracher, Frederick. "James Gould Cozzens: Humanist," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 10-29.

_____. "Of Youth and Age: James Gould Cozzens," Pacific Spectator, V (Winter, 1951), 48-62.

Coxe, Louis O. "The Complex World of James Gould Cozzens," American Literature, XXVII (May, 1955), 157-171.

_____. "A High Place," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 48-51.

De Voto, Bernard. "The Easy Chair," Harper's, CXCVIII (February, 1949), 72-73.

Duggan, Francis X. "Facts and All Man's Fictions," Thought, XXXIII (Winter, 1958-59), 604-616.

Eisinger, Chester E. "The American War Novel: An Affirming Flame," Pacific Spectator, IX (Summer, 1955), 281-285.

Ellmann, Richard. "The American Aristocracy of James Gould Cozzens," The Reporter, XVII (October 3, 1957), 42-44.

Fergusson, Francis. "Three Novels," Perspective, U.S.A., No. 6 (Winter, 1954), 35-39.

Fischer, John. "The Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's, CCXX (September, 1957), 14, 15, 18, 20.

Fowler, Alastair. "Isolation And Its Discontents," Twentieth Century Literature, VI (July, 1960), 51-64.

Frederick, John T. "Love by Adverse Possession: The Case of Mr. Cozzens," College English, XIX (April, 1958), 313-316.

Garrett, George. "By Love Possessed: The Pattern and the Hero," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 41-48.

Geismar, Maxwell. "By Cozzens Possessed," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 51-53.

Hamblen, Abigail Ann. "The Paradox of James Gould Cozzens," Western Humanities Review, XIX (Autumn, 1965), 335-361.

Harding, D. W. "The Limits of Conscience," Spectator (London), CC (April 18, 1958), 491.

"Hermit of Lambertville," Time, LXX (September 2, 1957), 72-78.

Hicks, Granville. "The Reputation of James Gould Cozzens,"
College English, XI (January, 1950), 177-83.

_____. "The Case for Cozzens," The Saturday Review of
Literature, XLII (August 8, 1959), 12.

Howe, Irving. "James Gould Cozzens: Novelist of the
Republic," The New Republic, CXXXVIII (January 20,
1958), 15-19.

Human, Stanley Edgar. "James Gould Cozzens and the Art of
the Possible," New Mexico Quarterly Review, XIX
(Winter, 1949), 476-98.

Leonard, Frank G. "Cozzens Without Sex; Steinbeck Without
Sin," Antioch Review, XVIII (Summer, 1958), 209-218.

Levenson, J. C. "Prudence and Perdition," Critique, I
(Winter, 1958), 53-54.

Lewis, R. W. "The Conflicts of Reality: Cozzens' The Last
Adam," Seven Contemporary Authors (edited by Thomas B.
Whitbread), Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966,
pp. 1-22.

Loomis, Edward W. "Three Notes on Plot," Spectrum, IV
(Spring-Summer, 1960), 94-99.

Ludwig, Richard M. "James Gould Cozzens: A Review,"
Texas Studies in Literature and Language, I (Spring,
1959), 123-36.

_____. "A Reading of the James Gould Cozzens Manuscripts," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, XIX (Autumn, 1957), 1-14.

Lydenburg, John. "Cozzens and the Conservatives," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 3-9.

_____. "Cozzens and the Critics," College English, XIX (December, 1957), 99-104.

Macdonald, Dwight. "By Cozzens Possessed," Commentary, XXV (January, 1958), 36-47.

McKernan, Louis, C.S.P. "Profile of an Aristocrat," The Catholic World, CLXXXVI (November, 1957), 114-19.

Meriwether, James B. "A James Gould Cozzens Check List," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 57-63.

Millgate, Michael. "By Cozzens Unpossessed," The New Republic, CXXXVIII (June 9, 1958), 21.

Nemerov, Howard. "The Discovery of Cozzens," Nation, CLXXXV (November 2, 1957), 306-308.

O'Connor, William Van. "A Muted Violence," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 54-55.

Parrish, James., Jr. "James Gould Cozzens Fights a War," Arizona Quarterly, XVIII (Winter, 1962), 335-340.

- Powers, Richard H. "Praise the Mighty: Cozzens and the Critics," The Southwest Review, XLIII (Summer, 1958), 263-270.
- Rideout, Walter B. "James Gould Cozzens," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 55-56.
- Scholes, Robert E. "The Commitment of James Gould Cozzens," Arizona Quarterly, XVI (Summer, 1960), 129-44.
- Stace, Walter T. "Man Against Darkness," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXII (September, 1948), 54-58.
- Straumann, Heinrich. "The Quarrel About Cozzens," English Studies, XL (August, 1959), 251-65.
- Ward, John. "James Gould Cozzens and the Condition of Modern Man," American Scholar, XXVII (Winter, 1957-58), 92-99.
- Weimer, David R. "The Breath of Chaos in The Just and the Unjust," Critique, I (Winter, 1958), 30-40.

Pamphlets

- Hicks, Granville. "James Gould Cozzens," University of Minnesota Pamphlets On American Writers, Number 58, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1966.