COMEDY: THE UNCERTAIN TERRAIN OF JOHN HAWKES

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COMEDY: THE UNCERTAIN TERRAIN OF JOHN HAWKES

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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To Carol who has developed a great sense of humor.
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ABSTRACT

COMEDY: THE UNCERTAIN TERRAIN OF JOHN HAWKES

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This dissertation examines the nature and function of John Hawkes' comic method. Although most critics acknowledge that Hawkes writes comedy, very few of them agree on the moral nature of this comedy. Chapter I examines these differing responses to Hawkes' work and offers an alternative way of evaluating his humor, based on his own and other critics' comments on comedy. This chapter also suggests that our responses to Hawkes' humor occur on an uncertain terrain where two or more, sometimes opposite, reactions to a text clash, forcing us into continuous moments of indecision.

Chapter II deals with Hawkes' first novel, Charivari, which is important because in it we find Hawkes experimenting with comic techniques which he employs in later novels.

Chapter III explains how comic techniques in The Lime Twig trap us between our emotional, moral, intellectual,
and aesthetic concerns for Michael and Margaret Banks and William Hencher. Comedy forces us to judge these characters' human failings, though we also sympathize with them and recognize our own faults in them.

Chapter IV discusses Skipper's contradictory nature in *Second Skin*, explaining how comic techniques make us question his attractive self-portrait and realize his responsibility for the tragic events in the novel.

Chapter V illustrates what happens to comedy in *The Blood Oranges, Death, Sleep & the Traveler, and Travesty* when we become less concerned with the comedy of character and action and more interested in the author behind the trilogy who is playing with language and form.

Chapter VI deals with *The Passion Artist* and *Virginie: Her Two Lives*. In Hawkes' most recent novels the nature and function of comedy is not always clear because Hawkes seems to treat seriously the same sexual attitudes and practices that he ridiculed in previous novels. This chapter ends by suggesting that Hawkes' comedy is maximized when, as in *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin*, all of our concerns--emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic--are played off each other, so that, as Hawkes himself says, we are challenged "to know ourselves better and to live with more compassion."
CHAPTER I
JOHN HAWKES' COMIC METHOD

For fans of John Hawkes' comedy, there is good news. Most critics now consider him to be a comic writer—something many of us have argued all along. Hawkes himself, from the beginning of his career, has always maintained that he was writing comedy, and in a prefatory remark to his latest novel, *Virginie: Her Two Lives*, he freely admits his comic intentions and his deliberate attempts to parody certain writers.¹ The *Massachusetts Review* has reinforced Hawkes' position as a modern American comic writer by including an excerpt from *Virginie* in its recent comedy issue, which also includes the work of other literary jesters like Robert Coover, James Tate, and Russell Edson.²

But although most critics now seem to accept that Hawkes writes comedy, still very few of them can agree on the nature of this comedy, and some are offended by its apparent implications, questioning the worth of comedy which, they argue, presents a dark, immoral vision.


James Wolcott, in a review of *Virginie*, launches the latest attack on Hawkes' work. He argues that the quality of *Virginie*'s moral vision mirrors the quality of Hawkes' mind, and he believes that there is "something unclean" about that mind. "No matter what riotous coupling is taking place in barnyard or boudoir," Wolcott writes, "one is always aware of Hawkes conducting the action from the pit, at sluggish tempo." Wolcott goes on to say that Hawkes' "imagination has turned into a sick ward" and that it might be best for him "to step out for an invigorating bolt of air."³

Certainly Wolcott's review seems unjust because it attacks Hawkes personally, as well as his work. At least Hawkes' previous detractors leveled their remarks at his novels. *The Goose on the Grave* has been called "unreadable"⁴; *The Blood Oranges* has been described as a "bloodless, academic exercise"⁵; and *Travesty* has been dubbed a "dead and empty book."⁶

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In a sense, Wolcott's review could be said to represent the low point of anti-Hawkes criticism. It began early in Hawkes' career when critics were annoyed more by his experimental writing techniques than his message. They argued that it was impossible to discover a message without the traditional novelistic signposts of plot and character to follow. Even readers who liked such novels as Charivari and The Cannibal wished Hawkes would move more toward literary realism. They felt that his detractors would be able to appreciate his dark visions if those visions were not so obscured by experimental technique and verbal artifice.

Then, as experimental writing became acceptable--even common--critics stopped complaining about the difficult language and plotlessness of Hawkes' novels and directed their anger at the worlds these novels created. And they had no trouble finding evidence that these worlds were depraved and full of unnecessary violence and sexual atrocities. But Hawkes' defenders again came to the rescue. Indeed, much of the best literary criticism of Hawkes' work during the late 1960s and early 1970s opens with a defense of Hawkes and goes on from there. Most of his defenders argued that to view Hawkes' novels as pointless, nihilistic workshop exercises was to miss the comedy of the novels, their "black humor." In a chapter of The Fabulators, Robert Scholes discusses this black humor, showing that The Lime Twig is not morbid or self-indulgent in its apparent penchant for violence. Scholes contrasts a scene in
The Lime Twig—where Margaret Banks gets beaten to death with a truncheon—to a scene in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and shows how Joyce's language emphasizes the physical pain of Stephen Dedalus' pandying, while Hawkes' language tries to avoid the pain of Margaret's beating in such a way that it makes for a curious and comic scene.7

Since the publication of *The Fabulators* we have come to understand some of Hawkes' comic methods, and his name, along with other names like Terry Southern and John Barth, has become synonymous with black humor. And yet the distaste for the "vision" or "message" or "meaning" of his novels still persists. Even someone as annoyed at Hawkes' work as Wolcott is can agree that Hawkes is a comic writer (though he thinks *Virginie* would have fared better under the pen of Peter Devries or S.J. Perlman). But Wolcott can't get past the "orgasmic death rattle of the book,"8 just as other critics haven't been able to get past the murders of *The Lime Twig*, the literal cannibalism of *The Cannibal*, the onanism of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler*, and the scatology of *The Passion Artist*.

It seems, then, that many critics, though recognizing Hawkes' comic intentions, believe that he uses comedy as a


8 Wolcott, p. 14.
pretense to vent a sick imagination, and that whether we wish to call his work comic, strangely comic, or black humorish, it is, above all, sick and dirty. Ironically, Hawkes would probably agree with some of his detractors, since he, too, believes that his writing is not meant to "minimize the terror" of his readers. His "aim," he says, "has always been the opposite, never to let myself or the reader off the hook, so to speak, never to let him think that the picture is any less bleak or that there is any way out of the nightmare of human existence." And yet Hawkes still believes that he can accomplish these goals through comedy and that, in a way, his books are very moral.

Obviously, the key word in this argument is "moral," which is as difficult to define as words like black humor or pornography. As D. H. Lawrence writes, "What is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another." And yet it is easy to sympathize with Wolcott's predicament. A reader may find it hard to defend Hawkes' vision, much less his comedy, when Hawkes himself seems so proud of the way he presents sex and death against a sterile, apocalyptic landscape. In one interview, he comes close to defending

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nihilism when he confesses that his favorite fictions are those "created out of always the nothingness and always pointing toward that source of zero, a sort of zero force." And in another interview, he admits that after one of his readings he felt a "moment of genuine pleasure" when a student came up and asked him if he were the Devil.12

One of the major problems raised by even the briefest survey of the criticism of Hawkes' work, then, is how to explain the large gap between reviews like Wolcott's and those by such critics as Alan Friedman, who in another review of Virginie becomes enthusiastic about the same things Wolcott deplores. Friedman, writing in the same paradoxical language that Hawkes would use to comment on his own works, argues that the ideal readers of Hawkes' novels "hear in the literature of sadism not so much the shriek of horror as a celebration of nihilism, which can intermittently transform itself into a ritual of transcendence."13

At first it might seem impossible to resolve the conflict between views as disparate as Wolcott's and Friedman's.


It appears as if one response necessarily excludes the other. But there is a third response open to us which is dependent upon and yet goes beyond the first two. We can begin by arguing that both Wolcott's and Friedman's approaches to Virginie, and to Hawkes' work in general, have valid points which can be supported by textual evidence. Wolcott judges Virginie from a conventional, moral perspective, and consequently condemns the blatant nihilism and sexual depravity he finds there. Friedman, on the other hand, seems to assume a detached, philosophical stance toward the book, and believes that a new kind of morality is being presented, a "celebration of nihilism."

When we look at these two different responses, however, we must realize that Hawkes himself is not presenting two different visions in Virginie, but that Wolcott and Friedman represent two different attitudes toward what Hawkes is doing. These critics see the same nihilism, the same exaggerated sexuality, but respond to them on different levels. In fact, I would argue that all of Hawkes' novels demand this kind of dualistic response from us. When confronted with such atrocities as cannibalism or rape, we react, firstly, on an instinctive level, often repulsed by brutal scenes or attracted to sexual ones. But Hawkes continually undercuts or reverses our initial responses, making us experience, simultaneously, two opposite reactions to a character or an event.
In *The Blood Oranges*, for example, there is a narrator, Cyril, who is a proponent of free-love. On a very moral level, some critics might find Cyril reprehensible. They might recoil from his sexual preferences, his strange, erotic games, or his treatment of other characters who don't agree with his theories. But, on the other hand, Cyril is one of the most articulate and attractive characters in the book. For one thing, his "sex-song," as he calls it, is often appealing because of its sweet notes; and even if we don't agree with Cyril's idea of "sexual extension" (spouse-swapping), we still, perhaps, can appreciate the language in which he presents it. Moreover, Cyril's theories on sex and love do become more attractive when contrasted with Hugh's dark and sterile approach to those same concepts.

There is, I think, a value to responding to Cyril in these two opposite ways. When we are forced into conflicting views of him, we experience his ideas on love and sex from different angles, sometimes in agreement with him, other times distanced from him. As the novel progresses, though, the author of *The Blood Oranges*, through a number of techniques (mostly comic as we shall see), distances us further and further from Cyril's perspective. Another way of describing what happens to us in *The Blood Oranges* is to say that we begin by sympathizing with Cyril's perspective, then we fluctuate between liking and disliking him, and finally, we end up somewhat detached from him as we move toward the perspective of the implied author, with whose
values and beliefs we are expected to agree. And at the end of The Blood Oranges, I think we do share the implied author's values, which seem to go against Cyril and his sexual theories.

Although the values of the implied authors of Hawkes' novels will vary from book to book, we come to an understanding of these values or perspectives, first, by experiencing many different and often contradictory responses to a text. Comedy is important to this way of reading because it is primarily through comic techniques that Hawkes undercut our original responses to action, forces us to explore complex issues, and eventually leads us to the implied author's values, which we may or may not accept. In Cyril's case, for example, when we begin to see him as a comic character and laugh at him, we distance ourselves a bit from his perspective and see that he isn't what he pretends to be. From this detached position, we are then able to judge him and his theory on sexual extension with some objectivity. But we also should realize that we haven't been able to reach this confident position until we have first experienced the action of The Blood Oranges from Cyril's own point of view. Thus, in The Blood Oranges, Hawkes makes us look at the subjects of Cyril's narrative—sex, love, jealousy—from different perspectives.

Hawkes' humor, then, seems to reveal the possibilities of human experience, and he himself describes his comedy in such terms. "Comedy," he says,
has to do with the multiplicity of experience or with illusion or the fact that any action may be more complex than we would originally think. Comedy involves surprise, and total surprise would have to do with the vitality of life, the potential for life in a human being.\textsuperscript{14}

Hawkes seems to suggest here that fictive experiences, like life experiences, cannot be defined in a clear-cut manner. And he implies that one way we can view this complexity in his work is to pay attention to his comedy. This comedy, as we shall see, primarily reveals itself to us when we look at the stylistic choices that Hawkes makes. Although we are aware of an author lurking behind the action of any novel that we read, it is most important in a novel by Hawkes to see how he plays with language, structure, and point of view. For it is by tampering with these stylistic elements that he accomplishes his goals to never let us off the hook or let us forget that every action is more complicated than we originally think.

Robert Scholes was the first critic to direct his attention to the complex relationship between the meaning, comedy, and style (particularly point of view) of one of Hawkes' novels. He did so, as I have mentioned, by trying to understand Margaret Banks' beating in \textit{The Lime Twig} in terms of the novel's point of view and language. But few close textual analyses of Hawkes' work have followed. In

\textsuperscript{14}Kuehl, "Interview," p. 174.
a way this situation seems strange since Hawkes has spoken so often about the technical choices he makes as an author, and because most of us now accept that a novel's meaning or ideology can be revealed through a study of point of view. Most of us take as a truism Philip Stevick's statement that "point of view determines to a large extent our perception of the novel's value system and its complex of attitudes." "It is even true," he goes on to say, "that in a slightly uncomfortable way our judgment of the worth of a novel depends upon our reception of its point of view." \(^{15}\)

In Hawkes' work, his comedy and style are inseparable, and he himself explains how they work together to reveal the underlying meaning of his dark visions. As he says:

> comedy, which is often closely related to poetic uses of language, is what makes the difference for me. I think that the comic method functions in several ways; on the one hand it serves to create sympathy, compassion, and on the other it's a means for judging human failings as severely as possible; it's a way of exposing evil (one of the pure words I mean to preserve) and of persuading the reader that even he may not be exempt from evil; and of course comic distortion tells us that anything is possible and hence expands the limits of our imagination.\(^{16}\)

Here, Hawkes suggests what elements in his fiction readers should look for: surprise, contradiction, paradox, and an open-endedness which leads us to believe that anything can


\(^{16}\)Enck, p. 145.
happen in life and literature. These elements, of course, have always been at the heart of comedy. And now it seems best to say more about Hawkes' special brand of comedy—how it reveals itself and also how it developed from previous notions of comedy.

One characteristic Hawkes' comedy shares with all other kinds of comedy is that it involves contradiction. Kierkegaard recognized that the "comical is present in every stage of life, for wherever there is life there is contradiction."\(^{17}\) And we can argue that all of this contradiction inherent in life and fiction creates a number of internal conflicts in the reader experiencing a work of art. Consider these quotations:

1) Comedy involves something mechanical encrusted upon the living.—Henri Bergson
2) A laugh detonates whenever there is a rupture between thinking and feeling.—* Wylie Sypher
3) Comedy demands a momentary anesthesia of the heart. It appeals to intelligence, pure and simple.—Henri Bergson

4) "Innocence" is whole and single. With experience comes comic division and duality—without which there is no humor, no comedy.—Eric Bentley

5) The analytic study of laughter is a study of creative communication between the unconscious and the conscious, leading to the experience of happiness in fulfilling one's potentialities.—Martin Grotjahn

6) Are you aware that even at a comedy the mind experiences a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure?—Plato

Each of these quotations implies that the comic response depends upon the interaction of two conditions, two emotions, or two states of mind. We can make a list of these opposites which would look like this:

1) mechanical vs. living
2) thought vs. feeling
3) intelligence vs. heart
4) innocence vs. experience
5) conscious vs. unconscious
6) pain vs. pleasure

Traditional theorists of comedy, in contrast to some modern theorists and practitioners like Hawkes, rely heavily on separating the elements in each of the above pairs. For example, Bergson sees a collision of these opposites as the main cause of humor, and he believes it is the job of our analytic natures consciously to reconcile this conflict. As an example, Bergson gives us the portrait of a man who

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lives his life with "mathematical precision," and he wonders what would happen if the objects around this man were tampered with by a practical joker: if his inkstand were filled with mud, if his chair fell apart when he sat on it, etc. Bergson argues that we would laugh at this mechanical man if he did nothing to check his movements, and instead fell into one joke after another. We would laugh because he was such a slave to habit, so unadaptable to new situations, that he resembled a machine. And we would, as outsiders, reconcile the man-machine confusion by applying our analytic minds to the event. We would surmise that the social significance of the event, its lesson, is that to keep in one piece we must be elastic, adaptable.\(^1\)

Sypher's and Bentley's views are, in a way, similar to Bergson's. Like Bergson, Sypher views the comic response as an abrasive act when thought and feeling, meant to be one, go their separate ways. Bentley further develops the social and moral role of comedy, when he suggests that it derives from a violation of innocence. He goes so far as to argue that the quality of comedy improves as the writer and reader of a text gain life experiences—experiences which make it apparent that life is divisive, Manichean by nature.

These three views (Bergson's, Sypher's, and Bentley's) are representative of traditional theories of comedy because

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they imply that comedy is caused by a violation of reason or the moral order which then must be rectified. They imply that humor is a healthy form of psychic bloodletting, but must be controlled; thus a comic hero can break a moral or social law, make a fool out of himself, but he must eventually be bridled and brought back to the fold or forever cast out. This approach to comedy has been a long-standing one, and even Northrup Frye, writing so much later than Bergson, maintains that comedy should move toward a reconciliation of opposites, toward a "happy ending."  

This emphasis on a reconciliation of opposites is what separates traditional theories of comedy from some of the modern ones, usually lumped together under the vague category of "black humor." The term "reconciliation," which implies a compromise or harmony, creates many of the problems we face when studying traditional theories of comedy. When reading such critics as Bergson, Sypher, or Bentley, we don't sense that the reconciliation they describe is one of harmonious balance. Instead it seems as if these critics are advocating that the comic experience should include a victory of reason over emotion, thought over feeling, experience over innocence.

Unfortunately, these theories are not very useful when we try to apply them to a many modern comic works, especially

Hawkes' fiction, because much modern comic fiction is not interested in reconciling ruptures in feelings and thoughts, in making people feel good or teaching them something. Robert Scholes puts it best when he says that what he calls black humor, experienced in the works of Hawkes, Barth, and others, is not concerned with "what to do about life but how to take it." Nevertheless, modern comedy is very interested in the interaction of opposites outlined above. In fact, many authors exploit the discomfort we experience when we cannot reconcile two opposite reactions to a text. For example, very often, when we read a novel by Hawkes we are not sure how to react to certain scenes; we are left in a kind of limbo with nothing very firm to hold onto.

As already stated, Hawkes deliberately forces us into this uncomfortable reading experience to make us realize how complex human experience is. And when we look at his novels, it seems that one way he makes us feel this complexity is by forcing us into a continuous back and forth movement between opposite reactions to a text. Both Plato and Grotjahn realized the importance of this movement in responding to comedy. Grotjahn suggests that we experience comedy as a creative mingling of two different psychological states. According to him, comedy is an ongoing process, not one we can isolate and analyze like the life systems of an animal.

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21 Scholes, p. 38.
To me, Grotjahn's brief comment in the fifth quotation above seems to be a more complete and active description of the comic moment than Bergson's. His description also leads us closer to Hawkes' comic method than Bergson's does. To be sure, Grotjahn's vocabulary is vague, but for a good reason—because it is difficult to name the exact moment when the conscious and unconscious mingle, just as it is difficult to mark the exact moment in one of Hawkes' novels when an event, which at first appeared horrible, suddenly becomes comic, or vice versa. But we can at least try to describe this process, as Arthur Koestler attempts to in his analysis of comedy in The Act of Creation.

Koestler begins one of his discussions of comedy by referring to a story quoted in Freud's essay on the comic:

Chamfort tells a story of a Marquis at the court of Louis XIV who, on entering his wife's boudoir and finding her in the arms of the Bishop, walked calmly to the window and went through the motion of blessing the people in the street. "What are you doing?" cried the angry wife. "Monseignor is performing my functions," replied the Marquis, "so I am performing his." 22

Because this joke is about adultery Koestler compares it to Othello, a tragic handling of the subject. In the Chamfort anecdote, he argues, as in Othello, "the tension mounts as the story progresses, but it never reaches its expected climax. The ascending curve [increasing tension] is

brought to an abrupt end by the Marquis' unexpected reaction, which debunks our dramatic expectations; it comes like a bolt out of the blue, which, so to speak, decapitates the logical development of the situation. "23

Koestler goes on to say, however, that "unexpectedness alone is not enough to produce a comic effect." We also have to make an act of what he calls "bisociation." That is, we laugh at the joke because it contains two separate and self-consistent "frames of reference," in this case "codes of conduct." The logic of one code of behavior suggests the Marquis will be so angered that he might throw the Bishop or his wife out of the bedroom window. But, simultaneously, we can also recognize another code which deals with the "division of labor, the quid pro quo, the give and take." 24 And this code, too, has its own logic which makes sense to us in another context. It is the "clash of these two mutually incompatible codes, or associative contexts," Koestler argues, "which explodes the tension" and makes us laugh. As Koestler says, we experience a "double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both thought and emotion is disturbed." 25

23 Koestler, p. 33.

24 Koestler, p. 35.

25 Koestler, p. 36.
Koestler argues that all creative acts are governed by bisociation, though his theory works especially well with comedy. The only problem I see with his analysis is that he seems to view bisociation as a rigid act, one we can diagram on a graph, and then show when the moment of intersection between two codes or frames of reference occurs. I see it as a process which forces us to take a chance when we read because we must surrender to the text; we must check our analytic natures. If we don't, many of us will not understand Chamfort's anecdote. Nevertheless, the process of bisociation described by Koestler does help us to explain the dualistic way that we respond to comedy. And if we add to Koestler's ideas another theory of comedy, proposed by Fred Miller Robinson in The Comedy of Language, we come closer to a direct discussion of Hawkes' comic method.

Robinson's ideas on comedy, especially his insights on a comedy of language in the works of Joyce, Faulkner, Wallace Stevens, and Samuel Beckett, are very useful to a study of Hawkes' fiction. Robinson is interested in what he calls a "metaphysical" theory of comedy, which includes "all comedy that has reference beyond the physical and the social, comedy that has epistemological, ontological, theological, or physical dimensions." To arrive at a definition of this

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metaphysical comedy, he relies heavily upon Henri Bergson's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, which he believes has more "profound implications for comedy" than does Bergson's essay, "Laughter."

According to Robinson, in his *Introduction* Bergson distinguishes between intuition and intellect and mentions how these modes of perception coincide, respectively, with mobility and immobility. Bergson writes:

> We place ourselves as a rule in immobility, in which we find a point of support for practical purposes, and with this immobility we try to reconstruct motion. We only obtain in this way a clumsy imitation, a counterfeit of real movement, but this imitation is much more useful in life than the intuition of the thing itself would be . . . .

> The difficulties to which the problem of movement has given rise from the earliest antiquity have originated in this way. They result always from the fact that we insist on passing from space to movement, from trajectory to flight, from immobile position to mobility, and on passing from one to the other by way of addition. But it is movement which is anterior to immobility, and the relation between position and displacement is not that of a part to a whole, but that of the diversity of possible points of view to the real indivisibility of the object.27

Realizing the complexity of Bergson's ideas on perception, Robinson tries to simplify and apply them to a theory of comedy. He argues that:

> The human condition itself can be seen as comic, above and beyond the exigencies and impulses of

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society. What is "encrusted" on us, the living, is our intellect, which perceives in fixed products a reality that is in constant process. The natural, the adaptable, the pliable, the creative, are not strictly social ideals, but the very life of things. So that when we discover the comic, we are not always correcting mechanical behavior, we can be observing an aspect of human behavior that is beyond correction, that is universal. In this sense the comic has a broader range and deeper resonance than the satirical thrusts of comedies of manners (viz. Bergson) or the overcoming of social inhibitions (viz. Freud).28

I quote such a long passage from Robinson's book because, to me, his interpretation of Bergson's ideas represents a highly sophisticated yet common sense description of the comic process. More specifically, his theory is very helpful in understanding how Hawkes' comedy works. Hawkes, like Robinson, is not solely interested in the social significance of comedy. He truly is intent on exposing the inward life of things, and his statements on his work seem to lead us away from a static approach to his comedy. Hawkes suggests, with his emphasis on the creative process, that we can best understand his comedy by giving ourselves up to the text, following its ongoing processes, instead of trying to pinpoint one, static comic effect. "I want to create a world," he says, "not represent it. And, of course, I believe that the creation [the process] ought to be more significant than the representation [the surface content]."29

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29Enck, p. 154.
Consequently, if we demand social significance from the comedy in one of Hawkes' novels, we will be disappointed. There may not be a "correction" of behavior taking place; instead we may be observing "an aspect of human behavior that is beyond correction, that is universal." And perhaps this outlook on comedy explains why some traditional theories of the comic are not very applicable to many modern works, which use experimental writing techniques to reveal comedy. Traditional theories, stressing the end of the comic process, often overlook the ongoing comedy which takes place as a novel unfolds. Traditional theorists are in too much of a hurry to stop the action of a novel and order it.

William F. Lynch, S.J. calls the kind of mind that is responsible for older and more static approaches to comedy, and to literature in general, a "univocal mind." It is a mind, he writes, which descends "through diversities, densities and maelstroms of reality in such a way as to give absolute shape to it through these unities and orderings . . . it cannot abide the intractable differences, zigzags and surprise of the actual." In contrast to this

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univocal mind, is what he calls an "analogical mind," an imagination receptive to paradox, in "keeping the same and the different, the idea and the detailed, tightly interlocked in one imaginative act."\(^31\)

The type of comic response Lynch advocates here sounds similar to the way Koestler describes bisociation, especially in Lynch's acceptance of paradox. Both Lynch and Koestler seem to realize how difficult it is for us, as we experience comedy, to embrace opposites in "one imaginative act." This response is especially hard when we read a novel by Hawkes. When faced with the grotesque content and difficult writing style of most of Hawkes' fiction, we naturally feel uncomfortable. Consequently, we have the urge to give into our "univocal" sides, so that we can make quick judgments on a novel's upsetting content and place order on a style which self-consciously tries to disorient us. But we must check our compulsion to order if we truly want to experience the comedy and complexity of one of Hawkes' novels. We must accept the contradictions in one of his books and not try to reconcile them; and we must guess at why he chooses the form and content that he does. We can see how this approach to reading Hawkes' novels works by briefly looking at a scene in *The Lime Twig* in which Margaret Banks is beaten.

unconscious with a truncheon by Larry the Limousine's thug, appropriately named Thick.

On the surface, this beating is horrible, made even more horrible because we witness it from Margaret's point of view. But Margaret's reactions to the beating overthrow some of our initial expectations. She doesn't think the crime is actually happening. She thinks: "it was something done to abducted girls, that's all." This surprises us. We know she should hate what is happening to her (what our emotions tell us would be a normal response), or enjoy it (what we would consider the abnormal response of a masochist, yet one we could still accept intellectually because we are familiar with the concept masochism). But Margaret's responses fall somewhere in between; and instead of becoming a sympathetic character, she becomes a ridiculous one. We find out that "she only wanted a little comfort, a bit of charity." From whom? The brute Thick, or Larry who will later rape her before she dies? Her inappropriate responses to the beating itself are even more ridiculous than her expectations of her abductors. She views the truncheon, the same truncheon which will cause her death, as a "bean bag, an amusement for a child" (127); she thinks the uncomfortable position

she is tied in might be good for her figure (122); and she considers how inappropriately she is dressed (130). How is one supposed to dress for a beating? we ask.

What happens in this scene, then, is that we detach ourselves from the gross details of the beating once we get into Margaret's head and see the event through her unperceptive eyes. In a sense, the scene becomes comic for some of the same reasons Koestler's anecdote about the Bishop and the Marquis is comic. Margaret is funny for two reasons: first, because she acts unexpectedly; secondly, because she confuses two codes of behavior. That is, she takes an accepted code of behavior, that one should dress properly for certain occasions, and applies it to a situation where that code of behavior doesn't apply. But if we laugh at her, it is a strange laughter tempered by our emotions, by the fact that although her responses may be inappropriately comic, she is still a human being, basically harmless, who is being beaten to death, and therefore merits our compassion.

In this brief look at Margaret's beating, then, we can see many of the characteristics of comedy we will encounter throughout this study of Hawkes. For one thing, we can note, as Plato, Grotjahn, and Hawkes himself have, how important it is for us, when experiencing comedy, to move continuously back and forth between opposite reactions to a comic event. In the beating scene, for example, we feel sorry for Margaret, we don't, then we do again, and
so on. Admittedly, the uncertainty of this response unsettles us. As Lynch says, the orderly sides of our minds cannot abide "intractable differences, zigzags," paradoxes; and yet we must accept our contradictory responses to the beating scene if we wish to understand its comedy and complexity, if we wish to see that "any action may be more complicated than we would originally think."

Thus, we must suppress our moral outrage at Thick's act while, simultaneously, shifting our attention to Margaret's strange point of view. Consequently, what we feel with our emotions (hatred for the act) clashes with our knowledge of the point of view, which itself detaches us from the event. We must let the clash between these two responses—one emotional, the other intellectual—occur and keep occurring, in order to get the full, comic effect of the scene. The significance of using such a complex, comic technique as the one above becomes clear when we see the beating scene in relation to other comic scenes in the novel, as I will do later when I discuss The Lime Twig's comedy in terms of its language, point of view, and recurring imagery. At that time, we will see how these techniques function to reveal the value structure of The Lime Twig.

Admittedly, Hawkes' brand of comedy demands a lot from readers. Unfortunately, many critics find the beating scene just horrible or just comic, overlooking that both of these responses to the text are justified. They over-
look that Hawkes' comedy depends on these opposite reactions playing off each other, vying for superiority but never achieving it. In short, our responses to Hawkes' comedy occur on what we might call an uncertain terrain where two opposite reactions to a text clash, forcing us into continuous moments of indecision. As we will see throughout this study, the discomfort we feel when reading a novel by Hawkes often stems from the conflict between a novel's literal grotesque content and the way that content is being presented to us.

So far, then, it seems that any discussion of Hawkes' comedy leads us back to the horror of his novels, his dark vision, which initially disturbs so many critics. These critics' inability to accept the necessary relationship between the grotesque and the comic seems strange in a way, because tragedy, evil, disorder, and irreverence certainly are no strangers to comedy. Martin Grotjahn argues that comedy fulfills (in the reader and the author, I suppose) the "psychologic 'necessity for irreverence' which is the essential unconscious motive in the enjoyment of humor." And Richard Duprey suggests that "comedy itself is basically a pessimistic thing which shows us man, not as he ought to be, but as he is--calced over with the lewd scales of sin and wrapped in the

hypocrisy of his fallen nature." Duprey, though, and other theorists who share his ideas, do not fear this pessimism and evil, because they also argue that comedy allows us to laugh at this evil and surmount it. Like Satan in Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger, these critics believe that "against the assault of laughter nothing can stand."

Hawkes, however, and many of his contemporaries, would probably not agree with Duprey. Many modern comic writers, influenced by existentialism, believe that evil not only can withstand the assaults of laughter, but quite frequently does; and that when we laugh at evil we don't surmount it as much as we accept it as being on equal footing with the good, accept it much in the same way Prospero accepts Caliban as that dark side of himself. Thus, as Hawkes says, he does not want to "minimize" the terror in his fiction by having good forces overcome evil. He never wants the reader to think that "there is any way out of the nightmare of human existence." Father Lynch describes the kind of dark comedy Hawkes alludes to as one which "goes below all the categories within which

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34 Richard Duprey, "Whatever Happened to Comedy?" in Corrigan, p. 249.

the most of life is spent. In this descent it discovers a kind of rock bottom reality in man, the terrain of Falstaff and Sancho Panza, which is profoundly and funny unbreakable, which has no needs above itself . . . It is ugly and strong."\textsuperscript{36}

Put in these positive terms it seems surprising that more readers wouldn't be attracted to such a profound type of humor, which to Lynch involves a religious experience of sorts. Lynch's description also explains why Hawkes probably chooses the comic method that he does. As both Hawkes and Lynch seem to imply, true comedy, by going below our surface experiences, reminds us of our duplicitous natures which embrace both good and evil, both the comic and the horrible simultaneously, and thus helps us to gain a complex understanding of ourselves and the world around us more than everyday life does.

This experience might sound vague, but it is very common in literature. Franz Kafka describes it in a passage which was deleted from the published version of The Trial. He writes about coming to consciousness in the morning, that time when we are momentarily trapped between the real and dream worlds. "It is really remarkable," he says,

\textsuperscript{36}Lynch, p. 91. Quoted in Robinson, p. 12.
that when you wake up in the morning you nearly always find everything in exactly the same place as the evening before. For when asleep and dreaming you are, apparently at least, in an essentially different state from that of wakefulness; and therefore, as that man truly said, it requires enormous presence of mind or rather quickness of wit when opening your eyes to seize hold as it were of everything in the room at exactly the same place where you had let it go the previous evening. That was why . . . the moment of waking is the riskiest moment of the day.37

The way we experience Hawkes' comedy is similar to the manner in which we experience the moment of waking, as described by Kafka. Hawkes' comedy demands that we accept the risky moments when we are unsure of how to respond to a scene or character. We must refrain from applying our quickness of wit, our univocal minds, to these moments, and disrupt their natural flow.

Donald J. Greiner describes this reading situation in a slightly different way. He argues that the new comic fictions, like Hawkes', force us "to cross the fine line between wakefulness and sleep, surface experience and underground dream, conscious and unconscious states." 38


But he doesn't go far enough. Hawkes' fiction does not demand that we cross the fine line separating opposites, but that we straddle it with, at different times, one foot in the conscious, the other in the unconscious, one foot in the comic, the other in the horrible, etc. Obviously, our minds cannot maintain this unsure position for too long or we would become irrational. So most of our experiences of Hawkes' humor comes in moments of surprise before our minds have a chance to recover. They are like T. S. Eliot's bewildering moments of poetry when there is a "first, or early moment which is unique, of shock or real surprise, even terror (Ego dominus tuus), a moment which can never be forgotten, but which is never repeated integrally; and yet it would become destitute if it did not occur in a large whole of experience; which survives in a deeper or calmer feeling." 39

How much this is like the comic experience I have been describing: a shock or surprise which slowly dissipates as we recover from it, and then which becomes a part of our whole experience of a text as we continue to feel its resonances and reverberations. There is, of course, an implied threat in such comedy because we have not learned to feel comfortable with a somewhat disordered, unconven-

tional humor which partakes of the shock and surprise of the horrible side of life, unless that humor eventually triumphs over that horrible side and has some redeeming moral or social significance. But Hawkes' morality is as unconventional and as hard to pin down as his comedy. It is very similar to the morality which Hawkes sees in Edwin Honig's poetry, which he calls:

a highly moral poetry, true enough; but nearly all of these poems construct a kind of ghostly and biting double exposure, or hold in some mercurial suspension, suasion, the two deplorable and astounding processes—that of dying and that of birthing.40

The problem, of course, is how to describe the comedy of Hawkes' novels, or guess at their ideologies, when these novels, because of their shifting natures, defy traditional categorization. Certainly, we must do more for readers than just describe in theoretical terms the fine line between opposites that we must straddle in order to understand Hawkes' work. Fortunately, however, even though we must describe the process of reading Hawkes' fiction in the abstract language of paradox (as Koestler, Lynch, and Hawkes do), we still can see how this process reveals itself by applying to it specific and traditional literary tools.

I have already argued that to distance ourselves from the initial horror of one of Hawkes' novels, we must first recognize its comedy. Then I have suggested that this comedy is often maximized or minimized by the way the author plays with such stylistic features as point of view and language. In this respect, Hawkes often resembles a trickster, toying with our responses, leading us across an uncertain terrain, unmarked, with many dark fissures. We must also keep in mind, however, that the analysis of a comic scene in Hawkes' work does not end, become static, once we see how technique transforms that scene. That is, even though we better understand the beating scene in The Lime Twig after we note Margaret's point of view, we still can't forget or ignore the horror of that act. Indeed, that scene's importance depends on the continual clash between our sympathy for and laughter at Margaret.

In The Lime Twig, then, and all of Hawkes' work for that matter, I think that comedy occurs when we are forced to shift our attention back and forth between the literal action of a text and the many perspectives from which we come to view that action. Generally speaking, we might say that we follow the motion of Hawkes' comedy and see how it functions to reveal meaning by examining the interplay of four elements, which continually overlap and modify each other. These elements are: the literal action of the text (its events); the way in which characters respond to those events and to other characters; the way in which
Hawkes presents those events; and our reactions to his manner of presentation, the expectations we bring to the text, our knowledge of comic literary conventions and our moral prejudices.

By examining the interaction of these elements in selected novels by Hawkes, we can approach an "active" reading of his work and also come to grips with his comic method. And hopefully, by appreciating Hawkes' comic writing process, we will see that most of his novels are not as bleak or nihilistic as some critics have suggested. Concerning Nathanael West's comic novels, Hawkes says, "I think he uses the sick joke always so that you feel behind it the idealism, the need for innocence and purity, trust, strength, and so on." I hope to show that some of these virtues are also part of John Hawkes' work, and that, as in West's novels, these positive values are reached, in very different ways, through comedy.

CHAPTER II

CHARIVARI

Charivari, John Hawkes' first novel, is important in terms of the evolution of Hawkes' comic style because in it we find him experimenting with comic techniques which he will employ in all of his novels and perfect, I think, in his most successful novel, The Lime Twig. In this chapter, I will be interested mostly in the ingenious way Hawkes complicates action and creates comedy by using recurring imagery, action, and verbal patterns—a structural device we find in all of his novels. I also will show how the recurrence of these textual elements works on a thematic level, helping us to evaluate character and action.

Besides looking at the successful techniques of Hawkes' comic method in Charivari, however, I also am interested in how the novel falls short of some of the demands Hawkes himself places on comedy. Hawkes has argued that his comic method functions to expose and ridicule, but also to create sympathy and compassion and to make us realize that we, too, may not be exempt from evil. But in Charivari, characters like Henry and
Emily Van are often exposed and ridiculed to such a degree that we find it hard to sympathize with them, much less to believe that we share their weaknesses. They are flat comic characters who lack the depth of Michael and Margaret Banks in *The Lime Twig*, and it will be interesting to compare all four characters in the next chapter.

To paraphrase Father Lynch's words from Chapter I, Henry and Emily do not seem to be ugly and strong, just ugly. And their lack of depth and appeal affects our reception of the novel.

I do not mean to suggest here that I will judge Hawkes' comic characterization according to my own preconceived idea of comedy. Perhaps Hawkes consciously made his characters flat in *Charivari*, so that they would resemble comic strip characters. But when he succeeds in this kind of characterization, he must also accept that our response to these characters will not be very complicated. Thus, perhaps unintentionally, he undermines the kind of comedy he so often talks about.

Another way of phrasing the problem of characterization in *Charivari* is to say that our expectations of a character's actions or thoughts are rarely overturned. We laugh at characters from a comfortable position with a feeling of superiority. We rarely feel surprise, frustration, or fear, as we do in the presence of Michael and Margaret Banks or Skipper, the narrator of *Second Skin*. Moreover, in *Charivari*, not only are characters'
actions, thoughts, and conversations absurd in themselves, but they are made to appear worse by a judgmental narrator who himself dislikes the characters, always commenting on their weaknesses, going so far as to call them names. As a result, we share the narrator's distaste for the characters and must wonder where this destructive kind of comedy is leading us.

We can see how Hawkes' harsh treatment of characters affects the comedy of Charivari by looking at one of the main characters of the book, the timid and clumsy Henry Van. Henry, like William Hencher and Michael Banks in The Lime Twig, is a man-child and also a childlike man. We first see Henry "curled" foetus-like "in one corner of the four poster," dreaming "fitfully beneath a sagging unwashed curtain overhead."

He is being questioned by an imaginary Expositor, who may represent his own conscience or possibly even the taunting voice of the narrator who is everywhere in the novel. The main objective of the Expositor is, quite appropriately, to expose Henry, to point out how silly and inadequate he is. The Expositor asks Henry what time it is:

Henry: Four o'clock.
Expositor: What should you be doing?
Henry: I should be counting my gold.
Expositor: Nonsense. You should be cleaning the stables. Come on; we'll take you to clean the stables.
Henry: Must I do it with my hands?
Expositor: Certainly. What do you see lying over there in the hay?
Henry: A woman.
Expositor: What is she doing?
Henry: Making love to the stable boy while I do his work.
Expositor: Do you notice anything different?
Henry: Yes, she has a baby in her arms.
Expositor: What do you have to do now?
Henry: I have to put it in a bucket of water and keep it there so she can go on making love.
Expositor: Do you think you can keep it from jumping out and biting you?
Henry: I can't. It's going to bite, it's going to bite! I'll run away. I'm going to run, run . . .
Expositor: I'll turn you into the drowning baby if you do, Henry . . .
Henry: I'm drowning. Help me, help me . . .

(pp. 51-52)

At first, this scene seems more nightmarish than comic because it contains a number of surreal, grotesque elements. Henry is told that he should clean the stable with his hands. At the stable, he watches a woman with a baby in her arms (the archetypal Madonna scene) making love to a stable boy. Then he is asked to drown the baby, which he eventually becomes, accounting for a strange sort of suicide.

Normally, we would sympathize with a character prone to such nightmares, taunted by a shapeless Expositor. At the least, we should share Henry's anxiety in the way that we feel the angst of the unnamed man in Kafka's
parable, "Before the Law," who tries to persuade a door-keeper to let him pass through. But unlike Kafka's unnamed man, who seems to be seeking self-knowledge, Henry, throughout Charivari, runs away from knowledge of any kind--knowledge of himself, of Emily's supposed pregnancy, of his bad relationship with his parents. He also is running away from work. Because he refuses to grow up in so many different ways it is appropriate that he becomes the drowning child at the end of his dream, floundering amid his own fears and inadequacies.

Thus, Henry's exchange with the Expositor moves toward comedy as we learn more and more about Henry, most of which information is unflattering. For one thing, Henry is, in fact, forty years old, even though he acts like a child. According to the narrator, he is a "gaunt, cut-up, timid little boy" (p. 60), whom the "generaless," his mother-in-law, calls "dear child" (p. 65). The general is not so kind. He considers Henry to be a "crumbly sort" (p. 66), and nothing that Henry does in the course of the novel contradicts this negative characterization. Even though his wife, Emily, often annoys him, Henry, by his own admission, doesn't have the gumption or even "the decency to quarrel openly" (p. 71) with her. Nor is he able to talk back to his domineering in-laws or to his over-protective mother and egotistical father, the person, who "never appeared before a group of less than three hundred," and whose "choir boys had his initials stitched on the collars of their gowns" (p. 105).
Henry makes himself even more unappealing in later sections of *Charivari*. When Emily announces that she is pregnant Henry leaves the party and runs away. The irony of his departure is that he escapes from a nagging mother-in-law and from Emily's pregnancy only to end up in a working-class district with Mrs. Miller, a midwife, and with the grotesque, man-like Mrs. Mahoney, who herself "had, in the past, known the pain and seen the midwife many times" (p. 70). Of course, only we and the implied author know this information about Mrs. Mahoney and Mrs. Miller. Henry is completely unaware of the irony. He is, instead, happy. Having marmalade and chatting with the two women, he says, "'This is the happiest day of my life'" (p. 83).

The comedy in this scene occurs because of the relationship between implied author and reader. The implied author has planted enough not-so-subtle signs in the text, which, if we follow, will lead us to believe that Henry is a fool. Ironically, with Mrs. Mahoney and Mrs. Miller, Henry is being mothered again, allowed to feel like a child. The women's treatment of him helps him to forget that "cry of a baby" he hears "above the wind" (p. 78), which reminds him, no doubt, of Emily's pregnancy. The ultimate irony of Henry's situation, however, is that Emily is never pregnant. Consequently, he could have saved himself a lot of anxiety if he had stayed around the house to find out the truth.
It seems, then, that everywhere in the novel it is made clear to us that Henry is ridiculous. And our opinion of him drastically changes the way we look at the Expositor scene. We can now see that the initial horror of that scene has undergone a change. For one thing, our sympathy for Henry is undercut when we find out how silly and inept he is. We don't really care what the Expositor does to him. In fact, it becomes difficult for us to view him as a victim at all; the Expositor, in truth, resembles Henry's own conscience more than it does some ruthless grand inquisitor. After all, Henry is the one who fills in the Expositor's harmless questions with most of the grotesque details we find in that scene. Moreover, it seems as if Henry deceives himself even in his dreams. When the Expositor asks him what he should be doing, Henry responds that he should be counting gold. We know this is a ludicrous answer because, in a later discussion between Emily's and Henry's parents, we learn that all of his financial speculations have failed (p. 65). The rest of the dream also becomes comic because we now know that Henry's impotence (symbolized by his having to stand by and watch the stable boy make love to the woman holding the child—probably Emily) is internally imposed. And the impotence and indecision he exhibits in this dream sequence characterize all of his action throughout the novel.

Henry, then, in one sense, is a stock comic character—a buffoon—and we laugh at him as we would at one of the stock characters of Plautus' comic plays. Our response to
Henry, however, is not very complex because his actions do not surprise us; in fact, we laugh at Henry precisely because he acts with predictable stupidity. In another sense, though, Charivari's comic method of characterization is complex in that we are not given Henry's comic nature all at once, but must learn about him in bits and pieces. We must overhear other characters' unflattering conversations about him, or juxtapose his observations of events with the observations of other characters. Consequently, we must delay our final analysis of a scene, like Henry's exchange with the Expositor, until we see how it is modified and in this case made comic by later events.

We might say, then, that part of the amusement in reading Charivari occurs when we become aware of the stylistic structural games the author is playing behind the scenes. These games force us to shift our attention from a character's actions to the way those actions are revealed. We have already noted how Henry's character undergoes change in the Expositor scene when that scene is modified by later events and conversations. Hawkes also uses, however, recurring imagery, action, and verbal patterns to complicate
certain scenes and our response to them. And it is im-
portant to this study of Hawkes' comedy to see how, even
as early as Charivari, he flirts with these techniques
of repetition, so that he is on the verge of creating the
kind of comedy he so often speaks of. Moreover, we can
form a model for reading Hawkes' later works by seeing how
these techniques play themselves out in Charivari.

The section of Charivari called RHYTHM provides a
good example of how recurring imagery, action, and verbal
patterns work in a novel by Hawkes. Emily Van, the main
character of RHYTHM, is not a very appealing figure
throughout the book. She, like her husband Henry, is
childlike, and it is suggested that she hasn't physically
grown since she was eleven. Moreover, the narrator of
Charivari seems as disgusted by Emily as he is by Henry.
He calls both of them "jackdaws" (p. 53), and suggests
that Emily is spoiled because she was "brought up on
parades" (p. 52). She is also as indecisive as Henry, so
indecisive that when she leaves him a note on the refrig-

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^2Hawkes himself has stated that "related or corres-
donning event, recurring image and recurring action,
these constitute the essential substance or meaningful
density of my writing." See Eliot Berry, A Poetry of
Force and Darkness: The Fiction of John Hawkes (San
to the original source of this quotation is incorrect.
erator explaining that dinner will be at one, she reconsiders and places a question mark after the one (p. 53). Finally, like Henry, she fears both sex and childbirth. This fear leads her to imagine that she is pregnant, which itself causes all the problems in the book.

Throughout most of Charivari, then, we laugh at Emily for the same reason we laughed at Henry: we feel superior to her. In the RHYTHM section, however, our attention shifts from comedy of character to comedy of form. In this section, Emily is not comic in the way that she responds to her situation at a party, but when we juxtapose her reactions with other events in the RHYTHM section, we see how recurring imagery and phrases can create a strange sort of comedy.

RHYTHM begins with Emily up in her room. She looks "for a long while into the empty bassinette, a basket propped between two chairs, covered with a handkerchief and filled with cotton" (p. 111). In the basket she imagines she sees her expected child. She tells him he must be a "good boy" and "love mother. Grow up to be a fine handsome young man." The child begins to cry and unexplainably grows sideburns, and with a "gaze, small, old and parched," he answers her:
"You must never do a thing without consulting me, you must always come and see that I am well and not crying." Her heart, the size of an egg, began to tap, and slowly turning over, stuck under her tongue. "You better give me another kiss, you better give me another kiss, you better give me another kiss!" The gaze in the bassinette held out its hands. Emily stared at the fat fingers. "You better know how," the little blue face coughed, choked, "to take care of me." It gasped. "You better know what to do." It laughed and choked again. Midnight covered more and more of the window, slowly lifted the silver shawl from her bare knees. There was only one bead on the counting board, one red bead and she pushed it back and forth. "The first little round first, first, first." She looked into the open dripping mouth. It was like a bird's. Its high whistle pierced louder and louder in her ears. The fingers worked rapidly and aimlessly towards her face. . . She hopped to her feet. The eyes were as white as the cotton wads, rolled upwards to the beginning noise. The sideburns withered and died. The frail peeping voice grew more excited, the toes curled . . . Midnight fled, leaving the bassinette. Tap, tap went her heart. She reached the door and heard the startled gasps of anger. "You better give me another kiss!"

She slammed the door and tore the baby cap from her head. She listened, short and fat in her blue jumper, her bare feet touching cold smooth boards and the violent ribbons in her hair spinning tightly in a color wheel. Kiss, kiss, kiss. (pp. 111-12)

Emily's imaginary encounter with the bearded child is similar to Henry's experience with the Expositor. On the surface, both of these scenes are grotesque until we realize that Henry and Emily become babies at the end of them. They are so obsessed by their fears of having children that they actually become what they fear. Emily even goes so far as to wear a baby cap. Thus, we laugh at her and she seems to be as ridiculous as Henry. But if we reexamine her daydream,
juxtaposing it with events that occur later in the RHYTHM section, our response to her gets further complicated.

Shortly after the exchange between Emily and the child, we move to a scene in which Dr. Smith is cracking jokes with a group of people at Emily's party. This is the same crude Dr. Smith, whom Emily, later on in the RHYTHM section, imagines roughly examining her in a hospital which itself looks like a prison. "'Time,'" says Dr. Smith, "'is a nutcracker. Get what I mean?' The ungracious daughter trembled and the little pekinese, whose basket Emily had upstairs, sneezed fitfully in the corner" (p. 113).

In this short scene, a phrase and an image make us look differently at Emily's conversation with the imaginary child. At first, her plight (fear of sex and childbirth) seems worsened when followed by the doctor, whose comments about the nutcracker to a group of men has sexual overtones. The sexuality of his comment becomes clear when he says that the nutcracker he refers to has to do with a woman grabbing a man "below the belt." And "after she squeezes for a long time, there's nothing left" (p. 113). A short exchange between the men at the party follows:

"Man tries . . ."
"Man plays . . ."
"At first with himself . . ."
"Finally grows . . ."
"He's sm"at, he knows . . ."
"Then he dies," said Henry. The heads turned to look at him. (p. 114)
At first, we might argue that placed right after Emily's waking nightmare, this scene makes us sympathize with her. She not only has to deal with her own and Henry's fears of parenthood and sex, but she has to work out these problems in a world of lascivious men and lockerroom conversations. But, on the other hand, this scene also breaks the tension created by her nightmare, and it is a bit comical in itself, even if crudely so. More importantly, however, we must note the brief reference made to the pekinese's basket which, we are told, Emily has upstairs. This is the same basket in which she imagines the sideburned child to be. What are we supposed to think of Emily if we learn that she is so anxious about a pregnancy, which we know to be a delusion, that she can go so far as to imagine a grotesque form of her child in a dog basket? And doesn't the devilish child become less forboding when viewed from this perspective? This scene becomes even more interesting if the dog is still in the basket while Emily is imagining the child, which would explain why she believes that it has sideburns.

All of a sudden, then, instead of having a powerful, emotional scene in which a woman is a victim of a terrible daydream, we are confronted with the scene uncolored by Emily's delusions, and we find her wearing a "little blue

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3 We are not told the period of time between Emily's nightmare scene and the conversation between the men at the party.
"bonnet" with "tassles hanging down to her ears" (p. 11), crouched over a pekinese in a straw basket, imagining it to be a child as threatening to her as Henry's Expositor is to him. It is not important in this analysis whether or not the dog is actually in the bassinette; it is only important that we must consider the possibility. And by considering it, we begin to feel less and less sympathy for Emily.

The complexity of this scene, however, does not end with the reference to the pekinese. There are other later images and phrases which echo those in Emily's encounter with the child, and which change our response to that event. One of the most upsetting moments for Emily in her daydream occurs when the grotesque child says to her, "You better give me another kiss." Even after she has left her bedroom, the words seem to be lodged in her mind: "kiss, kiss, kiss." This phrase also attracts attention to itself in the following scene in which Dr. Smith is summarizing his philosophy on sex. He says, "Everybody wants to kiss, kiss, kiss" (p. 114). And shortly thereafter, excusing himself from the conversation and leaning over to an anonymous woman, he says, "You better give me another kiss" (p. 114).

There may be two reasons for having Dr. Smith repeat this phrase. First, there is comic irony in having the doctor, the representative of coarse, male sex in the novel,
repeat a phrase occurring in one of Emily's daydreams, which often are loaded with fearful, phallic images. Secondly, the implied author of Charivari could be using repetition to help us establish some chronology in the RHYTHM section. That is, although Emily's scene comes before Dr. Smith's in the text, she actually may be overhearing him from upstairs in her room as he says, "You better give me another kiss." His words, through some sort of osmosis, may be breaking into her daydreams. This analysis would make sense because the two phrases match up word for word, and because the doctor's statement brings an end to her daydream. And what better way to create a comic effect than by juxtaposing events and characters in such a way that Dr. Smith's sexuality even intrudes upon Emily's private thoughts.

The phrase, "You better give me another kiss," occurs one more time in the novel, and, again, it furthers the comedy of Emily's daydream and also of the scene in which it appears. After we listen to the sexual and sexist conversation between Dr. Smith and another character named Joe, we are taken back upstairs into the general's bedroom, where his wife is asking the general's orderly for some milk for the cat. The general offers his cup of milk and she takes it. She feeds it to the cat, saying, "You better give me another kiss." The cat's tongue "still wet with milk" licks her cheek (p. 117).
This brief exchange between the generaless and her cat suddenly gains more meaning as it attracts to it other references to kissing. It also changes our outlook on those previous references. Now we must not only think about Emily's imaginary child as a dog, but also as a cat, which shifts our attention from her feelings. The implied author uses a similar device in a scene which begins with Henry listening to the chauffeur working on the middy car, "pumping grease into its nipple."

Henry heard the steel hammer-head beating the diaphragm, striking the warped fire-wall, and felt the pain of gas on his stomach.

Emily touched her landscaped abdomen, felt the twisting scars like a rough starfish. Every few years she liked to have an operation, be careful, please, and the starfish grew larger and larger with fat stitched tentacles. She felt it move. At any moment she expected Dr. Smith to say, "A boy. Nine pounds five ounces. Nice work."

She waited fidgeting with her toes.

"You're quite a nice little girl," the doctor said. The ungracious daughter didn't answer but leaned her back against his knees, trying to keep warm.

Emily frowned.

The chauffeur scratched his ear and looked at the large black body and jumbled tubes. It was dark.

The generaless's voice rang out in the darkness. "We'll take her in for an inspection tomorrow. I'm sure Emily will feel better when things are more certain." (p. 119)

This scene is comic, first, because of the sexual language used to describe the chauffeur working on the car. The car is compared to a woman, the chauffeur's "steel hammer-head" needing no explanation. Emily's habits themselves encourage this comparison because, just as a car
needs a temporary examination to keep working, so, too, Emily needs an operation every few years to keep her body in order. And if we have any doubts that we are meant to make this comparison between Emily and the automobile, these doubts vanish when the generaless suggests that she take Emily in for an "inspection." Bergson, of course, would view this as a comic scene par excellence, for what better example can we find of the mechanical being encrusted upon the living than Emily figuratively becoming a middycar.

But the comedy in this scene is even more complex than a first glance might indicate, especially when we see how it is affected by later events in the RHYTHM section. That is, it is funny that Emily is compared to an automobile, but it is not comical when, later on in the novel, we see Emily, at least in her mind, literally being treated like a machine, inspected by the doctor and frightened by the pounding of riveters. The combination of these two scenes is what Hawkes' comedy is all about. And we experience the important reading moment of the text when we make the connection between the two scenes, this moment happening at different times for different readers. Some readers may have to turn back pages to see how the doctor's examination has been foreshadowed, and to understand how it reflects back on and changes our responses to earlier scenes. For others, the strange comedy of Emily's trip to the hospital may occur on an unconscious level, with phrases and images reverberating as these readers continue on in the novel, so that, without
knowing why, they are uncomfortable with their responses to the scene at the hospital.

The difficulty involved in this reader-response explains why it is best to read a novel by Hawkes in one sitting to receive the maximum effects of recurring imagery, action, and phrases. It also explains why Hawkes' novels read so much better the second time around, when we can see how he plays with form and language and how his novels are structured.

It should be obvious why this kind of reader-response is so important to experiencing Hawkes' own brand of comedy. When we read the RHYTHM section of *Charivari*, for instance, we are able to develop previously unforeseeable connections between scenes by noting how a phrase like "You can give me another kiss" sheds light on the previous time it was mentioned. At the same time, we also are able to look forward to how other repetitions of the phrase will change the analysis of all three scenes in which the phrase occurs. This same process also applies to recurring imagery, action, in short, all of the literary strategies that Hawkes uses. And the movements we make between past, present, and future moments in a text drastically change the way we view a scene. That is, a scene which at first might seem horrible or upsetting can move toward comedy as it is modified by other textual elements, or vice versa. And to understand a novel based on such structural principles, we must become simultaneously involved in anticipation and retrospection
when we read; we must look ahead and back at the same time; we must read with our attention half upon the present, half upon the future.  

In terms of Hawkes' comic method, then, Charivari is successful in the way that Hawkes uses certain techniques to complicate action and to show us that life is often more complex than it originally seems. But we should realize that most of the comedy we experience in Charivari occurs solely on an intellectual or formal level. That is, because we are so emotionally detached from characters in Charivari, and because we tend to give most of our attention to the book's style, we might argue that, in a sense, the narrative structure of Charivari is itself the subject of the novel. That is, we are not as amused by characters as we are by the way that the implied author arranges textual materials to reveal the foolishness of his characters. And in Charivari it seems as if the implied author shares the beliefs and attitudes of the judgmental narrator he creates. All evidence leads us to believe that we, like the narrator and implied author, are also supposed to look down on Henry and Emily Van, to laugh at them with a feeling of superiority.

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Certainly, there is something to be said for comic techniques which brutally satirize a character or society which need satirizing. But this kind of comedy, which we find in Charivari, falls short of that ideal comic method Hawkes aspires to. In Charivari, comedy functions to expose and ridicule evil and stupidity, but it doesn't create compassion or sympathy or force us to face our own potential for evil. Thus, there is no implied threat in Charivari's comic method; we are not torn between our sympathy for characters and our desire to ridicule them. Although, stylistically, Hawkes may create surprise through various techniques, on a thematic level, he fails to create the paradox which is so important to his work. And I think this failure primarily occurs because he does not make us feel for his characters or what happens to them.

Concerning Hawkes' characterization in Charivari, Frederick Busch argues that Hawkes does not "create characters here in the sense that we might call Hardy's Tess a character--a flesh and blood person with whom we sympathize, identify, mourn." Instead Hawkes fashions characters who behave according to his vision and not according to that of his readers. Once he shatters his readers' expectations, the readers are Hawkes' captives. He can demand of them at his will by deciding how his characters will act. Thus, his stereotypical characters are, here, little more than avenues for his prose, gambits for his larger strategies.

Busch believes that this kind of characterization enhances Charivari. In contrast to Busch, I would argue that when Hawkes uses characters merely to further his stylistic concerns he must accept the shortcomings of such an approach. Because his characters in Charivari are flat, like comic strip characters, we don't identify with them, and consequently, we never feel uncomfortable moments of indecision when we respond to them, those terrible moments which characterize Hawkes' best work. We are left to experience a very surface kind of comedy, to perform an intellectual exercise, analyzing the structure of the book.

Nevertheless, Charivari is a useful book to look at in the way that it prepares us for The Lime Twig. In the latter book, we find Michael and Margaret Banks, characters who on the surface very much resemble Henry and Emily Van. We also see Hawkes playing with some of the same comic devices that he used in Charivari. The difference between the two books, however, is that in The Lime Twig we experience action and character on both an emotional and intellectual level. In contrast to Charivari, the comic method in The Lime Twig is not meant to draw attention to itself. Instead, it works toward thematic ends—to make us feel the complexity of the choices that characters make in that novel, to regulate our attraction and repulsion to them.
CHAPTER III

THE LIME TWIG

The Lime Twig presents a world where nightmares become real. In it we find out what happens to people when they are given a chance to live out their darkest fantasies. We also discover that everyone's fantasies are somehow connected. In contrast to Charivari, in The Lime Twig we are made to feel the threat of violence and death in the dream worlds of Michael and Margaret Banks and William Hencher, and we recognize their desires and obsessions in ourselves. These desires and obsessions bring on events in The Lime Twig which at first would seem to preclude comedy. For example, Margaret Banks is raped and beaten to death, Michael Banks and Hencher perish under the violent tattoo of horses' hooves, and a few minor characters are shot or slashed.

But there is a dark comedy in The Lime Twig, and it occurs when we are made to look at action from many conflicting perspectives. Hawkes shifts us back and forth between these perspectives—of characters, of a narrator, and of the implied author—in a number of ways. Sometimes, as in William Hencher's case, we are emotionally involved in the events of his monologue, but, at the same time, we laugh at
the inappropriate language he uses to describe them. Similarly, even though we are appalled at Larry's and Thick's physical attack on Margaret and at Sybil's psychological attack on Michael, we end up detached from these events and even find them comic because of the strange ways that Margaret and Michael view their assailants. Hawkes further achieves his comic purposes in *The Lime Twig* when he employs recurring imagery, action, and verbal patterns. Very often a scene which at first appears comic moves toward horror, or vice versa, when its images, actions, or language echo those from other scenes.

We have seen how techniques of repetition work in *Charivari*. But although these techniques complicated our responses to certain scenes in *Charivari*, they didn't seem to further the thematic concerns of that novel in any positive way. In fact, we often became so attracted to the structural devices of Hawkes' first novel that we ceased to care about characters or their predicaments. In *The Lime Twig*, however, Hawkes uses techniques of repetition to show that the dreams of Michael and Margaret Banks and William Hencher are intertwined. Each character's wishes or desires—the subject of the novel—seem to be a part of one enormous nightmare in which we, too, participate when we make connections between certain scenes. In this sense, we are aware of the stylistic techniques which distance us from characters and often make them appear comic, techniques which make us reexamine and reevaluate scenes, but we are never completely emotionally
detached from the often horrible action of the novel. Moreover, we are always aware of the importance and repercussions of the choices each character makes, choices which Michael Banks' final gesture must atone for.

Thus, *The Lime Twig* appears to satisfy Hawkes' own demands of the comic method: to expose and ridicule, to create compassion and sympathy, and also to make us realize that we, too, are not exempt from the evil in the book. We begin to see how this method works in William Hencher's monologue. Although Hencher's own thoughts are often frightening or eerie, they are presented in a comical manner. More importantly, though, the comedy of the monologue drastically changes the way we look at later action in the novel, since Hencher's narrative foreshadows events in his own life and in the lives of Michael and Margaret Banks. Very often, because of the overlapping of imagery, action, and verbal patterns in *The Lime Twig*, a scene which at first appears comic (Michael in bed with Sybilline) or horrible (Hencher in the cockpit of the disabled Reggie's Rose) changes in tone as it is disrupted by echoes from other scenes. Perhaps the best way to follow the movement from comedy to horror or vice versa in *The Lime Twig* and also to see how this movement affects the way we evaluate the novel, is to discuss a scene in isolation, then note the changes in that scene as it attracts others to it. In Hencher's monologue there are two scenes which lend themselves to this kind of analysis: Hencher's mother catching on fire and Reggie's Rose crashing to the ground whereupon Hencher climbs into its cockpit.
The literal action in the scene in which Hencher's mother catches fire is not outwardly very comic. Hencher smells smoke and decides to discover its source. Looking into the hallway, he sees boxes on fire, which contain his and his mother's belongings. His mother follows him into the hallway and runs into the flames in an attempt to save some stays and an "old tortoise-shell fan."¹ Her clothes catch fire, and Hencher watches her for a moment, finally running to her aid, wrapping his robe around her. Note how Hencher describes the entire scene:

"Are you awake," I said.
She sat up with the nightdress slanting down her flesh.
"You better put on the wrapper, old girl."
She sat startled by the light of a flare that was plainly going to land in old John's chimney across the way. I could see her game face and I squeezed on the slippers and squeezed the shawl.
"Don't you smell the smoke? The house is going up," I said. "Do you want to burn?"
"It's only the kettle, William . . . " And she was grinning, one foot was trying to escape the sheet. They were running with buckets across the way at John's.
"You look, William, you tell me what it is . . . ."
"Out of bed now, and we'll just have a look together."
Then I pulled open the door and there was the hallway dry and dark as ever, the slipper still hooked on the stair, the one faint bulb swinging round and round on its cord. But our boxes were burning. The bottom of the pile was sunk in flame, hot crabbing flame orange and pale blue in the draft from the door and the sleeve of a coat of mine was crumbling and smoking out of a black pasty hole.

Mother began to cough and pull at my hand—the smoke was mostly hers and thick, and there is no smudge as black as that from burning velveteen and stays and packets of cheap face powder—and then she cried, "Oh, William, William" I saw the pile lean and dislodge a clump of cinders while at the same moment I heard a warden tapping on the outside door with his torch and heard him call through the door: "All right in there?"

I could taste my portion of the smoke; the banging on the door grew louder. Now they were flinging water on old John's roof, but mother and I were in an empty hall with our own fire to care about.

"Can't you leave off tugging on me, can't you?" But before I could close my robe she was gone, three or four steps straight into the pile to snatch the stays and an old tortoise-shell fan from out of the fire.

"Mum!"

But she pulled, the boxes toppled about her, the flames shot high as the ceiling. While a pink flask of ammonia she had saved for years exploded and hissed with the rest of it.

From under the pall I heard her voice: "Look here, it's hardly singed at all, see now? Hardly singed ..." Outside footfalls, and then the warden: "Charlie, you'd better give us a hand here, Charlie...."

On hands and knees she was trying to crawl back to me, hot sparks from the fire kept settling on her arms and on the thin silk of her gown. One strap was burned through suddenly, fell away, and then a handful of tissue in the bosom caught and, secured by the edging of charred lace, puffed at its luminous peak as if a small forced fire, stoked inside her flesh, had burst a hole through the tender dry surface of my mother's breast.

"Give us your shoulder here, Charlie... lend a heave!"

And even while I grunted and went at her with robe outspread she tried with one hand to pluck away her bosom's fire. "Mother," I shouted, "hold on now, Mother," and knelt and got the robe around her—mother and son in a single robe—and was slapping the embers and lifting her back toward the bed when I saw the warden's boot in the door and heard the tooting of his whistle. Then only the sound of dumping sand, water falling, and every few minutes the hurried crash of an ax head into our smothered pile. (pp. 13-15)
The comedy in the above scene is most evident in Hencher's and his mother's reactions to the fire. He tells her the "house is going up," and instead of being startled or frightened, she grins. Hencher himself responds inappropriately to the crisis. Instead of immediately coming to his mother's aid, he watches the flames spread over her, "hot sparks . . . settling on her arm and the silk of her gown." Indeed, Hencher doesn't seem to offer his robe to his mother until the men are about to break down the door, which makes us wonder what he would have done if the men had never shown up. Granted, the above humor is grotesque, but this grotesqueness is lessened by the manner in which the scene is related. That is, halfway through this long passage, we find ourselves paying more attention to Hencher's hyperbolic descriptions than to the incendiary act itself. Once we focus on the intelligence at work in the description of the fire, we distance ourselves from the event. We also want to know more about Hencher's strange mind, and to do this we must learn about his relationship with his mother. We will then see that the scene has two fires: a real one in the hall, and a psychic one inside of William Hencher.

Before the fire occurs, we learn from Hencher that his relationship with his mother is a mixture of awe, fear, and hatred. He tells us that "they were always turning Mother out onto the streets" (p. 6), which suggests that she is a trouble-maker or a source of embarrassment. Moreover, because we always see her in various states of undress, we
might assume that she is forced to move because of her moral character. She does tease her son, and her language could be seen as sexual: "'You may manipulate the screen now, William,'" she says, while undressing (p. 6). And Hencher gladly obeys, imagining her behind the screen, "stripping to the last scrap of girded rag--the obscene bits of makeshift garb poor old women carry next their skin" (p. 6). His strange obsession for her comes across most clearly when he describes what life is like with one's mother. "If you live long enough with your mother," he says:

you will learn how to cook. Your flesh will know the feel of cabbage leaves, your bare hands will hold everything she eats. Out of the evening paper you will prepare each night your small and tidy wad of cartilage, raw fat, cold and dusty peels and the mouthful--still warm--which she leaves on her plate. (p. 7)

In this unappealing description of dinner with Hencher's mother, both the narrative eye and the language are amusing. Taken out of context, we could easily imagine that Hencher is feeding a dog, which is an appropriate comparison since Hencher sees similarities between his relationship with his mother and that between the boy with whip marks on his back and his dog. Just as Hencher scrutinizes each offensive detail of life with his mother, so the boy scrutinizes his dog. He "waggles the animal's fat head," flaps it upright and listens to his heart," and feels its "black gums," its "soft wormy little legs" (p. 8). Concerning the boy's affection for the mangy dog, Hencher says, "Love is a long
close scrutiny like that. I loved Mother in the same way" (pp. 8-9). And he continues this close scrutiny when he describes her eating:

the laughing lips drawn around a stopper of darkness and under the little wax chin a great silver fork with a slice of bleeding meat that rises slowly, slowly, over the dead dimple in wax, past the sweat under the first lip, up to the level of her eyes so she can take a look at it before she eats. And I wait for the old girl to choke it down. (p. 9)

This will be an important passage to remember in relation to the landing of Reggie's Rose. For although the language itself is strangely comic in its obsessiveness, there are words and phrases here that link this scene with the landing of Reggie's Rose and the unloading of Rock Castle. Reggie's Rose is a great metal (silver) machine which rises slowly over the buildings before it falls to the ground, and Rock Castle is a hunk of silver meat rising above the men as they unload him from the barge. If this comparison seems strained, note Michael's description of "the silver horse with its ancient head round which there buzzed a single fly as large as his own thumb and molded of shiny blue wax" (Italics mine) (p. 50). But I will talk more about the significance of this comparison later.

Once we have some knowledge of Hencher's relationship with his mother, the dark comedy of the burning scene becomes apparent. Some of Hencher's inappropriate reactions to the event also are explained. From the very beginning of the long passage, it is obvious that the fire does not affect Hencher as much as the sight of his mother's "nightdress
slanting down her flesh." He is more concerned that she put on her wrapper than in quickly discovering the source of the fire. There seems to be a strange game between mother and son, as if they are seeing how far they can push each other. At first Hencher's mother doesn't seem too frightened by the fire, either. She is more interested in William's reaction to it. Even though the flames across the street startle her, and even though Hencher has suggested that the house may be going up in flames, she can only respond, "'It's only the kettle, William . . .' and she was smiling, one foot trying to escape the sheet." We find her response to Hencher comic, first, because of its gross understatement of the event. Moreover, because we know of Hencher's obsession with his mother's sexuality, we must be amused when, even in an emergency, Hencher does not fail to note his mother's "foot trying to escape the sheet."

The tone of this scene becomes more ominous, though, when mother and son go into the hall and find their boxes burning. Hencher's mother's "game face" suddenly changes because the fire is rising from her "burning velveteen and stays and pockets of cheap face powder." The dark comedy in this part of the passage comes when we observe Hencher's delight at the boxes catching fire--boxes that remind him of all that is feminine and embarrassing about his mother. His apparent delight explains why he doesn't try to extinguish the fire, even when his mother tugs at his arm to do so; it also explains why he doesn't open the door for the firemen.
or answer them when they yell, "'All right in there?'" But we shouldn't be surprised that Hencher stands by as his mother rushes into the fire to save her possessions, since we know his weird relationship with her. All he can say is "'Mum!'", which, as we find out in the next few paragraphs, indicates very little concern for her. It is also in these next few paragraphs where a comedy of language takes over.

Instead of helping his mother, Hencher describes in minute detail his mother's clothing catching on fire. He is very interested in how his mother's body is revealing itself with the help of the flames. He notes that "one strap" of her gown burns through suddenly and falls away. Then he sees smoke rising from one of her breasts, "its luninous peak" described as if it were a miniature volcano. In fact, the breast does become larger than life to Hencher, and he imagines that the fire on its tip stems from an inner and not an outer source.

We might say that Hencher's descriptions are comic here for some of the same reasons that Lemuel Gulliver's descriptions are comic when, in Brobdingnag, he describes himself "astride" the nipple of a Maid of Honor. We laugh at Gulliver's description because of his unique point of view. Throughout his description he is defensive, assuring us that he is greatly displeased at being used by the Maid of Honor in such an ingnominious manner. But the perceptive reader can detect Gulliver's fascination for the event by noting how much time he spends describing it. Similarly, although Hencher is a normal-sized man, psychologically he becomes
dwarfed before the image of his mother's breast, and, like Gulliver, he responds to the breast with a mixture of fascination and disgust. His language itself is disgusting in its insistence on grotesque detail, but, at the same time, it is this very insistence which betrays his fascination for the event. The conflict between these two emotions results in comedy.

What happens, then, is that we are more interested in the way Hencher describes the fire than in the fire itself. We never really see his mother in flames, or smell the burning velveteen or stays. Our attention is shifted to Hencher's perception of the event, and the fire acts as a means to observe the peculiarities of his character. The interesting point about the language in this scene is that it is exaggerated and negligent at the same time. It is exaggerated in the sense that every little detail of his mother burning is precisely described, so that the breast does seem bigger than life. But his language is also deficient because of its impersonality. Hencher shows no concern for his mother in this description. He does not think of opening the door for the firemen until after he has finished his long, close scrutiny, until the men are about to break down the door. Only then does he assume the traditional son's role and come to his mother's aid. And even then we must laugh at him, because he never tells us that he is leading her to safety for her own benefit. The detail he remembers most about the rescue is "mother and son in one robe." This detail makes it seem as if he comes
to her aid so that he can be in the same robe with his mother, and also so that he can bring her to safety before the men break in and find her half-naked. Both of these responses are consistent with Hencher's character. They also are consistent with what Hawkes calls Hencher's "mas-turbatory intelligence," an intelligence arrested in a child's world of self-gratification.

But although we find his responses inappropriate and hyperbolic, we must also be aware of what the burning boxes mean to him. Early in the monologue, he explains that he and his mother "keep our pots, our crocker, our undervests" in "cardboard boxes," which they move from "room to empty room" until the "strings [wear] out and her garters and medicines [come] through the holes" (p. 6). And after each time they relocate and move their boxes into a new apartment, Hencher would say, "'Here's home, Mother'" (p. 6). It seems obvious, then, that these boxes represent a number of things to Hencher: his mother's sexuality (her undergarments), their constant moving, and "home." His complex relationship with his mother and the manner in which he has lived with her come together in the image of the tattered boxes. Consequently,

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when we point out the comedy in Hencher's description of
the boxes and of his mother burning, we must simultaneously
be aware of what the destruction of the boxes means to
him—the destruction of life with his mother.

This type of movement between comedy and horror, which
we participate in, is typical of the way we will read many
other scenes in The Lime Twig. To me, in the burning scene,
comedy functions to expose Hencher's contradictory respon­
ses of attraction and repulsion to the object of his desire,
his mother. His "love" is a strange love and also a des­
tructive one as we see when we note the similarities between
his perceptions of his mother and the fallen airplane,
Reggie's Rose. It seems as if Hencher has dreams of domi­
nating his mother and Reggie's Rose, which are sexual and
destructive images to him, and comedy works to undercut his
dreams of dominance. Comedy makes us see how dangerous it
is for a character to believe that he can make his darkest
wishes come true without paying a penalty for them in the
real world, a lesson Michael and Margaret Banks will also
have to learn.

In one sense, the crash of Reggie's Rose is as gruesome
as the sight of Hencher's mother on fire. Hencher goes out
for a walk and sees Reggie's Rose crash. He enters the
plane's cockpit, sits in the pilot's seat, breathes through
the pilot's oxygen mask, and places the pilot's helmet—
still warm and wet with the pilot's blood—on his head. He.ends up believing he is the pilot and, pretending that Rose,
the half-naked decal on the outside of the plane, is present, he whispers to her, "'How's the fit, old girl? . . . A pretty good fit, old girl?'" (p. 23).

After reading this summary of events it might be hard to believe that there can be anything comic about the plane crash. But we can find comedy in the same place we found it in the burning scene—in Hencher's description of the crash. Some of the humor stems from the strange comparisons Hencher makes. He views the slow descent of the "lifeless airplane," which itself is a symbol of death and war, as being similar to the rising and falling of a "child's kite" (p. 19); leaning against the plane's broken metal frame, he says, is like "touching your red cheek to a stranded whale's fluke" (p. 21); and he describes the dead pilot's oxygen mask as a "metal kidney trimmed round the edges with strips of fur" (p. 22). These unusual comparisons suggest that Hencher is unable to grasp the horror of the event. He seems to see the crash only as a means through which he can "play" pilot.

He already has part of his pilot's costume on before he views the crash. On the way out of his apartment, he tells us that he flings an end of his "shawl aside in flier fashion" (p. 18). Later on, he realizes that to complete his impersonation of the pilot he should also have a "visored cap, leather coat, gauntlets" (p. 21). There is, as Hawkes has said, "something of the child" in
Hencher's treatment of the crash, a "no one to see, you can do what you want" kind of attitude. And, indeed, sitting in the destroyed plane, Hencher resembles a child in a penny arcade with his "hands on the half-wheel and slippers resting on the jammed pedals, [his] head turning to see the handles, rows of knobs, dials with needles all set at zero . . ." (pp. 21-22).

The key word in this passage is "zero" because it makes clear the discrepancy between what Hencher thinks he is doing and what in fact is happening. He deceives himself into thinking that he is the pilot, Reggie, by donning the costume of a pilot, by breathing out of the "pilot's lungs" (p. 22), by settling the pilot's helmet on his head, and by working the levers and pedals of the plane. But we know that he doesn't become the pilot of Reggie's Rose until after the plane crashes, until after it has become impotent, a plaything. And rather than agreeing with Hencher's idea of himself as a heroic figure, we instead see the truth: a bald, fat man sitting in a destroyed airplane with a bloody helmet on his head, manipulating broken instruments, and conversing with a decal of a half-naked woman defaced by an oil leak, a "half-moon hole" on her thigh.

The discrepancy between ours and Hencher's points of view is captured perfectly in the phrase Hencher uses to

3Levine, p. 99.
describe the pilot's bloody helmet. He calls it his "bloody coronet" (p. 23). Hencher would stress the coronet part of the phrase, believing that he has crowned himself the new pilot (an implied comparison with Christ's crown is also here). We, however, cannot overlook the pilot's blood still dripping from the helmet, which undermines Hencher's self-crowning and makes him appear ludicrous and frightening at the same time. Hawkes sees this discrepancy between Hencher's and the reader's perception of the event in sexual terms. He admits that the scene in the cockpit is "extremely grotesque. Hencher performs a kind of female masturbation with the helmet, the pilot's brains inside it. The sexuality of the scene is all mixed up. And in one sense quite comical. It functions as human sexuality, and yet it isn't; it's one man and a lot of junk."\(^4\) I agree with Hawkes that the scene is sexual, but find the source of the sex in a different place. That is, I see Hencher's actions in the plane determined by his strange relationship with his mother. This connection becomes clear when we view the crash in relation to scenes which come before and after it.

If we return to the end of the crash scene, we see Hencher looking at Rose, the decal of a sensuous woman on the outside of the plane. He asks her how he looks with

\(^4\)Levine, p. 99.
his "bloody coronet" in place. "'How's the fit, old girl?'" he whispers. "'A pretty good fit, old girl?'" (p. 23). Now if we look back in the text, we find out that Hencher has referred to his mother three times (pp. 9, 13, 18) as "old girl," which leads us to believe that in his mind the images of Rose and his mother fuse. And this fusion makes us look at the crash differently than we did before. First, we can argue that Hencher's actions in the plane are meant to impress his mother, to show her that he doesn't need her, that he is man enough to handle the plane alone. In this respect, Hencher is more comic than before. He is so obsessed with trying to impress his mother that he is completely unaware of his real and obvious deficiencies as a pilot--not to mention that the plane isn't capable of getting off the ground.

But we must also wonder is, in Hencher's mind, Reggie's Rose and his mother are really one and the same. If so, then his attempt to master the plane is an attempt to master his mother, psychologically and sexually. There are obvious similarities between the way the plane, decal, and his mother are described. Hencher's mother and Rose are both viewed synecdochically—a bare leg or thigh here, a bare ankle there—, and his mother has yellow hair, Rose white. Moreover, in the fire, Hencher sees a hole burn through the padding around his mother's breast, while he also notes the hole in Rose's thigh through which oil pours. Finally, in the beginning of his monologue, Hencher has made the connection
between his mother and the plane clear. He can't think of one without thinking of the other. He says, "I see Miss Eastchip serving soup, I see Mother's dead livid face. And I shall always see the bomber with its bulbous front gunner's nest flattened over the cistern in the laundry court" (p. 11).

If we look back at the crash, keeping the comparison between Hencher's mother and Reggie's Rose in mind, we can suggest that Hencher uses the plane crash to assume, at least in his mind, dominance over his mother. In real life, she dominates him. He must move when she moves; he must cook for her; he must even "manipulate the screen" while she undresses. But in the bomber, breathing through someone else's lungs, wearing someone else's equipment, he is a "man," in control of a plane which, because of the decal of Rose, has feminine qualities. He is in his nightgown, astride his mother-figure, manipulating the plane's instruments. He appears ridiculous to us, of course, in his bogus attempt at dominance. We know how controlled he is by his mother, so much so that later on in the novel he will invoke her presence in order to board the Artemis (p. 36). But as we laugh at him, we must also be aware of the horror of a man who is so obsessed with playing out an incestuous fantasy that he is oblivious to the real death, blood, and destruction around him.

So far, most of the comedy we have looked at in The Lime Twig depends on the manner in which Hencher describes
actions, and on his inability to distance himself from events or to see the irony of his descriptions. There seems to be a private joke going on between the implied author and the reader of the text. Even though the monologue is a first person narration, we sense an intelligence behind Hencher which is responsible for the recurring images and scenes we have looked at. We have seen how a comparison between these recurring elements in the text affects the humor of the crash scene. Now we can describe how the landing of Reggie's Rose, itself modified by other details and scenes in the monologue, looks ahead in the novel to other crucial scenes: the deaths of Hencher, Michael, and Margaret; the beating of Margaret; and the seducing of Michael by Sybilline Laval.

All of the above connections become clear to us when we realize that the images of Hencher's mother and Reggie's Rose resemble the most destructive image of the book--Rock Castle. I have hinted at the comparison between Hencher's mother and the horse, but there are other minor images in the book which make it easy to connect these two images, and to see how this connection anticipates Hencher's death. Two images I have in mind are the cherubim on top of Dreary Station and the tiny, silver winged man, the hood ornament on Larry's van and limousine.

Hencher first mentions the cherubim with reference to his forced travels with his mother. He says he and "Mother" have spent fifteen years circling Dreary Station. "Fifteen years with Mother, going from loft to loft in Highland Green,
Pinky Road—twice in Violet Lane—and circling all that time the guilded cherubim big as horses that fly off the top of Dreary Station itself" (p. 7). Later, Hencher says that he watches "search lights" fix upon the "wounded cherubim [wounded because of the bombings] like giants caught naked in the sky" (p. 10). In comparison with this description of the cherubim, note Michael Banks' second "vision" of Rock Castle suspended in the air. He sees the horse

up near the very tip of the iron arm of the crane, rigid and captive in the sling of two webbed bands . . . they had wrapped a towel around its eyes—so that high in the air it became the moonlit spectacle of some giant weather vane. And seeing one of the front legs begin to move, to lift, and the hoof—that destructive hoof—rising up and dipping beneath the slick shoulder . . . (p. 52)

Hencher, watching this same scene, comments as they begin to lower the horse. He whispers to Michael, "'Ever see them lift a bomb out of a crater . . . something to see, man at a job like that and fishing up a live bomb big enough to blow a cathedral to the ground.'" (p. 50). These two passages suggest the explosiveness of Rock Castle as an image, and also remind us of the cherubim, defaced by bombs and poised on top of a cathedral. Moreover, Michael's vision of that "destructive hoof," that "shadowed hoof" which threatens to "splinter in a single crash one plank" of the floor of Dreary Station (p. 33), foreshadows Hencher's death.

Thus, the convergence of three images—Hencher's mother,
the cherubim, and Rock Castle--produces a response of horror from us. But this horror decreases when we juxtapose the fatalistic similarities between the three images with a statement Hencher makes on the cherubim early in his monologue. "We were so close to Dreary Station," he says, that

I could hear the locomotives shattering into bits of iron. And one night wouldn't a cherubim's hand or arm or curly head come flying down through our roof? Some dislodged ball of saintly brass palm or muscle or jagged neck find its target in Lily Eastchip's house? But I wasn't destined to die with a fat brass finger in my belly. (p. 10)

Once we have made the connection between the cherubim and Rock Castle, we realize that, indeed, Hencher will not die with the fat, brass finger of the cherubim in his belly. But the furthest extension of the cherubim's possible destructiveness, Rock Castle, will kick him to death with the closest thing he has to a brass finger or palm--a silver hoof.

Part of the comedy of this scene occurs because we see better than Hencher the dark prophecy of his words. The rest of the humor is generated by the presence of an implied author who is playing a joke on his readers, since Hencher actually seems to know how he is going to die. It's as if he delivers his monologue after his death, which is, in itself, a comic idea. This comedy is one of form because it depends on our ability to notice the author working behind the text; it draws our attention to the writer's artifice. When the implied author makes us aware of his technique here,
the comedy of the scene changes. First, the horror of Hencher's statement is tempered when we see him more as a fictional construct than as a real person; we are distanced from him and not so upset by his death. But we still can't ignore all the other images which the brass finger conjures up. These images are thematically important because their overlapping or convergence leads us to the structure and meaning of the text; the convergence of these images also allows us to see the book as more than just a conglomeration of random images. Furthermore, the interaction between this formal and thematic comedy forces us to look at Hencher's statement from a number of different angles, making his comments on death ironic, prophetic, comic, and horrible, all at the same time.

But the implications of Hencher's statement and the importance of the image of the cherubim do not end here. The mixture of terror, irony, and comedy which we find in the potential destructiveness of the cherubim gets further complicated when we compare its images to those of the winged man, Rock Castle, and Reggie's Rose. This tiny winged man, which is a hood ornament on Larry's limousine and van, is like Rock Castle in that it is silver, and like the cherubim in that it is winged. It is associated with Hencher, perceived through his point of view as a "tiny silver figure of a man which, in the attitude of pursuit, flies from the silver radiator cap" (p. 56). When the radiator overheats,
Hencher removes the cap and "kicks" the hood ornament away "into the potash and weeds" (p. 57). This image may at first seem harmless, peripheral; but note what happens when the image of Reggie's Rose landing in the courtyard attracts the images of the winged man, Rock Castle, and the cherubim to it.

For one thing, Reggie's Rose, the cherubim, and the hood ornament are all winged and either crash or threaten to crash to the ground. Moreover, the words used to describe Reggie's Rose could easily fit a horse, specifically Rock Castle. At one point, the plane is suspended in the air like Rock Castle in his leather straps, "ceasing to climb, ceasing to move," "stalled against the snow up there, the nose dropped" (p. 19); and like Rock Castle nearing the finish line, Reggie's Rose "push[es] on" with a "kind of gigantic and deranged and stubborn confidence" (p. 19). The decal of Rose is also like a horse in flight, "her long white head of hair," like a mane, "shrieking in the wind" (p. 19). The images of Rock Castle, the plane, the decal, the cherubim, the winged man, and even Hencher's mother, all fuse in a passage occurring just after Hencher leans against the plane for the first time. The act is like "touching your red cheek to a stranded whale's fluke when, in all your coastal graveyards, there was no witness, no one to see."
He continues:

I walk around the bubble of the nose— that small dome set on the edge with a great crack down the middle— and stood beneath the artistry of Reggie's Rose. Her leg was long, she sat on the parachute with one knee raised. In the kneecap was a half-moon hole for a man's boot, above it another, and then a hand grip just under the pilot's door. So I climbed up poor Rose, the airman's dream and big as one of the cherubim..." (Italics mine) (p. 21)

I have italicized words which suggest a comparison of the plane to other images I have mentioned. The "nose" and "long leg" remind us of descriptions of Rock Castle, and Hencher "climbs up" into the plane the way a jockey might mount a horse. He is the pilot-jockey of this plane-horse; he even has a pair of goggles at his disposal (p. 23), necessary accessories for both pilot and jockey. The crack down the plane's dome explicitly links the plane to Rock Castle, who, as we find out from Sidney Slyter, also has a crack down the middle of his head, the "King's own surgeon" having "transplanted a bone fragment from the skull of Emperor's Hand into Rock Castle's skull" (p. 124). Finally, in the above passage, we find an explicit comparison between the cherubim and the plane. It is a comparison which shouldn't surprise us, since we already know that Hencher imagines the cherubim falling through his apartment and crushing him, just as he anticipates being killed by the force of the plane crash, "brushed to death by a wing" (p. 20). This image of the cherubim, then, anticipates him being crushed under the hooves of Rock Castle, which, in turn, reminds us of Hencher
kicking the winged man into the bushes where he will lie when Cowles removes Hencher's battered body from the van.

My point is that every action, image, phrase, and so on in *The Lime Twig* is more complex than it originally seems when juxtaposed with other actions, images, etc. from the text. This juxtaposition of images also results in comedy. For example, the winged man represents Hencher's frustrations, and he seems to feel he can free himself from these frustrations by kicking the figure away. I say the hood ornament represents Hencher's frustrations because it, along with the cherubim and Reggie's Rose, is a winged creature incapable of flight. The ornament is rooted to the radiator cap; the cherubim is frozen to the top of the cathedral; and the plane is permanently grounded in the courtyard. Each of these images represents Hencher's impotence, and when they fuse with the image of his mother, they represent his frustrated sexuality. The images of "Mother," Reggie's Rose, and Rock Castle represent, respectively, Hencher's failure as lover, pilot, and jockey-gangster. Consequently, if we laugh at Hencher's abortive attempt to kick away the symbol of his frustration (the winged man), we also know that the furthest extension of that image, Rock Castle, will eventually have the last kick.

From the above analysis, the importance of comedy in *The Lime Twig* should be obvious: It reveals the meaning of scenes. Comic techniques force us to detach ourselves from Hencher's first person subjective point of view and see the monologue
from an objective position denied Hencher. Thus, comedy tells us where the author wants us to stand in a novel. It leads us to the perspective of the implied author of *The Lime Twig*, with whose values and beliefs we are expected to agree. And in *The Lime Twig*, the image that Hawkes creates of himself is of an author who is both attracted to and repulsed by William Hencher. That is, on one hand, this author seems attracted to Hencher's distinctive way of seeing and to the sense of devotion behind Hencher's obsessive descriptions. But, on the other hand, the comic techniques we find in the monologue, which undercut Hencher's personality, seem to tell us that we also are expected to understand, fear, and reject the potential destructiveness of Hencher's obsessions. As a result, when we read the monologue we are often torn between sympathizing with Hencher, laughing at him, and being disgusted with him.

The point of view in *The Lime Twig* is partly responsible for our conflicting responses to Hencher. For one thing, the first person point of view makes it easy for us to identify with Hencher. The first person monologue creates a voice, and most readers readily identify with someone speaking directly to them, no matter how perverse that someone may seem, especially when a voice like Hencher's reassures us of his devotion to and love of his mother.
Even if we do not like the details that William Hencher's narrative eye dwells on, we must still feel sorry that he spends his life as a perpetual lodger, continually forced to move from place to place.

But behind this first person monologue we sense an author arranging imagery and action, so that we are forced to question Hencher's perspective and discover his inadequacies, which often make him pathetically comic. It seems, then, that just as we are about to sympathize with Hencher, or to laugh at him, or to condemn him, our responses become complicated by new connections we make in the monologue itself or outside of the monologue where we receive information about Hencher from third person restricted or omniscient points of view. Perhaps out of all of the comic techniques in *The Lime Twig*, though, Hawkes' use of recurring imagery, action, and verbal patterns is the most important because it links Hencher's desires and obsessions with Michael and Margaret Banks. We can begin to see how inextricably these characters are bound together in life and death when we note the patterns of Hencher's thoughts and actions repeating themselves in the thoughts and actions of Michael and Margaret.

Like Hencher, Michael Banks wishes to be a gangster and a lover, and by the end of chapter seven, it seems as if his wishes have come true. Even as early as chapter five at Spumatis, he is accepted by Larry's gang, and with
this acceptance he makes a final leap into his secret dream-world. He is transformed and acquires magical abilities. All of a sudden, he knows how to banter with Sybil, how to touch her, and he even knows how to dance, "though he had never learned" (p. 119). In chapter seven, his powers increase: he becomes irresistible to women and sexually potent. He makes love to Sybil four times, and to the widow, Little Dora, and Annie once apiece. Moreover, he accomplishes this feat under the nose of Larry the Limousine, who we are told is the real "cock of this house" (p. 158). Rather than being impressed by Michael's metamorphosis, however, we know that Michael's change is a temporary one, as transitory as his one-night-stand with Sybil, for we have seen the real Michael in action long before he joins Larry's gang.

Although Michael is, indeed, an unlikely candidate for gangster or lover, it is easy to see why he is attracted to the excitement of these roles. He is as frustrated in his relationship with Margaret as Hencher is in his relationship with his mother, and, like Hencher, he seems impotent to alter his situation. Yet, since he feels that he must prove something to himself and to Margaret, he gets involved in the Rock Castle scam. Initially, he only seems interested in shaking up Margaret, not aware of how far he will descend into his dreams of sex and violence. Before he leaves home to meet Hencher, drinking from a bottle of liquor he has hidden (or so he thinks) in the
closet, he muses: "She'll wonder about me. She'll wonder where her hubby's at rightly enough" (p. 32). And Margaret does wonder; she worries to such a degree that she ends up talking to her cat, asking it, "'Where's my Michael off to? Where's my Michael gone?'" (p. 56). Michael's ability to anticipate so accurately Margaret's responses points out how boring his life with Margaret is, in contrast to the life he dreams about.

Their relationship is best summed up when the narrator, interrupting Margaret's thoughts, reflects on the couple's first kiss. "When Banks had first kissed her," we learn, "touching an arm that was only an arm, the cheek that was only a cheek, he had turned away to find a hair in his mouth" (p. 68). That last image of the hair in his mouth could stand as an objective correlative for their marriage. There is no passion in their union. More importantly, their first kiss pales before the kiss of Sybilline Laval, which, in Michael's mind, is "soft, venereal, sweet, and tasting of sex" (p. 122).

But even though Margaret's hair ruins the potential magic of that first kiss, she alone isn't responsible for the deficiencies in the Banks' marriage. Certainly we are not meant to sympathize completely with Michael. His marriage to Margaret isn't passionate and his life outside the house isn't exciting, but, ironically, they seem appropriate to the nature of his character. Indeed, when Michael has a chance to respond to a sexual adventure or
a dangerous situation, he either bungles those chances or becomes a caricature of a lover or gangster. Sybil notes Michael's inadequacies when she flirts with him at the Pavilion. In this scene, we are given Michael's lengthy description of Sybil, ending with an excited and breathless Michael thinking, "he could bear the crowds for this, and felt his feet dragging, his fingers pressing white against the sticky metal of the chair" (pp. 98-99). Yet he tries to stay calm, and when Sybil introduces herself, he asks, "'You wanted a word with me?'" (p. 99). Seeing through his pretense, probably sensing his exaggerated physical reaction to her presence, she laughs and replies, "'Oh come off it now . . . Sit down and have a drink with Sybil'" (p. 99).

A few other of Michael's one-liners also show his ineptitude at the roles he chooses to play. For example, at the Pavilion again, after Michael has noticed the tip of Sybil's tongue smelling like gin, the "fine soft flaming hair" on her arms, and the "holes cut in the tips of her brassiere" (p. 99), he senses her eyes on him. Rather than responding to her sexual presence, which has obviously excited him, he denies his attraction to himself. He can only say, "'I'm a married man'" (p. 100). This comment is comic, first, because it is the stereotypical reaction of a married man's first venture outside of marriage. It is as if Michael is reminding himself of his marital status. His comment is also comic because of Sybil's reaction to
him. Michael thinks he has startled her, but Sybil acts as if she doesn't even hear him, because "there was a waltz coming out of the speaker, and she was laughing, twisting a curl the color of nail polish round her finger" (p. 100).

Sybil ignores Michael because, unlike him, she is a part of Larry's gang, and in her world sexual availability has nothing to do with marriage. Yet even though she, and we, recognize Michael as a pretender, Sybil and Larry allow him to hang around. They recognize his usefulness. Sybil wants to dominate him, and Larry needs a respectable front for his operation. We, however, may have trouble tolerating Michael's attempts at being a lover-gangster because we know so much about him. Sybil and Larry can only guess at Michael's mundaneness; we are given a detailed account of it back at Dreary Station, an appropriate place for Michael and Margaret to live.

So far, then, it seems that Michael resembles Henry Van of Charivari. We have trouble sympathizing with both of these characters because they seem so silly and incompetent. However, although Michael shares some of Henry's faults, he is, in his own way, as devoted to Margaret as Hencher is to "Mother." Whenever Michael is present, there are reminders of Margaret everywhere. For example, Margaret physically disrupts Michael's dream-world at the race track. He spots her shortly after he has met with
Sybilline, shortly after he has told Sybil that he is a married man, which makes us wonder if Michael's confession doesn't invoke Margaret's presence in some strange way. This scene deserves a long analysis because, as it plays itself out, we see the kind of comedy at work which makes Hawkes' fiction worth reading.

Michael is wandering at the racetrack among a crowd who is taunting him, asking him if he has a quid, if he plans to bet on a horse. But Michael is unafraid of them; he is, after all, a member of Larry's gang and protected from the crowd by its fear of Larry. But even though he feels that he has control over the mob, he also wants to be accepted by them. Consequently, he tries to impress the woman with an "impression of knuckles beneath one eye" (p. 105). He tells her that he has been picking all the winning horses, but not for cash. Even though she calls his bluff, another man from the crowd defends Michael and tells the woman to shut up. And it seems for a moment that Michael has been accepted—by Sybil, by the gang, and by the crowd at Aldington.

But then over the heads of the crowd, Michael saw the profile of Margaret's face. When he jumped, took the first long stride, he kicked something under his foot and in a moment knew it to be the young woman's powder case, without looking down, heard the tinkle and scrape of the contents scattering.

"Here, don't be rude . . .," he heard the older woman say, and he was pushing, pushing away into the midst of them. And still there was the face and he gasped, slipped between the two men in black, tried not to lose her,
raised a hand. Here was surprise and familiarity, not out of fear, but fondness, and between them both perhaps three hundred others not moving, not caring what they lost in the sun.

"My God, what have they done to Margaret!"

Because, for the moment only he saw the whole of her and she was wearing clothes he had never seen before—an enormous flower hat and a taffy-colored gown with black-beaded tassles sewn about the waist and sewn also just above the bottom that was dragging. A dress from another age, too large, too old, Margaret clothed in an old tan garden gown and lost. "She's not yet thirty," he thought, shoving, using his elbow, "where's their decency?" Then she was gone and he shouted. (pp. 105-06)

When he reaches the spot where Margaret had stood, there is no one there. But he does see Margaret being led toward the Men's room by a man and a woman.

"Wait!" he was only thinking it, "wait!" Here was the first taste from the cup of panic, seeing the girl, his wife, pulled suddenly away from him by an arm. (p. 107)

We learn a number of things from this scene. When Michael first sees Margaret, he jumps, which again shows that he is not yet a part of the gang. It's as if he is a child who has been caught pretending to be something he isn't. But Margaret's appearance also causes confusion, and the crowd, which Michael has just become a part of, grows surly, like one of those faceless mobs in Nathanael West's fiction. It prevents Michael from reaching Margaret; it won't allow him to penetrate its mass. Then added to Michael's confusion and fear at being caught up in mob reaction is another emotion: "fondness." Suddenly, we feel
that an important bond exists between the couple, that something is at stake because of their separation. And when Michael exclaims with great concern, "'My God, what have they done to Margaret!'" we forget for a moment his silly conversations with Sybilline and with the woman at the Pavilion. We also share his confusion at the sight of Margaret dressed in clothes from another age, and we share his fear that she might be lost.

But lest we become too concerned about the couple, we are quickly reminded of Michael's foolishness by his final, inappropriate reaction to and comment on Margaret's "old tan garden gown." He doesn't think to ask the important question: what is she doing at the racetrack? Nor does he seem concerned for her safety. Instead, he is disturbed because the gown doesn't do her justice. "'She's not yet thirty,' he thought . . . 'Where's their decency?"' This question suggests that Michael wouldn't have been concerned at all if Margaret had been dressed in something that fit her age and style. But if we laugh at his inappropriate response to Margaret's wardrobe, we also cringe a bit, because it anticipates her own strange response to Thick's beating, when she is more concerned about the drabness of her hospital gown than about the beating itself. Her death is also foreshadowed in the racetrack scene because we know from later on in the novel that the old gown is the possession of a woman "long-dead" (p. 125). Consequently, when we read this
long passage, we feel uncomfortable because of the conflict between our concern for the couple and our urge to laugh at them. When we add to this ongoing tension the foreshadowings of Margaret's death, we realize that both Margaret and Michael are in for trouble. We also realize that they have brought these troubles on themselves.

It might be argued that I am not being fair to Hawkes' characterization of Michael in this scene, since Michael does show concern for Margaret; he does follow her as far as the Men's room. But I think his fear wins out over his concern when he can't bring himself to descend the stairs of the bathroom. His inability to follow her, to protect her, again makes us aware of his impotence, how little control he has over events. No doubt, he freezes at the top of the stairs because he remembers those three, anonymous Kafkaesque men who, earlier, had confronted him in the lavatory. These three men are the "eunuchs," "the mathematicians" (p. 92), the "triangle of his dreams" (p. 94), who frighten him so badly that, after they have gone, Michael remains on the "piece of battered lavatory equipment for an endless time," his eyes "half-shut" (p. 95). And so it seems that we experience a number of conflicting emotions when we follow Michael's actions at the racetrack. We begin by finding him comic, then we sympathize with him and Margaret, and then we find him comic again. Moreover, as we undergo these emotional shifts, there is always
the reminder of Margaret's death hovering in the background, darkening the scene.

It is no coincidence that Margaret's beating occurs in the text before Michael's seduction. Echoes from Margaret's chapter, along with echoes from scenes involving Hencher, seem meant to intrude on Michael's and Sybil's bedroom farce. These echoes remind us of the horrible results of Michael's decision at Spumatis to ride with the gang to the widow's house, and they darken the surface humor of Michael's sexual exploits. I say "surface" humor because, at first glance, Michael seems harmless and ridiculous in his sexual bouts with Sybiline, the widow, Little Dora, and Annie.

With Sybil, he is childish in the way he perceives events. "'Be a sweet boy!'" (p. 143), Sybil says to him as they play pearl games and indulge in sexual acrobatics. And Michael is a good boy, crawling on hands and knees, retrieving another pearl, his ticket of admission. Michael thinks he is having some innocent fun. He even believes that Sybil is innocent, "her fresh poses making his own dead self fire as if he had never touched her and making her body look tight and childish as if she had never been possessed by him" (p. 142). "That was the fine thing about Sybiline," he thinks later, "the way she could kiss and play and let her spangles fall, keep track of all the chemistry and her good times, and yet be sighing, sighing like a young girl in love" (p. 144).
But we view Michael's seduction and seductress differently than he does. We know that Sybil is not a "maiden" (p. 143), as Michael suggests. Instead, she comes to him as a lower class version of Aphrodite, and a little worse for the wear. As Dora says, "'Sybil's always been a cat . . . first at the fellows, first in bed'" (p. 149). But although Michael's idealistic perceptions of Sybil seem comic here, they are also frightening when we juxtapose them with Sybil's real, destructive intentions. As much as she is his seductress, she is also his emasculator. In a sense, she assaults him in a manner similar to the way Thick and Larry attack Margaret.

For one thing, Michael's seduction and Margaret's beating both take place in bed and occur between two and four in the morning. Sybil uses a stocking on Michael, Thick is less subtle with his truncheon. Thick's attack, of course, is more physically violent and grotesque than Sybil's seduction, and yet, from Margaret's point of view, the attack resembles a game. As already mentioned in my preliminary discussion of the beating scene, according to our standards, Margaret responds inappropriately to the beating. She likens Thick's truncheon to a "bean bag, an amusement for a child" (p. 127), and she thinks her bruises are "invisible" (p. 126). Admittedly, Margaret's game with Thick is more lethal than the pearl games of Michael and Sybil, but her unreal perceptions of the beating makes it a game, nonetheless. We can see
the similarities between these two beatings when we jux-
tapose the events of chapters six and seven. We also see
how Hencher's presence is invoked in these chapters.

When Sybil is through with Michael, she grabs one of
her stockings and makes it into a ball. She

reached forward and thrust the round silk be-
tween his widespread legs and against the
depth of his loin, rubbing, pushing, laughing.
He flushed.
"You see," whispering, "you can win if you
want to, Mike, my dear. But that's all for
now." (p. 144)

In this passage, Michael's perception of himself as lover
is again undermined. Sybil initiates all the action, and
he is completely controlled by her. His submission is
made clear when, in the beginning of the chapter, we see
him crawling around on all fours in bed, looking for one
of Sybil's pearls. His ignominious position here reminds
us of Hencher and Michael crawling around on all fours in
the scum of the quay as they await the unloading of Rock
Castle (p. 46). The language in this passage also sur-
prizes us because it suggests that, sexually, Sybil and
Michael have exchanged roles. She is the one thrusting
the phallic instrument (the stocking in her fist) into
Michael's loins.

But, as usual, the comedy of this scene darkens when
echoes from Thick's "real" beating of Margaret are felt.
Margaret's beating scene seems as sexual as Michael's
seduction. Thick is shirtless when he attacks her, and
the top buttons of his trousers are open (p. 127). Moreover, note how Thick speaks to Margaret. Like Sybil, he whispers as he holds the truncheon in the dark. "'I've beat girls before,'" he says. "'And I don't leave bruises.'"

"And if I happen to be without my weapon," raising a little the whiteness of the truncheon, the rubber, "the next best thing is a newspaper rolled and soaking wet. But here, get the feel of it, Miss." He reached down for her and she felt the truncheon nudging against her thigh, gently, like a man's cane in the crowd. (pp. 127-28)

You don't have to be a Freudian critic to make the connection between the truncheon and a penis ("a man's cane in a crowd"). Indeed, part of the humor of this passage occurs because the sexual comparison--between truncheon, cane, penis--is made so explicit. But, for our purposes, the passage is most important because of its similarities to the stocking scene. That is, as we laugh at Michael's seduction scene in chapter seven, and as we are amused by the language in that chapter which reverses sex roles, we simultaneously think of Thick's rough treatment of Margaret in the previous chapter. And we realize that Margaret might not have been in her unfortunate position if Michael hadn't insisted on pursuing his sexual fantasies.

Consequently, although Michael's actions and perceptions of those actions seem comic in chapter seven,
the repercussions of those actions are not. The complexity of chapter seven occurs when we embrace, at the same time, the apparent comedy and yet real danger of Michael's actions. This comedy itself is furthered every time we feel Margaret's presence in Michael's chapter, even in a minor scene, as when Sybil says to Michael, "'You can win if you want to'" (p. 144). The perceptive reader will remember that this phrase is also on an unillustrated poster Margaret notices before she is taken to the room where she will die (p. 77).

Besides Margaret's presence, the spirit of William Hencher also haunts chapter seven, appearing at key moments. As already explained, Hencher's presence will always be felt, at least subtly, when Michael is with Sybilline because of the similarities between Michael's perception of her and Hencher's perception of his mother. In Michael's chapter, however, Hencher explicitly surfaces in a conversation between Michael and Sybil. Michael, as usual, is making a fool out of himself, searching for Sybil's third pearl. Sybil teases him, "'I've seduced you, Mike, haven't I?'" "'You have,'" Michael answers, "'Good as your word'" (p. 142). As we note Michael's boyish acceptance of his seduction here, we must also realize that the phrase, "good as your word," is one of the idiosyncracies of speech that we associate with Hencher.

The repetition of Hencher's words by Michael affects our response to the seduction scene in a number of ways.
First, we are forced to shift our focus from Michael's comic, prolonged sexual pyrotechnics with Sybil. Instead, we think, for a moment, about Hencher, whom we have, most likely, forgotten about, and whom we know to be dead, pummeled by Rock Castle. When we feel Hencher's presence, everything we associate with him—his relationship with his mother, his attraction to and fear of Reggie's Rose and Rock Castle—becomes a part of Michael's chapter. Moreover, because Michael speaks William Hencher's words, we must ask if he has absorbed the spirit of Hencher, as some critics suggest? Is it fair, then, to see Sybil as an extension of Reggie's Rose, Hencher's mother, and Rock Castle? Sybil has a mane of hair like Rose and Rock Castle. She also has holes cut out in the tips of her brassiere, which remind us of the burning hole on the tip of "Mother's" brassiere.

I don't know if we can, or should, answer these questions. It is important enough just to raise them.

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because the overlapping of these images suggests that we should be aware of Hencher's presence in chapter seven in order to understand how the dreams and desires of characters are beginning to merge. Sometimes, as above, Hencher's presence is implied from recurring imagery or verbal patterns. Other times, he is explicitly mentioned in the text. For example, after Michael and Annie have made love, for apparently no reason at all, she tells Michael to "evict" Hencher, "'why don't you, Mike . . . throw the bastard out'" (p. 157). Her comment, of course, is ironic because Hencher is dead, and it is awfully difficult to evict a dead man. But there is a double irony in her suggestion to Michael because, in a metaphorical sense, Michael is incapable of evicting Hencher, or Margaret for that matter, from his dream-world. They reappear in various forms throughout Michael's sections. Even at the end of the book, when Michael rushes toward Rock Castle with arms outspread (p. 179), we are reminded of Hencher trying to hold off the descending Reggie's Rose with "outstretched arms" (p. 20), and of Margaret striking out with her "numb and sleepy arms" at her rapist, Larry (p. 137).

Amid the irony and comedy of chapter seven, then, death and destruction lurk, which account for our mixed reactions to Michael's seduction. I have already discussed one death in *The Lime Twig* (Hencher's), and an-
ticipated another (Michael's). But neither of these deaths is so minutely described, so complex, as Margaret's, and neither of them is given an entire chapter to itself. In my preliminary discussion of the beating scene, I argued that we must distance ourselves emotionally from Thick's attack on Margaret if we want to see all the implications of that beating. In one sense, we are numbed to the horror of the event by our disbelief at Margaret's inappropriate responses to the attack. But there is also a narrator present in the book who detaches us from the violence of the scene and further undermines our sympathy for Margaret by describing her in very impersonal language. Before we can see how both of the above techniques of distancing combine to create a strangely comic scene—one that also reveals the terrible results of Margaret's belief that she can live out her darkest wishes—we must first look at the information we are given about Margaret before she is attacked.

On the surface, she seems more shallow than Hencher or Michael, so shallow that, at different times in the novel, we must ask if the "innocence" one critic associates with her isn't plain stupidity, slowness of mind.

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6Greiner, Comic Terror, p. 154.
She is boring and has a routine life (p. 30), living among the "cold laurels" of an "empty room": "beef broth, water to be drawn and boiled, the sinister lamp to light, a torn photograph of children by the sea" (p. 65). And it doesn't seem as if she is unsuited to this environment. By nature, Margaret seems vacuous. As the narrator informs us:

She was a girl with a band on her hand and poor handwriting, and there was no other world for her. No bitters in a bar, slick hair, smokes, no checkered vests. She was Banks' wife by the law, she was Margaret, and if the men ever did get a hold of her and go at her with the truncheons or knives or knuckles, she would still be merely Margaret with a dress and a brown shoe, still be only a girl of twenty-five with a deep wave in her hair. (pp. 69-70)

This passage suggests two reasons for Margaret's more than ordinary lifestyle: her marriage to Michael (the band on her finger), and her own basic tastes (the brown shoe and wave in her hair). We might sympathize with her here, feel she is innocent, especially since the passage also anticipates her death, even the instruments used on her (the truncheon and Larry's knife). But this passage also suggests Margaret's dark side, which seems to hope for the beating. This is the side of her that imagines "crostics" feeling her legs, that dreams of herself lying "with an obscure member of the government on a leather couch" (p. 68), and
imagines each railroad tie to be a small child being crushed under the train she takes to Aldington (p. 70). If we remember this side of Margaret, she doesn't seem so innocent anymore. It's as if we are being told by the implied author, who himself is arranging all this information on Margaret, that if we do sympathize with her, this sympathy should have no sentimental base; it will be a different kind of sympathy.

One way the author leads us to this complex response to Margaret is by creating a narrator who "objectifies" her. We see this narrator at work in a long passage following Thick's final beating of Margaret. In one of the great understatements of the novel, Margaret thinks, "Thick had been too rough with her, treated her too roughly, and some things didn't tolerate surviving, some parts of her couldn't stand a beating" (p. 130). Suddenly, a narrator intrudes, and we see Margaret as if from the eye of a camera held above her, as if we are scrutinizing her through the lens of a microscope. We learn that

The moon had failed, the last clothes off her back were torn to threads, the ginger cake they had given her at noon sat half-eaten and bearing her teeth marks in a chipped saucer atop the wardrobe. The moonlight's wash reached the window and fell across the brass and Margaret on the bed: a body having shiny knees, white gown twisted to the waist, arms stretched horizontally to the end of the bed and crossed; gray mattress-ticking beneath the legs whose calves were swollen into curves, and the head itself turned
The sobs were not sweet. They were short, moist, lower than contralto, louder than she intended; the moanings of a creature no one could love. (pp. 130-31).

All of the words I have italicized in this passage distance us from Margaret; they turn her into a thing. Linguistically, we are never led in this passage to believe that a real human being is suffering this beating. Margaret is a "body," a "creature," and, much worse, a "creature no one could love." Moreover, only once does the narrator use the personal pronoun "her" to refer to something of Margaret's: "her back." By omitting "her" the narrator makes us view the scene as Thick would; we see Margaret as an object or thing which needs a beating.

Note how the entire tone of the passage would change if I were to insert the pronoun "her" in place of the definite article "the," and also add a few verbs and phrases, so that we would be forced to see and feel the beating from the point of view of a Margaret Banks who is suffering.

She felt as if the moonlight coming through the window was washing around her and the brass bed. She looked down at her battered body, her shiny knees, her white gown twisted around her waist; then she looked at her arms stretched horizontally to the end of the bed and crossed; she felt the gray mattress-ticking beneath her legs, her calves swollen into curves and she felt her head . . .
In this revision, we can feel Margaret's pain and we pity her. Written in this way, the scene is also easier to assimilate because it fulfills our expectations of how a normal person would react to a beating, and how a normal reader should respond to the victim. But Margaret is not a normal victim, and if we want to understand the beating scene, we cannot behave like conventional readers. On one hand, we are conscious of a real beating taking place and respond to it on an emotional and moral level. That is, when we become aware of the narrator's impersonal language, and also of the implied author behind this narrative voice, we shift our focus from our preconceived ideas of what a beating should entail. Moreover, once we are distanced by language from Margaret, we come to understand better her inappropriate responses.

Part of Margaret's problem is that, like the narrator, she, too, objectifies herself. She sees herself as a casualty in some newspaper she has read or as a suffering actress on the screen at Victoria Hall. Consequently, her perception of the beating is unrealistic and also comic, even if eerily so. For instance, even though she has been beaten and is bleeding to death, she believes that she is in a "bed she could not know—upon it a violence that seemed not meant for her" (p. 125). She even isn't surprised by the beating: "it was something done to abducted girls, that's all" (p. 126). She acts as if the entire beating has been a game, the truncheon "a bean
bag, an amusement for a child" (p. 127); and she seems most concerned about her predicament because now she no longer would be able to play with Monica. "She cared for nothing that Thick could do, but she would miss the games" (p. 128). Even right before her death she acts unrealistically, like one of those B-movie heroines at Victoria Hall. She waits for her hero Michael to save her, not knowing that while she is bleeding to death, Michael is finishing up with Annie and looking toward Little Dora. Perhaps Margaret's strangest response occurs when she feels "triumph" as Larry cuts her ropes, noting that all of his "gestures were considerate, performed calmly and with care" (pp. 136-37). Larry appears to be such a gentleman about the whole business that Margaret is surprised when she feels blood trickling down her wrists. "'You've wounded me,'" she whispers to him. "'You cut me.'" Larry seems as surprised by her naive comment as we are. "'I meant to cut you, Miss,'" he replies, no doubt, just as Thick meant to beat her (p. 137).

Many critics have argued that Margaret's inappropriate responses to her beating represent her innocence. But these analyses overlook Margaret's dark side, which anticipates her beating and death, even longs for them. Consequently, if we want to describe Margaret as innocent, we have to redefine the term in such a way that it doesn't imply she is a victim or free from blame. In fact, we can
only use the term if we mean that she is simple-minded. If anything, Margaret is a parody of innocence; she shows how an exaggerated form of it invites evil. In spite of her situation, then, we do end up frustrated by her responses to Thick and Larry; and we also find her comic, even if we feel uncomfortable with this kind of dark comedy.

So far, then, it seems as if William Hencher, Michael Banks, and Margaret Banks, all do not see the dangers of their dreams and desires. They live in illusory worlds which even physical pain cannot disrupt. The comic method of The Lime Twig functions to distinguish for us the enormous gap between these characters' illusory worlds and the real world they must exist in. And yet no matter how foolish these characters sometimes appear to us, we are never so completely frustrated by them that we refuse to sympathize with their plights. One reason we maintain sympathy for Hencher and Michael and Margaret Banks is because, from the beginning of the novel, we sense them all moving toward some sort of communal death and destruction. We fear for them as their dreams begin to overlap and the implications of their actions multiply and multiply until Michael must shatter their shared dream by bringing down Rock Castle on the racetrack at Aldington.

It is necessary for Michael to destroy Rock Castle because his dreams and the dreams of Hencher and Margaret merge in the image of the horse. I suggest this relationship between Rock Castle and Hencher and Michael and
Margaret Banks for a number of reasons. For one thing, Hencher and Michael know the horse first-hand, and they also have surrogate Rock Castles to respond to: "Mother," Reggie's Rose, and Sybilline. Larry the Limousine is Margaret's substitute for Rock Castle, and the descriptions of him—sometimes filtered through Margaret's point of view, other times given by the narrator—link him to Rock Castle and thus to all other manifestations of the horse. For example, to Margaret, Larry appears as a big man, "heavy as a horse cart of stone" (p. 72). Later in the novel, the narrator describes Larry bathing. No matter how much he washes himself, like an animal, the "tips of his fingernails" were always "black." We also see him grooming himself, holding the "brushes in two hands, [applying] them simultaneously to the shine of his hair" (p. 80). And then, after he has put on his bullet-proof vest, which fits "over the undervest like silk," he sits in a "horsehair rocker in the sun by the window" (p. 80). He seems most like Rock Castle when he is stripped to the bullet-proof vest and swaying (pp. 135-36), much in the same way Rock Castle sways in his leather straps as he is being unloaded from *The Artemis*. Finally, consider this passage:

So sometime after 4 A.M. she tried to use her numb and sleeping arms, twice struck out at him [Larry ], then found her hands, the bloody wrists, the elbows, and at last her cheek going down beneath and against the solid sheen of his bullet-proof vest. (p. 137)
How similar this death is to the deaths of Michael and Hencher, who both go down, arms outstretched, under the great silver animal Rock Castle.

Rock Castle itself is an interesting image in the way it reminds one of the beetle in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Because of Kafka's naturalistic style in that novel, we always feel that we are in the presence of a real, live beetle, yet we know that the beetle is also something "other"—the physical manifestation of Gregor Samsa's psychological perception of himself. Kafka also recognized the intangible quality of the beetle, which is probably why he refused his publisher's request to have a picture of a beetle superimposed on the front cover of the book. Kafka felt the beetle couldn't be drawn. Certainly we feel the same way about the image of Rock Castle. We realize that the horse's image is so powerful because it partakes, equally, of the real and dream worlds; we also realize that any picture of the horse must come from each reader's perception of what it represents. In this sense, the image of Rock Castle is perhaps more profound to us than it is to even Hencher, Michael, and Margaret. For these characters the horse is the projection of their individual desires and wishes. But because we are privy to all of these characters' thoughts and actions, our perception of Rock Castle is more intense than theirs. The horse seems to be the image on which all actions and thoughts in the novel converge. Consequently,
we have to ask what Michael accomplishes by destroying it.

Concerning Michael's final gesture, Donald J. Greiner writes:

When Banks dies crushed beneath Rock Castle, the dream-world literally collapses but in a comic way because the track is strewn with fallen horses and men. Larry's plan to marry Dora among the lime trees in the Americas has also failed since he will not have the money for the trip. Michael atones for his betrayal by destroying the dream which, because it has become reality, necessitates his own death. In doing so he shatters what Hawkes calls the "Golden Bowl of earthly pleasures."

His successful act of redemption is, nevertheless, a hopeless act. For while he repudiates the evil when he jumps in front of the horse he is still a victim of that evil in which he has so willingly participated.7

Greiner does admit, however, that it is a mistake to "term Michael's death meaningless," for redemption, "though sacrifice" is "certainly not a meaningless act."8

The problem with Greiner's analysis is that he doesn't distinguish between the two kinds of horses which merge in the single image of Rock Castle. First, there is the flesh and blood Rock Castle who is running in the Golden Bowl. This is the Rock Castle whose tongue is tied down and mouth "filled with green scum" (p. 164). It is the horse Larry and the gang hope to make real money on. The destruction

7Greiner, pp. 155-56.

8Greiner, p. 156.
of this horse is not that important, and I don't think it affects Larry as adversely as Grenier suggests. No doubt, Larry has been foiled before, and by now we must believe that someone with Larry's control over men, women, and the police (he is God in the novel as far as Hawkes is concerned), can get the money to go to the Americas if he wants to. There will be other Henchers and Michaels and Margarets out there—Annie, for instance, whose dream to kiss a jockey (p. 64) is granted by Larry (p. 165), seems like a likely candidate for the gang's next job.

But when Michael destroys the mythical Rock Castle—the projection of the desires and wishes of Michael, Margaret, and Hencher—he accomplishes a significant action. I would go so far as to say that his action is one of hope and even love, and it is treated differently by the narrator than any other scene in the book. Greiner argues that the picture of the fallen horses and men is comical, but in what way? In fact, the scene is treated seriously and we are encouraged to sympathize with Michael. Moreover, many of the comic devices we have noted in The Lime Twig are absent from the final chapter of the book.

For example, before Michael decides to bring an abrupt end to the race, we sense for the first time in the novel

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that he genuinely cares for Margaret and is sorry for his betrayal of her. He invokes her name twice, "Margaret, Margaret" (pp. 168-69), before he rushes toward the sound of the pounding hoofs. It's as if he senses that she is lost to him forever. And as he runs, we see and feel events completely from his point of view. We are running with Michael, dodging bullets, hoping that he accomplishes the destruction of Rock Castle. Then, all of a sudden, the point of view begins to shift. Michael is on the track. He sees the horses coming at him the way a photographer might, "except that there was no camera, no truck's tailgate to stand upon"

Only the virgin man-made stretch of track and at one end the horses bunching in fateful heat and at the other end himself--small, yet beyond elimination, whose single presence purported a toppling of the day, a violation of that scene at Aldington, wreckage to horses and little crouching men. (p. 170)

I do not understand what Greiner considers comic about this toppling, since I feel in complete sympathy with Michael. In the part of this passage I have italicized, I see the narrator explicitly commenting, with no irony, on the value of Michael's action; and for once it seems as if the narrator, the reader, and a character are in synch. That is, all three perceive Michael's action as being positive. As a result, for once our vision is not complicated by the strange comedy or stylistic games which characterize the rest of the novel. It's as if the implied author is
telling us to take this scene as it is, as a positive gesture.

There is, of course, a problem with this analysis. It suggests that Michael has redeemed himself, Margaret, and Hencher by bringing down the symbol of their self-destructiveness, Rock Castle. Thus, the novel has a very moral, traditional ending with Good overcoming Evil. But not quite. On Michael's final action, Hawkes says that

despite all my interest in evil, all my belief in the terrifying existence of Satanism in the world, I guess by the end of [The Lime Twig] I somehow intuitively must have felt the human and artistic need to arrive at a resolution which would be somehow redemptive.10

Obviously, Hawkes wouldn't have been able to accomplish his purposes if he had treated Michael as humorously as he did in previous chapters of the book.

But this positive ending does not mean that Hawkes has taken an easy way out of the book. As we read the ending, we still remember the foolishness of Hencher, Michael, and Margaret, and we remember the dark dream-like world they become a part of. This world shadows Michael's redemptive act. It is a world like ours, one we try to ignore. It is unpredictable, paradoxical, and if one doesn't know how to act in it, one can make a fool of oneself, or worse, get killed.

Throughout this chapter we have seen that the implied author of *The Lime Twig* reveals the complexity of this world through comic methods, because comedy, by its very nature, nurtures paradox. Indeed, all of Hawkes' requirements for comedy seem to be fulfilled in *The Lime Twig*. The comic strategies employed create in us sympathy and compassion for characters, and yet allow us to judge those characters' human failings as severely as possible. These methods also expose evil in the world (and in characters themselves) and persuade us that we might not be exempt from that evil if we give in to our darkest desires and wishes. More important, the comic distortion in *The Lime Twig* convinces us that in life, both real and imaginary, anything is possible. That is, even though we feel that Michael truly has redeemed himself at the end of the book, nevertheless, the dark, comic, paradoxical world of *The Lime Twig* survives him. The final joke occurs on the last page when the police find Hencher's body and go off in the wrong direction to "uncover the particulars of this crime" (p. 175).

Hawkes has stated that Nathanael West is the master of the "sick joke," and that he uses it so that "you feel behind it the idealism, the need for innocence and purity, truth, and strength, and so on." In Michael's action, we see a bit of idealism, innocence, purity, and truth, which
previously have been perverted by characters and parodied by the narrator. Ultimately, we are meant to see Michael as a character who stands up, albeit too late, to the evil in the world and in himself. In a sense, his final action provides a nice transition into Hawkes' next novel, Second Skin, where we find a character named Skipper who bears the brunt of every sick joke his friends and family play on him, and who still, like Michael, seems to transcend these jokes and the evil around him—not by action but by language. Even better than Michael, Skipper survives.
"In Second Skin," Hawkes says, "I tried consciously to write a novel that couldn't be mistaken for anything but a comic novel." Although most critics of Second Skin have agreed that it is in a large part comic, they have disagreed, often vehemently, on the contradictory nature of Skipper, the comic protagonist of the novel. This disagreement should not surprise us because Skipper's character is shifty and ambiguous, and it lends itself to different interpretations. For instance, Peter Brooks argues that Skipper's capacity for love, which Skipper himself often praises, is "undiscriminating, misdirected and repellent," and that his "courage" is mostly a "pose." Stressing Skipper's unreliability as narrator, Anthony Santore calls him a "coward" and a character who is "untruthful to himself, for it is only by suppressing the truth that he is able to endure his life and to bring order into it." John Kuehl


is even harder on Skipper, accusing him of driving "both his wife (Gertrude) and daughter (Cassandra) to suicide."\(^4\)

But there are other critics who admire Skipper. Stephen G. Nichols is representative of Skipper's fans. He argues that Papa Cue Ball's "visionary recreation of his journey proves him to be the man of courage he claims to be."\(^5\) Still other critics have mixed feelings about Skipper. Early in his analysis of *Second Skin*, Donald J. Greiner writes that "we despise Skipper's ineffectiveness, his incredible innocence in the presence of clearly defined evil, and his absurd efforts to save his daughter Cassandra from suicide, which succeed only in hastening her death."\(^6\) But later Greiner recants. Contrasting Skipper with some of Hawkes' previous first person narrators—Cap Leech, Zizendorf, and Il Gufo—he argues that Skipper is "normal, recognizable to all of us, and an acceptable object of our sympathy. The more he suffers violence, the more we sympathize, despite his bumbling, because we know him to be a good man."\(^7\) Hawkes himself


\(^6\) Greiner, *Comic Terror*, p. 161.

\(^7\) Greiner, p. 161.
recognizes that Skipper has two sides. *Second Skin*, he says, is about a "bumbler, an absurd man, sometimes reprehensible, sometimes causing the difficulties, the dilemmas he gets in—but ending with some kind of inner strength that allows him to live."^8

In a sense, all of the above responses to Skipper are valid depending on what scenes we look at. He is a walking contradiction, sometimes courageous and loving, other times cowardly, impotent, and absurdly naive. It is precisely because his character is so paradoxical that his narrative is such a rich source of comedy. But as illusive as Skipper's character is, we must try to come to grips with it if we wish to understand *Second Skin*, because the way we view Skipper's thoughts and actions determines how we evaluate his narrative. Skipper openly discloses his values and attitudes, and the only way we can judge their worth is to compare them to our own values and attitudes and to those of the implied author.

Thus, we must follow Skipper's interpretation of events, while at the same time clinging to our own perceptions of them. And we must also note how the implied author is arranging the text in such a way so that we must question Skipper's reliability. It is difficult,

of course, to achieve this detachment in *Second Skin*, since the entire novel is mediated through Skipper's highly emotional and idealistic consciousness. Our job is further complicated when we realize that Skipper's narrative is really a defense, an *apologia pro vita sua*, as Susan Sontag calls it;⁹ and a character who is on the defensive will naturally omit details unflattering to himself. Finally, we must deal with Skipper's style of story-telling: his effusive language and irregular ordering of action. His story often seems as erratic as that hummingbird that darts from a flower to his window sill (p. 1); it seems as changeable as the wind, "its rough and whispering characteristics, the various spices of the world it brings together suddenly in hot or freezing gusts to alter the flow of our inmost recollections of pleasure and pain" (p. 3)¹⁰. We must give ourselves over to this viewpoint, and yet also synthesize what it has divided up.

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¹⁰John Hawkes, *Second Skin* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 3. All further references will be in parentheses.
In contrast to *The Lime Twig*, in *Second Skin* we only have to deal with one point of view, Skipper's. But this fact doesn't make reading the novel any easier for us, since Skipper is such an unreliable narrator. We see his unreliability by contrasting his flattering self-portrait with our own perception of him. "I will tell you in a few words who I am," he says:

lover of the hummingbird that darts to the flower beyond the rotted sill where my feet are propped; lover of bright needlepoint and the bright stitching fingers of humorless old ladies bent to their sweet and infamous designs; lover of parasols made from the same puffy stuff as a young girl's underdrawers; still lover of that small naval boat which somehow survived the distressing years of my life between her decks or in her pilothouse; and also lover of poor dear black Sonny, my mess boy, fellow victim and confidant, and of my wife and child. But most of all, lover of my harmless and sanguine self.

Yet surely I am more than a man of love. It will be clear, I think; that I am a man of courage as well. (p. 1)

Shortly thereafter Skipper tells us that even his father's suicide could not undermine his "capacity for love" (p. 3). Although he realizes that some readers will laugh at his profession of love and courage, "others, like Sonny, recognize my need, my purpose, my strength and grace, always my strength and grace" (p. 3).

Skipper's self-praise is important in this first section because the rest of the novel deals with his attempts to prove how loving and courageous he is. In each section of the book, except the wandering island
sections, Skipper is confronted with evil which is directed either at him or a member of his extended family, and he tries to convince us that he not only survives this evil, but that he stares it down and overcomes it. He is "Miranda's match," he says, and to be Miranda's match is to be defender of some archetypal goodness, since she seems the embodiment of pure evil, the "final challenge of our sad society" (p. 5).

If we were to rely solely on Skipper's description of himself, we would end up believing that his story is one of legendary proportions (thus the many references to mythological figures in the book). According to Skipper, he is a good man who goes out and battles the dragons of darkness. But, in fact, he is more complicated than this. It seems that he, like Margaret Banks, has a strange attraction to evil. And part of the comedy of Second Skin occurs when we note Skipper's fascination for evil, death, and sexual depravity even as he is struggling against them. We first see these two sides of Skipper in his reactions to the deaths of his mother and father. Moreover, his responses to these deaths represent the two opposite ways that he views life.

Skipper sees his father's death as a threat to his capacity for love because it is violent and because it seems directed at him personally. He is exposed to all of the gory details of his father's suicide. He plays the cello in an attempt to distract his father; he hears
the shot, finds the body, and retrieves the empty bullet shell from the toilet bowl. The physical images of his death have affected him so strongly that he considers himself to be the "witness and accomplice" (p. 7) to the event. But in spite of his father's "confusion, his anger, his pathetic cries," Skipper seems to understand his father's action. He views the "tangible actuality of his death with shocked happiness, grateful at least for the misguided trust implicit in the real staging of that uncensored scene" (p. 7). Skipper's gratefulness, however, is tempered by the words "misguided," "real staging," and "uncensored." These words suggest how Skipper really judges the suicide. He seems to realize that only his father, an undertaker, a man Skipper thinks is "Death himself" (p. 161), would incriminate his son in a suicide, making sure that Skipper would understand the harsh realities of death by discovering all of its particulars—the blood, body, and bullet.

In contrast to the real staging of his father's suicide, Skipper prefers his imaginary vision of his mother's death. At least, in his mind, she had the decency "to disappear, to vanish, gone without the hard crude accessories of . . . stretcher, ambulance . . . gone without vigil or funeral, without good-bys" (p. 7). Her "disappearance" allows Skipper to create a fantasy death in which he imagines her departing in a "yellow machine with wooden wheels" (p. 8). There are no bullets
or visceral images for him to associate with her death. And although Skipper admits that his perception of his mother's death is "no doubt the product of a slight and romantic fancy" (p. 9), he prefers it to the memory of his father's death. Moreover, it seems that he identifies so closely with his mother that he wishes he had dealt with his father's suicide as she did. As pathetic as her self-deafening is, at least she didn't try to talk the undertaker out of the bathroom as Skipper did. Instead, his mother, "unable to bear the sound of the death-dealing shot . . . deafened herself one muggy night, desperately, painfully, by filling both lovely ears with the melted wax from one of our dining room candles" (p. 9).

Throughout *Second Skin*, Skipper will perceive evil and death like his mother, with the veil of illusion over his eyes. But his perception of events and his responses to them will also be affected by his experience of his father's suicide. That is, whether Skipper likes it or not, he is attracted by the "real staging" of "uncensored" acts, and when he is in the presence of these acts, he hangs around to observe their ugly particulars. We can establish this behavioral pattern in Skipper in sections where he undergoes some kind of degradation. In each case, the grotesque jokes on Skipper seem staged, orchestrated by a number of unappealing characters, including Cassandra. Often we feel
that Skipper knows he is being set up, and yet he sub-
jects himself to joke after joke.

He appears comic, sometimes absurd when he acts
this way. This comedy becomes further complicated when
he deludes himself about the jokes at the same time he
is being subjected to them. That is, when forced to
undergo degradation or to face the truth about other
characters or members of his family, Skipper will opt
for illusion. He will not face up to evil until he has
to; he will not rely upon his courage and love until
the last possible moment. But at least he does stumble
forward against this evil, thus transcending the sui-
cidal solutions of his parents. And we will see the
positive values of Second Skin in this persistent side
of Skipper. He is a "walker," he says, the "aggress-
ive personification of serenity, the eternal forward
drift or handsome locomotion of peace itself" (p. 3).

In section two of Second Skin, "Agony of the
Sailor," Skipper endures his first humiliation at the
tattoo parlor, and he deals with it as we might expect
him to. At first this scene seems quite horrible as
the needle of the tattoo artist bites into Skipper's
skin.

The scream—yes, I confess it, scream—that
was clamped between my teeth was a strenuous
black bat struggling, wrestling in my bloated
mouth and with every puncture of the needle—
fast as the stinging of artificial bees, this
exquisite torture . . . I longed to disgorge
the bat, to sob, to be flung into the relief of freezing water like an old woman submerged and screaming in the wild balm of some dark baptismal rite in a roaring river. But I was holding on. While the punctures were marching across, burning their open pinprick way across my chest, I was bulging in every muscle, slick, strained, and the bat was peering into my mouth of pain, kicking, slick with my saliva, and in the stuffed interior of my brain I was resisting, jerking in outraged helplessness, blind and baffled, sick with the sudden recall of what Tremlow had done to me that night—helpless abomination . . . There were tiny fat glistening tears in the corners of my eyes. But they never fell. Never from the eyes of this heavy bald-headed once-handsome man. Victim. Courageous victim. (p. 19)

The phrase "exquisite torture" implies that Skipper enjoys the pain even as he tries to disgorge the bat rising in his throat. His attraction-repulsion for the incident also can be seen in other peculiarities of his language. Although he stresses the pain of the needle through his metaphor of the bat, he also dwells lovingly on this pain to make sure that we view him as a "courageous victim." Certainly, as in the first section, Skipper wants us to locate himself in a heroic tradition. In "Agony of the Sailor," we now find the physical evidence of the love and courage he has professed—his "Good Conduct Medal," the "insignia" of his rank, and his Shore Patrol armband, which makes him both protector and protected, or so he thinks. Skipper also tells us that he is the "big soft flower of fatherhood" (p. 15) and, perhaps more importantly, the "victim" (p. 15), the "wounded officer" (p. 17) with the "suffering smile" (p. 15), who
will gladly "submit to an atrocious pain for Cassandra" (p. 17). Summing up this part of his character, Skipper says:

A few of us, a few good men with soft reproachful eyes, a few honor-bright men of imagination, a few poor devils, are destined to live out our fantasies, to live out even the sadistic fantasies of friends, children and possessive lovers. (p. 18)

He considers himself one of these men.

Skipper, of course, protests too much here. He insists that he is courageous and loving and also a victim so often that we question his motives in "Agony of the Sailor." For me, one of his unspoken reasons for getting tattooed is sexually based: he physically desires his daughter, Cassandra. For example, as the section opens, we find Skipper dancing with Cassandra, aware of her breasts and belly pressing against him (pp. 11-12). He considers himself to be one of Cassandra's suitors, and he feels that the tattoo artist is in "helpless and incongruous competition with him for Cassandra" (pp. 15-16). We might argue, then, that part of the reason that Skipper submits to the tattooing is to impress Cassandra, the way a young boy might try to impress his girlfriend. This makes his strange competition with the tattoo artist a parody of some medieval joust, the winner receiving Cassandra's affection.

Skipper's perception of the tattoo scene is comic because we know Cassandra is no virtuous damsel and
Skipper no knight. He himself is also comic because he seems oblivious to his real motives at the tattoo parlor. Granted, sometimes he seems to realize his desire for Cassandra, as when he wishes "to abandon rank, insignia, medal, bald head, good nature, everything, if only [he] might become a moment an anonymous seaman" (p. 11) and dance with Cassandra the way a strange man might. But when confronted with the physicality of this desire, he blushes (p. 15); and when Cassandra, more perceptive than Skipper, articulates his desire by calling him her "boyfriend" (p. 16), he blushes again.

To alleviate his discomfort, Skipper displaces his desire onto an object: he gives Cassandra his Good Conduct Medal as he hugs and kisses her (p. 13). He also subjects himself to the physical pain of the tattooing, which may be a kind of self-punishment for his incestuous feelings. Moreover, he refuses to accept Cassandra's real personality and real motives for encouraging him to get tattooed. Deep inside him, Skipper wants to believe that his daughter is "innocent" (p. 14), "modest" (p. 32), his high school "majorette" (p. 33). So he seems shocked that she would bring him to the "urine-colored haze" (p. 15) of the tattoo parlor, and that she is not as repulsed as he by the tattoo artist's teeth and breath. Yet, at the same time, he seems to glimpse her true character when he calls her his "child courtesan" (p. 17),
"small, grave, heartless, a silvery waterfront adventure" (p. 15). Certainly he cannot ignore her Lolita-like intentions when she calls him her boyfriend, or when, on the gentle island, she asks him to zip up her dress while she traces with her finger the needlework on Skipper's skin, "the letters of her husband's first name" (p. 74). Moreover, we cannot be expected to believe that Skipper doesn't recognize Cassandra's obvious role as accomplice to all the terrible jokes played on him.

Nevertheless, at this early stage of the narrative, Skipper prefers self-delusion to a painful understanding of himself and other characters and events. This self-delusion is responsible for many of the comic scenes in "Agony of the Sailor," which lead us to a true understanding of that section. These scenes become even more complex as they attract other scenes to them. That is, from looking at overlapping images and events in the novel, we can see that the tattoo scene is more than just one isolated incident in Skipper's life. It is, in truth, a small blueprint of all of his later humiliations.

We may begin by noting the obvious similarities between the tattoo scene and three later, important episodes in Skipper's life: when he and Cassandra are confronted by the "kissing bandits"; when he is attacked by snowballs at the high school dance; and when he watches
Captain Red seduce Cassandra on the bow of the Peter Poor. Each of these scenes is a certain "exquisite torture" for Skipper. In each case, he idealistically views himself as protecting Cassandra against male characters who want to seduce her, and in each case he ends up in "outraged helplessness," unable to thwart any potential or real evil perpetrated on him or his daughter.

In the section, "Soldiers in the Dark," we find the same Skipper as lover-victim that we do in "Agony of the Sailor." Skipper still feels that it is his duty to guard Cassandra, and, as usual, she doesn't want his protection. In fact, she makes fun of Skipper, referring to him sarcastically as her "boyfriend" again, her "blind date" (p. 31). "'This is my last blind date,'" she says. "'A last blind date for Pixie and me. I know you won't jilt us, Skipper. I know you'll be kind.'" (p. 31). As usual, Skipper wriggles and blushes when she confronts him with his true feelings for her and when she encourages those feelings. But he still deludes himself by believing that he is solely her protector. His self-delusion is most apparent when the kissing bandits show up. "And now they were lined up in front of Cassandra," he says, "patiently and in close file, while I stood there trembling, smiling, sweating, squeezing her hand, squeezing Cassandra's hand for dear life and in all my protective reassurance and slack alarm" (p. 42).
Skipper wants us to believe that he is supporting Cassandra through this hard time. But, in truth, from looking at his description of his own physical and emotional reactions to the kissing bandits, we wonder if he wishes he were one of the soldiers. He gives us a close, play by play account of each soldier's kiss, as if living vicariously through them. The kiss of the soldier Skipper calls "Pinocchio" especially intrigues him. "Foam, foam, foam," he says. "On Cassandra's lips. Down the front of her frock" (p. 42). By displacing his own desire for Cassandra into description, it seems that he avoids dealing with this desire. He also refuses to admit Cassandra's willful participation in the scene. He insists that his daughter is a "silvery Madonna in the desert" (p. 42), even though she ignores Skipper's encouragements to be brave (p. 42), even though he hears her tell the last soldier, "'Give me your gun, please ... please show me how to work your gun!'" (p. 43), and even though she taunts Skipper after the soldiers have gone. She whispers, "'Nobody wants to kiss you, Skipper'" (p. 43).

Skipper's dual comic role as boyfriend-protector, obvious in the above scenes, is further developed in the section "Cleopatra's Car" when he tries to prevent an affair between Jomo and Cassandra. In "Cleopatra's Car" Skipper is still the unwanted "guardian" of
Cassandra, "her only defense" (p. 81). **Unwanted**, because Cassandra chooses to be with Jomo, who, in a sense, is very similar to the soldier with the fingernail moustache and also to the tattoo artist. All three manipulate an artificial device in one of their hands, and each device is a source of pain for Skipper. The tattoo artist inflicts physical pain on Skipper with his needle; Skipper undergoes psychological discomfort when he hears Cassandra ask the soldier to teach her how to use his gun—a sexual image that is as overtly comic as Margaret Banks' perception of Thick's truncheon as a man's cane. Jomo's mechanical device is his artificial hand, which, like Thick's truncheon, is strangely comic in how it is perceived. Skipper says:

> On Sundays Jomo worked his artificial hand for Cassandra, but I was the one who watched, I who watched him change the angle of his hook, lock the silver fork in place and go after peas, watched him fiddle with a lever near the wrist and drop the fork and calmly and neatly snare the full water glass in the mechanical round of that wonderful steel half-bracelet that was his hand. (p. 70)

Skipper is fascinated by the arm, and we laugh at this fascination, at this close scrutiny of the mechanical device. But he also recognizes the arm's destructive

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11 See Chapter Three of this study, p. 94.
possibilities. For one thing, Skipper tells us that Jomo lost his hand at the battle of Salerno, so that the artificial device seems to be an extension of death or war. It is this destructiveness of the arm which upsets Skipper when he sees Jomo dancing with Cassandra, his "hook buried deep" (p. 80) in Cassandra's green taffeta bow—an image suggesting both Jomo's seduction of Cassandra and her eventual suicide. Yet, all in all, Skipper's attraction to the device seems more powerful than his fear and hatred of it. Thus, after he has been pummeled by snowballs, bruised, cut, and bleeding, he can only think of Jomo's hook. He doesn't question the purpose of the snowball attack but instead asks himself, "how it was possible... for a man to throw snowballs with an artificial hand" (p. 88).

Skipper overlooks the real significance of the snowball attack; he overlooks that he has been made a fool by the young girl who leads him out of the dance, and by the trio of Jomo, Red, and Bub, and even by Cassandra. He is not, as the young girl, "Bubbles," says, the "type all the girls go after" (p. 85); neither is he the "great stag" (p. 38) momentarily held at bay by the snowball throwers. He is just an old, bald-headed man tricked by a "child of chewing gum kisses" with a "plump young body sweetly dusted with baby talc" (pp. 84-85). He is an overaged, impotent warrior, hurling his harmless, icy missiles into the
empty night. But Skipper avoids this self-recognition by shifting his attention from the attack itself onto a consideration of Jomo's expertise at throwing snowballs.

In one sense, his responses to the attack are comic because they are inappropriate; that is, he doesn't act the way we would expect him to. But, in another sense, his actions are very consistent with his avoidance, throughout Second Skin, of the pain of self-knowledge. One way he avoids the anxiety of this self-knowledge is by transferring it into his descriptions of certain "loaded" images—Jomo's hand, Cassandra's green taffeta bow, Miranda's black brassiere. And although he consciously doesn't make the connection between these images and his own sexual fears, we do. Skipper also avoids the pain of self-knowledge by deluding himself, as when he wonders whether the snowballs hurled at him are "low flying invisible birds," "Escaped homing pigeons? A covey of tiny ducks driven beserk in the cold? Eaglets?" (p. 86). In later scenes—on the Peter Poor or during the drag race scene on the beach—Skipper exhibits this same pattern of avoidance. In both of these scenes, he battles the same trio of men, plus Miranda. And in these battles he seems unable to anticipate the traps set for him. Moreover, after he enters a trap, he refuses to see other characters' real motives for hurting him or his own willing participation in their pranks.
Certainly we would sympathize with Skipper in these scenes, except that we realize he is not as innocent or naive as he professes. There is a dark side to Skipper which the novel's comic techniques reveal. In fact, the function of comedy in *Second Skin* is to disrupt Skipper's narrative and make us question his motives. When we note Skipper's self-delusion, we realize that he may not be Cassandra's protector or a victim. Moreover, we may even come to believe that he is responsible for some of the horrible events which frame his narrative, for, at the same time Skipper is bumbling about, other people are killing themselves or others.

We can begin to see how this dark comedy complicates the action of *Second Skin* by going back to the tattoo scene. As already stated, Skipper may not be the martyr he claims to be, since he seems to purge his incestuous feelings for Cassandra by bearing the pain of the tattoo artist's needle. Certainly, it is not unlike Skipper to avoid a psychological pain by submitting to a physical one. This explains why Skipper prefers the sting of the snowballs to finding Cassandra cavorting with Jomo. On the *Peter Poor*, it is also a physical attack, Bub's tire iron crashing down on Skipper's head, which prevents him from watching Cassandra submit to Captain Red. The strange comedy in this scene is that Skipper doesn't go down for the count until Bub hits him a second time. Skipper keeps conscious after the first hit just long
enough to see Cassandra begin to give in to Red, which reminds us of how he lived vicariously through the three soldiers in the desert.

All of the above scenes—at the tattoo parlor, at the dance, with the kissing bandits, and on the Peter Poor—seem to merge in the green tattoo above Skipper's nipple. The tattoo reads "Fernandez... the green lizard that lay exposed and crawling on his breast" (p. 20). Skipper may not, at first, see the significance of this tattoo, but Cassandra does. When she intimidates him into getting tattooed, she attacks Skipper in a number of ways. First of all, she makes him into her surrogate husband by having her real husband's name etched on his chest. She also makes it so Skipper will never be able to forget his own enthusiastic participation in her marriage to Fernandez, who left her for a homosexual lover. Skipper, even if unconsciously, must be aware of the hints of homosexuality contained in the tattoo. He reports Cassandra's comment to him that Fernandez's boyfriend, Harry, also has a tattoo, "'like you, Skipper!" (pp. 23-24), she says. Moreover, the pain of the needle itself reminds Skipper of his abomination at the hands of Tremlow (p. 19). We can even argue that the language Skipper uses to describe the tattooing (p. 19), taken out of context, could easily refer to Tremlow's buggering of him.

Once the image of Tremlow's mutiny is conjured up, further connections between various scenes in the novel
present themselves. For one thing, the punches Skipper takes from Tremlow before the buggering (p. 146) are described by Skipper in language that is similar to his description of the snowball attack. The first snowball, Skipper says, like a punch, "caught me just behind the ear" (p. 86). He continues: "Tremlow, I thought, when the hard-packed snowball of the second hit burst in my face" (p. 87). Moreover, his absurd response to Tremlow's punches recalls his inappropriate description of the snowballs as birds, eaglets (p. 86). Skipper wonders why Tremlow doesn't respect his age and rank and return below to his station. Even more absurdly, he wonders why Tremlow doesn't hit him in the "nose . . . or the naked eye, or the stomach, why this furious interest in my loose and soft-spoken mouth" (p. 146). He deludes himself in a similar manner on the Peter Poor when Bub hits him with the tire iron. "Mishap of the boom?" he thinks. "Victim of a falling block? One of the running lights shaken loose or a length of chain?" (p. 184).

But we are not allowed to laugh too long at Skipper in these scenes once the names of Fernandez and Tremlow have been invoked. The image of the tattoo sets off a number of connections which lead to these two characters, who themselves remind Skipper of death and his own impotency. I say impotency because I think we could argue that each humiliation scene shows an attempt
on someone's part to emasculate Skipper physically or psychologically. References by other characters to Skipper's impotency are made throughout the novel. Cassandra tells Skipper that no one wants to kiss him (p. 43); and Fernandez, after reminding Skipper that he, not Skipper, is Cassandra's husband, says, "That's all you are, Papa Cue Ball. The father of a woman who produces a premature child. The husband of a woman who kills herself" (p. 130). In addition to these slurs, Miranda calls Skipper an "old maid" (p. 188). Skipper, of course, doesn't accept any such explanation about himself, thus completely missing the irony of his present position as artificial inseminator. He also refuses to admit that Catalina Kate's child is really fathered by Sonny. 12

I stress the themes of homosexuality and impotency suggested by Skipper's lizard-like tattoo because these two themes link the humiliation scenes. They also direct us to the dark comedy of the novel. That is, we begin by reading the tattoo scene, which is overtly comic because of Skipper's perception of it. But then we must look at the implications of the tattoo. This tattoo reminds us of Fernandez's infidelity and homosexuality, which reminds us of Tremlow and the snowball scene. (All of these scenes

12 Santore, p. 92.
are connected in Skipper's mind, as I have shown.) From here we compare the green tattoo to Cassandra's green taffeta bow attached to the back of her dress. Jomo likens the bow to an insect or animal, laughing at it, and saying that he'd like "to kill it with a stick" (p. 78). This unlikely comparison between the lizard-like tattoo and the insect-like bow would remain comic except that, to Skipper, the bow is symbolic of Cassandra's virtue. This is why he shudders when he sees Jomo dancing with Cassandra, his knee between her legs, his hook "buried deep in her bow" (p. 80). And when we note the image of the hook, itself suggested by the green taffeta bow, which is in turn suggested by the tattoo, we must think of Fernandez (his green guitar, his green sedan) lying on the floor of a whore-house crash-pad, his fingers cut off, as if in need of an artificial hand. And, most horribly, all of these images of death and sterility find their way back to Skipper, whose Good Conduct Medal squirms like a "dazzling insect" (p. 13) on his chest, and who describes himself as a "green-eyed and diamond-brained young matron" (p. 33).

Miranda's emerald kerchief also links her to the above destructive images, though we associate her mostly...
with her "canary yellow slacks tight at the ankles" (p. 59). And the constant references to Miranda in yellow foreshadow Skipper in his yellow oilskins on the Peter Poor, waking to Miranda's black brassiere "circling above [his] head and lashing its tail" (p. 186). Once we are placed back on the deck of the Peter Poor, we can almost hear Cassandra taunting Skipper, saying, "'Red--Captain Red--has been teaching me how to sail!'" (p. 186), which recalls her previous request from the soldier to show her his gun (p. 43).

Certainly we may laugh at these old metaphors for sex, but our laughter is tempered by Cassandra's cruel intentions. These intentions become explicit when, after she has given herself to Red and told Skipper about it, she encourages him to bare his breast to the crew of the Peter Poor. "'That's the name of my husband, Red,'" she says. "'Isn't it beautiful?''" (p. 188). And we are again made to remember the scene at the tattoo parlor.

When we follow this back and forth movement in Second Skin, as the implied author wishes us to, we must wonder why Skipper doesn't see the importance of the overlapping elements in his story, since it is his own consciousness which is structuring the tale. Perhaps if we didn't make

connections between images and scenes in the novel, we, too, would view Skipper as a victim. But we always feel the presence of an author in Second Skin who, although sympathetic to Skipper's plight, also makes it clear that Skipper may be deliberately concealing his own responsibility for events by feigning naivete.

In this sense, the overlapping imagery and action works in two opposite ways. It makes us sympathetic with Skipper because the horror of his situation is intensified as one dark comic scene after another merge. But this overlapping also distances us from Skipper. We wonder why he cannot see, as we do, that he creates and complicates many of his own problems by exhibiting the same inappropriate behavior patterns over and over again. Faced with this contradictory response to Skipper, we ask again what kind of man he is, and what is the purpose of his narrative.

At the beginning of "Land of Spices," Skipper suggests a few descriptions of his narrative:

High lights of helplessness? Mere trivial record of collapse? Say, rather, that it is the chronicle of recovery, the history of courage, the dead reckoning of my romance, the act of memory, the dance of shadows. And all the earmarks of pageantry, if you will, the glow of Skipper's serpentine tale. (p. 162)

Indeed, resting on his "wandering island," knock up" cows (p. 163), Skipper feels that he has grown since the beginning of his tale. Early in the novel, he refers to
his last months on Miranda's island as his "final awakening" (p. 5). Looking back on the last few years of his life, he feels that he has freed himself from the destructive influences of such characters as Miranda and Tremlow. He also feels cut loose from his self-imposed duty to protect Cassandra, a duty which ends at her death. Even the physical signs of his previous subjugation are vanishing: the eagle on his naval hat has faded, and the "green name tattooed on [his] breast has all but disappeared in the tangle of hair in [his] darkening skin" (p. 47).

Skipper not only believes his present life is better than his past, but also views his move to the island as a triumph of sorts. He argues that his present occupation as artificial inseminator (the carrier of life) has "redeemed" his father's profession of undertaker (p. 47). He further states that "it should be clear that I have triumphed over Cassandra too, since there are many people who wish nothing more than to kiss me" (p. 50). Finally, he considers the actual narrating of his story to be a triumph. As he "goads [himself] with the distant past," he enthusiastically addresses his old nemeses. "So hold your horses, Miranda!" he says. "Father and Gertrude and Fernandez, sleep! Now take warning, Tremlow" (p. 110). By telling his story, then, Skipper thinks he can check
Miranda, bury his dead once and for all, and revenge Tremlow's humiliation of him.

Unfortunately, Skipper doesn't realize, even at the end of the novel, that his conflicts are as much within himself as they are in the outside world. Instead, by moving to Sonny's island, he thinks that he can overcome evil by avoiding it. On the island, no longer will he have "to fling" himself into the face of destructive images (p. 33); no longer will he have to endure taunts and sick practical jokes. In place of Miranda, Gertrude, and Cassandra are a trio of cow-like, submissive women. Listening to Skipper go on about his utopian island, we are happy that he is getting a breather from murder and suicide. But we also feel a little uneasy when we look beyond his rhetoric and recognize why he really remains on the island.

Skipper doesn't seem to have changed at all. He still deludes himself, perhaps more so than in the past. For example, in Skipper's mind, his island is idyllic because the harsh facts of the real world—evil, death, and destructive sexuality—do not exist. Moreover, there are no characters on the island whose cynicism threatens to shatter his illusions. The island's inhabitants are really nothing more than sounding boards for Skipper, children whom he orders about. For instance, Skipper treats Catalina Kate like an ignorant child. Admittedly, she is only sixteen, the approximate age of the plump
nymphet who led Skipper into the snowball massacre. But Kate is not as clever as the young girl Skipper calls Bubbles. She seems slow-witted, and Skipper likes her this way. Although part of Kate's slowness can be attributed to her inexperience with the English language, this explanation still doesn't account for the Crusoe-Friday relationship Skipper nurtures.

As far as Skipper is concerned, he has found his perfect mate. He also has found a surrogate daughter who will listen to and obey him. When Skipper tells Kate to do something, her usual response is, "'Whatever you say, sir!'" (p. 173). Her blind obedience becomes most evident at the end of the novel, when, after Kate has given birth, Skipper is already planning her next pregnancy. "'But just think of it,'" he says to her. "'We can start you off on another little baby in a few weeks. Would you like that, Kate? But of course you would.'" "Kate nodded," Skipper says, "smiled, held the baby tight" (p. 209).

Skipper is in character here, still protecting his charges, telling them what to do. And this time someone is actually listening to him. A typical conversation between him and the island women goes something like this:
"Good-by to the dark-eyed cow," I said. "And now Big Bertha and Catalina Kate and Sister Josie, I want the three of you to return to the Plantation House together while Sonny and I go down to the south beach and have our bath. You lead the way Bertha; be careful, Kate; remember what you do at sundown, Sister Josie."

(p. 172)

No one questions him, of course. Neither does anyone reply to the master of Plantation House.

It should be obvious why Skipper prefers to remain on the island: it is the only place where he is able to control events; where life is what he, and sometimes Sonny, say it is; and where he is so powerful that he can predict the hour at which Kate will give birth and also the sex of the child (p. 205). We, however, view Skipper's life differently. For one thing, even though Sonny and the women on the island perceive Skipper to be what he himself says he is—father to a whole island—, we know that he is, in truth, impotent. We know from the color of Kate's child (p. 209) that it is fathered by Sonny. Consequently, when Skipper tells Kate that "we can start you on another little baby'" (Italics mine), he doesn't know how true his words are. Skipper also doesn't see the irony in his job as artifical inseminator, or how that job relates to his past. He doesn't see that his new job is as much of a duty as his older jobs. In place of the Good Conduct Medal and the Shore Patrol emblem, Skipper now has his "official black satchel" (p. 107). And his official tube, through which he blows
sperm pellets, is really just a further extension of the other artificial sexual devices previously mentioned.

When Skipper doesn't recognize the truth about himself or his situation on the wandering island, and when he continues to misinterpret life around him, he becomes comic in our eyes. In this sense, comedy provides us with a way of discovering the truth about Skipper and his narrative. The author of Second Skin uses comic methods to undercut Skipper's narrative for at least two reasons: first, to show us that human experience is more complicated than we would originally think, and secondly, to make us reject Skipper's narrative and his value system. As a result, we must look for the book's ideology somewhere else. This is not to say that we are expected to despise Skipper, for, as I have shown, in certain respects Skipper is appealing, living his life as best he can. Certainly, we root for him in his conflicts with Jomo, Bub, Captain Red, and Miranda, and we would like to see him happy on his wandering island.

But in the long run, we must judge Skipper according to other criteria than his own, criteria which we and the implied author share. To me, all the textual evidence of Second Skin forces us to reject Skipper's final solution—his wandering island. Utopias exclude evil, and Second Skin, I think, is very interested in how we should deal with inner and outer evil. I use a loaded word like
"evil" because, throughout the novel, Skipper's brief skirmishes with Tremlow, Miranda, Fernandez, Jomo, etc. are representative of a larger evil with which he must deal.

Many of Skipper's nemeses seem to overlap and merge into one shadow or silhouette which haunts Skipper. He calls Cassandra the "single shadow" (p. 12) cast up by the union of Skipper and Gertrude; he notices that "Cassandra was Miranda's shadow" (p. 69); and Miranda (p. 189), like Tremlow (p. 137) and the kissing bandits (p. 39), are all viewed by Skipper as "silhouettes." All of these images can be said to merge in the one terrifying "shadow of the bullet" (p. 9), which Skipper tries to dodge throughout the novel; it is the shadow of despair that killed his father. When he finds it impossible to avoid this bullet in the real world, he creates a fantasy island. More specifically, he creates an illusion of a fantasy island, for, in spite of Skipper's comments to the contrary, there is evil on the island. It arrives in the form of the iguana, and it is interesting to note Skipper's inadequate response to the invader.

On the surface, the sight of an enormous green reptile clinging to the back of a pregnant Catalina Kate is terrible. But Skipper's inappropriate response to the event undercuts its terror. He tries to remove the iguana from Kate's back and can't. As he is pulling on
the creature, he says, trying to comfort Kate, "'It's just like being in the dentist's chair, Kate . . . it will be over soon'" (p. 107). Only Skipper would be absurd enough to think of this strange comparison at such a time. Moreover, he doesn't seem to realize that Kate wouldn't know what a dentist is any more than she would know what an obstetrician is. The comedy of this scene is further increased by the presence of Sister Josie, sitting patiently by, reading her Bible.

But there is much more to this scene than this cursory analysis suggests. The above humor quickly darkens when we begin to make connections between the iguana and other images in the novel. For one thing, the iguana embraces all of the other green images I have mentioned—the lizard-like tattoo, the soldiers who are described as "deadly lizards" (p. 39), the green taffetta bow, etc. We can even argue that the iguana, "stuck to Kate's back, spread eagle on her soft naked back," "its tail dropped over her buttocks" (p. 105), is in a position which reminds us of Tremlow's humiliation of Skipper. But the iguana is also a metaphoric "monster" (p. 106), and when Skipper grapples with it, he is really grappling with the evil he thinks he has left behind.

And has he learned anything from his past encounters with the enemy? Apparently not. Even though Sister Josie says, "'Don't touch iguana, sir. Him stuck for so'" (p. 106), Skipper insists on discovering whether the
reptile is a "match for Papa Cue Ball" (p. 107). We smile at this comment, of course, because we know that just about anyone or any "thing" is a match for him. But we also cringe because his insistence on battling the iguana causes Kate much discomfort. Skipper describes the wrestling match as follows:

So I kept pulling up on the iguana, tugged at him with irritation now. With every tug I seemed to dig the claws in deeper, to drag them down deeper into the flesh of poor Kate's back in some terrible inverse proportion to all the upward force I exerted on the flaccid wrinkled substance of jointless legs or whatever it was I hung on to so desperately. And he wouldn't budge. Because of those claws I was unable to pull him loose, unable to move him an inch, was only standing there bent double and sweating, pulling, muttering to myself, drawing blood. (p. 108)

Skipper's wrestling with the iguana is typical of his encounter with threatening elements throughout the novel. All the "upward force" he applies in certain situations is useless. Moreover, sometimes his application of this force exacerbates the potential danger of certain situations, so that it appears as if he is responsible for some of these situations. In short, dangerous predicaments often become more dangerous in proportion to Skipper's bumbling efforts to thwart them. Because Skipper doesn't make the connections that we do in the above scene, he learns little from his match with the iguana. This surprises us. Certainly, we think, he must see the resemblances between the iguana and many other green images
which, after all, he himself creates. And certainly, when he says to Kate, "'But no more iguanas, you must promise me that. We don't want the iguana to get the baby, you know'" (p. 189), he must make the comparison between the iguana going after Kate's child and Miranda presenting Cassandra's aborted foetus to Skipper in a glass jar.

But the only noticeable change in Skipper during the iguana scene occurs when he eventually decides to wait patiently for the iguana's retreat rather than continue his futile tugging. This decision seems wise, but, unfortunately, he doesn't arrive at it until after he has battled with the creature, until after he has caused Kate pain. After we read this scene we must wonder if it was also Skipper's determination to confront evil, to place him and Cassandra in dangerous situations, that put her in the position to submit to Jomo's claw.

But perhaps the saddest part of Skipper's confrontation with the iguana is that he loses a great opportunity to learn something about evil and something about himself. Ironically, he could have learned how to deal with the real and metaphoric creature by watching how Sister Josie and Kate—his two illiterate subjects—respond to the iguana. As we have seen, when confronted with death, evil, or destructive sexuality, Skipper responds in two inadequate ways: like his father, he morbidly and per-
sistent faces evil; or like his mother, he prefers illusion. The combination of these two approaches to crises working simultaneously in Skipper often make him ineffective and absurd. But even more absurd is his philosophy on the wandering island. He seems to be totally his "mother's son" (p. 98) in his attempt to create a loving and fertile utopia, disrupted once in a while by a stray iguana.

Unlike Josie and Kate, Skipper doesn't know who or what his enemies are, and so he responds inadequately to them. Ironically, Skipper voices the solution to his problem after he gives up on the iguana. He says, "'Got us licked, hasn't he, Kate? He means to stay right where he is until he changes his mind and crawls off under his own power. So the round goes to the dragon, Kate. I'm sorry!" (p. 108). Josie and Kate deal with the iguana as Skipper suggests. They perceive it as a grotesque and dangerous creature yet also a necessary part of the island, and thus it must be endured until it leaves. Skipper, however, doesn't take his own advice, reaching his conclusion after he has tugged on the iguana for an unreasonable amount of time. Moreover, after the iguana leaves, Skipper acts like the old Skipper, viewing the event in heroic proportions. He calls the iguana a "dragon" and Kate his "Joan of Arc" (p. 109).
At the end of *Second Skin*, then, it seems to me that Skipper is still a contradictory character. He sums up his character best when he calls himself "accomplice, father, friend, traveling companion, yes, old chaperon, but lover and destroyer too" (p. 175). This moment of recognition—the naming of oneself—is brief, however, and Skipper doesn't get any insight from it. He is so complex because in one sense he is very introspective, and yet, at the same time, he doesn't acquire self-knowledge through this introspection. He scrutinizes himself very closely and asks himself a variety of questions, but he draws no useful conclusions from this self-scrutiny. Only once in the novel is he forced to look at one of the end products of his bumblings: when Miranda presents him with the jarred foetus. Even an illusionist as persistent as Skipper can't ignore the image of the aborted child. He finds it so frightening that he drops off Pixie at a relative's house (perhaps fearing that she might be her mother's daughter as Cassandra was Gertrude's) and heads for the wandering island.

It seems, then, at the end of *Second Skin*, that we find ourselves frustrated by Skipper's lack of movement. He doesn't make that final, grand, redeeming gesture that Michael Banks makes in *The Lime Twig*; nor does he experience the kinds of personal epiphanies we are used to in literature. Admittedly, we could argue that it isn't fair
to judge Skipper according to the above criteria. Shortly after the publication of Second Skin, in an interview with John Kuehl, Hawkes explained that he "no longer believes in the necessity of purgation or expiation. Exposure, facing, knowing, experiencing the worst as well as the best of our inner impulses—these are the things I am concerned with."

But even if we judge Second Skin by these criteria, we run into problems; for, although Skipper does indeed expose himself to his own impulses, he doesn't learn anything from this exposure.

Concerning the meaning of Second Skin, many critics agree with Patrick O'Donnell who writes:

Indeed, it is Skipper's ability to order the patterns of his life, an order that contains contradictions and ambiguities, which provides the central interest of the novel. How he perceives the world and transforms it through language . . . how, like his creator, Skipper brings a "savage or saving comic spirit and the saving beauties of language" to a world where death and determinism reign supreme—these form the subject of the novel.15

From Skipper's point of view, this explanation of the novel seems correct. But although Skipper believes he has transformed the terrors of his life through language,


we realize that he has not hit upon those "lasting values" Hawkes himself so often mentions. We know that Skipper deludes himself as much at the end of his narrative as he does at the beginning. In this respect, it is appropriate that the narrative is a retrospective. It is as if Skipper is telling the story in one sitting, and so we can't expect him to change gradually from beginning to end, even though the narrative itself takes place over a number of years.

Perhaps the best way we can get at the meaning of _Second Skin_ is by arguing that Skipper's final self-appraisal does not correspond to the implied author's or to our own appraisal of him. And this discrepancy is the result of the novel's comedy. Throughout _Second Skin_, by juxtaposing certain scenes, images, and verbal patterns, and by noting how this juxtaposition results in comedy, we cut through the self-flattery of Skipper's narrative and see the "contradictions and ambiguities" of his life better than he does. Thus, the purpose of the comic spirit in the novel is, in Hawkes own words, "to maintain the truth of the fractured picture; to expose, ridicule, attack,"\textsuperscript{16}

I would argue that because of the way _Second Skin_ is structured, we are asked to reassemble Skipper's fractured

\textsuperscript{16}Enck, p. 143.
picture, and to do so we must grasp his true nature which comedy reveals. I would also argue, though, that we can recognize Skipper's faults, his unreliabilities without despising him. In fact, I believe that the same comedy which exposes his character also makes us sympathize with Skipper, because we recognize our own frailties in him. Moreover, no matter how badly we might wish to judge him, we must still admire the fact that he survives the evil which destroys so many other characters. Thus, in *Second Skin* and *The Lime Twig*, although the true and sometimes odious sides of characters are revealed through comedy, this comedy seems balanced by other textual elements, so that we sympathize with characters even as we laugh at them. In the love trilogy, however, we will find three first person narrators who will not be so easy to accept. As in *Second Skin*, in the trilogy comedy will uncover the true nature of certain narrators--Cyril, Allert, and Papa--, but the final, psychic profiles we get of them make it hard for us to sympathize with them. Consequently, we must ask if the comedy in those novels fails, or if it is just trying to achieve different ends.
CHAPTER V

THE TRILOGY

In *The Blood Oranges, Death Sleep & the Traveler*, and *Travesty*, the self-consciousness and intense self-scrutiny that we noticed in parts of Skipper's narrative are pushed to their limits. Skipper's narrative was self-conscious because he felt that it stood for something; it was supposed to reveal his virtues. He told us that he was the "courageous victim" and that his story was the "chronicle of recovery, the dead reckoning of my romance."\(^1\) Skipper's self-scrutiny, however, didn't bring him self-knowledge, since he seemed incapable of interpreting events. We had to perform the critical acts in *Second Skin*.

In contrast to Skipper, in the trilogy Cyril, Allert, and Papa are all intellectuals of sorts. They have developed complex theories on love, sex, and death, and they live according to these theories. Cyril defends his idea of "sexual extension"; Allert tries to convince

\(^1\) John Hawkes, *Second Skin*, p. 162.
us that he is a willing participant in a ménage à trois; and Papa, as the wronged-husband, -father, and -friend, offers a theory of murder and suicide. Even though Skipper's narrative was a defense of certain principles, he didn't philosophize of his life with as much erudition as do the narrators of the trilogy. Consequently, the narrative voices of the trilogy differ from Skipper's. Cyril, Allert, and Papa are interested more in ideas and in psychological interior landscapes (thus all of their references to concepts like "the psyche," "the self," and "consciousness") than in physical exterior ones.

Of course, we could argue that Skipper's physical descriptions and Hencher's for that matter, all mirrored their psychological states, but these narrators did not make connections between their fears and anxieties and the images they created. Consequently, we had to discover their motives, the workings of their minds, by juxtaposing and analyzing recurring imagery, verbal patterns, and so forth in their narratives. They never achieved self-knowledge in our eyes, or even the illusion of self-knowledge. Instead, they accumulated detail after detail, insulating and protecting themselves from the meaning of those details.

On the surface, the narrators of the trilogy seem to approach their stories differently. They appear to control, and understand their narratives. They organize and
comment on action and imagery as their narratives unfold, which saves us the time we spent in earlier novels synthesizing materials. We don't have to tell Cyril that the chastity belt symbolizes Hugh's Puritanism, which itself threatens Cyril's and Fiona's sex-song; he knows this. We don't have to tell Allert that the bats engaged in autofellatio represent his own onanism; he makes the connection himself. And we don't need to explain much of anything to Papa; he has thought long and hard on every particularity of his death drive, accounting for each possible variation in his "design".

Nevertheless, we must still be leery of how their tales unfold. We must realize that the narrators of the trilogy only give us the illusion of self-knowledge and control. In spite of their cool and persuasive intellectualizing, these narrators are just as unreliable as Skipper or Hencher. We discover their unreliability when we distance ourselves from them and note the discrepancy between how they and we see events. As in Second Skin, the function of comedy in the trilogy is to make this distancing possible, and narrators become less attractive and their stories unreliable in proportion to how ignorant they are of their true natures. Thus, comedy provides us with one means by which we can evaluate narrators and the worth of their philosophical stances.
When we read the trilogy in this manner, we realize that although Cyril, Allert, and Papa appear deft at interpreting details and scenes, they often miss the deeper significance of these same details and scenes. Thus, we applaud Cyril when he recognizes that the chastity belt is evil, a symbol of Hugh's destructive ideas on sex. But in the long run, he judges the belt from a limited and selfish point of view. He is most upset because the appearance of the belt disrupts his and Fiona's sex-singing. He doesn't see that he, too, might be responsible for its presence. He never asks if he has goaded a sick Hugh into putting the chastity belt on Catherine, which action leads Hugh to Fiona's bed, and finally to a noose. For all of Cyril's philosophizing and intellectualizing, then, he, and other narrators of the trilogy, are morally myopic, interested only in drawing self-serving conclusions from narrative action.

This is not to say, however, that they are morally deficient in equal degrees or in the same way. Our opinions of their moral natures depend on how we perceive their self-delusions. There is a difference between a character who deliberately lies and one who genuinely isn't aware of his or her infirmities. As we have seen, Skipper deludes himself, but he doesn't seem to have malicious intentions. He is more "inconscient" than any-
thing else, a fictional situation which occurs, according to Wayne Booth, when a "narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him." All of the narrators of the trilogy, to some degree, are "inconscient," and so we judge some of them harsher than others. Whereas we might want to meet Cyril, we most likely could do without Papa's company, especially on a Sunday drive.

Thus, in the trilogy, we must deal with the question of reader-identification and ask ourselves how distant the norms and beliefs of characters are from our own norms and beliefs and those of the implied authors of the books. Comedy and irony, of course, are important to this notion of distance because they expose character; and we cannot gauge the distance between the values of an implied author, and of a narrator, and of a reader, until we see a narrator as he really is instead of how he presents himself.

In the trilogy, Hawkes plays with distance in different ways. Sometimes, intellectually, we are attracted to

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the form of Cyril's, Allert's, and Papa's narratives. Each narrative "sounds good," and each narrator has a distinctive way of seeing which is at first intriguing, especially because they explicitly describe sexual episodes in their lives. But in the long run, the language of each narrator loses both freshness and credibility and seems to parody the language of free-loving (Cyril), psychoanalysis (Allert), and existentialism (Papa). Once this rhetoric becomes self-parodic (unintentionally as far as the narrators are concerned) it ceases to be believable, even interesting. Rather quickly, we detach ourselves from these narrators and eventually find them odious or morally reprehensible.

Although each narrator is attractive, repulsive, and comic in quite different ways, they all share one unflattering trait: narcissism. They resemble the confessional novelists Christopher Lasch describes in The Culture of Narcissism. Like the writers Lasch refers to, the narrators of the trilogy "voyage to the interior" but end up "disclosing nothing but a blank." This kind of writer-narrator no longer sees:

life reflected in his own mind. Just the opposite: he sees the world, even in its emptiness, as a mirror of himself. In recording his 'inner' experience, he seeks not to provide an objective account of a representative piece of reality but to reduce others into giving him their attention, acclaim, or sympathy and thus to shore up his faltering sense of self.\(^4\)

I suppose the obvious question is: why bother reading the narratives of such repellent characters? This question looms larger when we learn that, besides being narcissists, Cyril, Allert, and Papa often suppress information, lie, and even murder. But although we don't identify with the narrators of the trilogy as closely as we do with some of Hawkes' other characters—Skipper, Michael and Margaret Banks—, we still are attracted to their curious language and way of seeing. Moreover, if for a moment we overlook the morality of each narrative, we can grant that on a formal or aesthetic level we enjoy deciphering the complex personality of each narrator, juxtaposing his perception of events with ours, and experiencing the results of this juxtaposition.

But the trilogy is important for more than just aesthetic reasons. The author of these novels uses the first person narrative mode to explore some very serious subjects: the nature of love, sex, and death, and the human capacity to

\(^4\) Lasch, pp. 54-55.
murder. We are asked explicitly by Cyril, Allert, and Papa and implicitly by the author to judge, according to different criteria, each narrator's theory and the theorists themselves. That is, the three narrators, relying on their persuasive rhetoric, which we might call "sleight of mouth," try to make a reader who will sympathize with them and their unconventional ideas. At the same time, the implied author of each novel tries to make a reader who will see the comic irony of each narrator's language and philosophy. Thus comedy works to detach us from the narrators of the trilogy, so that we can judge them according to the objective norms and values of the implied author, with whom we are expected to agree.

Throughout the trilogy, we have to choose between whose reader we want to become: the narrator's or the implied author's. Although by the end of each novel we agree with the values of the implied author and find each narrator to be morally deficient, nevertheless, as the action of each novel unfolds, our allegiances often fluctuate. For example, I personally find Hugh more odious than Cyril at the beginning of The Blood Oranges, and I sometimes find myself siding with Cyril in his attempts to show Hugh all of the possibilities of sex and love. But then, in certain scenes, I become the implied author's reader and laugh at Cyril's childish behavior and attempts at self-delusion. In these scenes, I distance myself from
him and begin to wonder about his reliability in general. And the tension between my two responses to Cyril accounts for much of the strange comedy I experience in *The Blood Oranges*.

To different degrees, I would generalize that most readers experience a similar response to each narrator of the trilogy. I would also argue that it is important for an understanding of the trilogy to note, as we read, the different shifts in narrative distance within and between novels. When we are forced to examine, reexamine, and judge a narrator's ideas on love, sex, and death from different perspectives—the narrator's own and those of other characters and of the implied author—we must come to our own notions of these terms. Even if by the end of each novel we don't agree with the stances of Cyril, Allert, and Papa, we still have participated in their distinctive ways of seeing and valuing, and this participation has made us review and re-evaluate our own notions of love, sex, and death. We can see how this reading process works by looking at Cyril's theory of "sexual extension," which seems attractive, simplistic, comic, and dangerous, all at the same time.
The Blood Oranges

At first it might seem unfair to call Cyril a narcissist or to group him with Allert and Papa. Hawkes himself is very fond of the sex-singer. "My sympathies are all with Cyril," he says:

I don't see any way to argue that he is reprehensible. I do not think he is a manipulator... except in so far as he is an agent for Fiona. It seems to me that he is a god of love, a kind of eros—a sort of ordinary but fabulous figure. Of course, some of his writing is exaggerated. But that's to emphasize his comic imperfections.

It seems here, though, that Hawkes is talking about just one side of Cyril, a harmless and comic side, which at first makes him reasonably attractive. We admire his total commitment to love, and we are amused by the elaborate rhetorical notes that make up his sex-song. Whether or not we agree with Cyril's theory of "sexual extension," we smile at the apparent idealism and naivete behind it. Thus, we tend to identify with Cyril in the beginning of The Blood Oranges because he takes his role as sex-singer very seriously, and because he presents his theory in very positive language, employing euphemisms for concepts

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5Donald J. Greiner gives a good summary of the critical responses to Cyril's comic character in Comic Terror, pp. 205-10.

which might otherwise offend us. For example, spouse-swapping becomes "sexual extension"; a person obsessed with all the ins and outs of sex becomes a "sex aesthetician"; and Cyril's penis, which causes a lot of trouble in the novel, is called the "shiny source of [his] song" (p. 260). Subsequently, Cyril develops an entire philosophy for the physical sex-act. He says:

Need I insist that the only enemy of the mature marriage is monogamy? That anything less than sexual multiplicity (body upon body, voice on voice) is naive? That our sexual selves are merely idylers in a vast wood? (p. 209)

Cyril's exaggerated rhetoric is comic here, but in a harmless way. We are attracted to it as we are amused by it. Like Cyril, most of us romanticize sex, make it more than a physical act, raise it above its traditional procreative functions. Consequently, when we identify with this aspect of his song we please that side of us that wishes to celebrate our sexuality. Certainly, this celebration becomes even more attractive when presented by a character who believes so whole-heartedly in it, an apparently wide-eyed and idealistic character possessing "aching candor" (p. 6).

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But we also identify and sympathize with Cyril at the beginning of *The Blood Oranges* for reasons besides his candor. Forced to choose between Cyril's eroticism and Hugh's "unmusical" (p. 43) and "monogamous song" (p. 154), we seem to have no choice. We do not want to be one of Cyril's enemies, who, Cyril tells us:

> would like nothing better than to fill my large funnel-shaped white thighs with the fish hooks of their disapproval . . . deny me all my nights in Fiona's bed if they could . . . strip me of silken dressing gown and fling me into some greasy white-tiled pit of naked sex offenders. (p. 36)

We do not want to be one of those people for whom "love itself is a crime" (p. 36). And with convincing rhetoric, Cyril makes us believe that to be his enemy is to be the enemy of love, and also of life.

Cyril has drawn up battle lines. We must choose between him and Hugh, and Hugh doesn't have much to offer. Hugh, with his black hair and face of stone (p. 31), his "black sylvan whisper" (p. 59), resembles Death himself. In spite of engendering three children, Hugh is sterile and impotent. He is, as Fiona tells Cyril, "cold, baby, cold" (p. 148). He is a man who seduces Catherine through baby-talk, who, in Cyril's words, "fishes for the love of his wife with the hook of a nursery persona" (p. 153). He is also a man who instead of making love to Fiona chooses to masturbate in a stretch of crab-grass (p. 85). Moreover, Cyril leads us to believe that Hugh's preference for
death and sterility is contagious. He fears Hugh will "transform" Fiona "into a lifeless and sainted fixture in his mental museum" (p. 201). Finally, there is Hugh's missing arm, symbolic of his impotence, yet also comic in its impatience "to wag, to flex, to rise into action" (p. 65), as he takes a picture of one of his peasant nudes. Hugh has no artificial limb like Jomo; instead he wields his cameras, creating a strange kind of pornography, and it is this pornography that points out his sexual limitations.

But in fairness to Hugh, we must remember that we learn about him from Cyril's very subjective perspective, and even early in the novel it's not clear how reliable that perspective is. We feel that there is a "real" Cyril who exists behind the fancy rhetoric, a character who is as complex and contradictory as the notion of love he presents. I think we can begin to see this real Cyril when we realize that his language obscures, perhaps purposefully, his misinterpretations of characters and events. In spite of Cyril's apparent omniscience and ability always to find the right word, he really offers very few insights. He doesn't even seem to understand Fiona, though he speaks about her continuously, pretending to know what she is thinking while in his presence, and what she is doing when apart from him.
Cyril wants us to think favorably of Fiona, and so he exaggerates her virtues as sex-singer. She is irresistible, he says, her sexual escapades as natural as the grape arbor which surrounds their villa. Like Cyril, she is a "sex aesthetician," nearly his equal in her knowledge of the philosophies and practices of love. Her "very quickness of breath," he says, "could liberate the lover buried inside the flesh of almost any ordinary man in undershorts" (p. 56). She seems to be both siren and earth mother (she cares for Hugh's children after his death), except that she also possesses a dark side which Cyril mentions but doesn't elaborate on, as if blinded by her eroticism.

Cyril fears that Hugh's fascination with death might infect Fiona, but she, too, has an interest in the macabre. Touring a church with Cyril, Fiona discovers the skeleton of a child and kisses it, finding the "small white skull with her eager mouth" (pp. 19-20). She also enjoys kissing "flowers, shadows, dead birds, dogs, old ladies, attractive men, as if only by touching the world with her own lips could she make it real and bring herself to life" (p. 20). And there is something about these kisses that is funereal, a "special flavor" in her mouth, "a special taste of mint tinged with that faint suggestion of decay" (p. 35). Cyril hints at this predatory side of Fiona when he calls Hugh Fiona's "prize" (p. 260). Hugh's death is also prefigured in terms of Fiona when we learn that she "habitually
imagined the death or departure of a potential lover with the first hours of any unexpected passion" (p. 114).

But nevertheless, Cyril doesn't dwell on this side of Fiona; instead, he tries to adjust his sex-song to include her behavior. We see him making this adjustment in his language, in his description of the "special flavor" of Fiona's kiss. Fiona's paradoxical nature (mixture of sex and death) is revealed in the combination of positive words (special flavor, mint-tasting) and one negative word (decay). Cyril often describes Fiona, other characters, and certain actions in this same paradoxical language. For instance, again in reference to Fiona, we see an unlikely and comic combination in the objects of Fiona's kisses--flowers and attractive men (nice things), but also shadows and dead birds. More importantly, his paradoxical language, especially as it applies to Fiona, also suggests something about him.

Perhaps Cyril is as fascinated by death and as predatory as Fiona. It does seem as if he and Fiona are waiting for a character like Hugh to appear, as if they have been in training for the kind of challenge Hugh will offer. Even before they meet Hugh, Cyril and Fiona are fascinated by underground places of death. For example, they take pleasure in visiting a stone crypt, a place where Cyril says Fiona can be her true self. And when they arrive at the crypt, they joke about being buried alive (p. 18). Moreover,
in a sense, they seem to be accomplices to Hugh's death, both of them finding Hugh's corpse after he has hanged himself in his attempt to make a personal statement on the theory of sexual extension. When they come upon the corpse, Cyril says, "Yes, Fiona and I were in competition for Hugh's life from the first moment we intruded upon the scene of his art and his death" (p. 266). By "competition" for Hugh's life Cyril means that he and Fiona are competing to be the first one to cut Hugh down. But there seems to be a sinister connotation to the phrase, for they really do compete for Hugh when they toy with his Puritan mentality, knowing that he is an unlikely sex-singer and unwilling participant in sexual extension.

The author of The Blood Oranges expects us to note all of these allusions to death which lurk behind the playfulness of Cyril's sex-song, so that we must re-evaluate Cyril's character. We also must reexamine Hugh, who doesn't look so bad anymore. We must wonder if Hugh's sickness—his loveless, lifeless, masturbatory view of sex—isn't exploited by Fiona and Cyril, so that they can have a few kicks. Again, the way in which we view these three characters (and Catherine) and their relationships with each other depends on how closely we sympathize with Cyril's point of view.

Overall, I think we can view Cyril's narrative from three different perspectives. First, we can identify completely with Cyril and become sex-singers. If we choose
this route, we don't laugh at Cyril but with him. We smile at the ingenuity of the games he and Fiona have invented to further the idea of sexual extension. We also laugh at Hugh's Puritanism because we feel superior to him, surprised at his old-fashioned beliefs in monogamy. But if we detach ourselves from Cyril's point of view for a moment, we can see him as an ironic spokesman for love, and we laugh at him for the same reason he laughs at Hugh--because we feel superior to him.

In a sense, though, I think the implied author of the novel wants us to accept and reject Cyril, so that we understand the contradictory nature of love and its spokesman in the book. That is, in The Blood Oranges, Hawkes creates an image of an author who, on moral grounds, must eventually condemn Cyril's sex-song, and yet, on a purely intellectual and aesthetic level, he seems attracted to the logic and even the mystique of sex-singing. For us to approach this position of the implied author and understand all of the creative possibilities and flaws of sexual extension, we must try to view events simultaneously from within and outside Cyril's point of view. In the grape-tasting scene of The Blood Oranges, we can see how this reading process works.

The grape-tasting game is a crucial scene for a number of reasons. First, the game takes place on the first morning after the first night that Cyril has made love to
Catherine, and, to the best of his knowledge, Hugh has been with Fiona. Secondly, because all four characters are present in the grape arbor, we have a chance to watch their reactions to each other on the day after the consummation of a sexual experience that some of them have been hoping for, some of them dreading. Third, each character's participation in this game suggests how he or she feels about sex in general, and hints at where he or she will be at the end of the novel. Fourth, the game gives us an opportunity to see Cyril in action as master of a sex ceremony, and we infer much about his character from his observations of and participation in the game. Finally, and most important to this study, we see in the grape-tasting scene the many different ways comic techniques work to attract us to and push us away from characters, so that we must look at the results of sexual extension in many different ways.

The section which includes the grape-tasting game opens with Cyril and Fiona trying to amuse themselves at their villa, wondering why Hugh and Catherine haven't showed up. Fiona passes the day changing clothes, while Cyril smokes cigarettes. They both are a bit edgy but they are also used to days like these. The day after spouse-swapping, according to Cyril:

was always the same, Fiona's briefly pantomimed reassurances, my slumping revery, her thoughts, my thoughts, the curious sensation that the adventure begun in the dark was somehow obscured, discolored, drowned in the bright sun. (p. 180)
Finally, Catherine and Hugh appear, and from Cyril's point of view they are a source of both amusement and annoyance. Veterans of many day-afters, Cyril and Fiona are dressed casually, whereas Hugh and Catherine show up in formal attire, as if their modest clothing might temper the previous night's adventure. Fiona thinks the sight of Hugh in "powdery blue jacket" and necktie and of Catherine in "grey dress" is "sweet," but Cyril seems put off by the couple's inexperience in day-afters. He seems to be sick of the restraints this couple keeps imposing on the spontaneity of his sex-song.

If we look at them, especially at Hugh, from Cyril's point of view, we can understand why Cyril finds Hugh ridiculous. For one thing, Hugh shows up with a bottle of cognac as if to celebrate the night before, but he refuses to drink any of it. He says that he is sick, "'Cramps. Diarrhea. Weakness'" (p. 183), which are no doubt psychosomatic ailments brought on by a bad conscience. With her usual optimism, Fiona says to Cyril, "'Hugh's all right, baby. You can see he is.'" But Cyril, recognizing the psychosomatic nature of Hugh's illness, replies sarcastically, "'Yes . . . great Pan is not dead!'" (p. 182). We laugh at this statement because Hugh is such an unlikely Pan; but Cyril's words are also eerie since they foreshadow Hugh's hanging.

But Hugh doesn't appear comic in this scene only from
Cyril's perspective; even if we look at his actions objectively we find ourselves agreeing with Cyril's perception of Hugh. For one thing, Hugh pretends superiority to Cyril when the game begins. He doesn't want to play. "'It's silly, boy,'" he says. This is a strange response to the game since it comes from a man whose idea of foreplay is to chase his wife around the bedroom, murmuring, "'Don't be afraid of Daddy Bear . . . Don't be afraid of Daddy Bear . . . '" (p. 153). We realize what Hugh doesn't, that it is the implied sexuality of the game and not the game itself that at first puts him off. "'No grapes for me,'" he says to Cyril, "'No thanks!'" (p. 184). Paradoxically, though, it is also the implied sexuality of the game which eventually makes him take part in it. After Hugh sees Cyril sucking a "single plump dangling grape," splitting the skin and chewing on it, he wants to play. "'God, boy,'" he says to Cyril, "'I see what you mean!'" (p. 185). He becomes even more enthusiastic about the game when he sees Catherine trying to grip a grape between her lips. Cyril describes the scene:

"You missed," Hugh said. "Try again."
"I lost my balance."
"They're only grapes," I said under my breath. "Have some."
"Nipples, boy, that's what you mean."
"Suit yourself," I said and laughed. "But they're just grapes." (pp. 185-86)

Comedy works here to expose Hugh's flimsy Puritan disguise. We laugh at him the way we might laugh at a priest.
coming out of an x-rated movie theater. We also laugh at the crude connection between the game (grapes) and sex (nipples), and at Hugh's enthusiastic participation in the contest, "stretching like a man attempting to chin himself without the use of his hands" (p. 186). Cyril may not have convinced Hugh to pursue the aesthetics of sexual extension, but he does convince him that there is a better way to go after grapes than to pick up a couple of bunches with his hands and go sit under a tree (p. 184). Hugh, then, at first a difficult student of love, succumbs to the lure of the grapes. He is comical because he doesn't realize how quickly he has moved from extreme abstinence to extreme passion, and, as a result, we are made to see the paradoxical nature of Puritanism—a Puritan's fascination with the object of his scorn.

But perhaps even more comic than Hugh is his teacher, Cyril, especially in the way Cyril describes the grape-tasting game. He is conscious of Hugh's and Catherine's and Fiona's participation in the event, but he seems most interested in his own role as master of ceremonies. He describes his own assault on the grapes as if looking at himself from a distance, mesmerized by his own sensuous movements. He says:

For a moment longer I took all the time I wanted—adjusting spectacles, letting arms hang loose, cushioning the backs of both clasped hands against upper thighs and lower buttocks, unlimbering the torso inside the old white linen jacket. And then I rose on the balls of my feet and simply
stuck my face up among the grapes. But strain? No. Exertion? No. Yet Hugh and Catherine and Fiona could hardly help but be aware of my lifted chin, the soft open planes of my tilted face, the heavy and tightened flesh of my bent neck. And was Fiona fidgeting? Hugh grunting? Catherine sighing in disbelief? I heard them. I too was amused at their vision of my bulky athletic figure sporting with playful aesthetic hunger among the grapes. Yes, I told myself, my large head poking for no apparent reason into the symmetrical fat clumps of purple grapes was no doubt an amusing sight, as I intended it to be. (pp 184-85)

In this passage, Cyril betrays his fascination with himself as sex-singer. He is an exhibitionist, which is why the grape-tasting game is so appealing to him. It gives him an opportunity to strut his stuff. But we perceive him differently. Although we must agree that he is a formidable match for the grapes and the perfect model for the grape-tasters who will follow, we also must perceive him to be a self-centered man with an exaggerated sense of self-importance. That is, we get caught up in Cyril's excited description of the game and sometimes feel as if we are stretching after the grapes with him, but the importance of the game is undercut for us when we see it as a silly substitute for sex. Consequently, when Cyril sees Hugh's and Fiona's "heads together temple to temple, one of his darkly trousered legs . . . canted across one of her bare legs" while the grapes swing and ripple to the "sound of their laughter, the movements of their open mouths" (p. 187), it is clear that this is the closest Cyril will come to catching Hugh and Catherine in a sexual moment. It
also becomes clear that this is the only way Hugh seems capable of enjoying sex. Ironically, both Cyril and Hugh must settle for the game. And it is precisely because the game is a mock-sexual contest that it is comic. Even Cyril's attempts to romanticize the contest with a flurry of erotic rhetoric doesn't work. If anything, the more Cyril tries to romanticize the game, the more absurd and pathetic it becomes; we see the contrast between his serious, erotic language and the simplicity of the game itself.

In one sense, of course, it is appropriate that the game is ersatz sex, since Hugh (and Cyril, as we will see later) isn't too good at the real thing. It is, indeed, the artificiality of the event that turns Hugh on, the fact that he can play with sex without having a real affair. This element of "play" and "pretend" also attracts Cyril, Fiona, and Catherine to the game. Consider this conversation between the four of them, part of which already has been reproduced. Hugh says to Cyril:

"No grapes for me, boy. No thanks."
"Oh," I said, and laughed, "you don't need to eat them. Just try to catch them in your lips and pull them down."
"Why not pick a couple of bunches with our hands," Hugh said, "and go sit under a tree?"
"Let's do what Cyril says, Hugh. Please."

[ Catherine speaking ]
"Baby, I want to be first. OK?" [ Fiona speaking ]
"No, Fiona," I said slowly, "I'm first."
(p. 184)
Out of context, this conversation reads like an exchange between children. It's as if the neighborhood kids have gotten together and are trying to figure out what to do with themselves before the streetlights come on and they have to go home. "'But, baby, what shall we do?'" Fiona asks:

"Well," I said, "before it gets too dark, let's look at the grapes."
"Oh, Cyril, the grape-tasting game . . ."
"Want to play?" (p. 182)

And everyone does want to play. Even though there is one kid who tries to ruin all of the fun, everyone else eventually talks him into playing. In the grape-tasting game, we even see a hierarchy develop which we notice in groups of children, with Cyril being the leader and inventor of the game, thus deserving the right to go first.

Although we are able to see the comedy and irony of the grape-tasting game, Cyril doesn't. It seems as if the implied author, by arranging materials in such a way that we note this comedy and irony, distances us from Cyril's perspective. After watching Cyril's performance in the grape-tasting scene, we realize how self-absorbed he is, how blinded he is by his exaggerated opinion of himself. Thus we must question whether his motives as sex-singer are as altruistic as he suggests, and we must wonder about the worth of his theory of sexual extension. When we begin to question Cyril in this manner, we recognize that there is
also a dark edge to the grape-tasting scene.

That is, at first the foursome and Cyril's game seem silly, though harmlessly so. We could even argue that there is a certain innocence to this scene: grown-ups having fun and acting like kids, something we all like to do once in a while. But beyond this apparent harmlessness something terrible is going on. We must remember that the game takes place on the evening after the couples have exchanged partners—an experiment in sexual extension which eventually leads to Hugh's death and to Catherine's hospitalization. Cyril would like us to believe that the game is a means through which Hugh and Catherine can alleviate their post-swapping anxieties, but we know better. If anything, the grape-tasting game seems to exacerbate their anxieties, since, shortly after the game, Hugh, more distraught than ever, leads his own expedition to discover the chastity belt, and Catherine still has problems saying the word "sex" (p. 254).

There seems to be something dangerous about the game, then. Not only is it potentially harmful because it works on the repressed desires of Hugh and Catherine, but the inventor of the game and its master of ceremonies, Cyril, also seems harmful when in control of the game. I am suggesting, then, that the real terror in the grape-tasting scene, which exists simultaneously with its comedy, can be found in Cyril's participation in it. For although the
game reveals different sides to all four characters, it reveals more about Cyril—his perceptions of Fiona, Hugh, and Catherine, his ideas on sex and love—than anyone else. And if we look beyond Cyril's apparent playfulness and concern for Catherine and Fiona, we discover a very unappealing character. We also learn that he enjoys sexual extension only if it takes place according to his rules.

This immature and nasty side of Cyril's surfaces at the very beginning of the grape-tasting section. At first, Cyril just appears bored. But this boredom becomes annoyance when Hugh and Catherine appear and the two couples exchange pleasantries. Being an old hand at day-afters, Cyril is put off by these rituals, which he describes as:

Meeting. Mingling. Greeting each other. And I shook Hugh's hand, Hugh shook Fiona's hand, I put my arm around Catherine's waist, Fiona took a sudden firm grip on my white linen shirt. And the day? Gone. The Night? Deep. (p. 182)

Although Cyril could probably tolerate these pleasantries, he can't seem to stand much more of Hugh. After Cyril suggests the game, he knows Hugh's initial reaction will be one of "distaste," which makes the game, in Cyril's mind, a contest between him and Hugh. This explains why Cyril is so concerned with how erotic he looks when he goes after the grapes. He, no doubt, hopes to excite Fiona and Catherine, thereby upsetting Hugh. "And was Fiona fidgeting?" he asks. "Hugh grunting? Catherine sighing in
disbelief?" (p. 185). In one sense, Cyril wins his battle with Hugh because Hugh eventually enjoys the game. Cyril even seems to excite Hugh as much as he excites Fiona and Catherine. But we must ask what Cyril's victory accomplishes. Is it representative of Love's victory over Puritanism? Or is it a more personal matter, Cyril's own private victory, inflicting his will on Hugh, Fiona, and Catherine?

Cyril, of course, would argue that he is but an agent of love, a servant of "Love's will" (p. 21). But how much can we allow him to do in the name of love. It is obvious from a look at the grape-tasting game that Cyril knows the weaknesses of Catherine and Hugh. He knows that Catherine is shy, uncertain, and apprehensive, and that Hugh is uptight and, quite frankly, sexually maladjusted. And yet Cyril places them in situations where he can take advantage of their weaknesses. Why? Again, Cyril would argue that he is an agent of love, and also an agent of Fiona who wants Hugh from the moment she sees him.

But certainly no matter how much we dislike Hugh's Puritanism and laugh at him as this Puritanism exposes itself, we still must feel that Cyril goes too far and takes too much pleasure in "freeing" Hugh and Catherine from their inhibitions. Certainly, even the most libertine of readers can see something malicious in the way Cyril toys with Hugh when he tells him that the grapes are only
grapes, not nipples, as Hugh insists. After all, Cyril is the inventor of the game and the sex-singer par excellence, so he must recognize the sexual implications of the grapes. We must wonder why Cyril can't see what the game is doing to Hugh, and put an end to it. When Cyril describes Hugh attacking the grapes, "stretching like a man attempting to chin himself without the use of his hands" (p. 186), he must be able to make the connection between this description and the later one of Hugh hanging from a rope. This connection must be present in his mind, since, in the section immediately following the grape-tasting scene, Cyril describes Hugh "with a length of rotted rope in his hands" (p. 187).

It seems, then, that we have come a long way from the initial comedy of the grape-tasting scene. We must realize, though, that we wouldn't have been able to question the motives of Cyril and other characters or to question the worth of sexual extension without the aid of comedy cutting through the surface of Cyril's attractive rhetoric. And, in this sense, The Blood Oranges is easy to interpret. We could argue that sexual extension is foolish at best, dangerous at worst. We know that the implied author of the novel must feel this way or he wouldn't have made the sex-singer and his sex-song appear so foolish and potentially dangerous in the first place.

But, as usual, it is not possible to give such a clear-cut interpretation of a novel by Hawkes. Even after we see
through Cyril's rhetoric, we still can't turn completely against him. What other philosophy of love does the book offer that is better than Cyril's. Hugh's and Catherine's? Moreover, shouldn't we admit that Cyril and Fiona have a right to extra-curricular sexual activity, if they agree upon it? Is it their fault that they end up with two prudish partners?

But although we may often have contradictory responses to Cyril and his sex-song throughout *The Blood Oranges*, I still think that the implied author of the book leads us to one clear-cut value judgment. That is, on one hand, it isn't clear whether the implied author is against the idea of sexual extension, or whether he prefers any one philosophy of sex or love over another. Instead, I think we are meant to see that love is paradoxical by nature and that we shouldn't try to categorize it. But, on the other hand, through comic techniques which undercut Cyril and Hugh, the implied author leads us to believe that eventually we must condemn both men. There might not be anything wrong with Free-Loving and Puritanism in themselves, but the proponents of those theories, especially Cyril, are made to appear dangerous. We do not have to read far into the novel to realize that *The Blood Oranges* deals more with the destructive potential of Cyril's self-love than with the shared love of sexual extension. And it is made clear that we should condemn this narcissism.
Cyril's narcissism primarily springs from his own sense of himself as being physically attractive and intellectually engaging. He calls himself a "sex aestetician," a "god-like foreigner" (p. 7). Fiona encourages his mythological perception of himself when they run into the goat-girl on one of their hiking expeditions with Hugh and Catherine. "'Kiss her, baby,'" Fiona says. "'She probably thinks you're a god.'" To which Cyril replies, "'Of course she does'" (p. 145). Cyril is obsessed with his own good looks, his physique, and with his wardrobe. He always wonders if people are looking at him, asking themselves who this attractive man is (pp. 26, 63, 182). He also spends a great deal of time describing his clothing, "my own soft cord trousers hastily donned in semi-darkness," he says, "and stuffed into the tops of large and partially laced chamois boots . . . my faded denim shirt still unbuttoned and flowing away from massive breast with its bronze luster and sleep-matted hair" (p. 135).

His extreme self-consciousness becomes most odious when he is with Fiona, because it seems as if Adonis (Cyril) has found his Aphrodite (Fiona). When Cyril and Fiona watch the bus that carries Hugh and his family sinking into the canal, he doesn't worry about the people aboard; he's not concerned with their safety. He only wonders if the bus' passengers have noticed him and Fiona. "For one terrible instant did it occur to them," he asks, "that the tall man
and woman on the edge of the crowd might be precisely strong enough to save them?" (p. 26). His thoughts are comic here because of their inappropriateness. But they also are a bit frightening because, in spite of Cyril's professed desire to "save" Hugh, he ends up aiding in Hugh's destruction, Catherine's hospitalization, and Fiona's departure with Hugh's children.

Cyril often asks us to believe that he is helping people when, in fact, he is only interested in entertaining himself. His actions and rhetoric are not altruistic but self-reflective. In this way, inwardly, Cyril isolates and protects himself from other characters, while, on the outside, he tries to convince us and others that he is the unselfish agent of Love and of Fiona, and that his duty is to lead Hugh and Catherine to Illyria--his utopian love-nest.

We see, however, that not only does his rhetoric isolate him, but it also suggests his insensitivity to others. That is, even though Cyril is constantly trying to explain matters of sex-singing to Hugh, Catherine, Fiona, and to us, he doesn't really communicate. He, very much like Skipper, is only interested in how he can authenticate himself through language, protect himself from accepting responsibility for the tragic events which evolve from his experiment in sexual extension. For example, speaking to Catherine, Cyril insists that:
Hugh's death was an accident inspired, so to speak, by his cameras, his peasant nudes, his ingesting of the sex-song itself. It was not our shared love that had triggered Hugh's catastrophe. It was simply that his private interests, private moods, had run counter to the actualities of our foursome, so that his alien myth of privacy had established a psychic atmosphere conducive to an accident of that kind. Hugh's death hinged only on himself. And yet for that death even he was not to blame. (p. 211)

In this passage, we listen to a narcissist who has so emotionally detached himself from Hugh's death that he can propose reasons for it in the dispassioned language of a social psychologist. Cyril exhibits this same insensitivity when he visits the "heavy-hearted" Catherine in the beginning of the novel. He asks her, "'Remember how Hugh's coffin made that poor wreck of a hearse sag in the rear?'" (p. 12). There is a kind of cruel comedy in the inappropriateness of this comment. And we wonder if he is being deliberately mean to Catherine, or if he is so obsessed with his own thoughts that he doesn't see the insensitivity of bringing up Hugh's death in such a coarse manner at the same time Catherine is trying to recuperate from it.

So although we, depending on our personal beliefs, may condone the idea of sexual extension, we cannot, I think, condone Cyril's behavior. Neither should we confuse his narcissism with naivete, nor accept his excuses for eschewing responsibility for the tragic results of sexual extension. Cyril maintains to the end that he is an agent
of both Love and Fiona, and that he performs at his wife's "bidding" (p. 145). He does admit that he wasn't, in his own words, forced "to climb into my dressing gown and silk pajamas and cross from my villa" to Catherine's hotel, but then a "steady, methodical, undesigning lover like myself has no choice." And "'don't forget,'" he tells Catherine:

"you were waiting for me. You wanted my slow walk, my strong dark shadow, my full pack of cigarettes, the sound of my humming as I approached your villa. We both knew you were waiting, Catherine. Neither one of us had any choice that first night. It was inevitable." (p. 11)

"It" would have been inevitable if Cyril were, in truth, an irresistible sex-singer, if he were the spontaneous agent of Love he claims to be, who "takes a fair roster of other girls and women, from young to old to young, whenever the light was right or the music sounded" (p. 2). But Cyril is more methodical than he suggests here, and, as we have seen, he is not as good a free-lover as he first appears to be. In fact, according to his own high aesthetic standards for love, Cyril seems to fail as a lover at the end of the novel when he winds up with Rosella, one of Hugh's peasant nudes, who is as non-verbal as Catalina Kate. It is ironic that he remains with a girl whom he finds to be as "aesthetically self-defeating" as Hugh's one-armed shape; a girl who, like Hugh, cannot "understand a word of my lengthy erotic declarations" (p. 2). It's as if by living
with Rosella that Cyril holds onto a part of Hugh; but instead of having a picture of one of Hugh's peasant nudes to fantasize on, he has the real thing, though he won't make love to her.

We shouldn't be surprised that Cyril usurps Hugh's position at the end of the novel by living with Rosella and becoming a surrogate husband to Catherine. Cyril and Hugh are not as different as they first appear. On one hand, we might argue, as John Kuehl does, that "Cyril and Hugh stand for oppositions of purity and Puritanism, love and idealism, life against death." But once we see through the verbal smokescreen Cyril creates to confound us and himself, we realize that he, too, is attracted to Puritanism, idealism, and death, and that he might be just as jealous as Hugh, though he expresses this jealousy in a different way.

At first it might seem absurd to suggest that Cyril is capable of jealousy, since he often condemns it. "It is not in my character, my receptive spirit," he says, "to suffer sexual possessiveness, the shock of aesthetic greed, the bile that greases most matrimonial bonds, the rage and fear that shrivels your ordinary man at the first hint of the obvious multiplicity of love" (pp. 57-58). Yet, in spite of this sex-singing, even Cyril must admit that

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8 Kuehl, John Hawkes and the Craft of Conflict, p. 129.
he and Fiona have quarreled over matters of love. We realize that all is not well in Illyria when Cyril discusses his and Fiona's past lovers, and we wonder if their quibbling over the fine points of sexual extension doesn't stem partially from jealousy. For example, Cyril admits that not even the love between himself and Fiona could be without pain, and he asks, "Could any perfect marriage exist without hostile silences, without shadows, without sour notes?" Yes, he goes on to say, he and Fiona have had "bitter whispered confrontations over the use of the bed in the master bedroom, brief spurts of anger about a sudden loss of form on the tennis courts" (p. 56). Moreover, Cyril admits that there is a "degree of pain" involved in listening to "one of Fiona's analytical and yet excited accounts of a night of love away from me," or in "smelling cigar smoke on her belly" (p. 57).

Cyril also suggests that he and Fiona have had trouble with participants in sexual extension before. He explains that he and Fiona "have tasted departure and the last liquid kiss, tried to console each other for each pair of friends who, weaker or less fortunate than ourselves, went down in flames" (p. 56). After we become aware of this information, we must ask why Cyril and Fiona pursue the idea of sexual extension with so much vigor when their affairs end so frequently in jealousy, quibbling, and death. Are they both just harmless agents of Love, or are there
darker motives for their actions? Considering what we know about Cyril and Fiona, it seems that their experiments in sexual extension, in spite of Cyril's attempts to idealize them through rhetoric, are of a combative nature. We already have examined the confrontation between Cyril's sex-song and Hugh's Puritanism. But there also seems to be a subtle conflict going on between Fiona and Cyril, and this conflict seems to get worked out in their affairs. Sometimes it even appears that they compete to see who gets the best partner in a sexual exchange, and then they tell each other the details of their affairs.

Perhaps the friction between them stems partially from the way Fiona speaks to Cyril at times. For example, on a tour of a church early in the novel, Cyril embarks on one of his meditations on Fiona. He hears the "sharp sounds" of her "footsteps as she bent all the energy of her tall and beautiful and impatient self toward finding a still better angle from which to view the altar." Fiona disrupts his musings with, "'Cyril, baby, why don't you put out the cigarette? For God's sake . . .'' (p. 18). This brief exchange is important for two reasons. First, it shows the contrast between Cyril's erotic description of Fiona and the ordinariness we hear in her speech. Thus we laugh at his attempt to turn her into something she isn't; we see again the narrator who exaggerates in order to fit characters and events into his sex-song. But this scene is also
important because we sense in Fiona's voice anger and annoyance. Her angry tone surfaces again when they are on one of their idyllic walks with Hugh and Catherine. Fiona, as if recognizing that Cyril is a word-bag, as if expecting him to go into one of his orations on nature or love, says, "'Don't say anything, Cyril, don't spoil it'" (p. 135).

We might suggest, then, that Fiona is not as controlled by Cyril as he wishes us to believe. We can even argue that Cyril might have become a sex-singer out of necessity, in an attempt to match Fiona's infidelities one for one. After all, it was Fiona who christened Cyril a sex-singer early in their relationship. "Don't bother being a husband, baby," she says. "Just be a sex-singer" (p. 97). Perhaps Hugh understands more than we think when he says to Fiona concerning Cyril, "'That's it, all these years you've been castrating him"' (p. 4).

Once we note this friction between Fiona and Cyril, it becomes easy to accept those contradictions in Cyril's character that don't coincide with the role of sex-singer. For example, it is strange that Cyril, a self-professed free-lover, should also be as fond of the Blessed Virgin Mary (p. 19) as Skipper is. It is also strange that when Fiona returns from a walk with Hugh, Cyril checks to see if the "elastic of her panties were still to be felt" (p. 105) under her dress. Perhaps, then, Cyril is as possessive and jealous as Hugh; but whereas Hugh takes out his sexual
frustrations on himself, Cyril intellectualizes his predicament and displaces his anxieties and anger into elaborate and weird games and philosophies of love.

He even seems to be playing some sick game with Fiona at Hugh's death. Looking at her, Cyril says, "she was hardly a woman to display grief. But for once Fiona, still kneeling" next to the corpse, "was behaving out of character, and I was glad" (p. 268). It's as if Cyril is pleased with Hugh's death because it makes Fiona openly suffer, which makes us wonder if, unconsciously, he didn't drive Hugh to death in their last conversation (pp. 242-52), when he cruelly taunts him.

By the end of The Blood Oranges, then, we find it hard to believe anything that Cyril tells us. We don't trust him, and many readers probably don't even like him. Moreover, even though Cyril is comic when he misunderstands himself or misinterprets and over-describes events, we do not find that the results of his self-delusions are very funny. Comedy exposes his real motives and also Hugh's flimsy Puritanism, but it leaves us with an empty feeling about love and sex. Even Fiona and Catherine don't seem to offer anything positive for us. Fiona is made to sound ridiculous and vulgar every time she opens her mouth, and Catherine, a mother of three and lover to Cyril, still can't say the word "sex." Comedy has diminished each character, made them pathetic in our eyes. It also threatens to make
the novel meaningless, since we have no positive values at the end of *The Blood Oranges* to hold onto. Where are those universal values which Hawkes says true comedy reveals?

Perhaps we will have problems with the meaning of *The Blood Oranges* if we look for those values just in Cyril's and Hugh's approaches to love—the only apparent approaches we get in the novel. Instead, we must come to our own perceptions of love after questioning and rejecting the outlooks of characters. Thus, love isn't what one character, especially Cyril, says it is, but what we believe it to be after we have considered everyone's limited point of view. We must be like novice artists sketching negative space, which itself is spatially defined not by what it is but by what it is not, by the objects around it. Comedy is important in *The Blood Oranges* because it shatters the self-serving illusions of love and sex presented by Cyril. It allows us to take a first step away from the inadequate manifestations of love and sex that we find in the book.

But this is not to say that Puritanism or Free-loving, per se, are condemned by the novel. What really gets a working-over in *The Blood Oranges* is the mean egotism of the representatives of Puritanism and Sexual Extension, Hugh and Cyril. The novel deals with how this egotism results in extreme and dangerous behavior and how it ultimately destroys love between and among couples. In
this sense, Hugh and Cyril, though apparently "polar opposites," according to Hawkes, are yet also "versions of a single figure." He goes on to say:

Cyril is a modest but literal lover. Hugh is an idealist. And Hugh's idealism is a totally destructive quality. Cyril is practitioner of Hugh's idealism, is able to love with the same strength and purity that is in fact Hugh's ideal.9

Hawkes also has said that the function of comedy is to write in such a way that the reader is always hovering between opposites, trapped in paradoxes, "poised between what is and isn't."10 Certainly in our responses to Cyril and Hugh, we experience the paradoxical nature of love and also its extremes, which they represent. Within the novel itself Cyril's and Hugh's strange, paradoxical relationship becomes most clear when Cyril first spots the chastity belt around Catherine's waist. Looking at it, mesmerized, he asks:

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10 Kuehl, "Interview," p. 175.
But Hugh's accomplice? Yes, I was Hugh's accomplice. In all my strength and weight I was not so very different from Hugh after all. Because as soon as I pressed my thumbs and fingers against the thin pitted surface of the iron band circling Catherine's waist, I realized that Hugh's despairing use of that iron belt must have occasioned a moment more genuinely erotic than any he had known with Catherine, with his nudes, in his dreams of Fiona. (pp. 256-57)

Unfortunately for Cyril, even though he has the ability to make this connection, a talent Hencher and Skipper do not have, he doesn't realize that his insight could save him. That is, if he really understood, as we do, that his approach to love and sex is just as sterile and destructive as Hugh's, he might be able to clear up his confusion over Hugh's death and move on from there. Instead, at the end of the novel, we find him sitting alone in his room, surrounded by three circular mementos of his experience with Hugh and Catherine: a dried-out flower crown he once wore, a large and sagging pair of shorts (probably Hugh's), and the iron chastity belt. Even after all of the complex events that have taken place, even after Cyril has tried to control these events by narrating them to us, he still seems to miss the deep significance of the mementos. He doesn't realize that the one "circular relic" (p. 271) that is missing from his mementos is Hugh's noose, an image of death which undercuts his final words, "Everything coheres, moves forward" (p. 71). We realize with both a laugh and a shudder that Cyril, too, has come full circle; he is not any
more conscious of what happened to him and the other members of the experiment in sexual extension than he was when he began his narrative.

As the trilogy progresses, we see narrators becoming less and less concerned with alternative ways of "seeing," which could possibly save them. In different ways, Allert and Papa are more myopic and narcissistic than Cyril, and certainly more than Skipper. And since they care less than Cyril and Skipper about the audience they address, we seem to care less about them. Moreover, comedy doesn't work in exactly the same way in Death, Sleep & the Traveler and Travesty as it does in The Blood Oranges. In the latter two novels of the trilogy, the unreliability of Allert and Papa is obvious from the beginning of each narrative. Comedy highlights this unreliability, but Allert's and Papa's faults are obvious without its aid.

Nevertheless, comedy still controls the distance we keep from narrators in the latter two novels of the trilogy. For instance, personally, even though I know that Papa is a murderer, and even though I know that the values of the implied author of Travesty do not mesh with Papa's, I still enjoy his narrative more than Allert's. I like the way the comedy of Travesty unfolds; I like watching the intelligence behind the book playing with Papa's theories. I see a similar intelligence also undercutting Allert in Death, Sleep & the Traveler, but Allert's overt grossness offsets
my pleasure. To generalize about the last two novels of the trilogy, then, we might say that we will begin to experience comedy more on a formal or aesthetic level than on a thematic one. We will still be interested in Allert's and Papa's perspectives on love and sex, but we will move further away from those perspectives than we did in The Blood Oranges, and, consequently, we will move quicker and closer to the perspectives of the implied authors of those novels. There are aesthetic advantages to this movement, but we will also lose something when we become more interested in the author pulling his characters' strings than in the characters themselves.

_Death, Sleep & the Traveler_

_Death, Sleep & the Traveler_ is perhaps the least comic novel of the trilogy, as Hawkes himself has suggested, and yet we can see Hawkes using some of the same comic techniques—especially recurring imagery, action, and verbal patterns—to expose Allert's true character as he did to reveal the contradictory natures of previous first person narrators. As in the cases of _Second Skin_ and _The Blood_

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Oranges, we cannot evaluate *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* until we have uncovered and judged the attitudes and beliefs of its narrator, Allert, who, like Skipper and Cyril, attempts to deceive both himself and us about his participation in the deaths of Ariane and Peter.

That is, Allert asks a question in the novel: why is his wife, Ursula, leaving him? And we are expected to help him answer this question as we follow the back and forth movements of his memory and his digressions on the unconscious. Ironically, though, as we proceed in the novel, Allert's question seems to be subordinate to three more important questions: Did Allert murder Ariane? Is he in some way responsible for Peter's death? And is he in fact insane, as one critic suggests? To answer these questions, we must explore Allert's unconventional sexual experiences, since all of his actions seem controlled by his perceptions of himself as sexual object and practitioner.

Perhaps it might be best to begin a study of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* by comparing Allert to previous first person narrators we have encountered. Like Cyril, Allert is at times overtly absurd, and yet he doesn't have Cyril's attractive and sensuous voice to offset these faults. We

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12Greiner, *Comic Terror*, pp. 259-60.
may disagree with Cyril's theory of sexual extension, but the sounds of his notes, his soft words, still please our ears. Unlike Cyril's verbal celebrations, Allert's rhetoric diminishes objects, events, and people. He speaks as an intellectual Hugh might, describing action through grotesque figures of speech. He compares his name, and by extension himself, to a "thousand year old clay receptable with paranoia curled in the shape of a child skeleton inside." And Ariane's eyelashes make him think of "flies climbing a wall" (p. 10). Allert also shares with Hugh an interest in pornography. He even sees his life as a soiled picture, "uncensored, overexposed. Each event, each situation, each image," he says, "stands before me like a piece of film blackened from overexposure to intense light" (p. 31).

In spite of his self-loathing, though, Allert leads us to believe that, like Cyril, he is all for sexual extension. He says that he shares Ursula "willingly" (p. 93) with Peter and he even seems to encourage their affair. The resemblance between Allert and Cyril becomes even more pronounced when we realize that their wives and mistresses also share certain traits. Like Fiona, Ursula is crude and comic in her observations, as when she says to Peter and

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13 John Hawkes, *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 3. All further references will be in parentheses.
Allert after they have shared her, "'Thanks to my two selfish friends I hurt in my crotch'" (p. 163). And Rosella and Ariane are comparable, with names "typical of those . . . bestowed so often on the female children in poor families" (p. 35).

Besides being a combination of Cyril and Hugh, Allert also resembles Skipper and Hencher. He has Hencher's masturbatory and anal intelligence, his preoccupation with getting every grotesque detail just right. And like Skipper, and perhaps Cyril again, Allert tries to deflect our attention from the real questions of the book by constructing a mountain of detail between us and the real facts.

Allert, however, distinguishes himself from previous narrators in his penchant for self-loathing. He seems to dislike himself more than we or any other character in the book do, which at first would seem to exclude him from narcissism. But, in fact, this is not the case. If anything, Allert's self-disgust is just another version of self-love, a melancholy preoccupation with himself, and more specifically, with his penis. He shows the narcissism of a young boy who is fixed on his own and his mother's genitalia. But his fascination with the inside of the womb, which he visits in one of his dreams (pp. 72-74), does not mean that he shifts his attention from himself to his mother. This narcissist has what we might call a Nero
complex, and is thus only interested in the uterus because he came from there. It is, after all, the "rare North Penis" that Allert worships, and that he dreams of sprouting between his legs.

On one hand, we would think that Allert's self-loathing would make him more reliable than someone like Cyril because Allert openly reveals unattractive sides of himself. Certainly, because of his willingness to tell us his most personal habits, he doesn't seem to be hiding anything or protecting himself or pretending to be better than he really is. But this self-disgust, like Skipper's and Cyril's supposed naivety, is a pose of sorts. After awhile, we become numb to his personal confessions and, like Peter and Ursula, we end up laughing at them. It is in fact the seriousness of Allert's tone, his inability to recognize irony and paradox, that make his pronouncements comic. Time after time, he soberly reports his dreams and he willingly awaits Ursula's sarcastic interpretations of them. At these moments, we are faced with Ursula's problem: how to take a man seriously who can relate the following dream with a straight face. "In my dream," Allert says:

I am somehow endowed with the rare North Penis, as if the points of the compass have become reliable indicators of sexual potency with north lying at the maximum end of the scale. First I see the phrase North Penis on a sign above the door of a shabby restaurant . . . then I am seated at the single unsteady little table in front of the restaurant and am aware of the sudden ill-fit of
my trousers and of the physical sensations of the rare North Penis between my legs. (p. 16)

When we read this weird dream and then overhear other characters making fun of it and Allert, we, like these characters, tend not to take Allert very seriously. He seems to be emotionally arrested, though harmless. He is no threat to other characters as long as his dreams and fantasies play themselves out in his unconscious. But we must not find him ridiculous to such a degree that we overlook his responsibilities in the deaths in Death, Sleep & the Traveler. Ursula and Peter are adept at exposing Allert's inadequacies, and, in this sense, they act as Allert's comic foils, agents of the implied author. But they often seem to overlook Allert's destructive capabilities as they laugh at him. We, however, should recognize Allert's dark side, his potential for debasing not only himself but also others. In Allert's description of Ursula performing fellatio on him and Peter, we see his dark side revealed in a comic way. He says that he "felt the muted fierce sensation of Ursula."

Felt and heard the tip of the tongue, the edge of the tongue, the flat of the tongue, the softness inside the lips, the resilience of the lips firmly compressed, the gusts of unsmiling breath, the passionate suction of the popping that was sensation as well as sound, the nick of a white tooth, the tip of her nose, the side of her cheek, the feeling of her head on its side with the mouth gripping me, carrying me, as a dog carries a sacred stick . . . (pp. 22-23)
This description of fellatio hints at how Allert perceives himself and his relationship with Ursula. It also suggests his hostility for women, which might account for his treatment of Ariane. First, I would argue that Allert's description of fellatio is far from sensuous, certainly unlike the way Cyril would describe it. But it is consistent with the destructive way Allert thinks. That is, his language destroys the sensuality of the event because of its dispassionate, voyeuristic tone. And the last simile emphasizes Allert's emotional detachment from the event. In one sense, his language, and especially the final simile, is comic for the same reason Hencher's language is comic—because of its inappropriateness. Even if someone is appalled by the misogynic overtones of the simile, he or she still should be able to see the comic surprise of the comparison, and also note that the comparison of Ursula to a dog really belittles the mind that thought it up more than it does Ursula.

More significantly though, in terms of the important questions we are asked in the novel (Why does Ursula leave Allert? Is Allert responsible for Ariane's death? Is Allert crazy?), this description also reveals an ugly, onanistic side of Allert. When he says that Ursula carries his penis in her mouth as a "dog carries a sacred stick," we see his distaste for Ursula and his reverence for his own genitalia. Ursula accuses Allert of "poeticizing" her
"crotch" (p. 70), but she need not worry. Allert's narrative is really a panegyric to the "rare North Penis," and throughout the novel, he becomes most emotional in describing sexual activity which precludes women. In two of his dreams he touches himself, and, in one scene, he rubs a picture of two naked "crawling and squirming" figures between his legs for kicks (pp. 70-71). He also prefers solo climax when he listens to Ariane playing her flute, another obvious phallic symbol. And although he never spends much time describing sex between himself and Ursula and Ariane, he does go into great detail describing fellatio, or Ariane sucking on her finger (p. 8), his nose (p. 45), and, most disgustingly, on his flabby sides (p. 63).

I stress Allert's sexual preferences--both the comic and grotesque manifestations of his auto-eroticism--because his frustrated and onanistic approach to sex underlies his responsibility in the murders of the novel. It also mirrors the isolation he feels in his marriage with Ursula and his friendship with Peter. In this sense, he is somewhat like Cyril again. In my discussion of The Blood Oranges, I suggested that a deep hostility existed between Cyril and Fiona, and that Cyril might have become a sex-singer in order to match Fiona affair for affair. I also suggested that he might have developed a theory of love and felt the need to express this theory, in order to divert his
and our attention from his anger and jealousy. When we looked at Cyril from this perspective it seemed reasonable to suggest that he rid himself of anger and jealousy by entering into a combat or contest with Fiona and Hugh. This interpretation of Cyril accounted for some of the contradictions in his character: why the sex-singer ends up in a Platonic relationship with a crude peasant girl; why he is so insensitive to the welfare of Catherine and Hugh; and why an agent of love is so attracted to a rusty chastity belt.

Allert, too, is guilty of a verbal subterfuge which resembles Cyril's. Cyril wants us to believe that he is a servant of love and that sex is the only natural extension of that love; thus he becomes a sex-singer. Allert suggests that he is only interested in sex, not some romantic notion of love. He tells us that he is "drenched in sex" (p. 51), which is why most of the novel is composed of him thinking and dreaming about sex, having it by himself, or watching others engaged in it. Because Allert is so immersed in sex we tend to think of him as being incapable of sexual possessiveness or jealousy for Peter and Ursula. And if we cling to his viewpoint throughout the novel, we, like him, will be confused as to why Ursula leaves him, and why people blame him for Ariane's death. Certainly, if Allert is as sexual as he leads us to believe, he should have no problems with the "perpetually moist" (p. 158) Ursula or the imagina-
tive nymph Ariane.

But onanism is at the center of Allert's sexuality; he is, as he himself says, as "sexually free as the arctic wind" (p. 134). He misses the irony of this paradoxical comparison, of course, but we must not. It is essential that we do not confuse his sexuality with sensuality. On one hand, Allert is physically successful with women. Ursula admits to Peter that she and Allert "go good in bed together" (p. 164). Yet she makes a crucial point about Allert when she tells him, "'You are the least sensual person I have ever known. There is a difference between size and sensuality'" (p. 177). She points out similar deficiencies to him earlier in the novel, calling him a "'psychic invalid. You have no feeling'" (p. 8). Later she says, "'You think of yourself as Casanova. But all the amours in the world do not mean that you are attractive to women'" (p. 87).

Given what we know about Allert, we sense that Ursula's comments are on the mark. Her observations also emphasize that Allert's apparent self-loathing is really a ruse, and that he is as obsessed with himself as Cyril is. Thus, the great comic irony of Death, Sleep & the Traveler is that, to us, Allert is more odious than even he thinks. He is odious, first, because of his perceptions of events--his unintentionally comic descriptions, his lack of self-knowledge, his auto-erotic dreams. But these faults seem to render him
harmless and ineffective, and so we end up laughing at him, not fearing him. But Allert's buffoon role in the novel becomes more serious when we realize that he is most likely guilty of murder, and that he asks questions and feigns incomprehension in order to deflect our attention from these murders.

We, however, should see what I think the implied author of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* wants us to see: how Allert's excessive preoccupation with himself, manifested in onanism, destroys love, sex, and even lives. We, along with the implied author who undercuts Allert's perspective through comic techniques, are meant to condemn this narcissism. And thus we discover Allert's destructive capabilities by juxtaposing his interpretation of events with the way the implied author allows us to see these events. In this sense, there are at least two opposite ways of viewing the novel, and Allert's is the least reliable. We arrive at a more accurate interpretation of events than Allert, and we learn about the underside of love and sex, when we see through Allert's self-serving explanations of action.

These are the questions Allert asks himself at the beginning of the novel:

Why did Ursula come to my support at the trial only to desert me in the end? Why did she wait this long to tell me that I am incapable of emotional response and that she cannot bear my nationality? Why did she refuse to join me on the white ship and so abandon me to death, sleep, and the anguish of lonely travel? (p. 2)
In this passage, Allert refuses to take responsibility for his present condition. He admits here that his narrative is not directed at self-knowledge but at knowledge of Ursula's motives, and he defines himself in relation to her actions, not his own. He even suggests that Ursula "forced" (p. 16) him to take the ocean cruise, which seems to make her responsible for what happened on the ship.

Next Allert narrates three concurrent stories: one concerning the ménage à trois with Ursula and Peter; another concerning his dream-life; and a third concerning his ocean journey. From these three stories, he wishes us to discern that he willingly participates in the ménage à trois, and that he even encourages Peter to "take [Ursula] regularly to bed" (p. 4). He also insists that he enjoys himself when Ursula shares herself with both men on the beach, or in the sauna, or on the floor of Peter's cabin. And when Peter and Ursula make fun of him, he seems to take the jokes and abuse in stride.

On the ship, Allert tells us that he comes into contact with a devious nemesis, Olaf, the wireless operator. According to Allert, he controls his anger for Olaf and successfully brings off his affair with Ariane, which, though kinky, appears harmless enough. Allert tells us nothing directly about Ariane's death, except that he is not responsible for it. As far as Allert's dreams go, they do seem sexually disturbing, but aren't many dreams full of strange sexual fantasies? Should we condemn Allert for
articulating the unconscious landscapes we would never speak of? In short, if we read the novel according to Allert's perspective, he seems calm and perhaps even fun-loving. Perhaps we can even believe him when he says, "I want to please, want to exist, want others to exist with me" (p. 9).

Yet we can offer another interpretation of the novel, which, I think, is more accurate. We might suggest that Allert makes his first blunder by guessing the wrong reasons for Ursula's departure. Perhaps she leaves because she realizes that he is responsible for the deaths of Peter and Ariane. Although his participation in Ariane's disappearance is more obvious than his responsibility for Peter's death there are hints that Allert feels guilt at Peter's sudden heart attack. He even, I think, wishes for it. In one scene, when Allert is with Peter and Ursula, he says, "my own footsteps made me think of those of a lurching murderer" (p. 18). In another scene, after Peter accepts Allert's offer to take Ursula to bed regularly, Allert tells us, "It was then . . . that I had my vision of Peter sealed at last in his lead box but with his penis bursting through the roof of the box like an angry asphodel" (p. 31). And at the moment of Peter's death, after Allert has cleaned up Peter's defecation, he says, "I thought my hand would be forever stained with the death of my friend" (p. 171). Finally, we should know that Allert contracts the same rash after Peter's death (p. 145) that he did on
the voyage (p. 70) where Ariane dies. This rash seems to symbolize death, guilt, and sexual frustration, which is why it, as he says, "girdle[s] my belly and buttock and genitalia" (pp. 145-6).

In spite of the above evidence, Allert maintains in the last sentence of his narrative, "I am not guilty" (p. 179). Not guilty of what? we ask. Ariane's death? Peter's death? Not guilty of driving Ursula away from him? Not guilty of coldness, anger, and jealousy? All of these questions may be interrelated because Ariane's and Peter's deaths, along with Allert's lack of sensuality, may be the real reason why Ursula must leave, why she feels that she has "mourned at [Allert's] funeral too long already" (p. 129). More specifically, we can see a clear connection between Ariane's and Peter's deaths; these two deaths even seem to have a cause and effect relationship in Allert's mind. That is, even though the voyage occurs six years before Peter's death, and Peter's death three years before the narrative begins, the ménage à trois Allert has with Ursula and Peter reminds him of his triangle with Ariane and Olaf to such a degree that images from one triangle often merge with images of the other. This merging of events and images in Allert's mind probably accounts for the disjointed and unchronological narrative structure of Death, Sleep & the Traveler, which often makes it difficult to locate each section in "real time." But when
we do order action, we get an idea of how Allert's mind works.

Allert, of course, doesn't want his narrative ordered. He is pleased with the haphazard structure, which makes it unnecessary for him to face the chronology of cause and effect, and thus have to deal with Ariane's and Peter's deaths, or to accept blame for them. When Ursula asks if he pushed Ariane out of a porthole, Allert doesn't answer her. Instead, he thinks:

I could not bear the question. I could not believe the question. I could not answer the question. I could not believe that my wife could ever ask me that question. I could not bring myself to answer that question. (p. 61)

Unlike Allert, we can answer Ursula's question with some certainty. Once we detach ourselves from Allert's point of view, which is initially impressive in its apparent willingness to bare all of his "psychic sores" (p. 164), we can construct a scenario which might go something like this. About eight or nine years before Allert's narrative begins, Ursula encouraged him to take an ocean cruise by himself. From what we know of her, she more than likely had a lover to keep her busy while Allert was away; or perhaps Allert began his trip shortly after the suicide of another one of Ursula's lovers (p. 61). At any rate, it is reasonable to assume that Allert is not feeling very good about himself as he boards the ship. On board, he
willingly becomes involved in an affair with a simple girl, Ariane, and he unwillingly becomes involved in a love triangle, including both Ariane and the crude Olaf.

Ariane teases Allert, introducing him to some strange sexual foreplay. Olaf insults him and introduces him to a pornographic picture, which Allert is still carrying around with him at the time of his narrative. Allert becomes jealous of Olaf and some of the other of the ship's officers, who also appear to share Ariane, partly because he wants Ariane for himself, partly because he feels superior in breeding and intelligence to these other men. He retaliates for the humiliations that he receives on ship by murdering Ariane, holding her over the ship's rail, and letting her fall into the ocean.

Six years later, he finds himself in another triangle with Peter and Ursula. He is still the same Allert, sexual but not sensuous, and Ursula frequently reminds him of his inadequacies. She insults him and reveals his onanism and attraction to pornography (pp. 149-52) in a tone of voice which is as cruel and vicious as Olaf's. In fact, if we isolated their insults, it would be difficult to decide who is speaking. Unlike the ship's officers, and unlike Allert himself, Peter, a psychiatrist, is sensuous and thoughtful. He is also more attractive to Ursula than Allert, which makes him more threatening to Allert than Olaf. A ménage à trois follows, during which Allert is
continually insulted or ignored. Though he tries not to show it, Allert is angry at and jealous of Ursula and Peter, partly because they belittle him, mostly because the ménage à trois reminds him of the triangle aboard the cruise. Thus, he kills Peter in his mind (as I have shown), and then Peter himself literally dies of an apparent heart attack on the floor of the sauna.

This, admittedly, is a simplistic interpretation of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler*, but I think it addresses the central issues of the novel. Allert would like us to believe that his actions are an extension of his disturbed dream-life, or that he is an example of Peter's theory that a "man remains a virgin until he commits murder" (p. 26). But Allert's situation is not as complex as he leads us to believe. He murders physically and he murders in his mind basically because he is angry and jealous. And part of the comedy in *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* comes from Allert's attempts to make himself more complex than he really is.

All of this talk about anger, jealousy, and murder is serious business, and yet Allert appears comic when, against all evidence, he keeps insisting that he is calm and patient, and that Ursula loves him, and that he takes joy in the ménage à trois. Behind all of his protestations, we can almost feel him simmering, suppressing his anger, waiting for an opportunity to release it. We see this conflict most clearly in his relationship with Ursula. On the
one hand, he lists a number of her personality traits
that annoy him (pp. 5-6), and yet also argues that he and
Ursula "have given each other freedom, excitement, tender­
ness, and comfort" (p. 6).

But we don't sense any tenderness on Ursula's part.
She despises him. She calls him a "psychic invalid" (p. 8);
she tells him he has the "face of a fetus" (p. 75) and that
he is "dead" (p. 129). She also makes it clear that despite
Allert's prodigious sexual build, she prefers Peter. When
it comes to group sex, Allert is always second in line;
and when he interrupts Peter and Ursula in bed, she tells
him to go away, "'Peter needs his sleep!'" (p. 129). Her
ultimate insult occurs when she notifies him that during
his trial she had sex with his attorney every night. Allert
says, "It was her way of rewarding herself, as she expressed
it, for her loyalty" (p. 128).

But as hateful as Ursula's insults seem, they still
are more comic than cruel. She often tears into Allert
after one of his philosophical statements on "reality" or
after he has related, with great seriousness, one of his
weird, overtly Freudian dreams. Thus, her comments tend
to undercut his extreme soberness, which, like Cyril's
extreme romanticism, distorts action. Her overstatements
offset his understatements; her sarcasm contrasts with his
controlled sobriety. And when these two points of view
clash, we see the emotional cracks in Allert's sober exterior.
Although at times Ursula, too, is comic in her voracious sexual appetite and in her exaggerated responses to Allert, she still seems credible to us, so much of what she says about Allert coincides with our perceptions of him. For example, she tells Allert that the reasons for her leaving him are not sexual:

"Not at all sexual. It's just that you don't know yourself, that you have no idea of what you are, that in my opinion you are an open cesspool. Your jowls, your eyes like lenses for the treatment of myopia, your little cigars, your ungainly person, your perverse sense of humor, all this is nothing to me. But you have long since emotionally annihilated yourself, Allert, and I can no longer tolerate your silences, your silence in the throes of passion, the accounts of your dreams, the stink from the cesspool that is yourself." (p. 46)

Even though Allert later tries to qualify her image of the open cesspool (p. 75), her comments come closer to describing him than do his own self-revelations.

It isn't very hard, then, to establish Allert's unspoken anger for Ursula. His relationship with Peter, however, is more complex. Peter also teases Allert, but more good-naturedly than Ursula. Perhaps Peter genuinely likes Allert, or perhaps he tolerates Allert because he is not threatened by the pornographer. After all, Peter is handsome (p. 31) and lean (p. 37), whereas Allert is pink (p. 34) and flabby. Allert himself tells us that Peter's "angular elegance" is a "mockery" of his own "shapeless size."
It was obvious Peter would never know the sensation of fine blue veins threading the whiteness of a fat arm" (p. 142). Moreover, Peter, not Allert, is Ursula's first choice as a lover. Perhaps the basic physical differences between Peter and Allert account for some of Allert's jealousy of Peter, or perhaps his hostility toward Peter is an extension of his greater anger at Ursula. We can even suggest that Allert's friendship might have thrived if Ursula didn't play the two men off each other. After all, Peter does appreciate Allert's pornographic collection; "it's excellent," he tells Allert (p. 155).

Although these are just conjectures, it seems fair to argue that beneath Allert's emotionless exterior, he is angry and jealous enough to revenge himself on Ursula and Peter as he did on Ariane and Olaf. He, no doubt, views the ménage à trois as threatening to him as the love triangle with Ariane and Olaf--perhaps more threatening because his rival is not an oafish, wireless operator but an intelligent, attractive psychiatrist.

Again, as in the cases of other novels by Hawkes, we begin to detach ourselves from a narrator and approach the perspective of the implied author of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* when we follow hints laid out for us which expose "real" events and "real" character-motivation. Sometimes Allert's philosophies are presented so that they are overtly comic; other times, I think we are supposed to share Ursula's
and Peter's laughter at and scorn of him. Perhaps the implied author comes down so hard on Allert because Allert's acts of omission and self-delusion seem so deliberate. In this sense, he is less inconscient than Skipper or Cyril.

And yet, in spite of all the evidence which suggests that the author is against Allert, Donald J. Greiner still maintains that we are supposed to praise Allert "for understanding the need to probe psychic tunnels." Greiner goes on to suggest that Allert "may exist only in his dreams," and that he "drops enough hints to suggest that the mysterious ocean liner is the dreamer himself, while the sea in his dream world." Certainly the nautical metaphors for the inward journey exist in the novel, but I think that if we take these metaphors literally, we are being tricked by Allert's rhetoric. For Allert would like us to confuse the dream and real worlds; if he is in fact dreaming, then we cannot condemn him for the real murders in the novel.

14 Greiner, Comic Terror, p. 243.

15 Greiner, Comic Terror, pp. 244, 252.
It seems to me that the implied author of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* expects us to recognize and perhaps even be amused by the water-related metaphors that Allert uses to describe self-scrutiny and isolation (he refers to himself as an island), but this author also expects us to see the disastrous results of this self-scrutiny and isolation. Moreover, in spite of Allert's protestations, I think we must believe that he is a "real" person, a "real" character. He may be crazy, even committed to Wild Acres, but his role in the deaths of Ariane and Peter is unmistakable. We discover this role when we reassemble the fractured picture of Allert's memory, and make connections that he doesn't, connections which make the initial comedy of his character darken.

And what do we know that Allert doesn't? First, although Allert is separated from Ursula on the voyage, we know that she is really never out of his mind. For example, on the voyage, in place of Ursula, he substitutes Ariane, who is understandably upset by Allert's jealousy, since he hardly knows her. We sense this jealousy when Allert describes her with other men (pp. 11, 29, 71, 95), and his possessiveness becomes explicit when he and Ariane discuss it (p. 37). His jealousy also contains an element of sneakiness, as when Allert frequently peers through the open crack in Ariane's door and sees her ironing the uniforms of various
ship's officers, while the officers sit half-nakedly by. This is the same kind of jealousy Allert exhibits later when he reads the love letters Peter sends to Ursula.

For her part, Ariane does not seem to encourage Allert's jealousy, and in some ways she is much nicer to him than Ursula is. But problems occur because Allert does not see Ariane as Ariane; to him she is, as all women are, an extension of Ursula. He admits that "Ursula was to me one woman and every woman," and that her name conjures up for him all that is unpredictable in women, all that is "uterine, ugly, odorous, earthen, vulval, convolvulacious, saline, mutable, seductive" (p. 61). Allert really admits here that because all women are Ursula, his hostility for her is easily transferable to other women.

But Olaf, too, has a lot of Ursula in him. Allert dislikes him because he doesn't want Ariane to be seeing such a crude character. But he must also dislike Olaf because Olaf insults him in a manner similar to Ursula's, though instead of taunting Allert with his sexuality as Ursula does, he uses a pornographic picture. This is the photograph Allert rubs between his legs, the photograph of "two gelatinous figures" (p. 13), "two white figures, like fading maggots . . . devouring each other sexually with carniverous joy" (p. 39). Allert hates Olaf because, like Ursula, Olaf knows and exploits his perversions. Olaf realizes that Allert will appreciate the photograph just as he
understands that Allert will be turned on by the two bats engaged in auto-fellatio. "'You're able to do what the bats do, aren't you, Vanderveenan?'" (p. 124), he says to Allert. This comment makes Allert despise Olaf, and yet also despise himself, since he sees the truth in it, which is why he sickens and must leave the zoo.

I am arguing, then, that Allert did kill Ariane, and for two simple motives. First, he is angry that he cannot control a relationship with a simple-minded young woman, nor deal with her oafish suitors. Thus, by killing her, he rids himself, in a very instinctive way, of his anger and jealousy. We should remember that she is dressed as a wireless operator on the night that she dies, wearing Olaf's uniform and hat, and that Allert begs her not to go to the masquerade ball but she defies him. We can also suggest, however, that he drops Ariane into the ocean because she, in particular, and Olaf, peripherally, remind him of Ursula. To argue this, we must assume that Ursula treated Allert as badly before the voyage as she does during her affair with Peter. This seems a fair assumption to make, considering her tone of voice to him before he embarks.

If we accept that Allert may have killed Ariane, all the time thinking of Ursula, a series of ironies develop into a final eerie joke on Allert. On one hand, Allert's murder of Ariane, from his point of view, revenges previous psychic wounds inflicted on him by Ursula. But six years
later, Ursula's affair with Peter, so similar to the Allert-Ariane-Olaf triangle, comes back to haunt him to such a degree that imagery from one triangle overlaps with another. Thus, instead of being surrounded by the wetness of the ocean, Allert finds himself in a sauna. Instead of seeing Ariane's "nearly naked buttocks," "the roundness and symmetry of her little backside" (pp. 65-66), Allert is now witness to the wriggling of Ursula's "tight buttocks" raised to the flow of the fire (p. 90). Instead of straddling Ariane's "shiny buttocks" with his "spread fingers" (p. 176), he is forced to watch Peter "grip[ping Ursula's] buttocks in his two determined hands" (p. 93). And, most importantly, in place of the photograph of the "two white gelatinous figures," Allert sees his wife and friend, lying side by side, "their bodies . . . slick and moving and fire-lit as if the emulsion of a photograph still hanging wet and glowing in the darkroom" (p. 95).

Certainly, Allert must see these connections, and recognize that his role in the ménage à trois is primarily that of a voyeur. It is important to realize, though, that in no way is Allert victimized by Peter and Ursula or Ariane and Olaf in the love-triangles. His own onanism isolates him from them; he is, like the psychiatric patient Peter describes, "drowning in the sea of self" (p. 143). And we are made to see the destructive capabilities of this inner voyage. By the end of the novel, we have turned
completely against Allert. We have little sympathy for him, even though we realize that the more he goes inward, the more he hates himself. Consequently, it is a horrible moment for Allert when he sees the bats engaged in auto-fellatio because they are the physical manifestations of his psychic and sexual self. But, for us, it is a comic moment, our revenge for listening to him go on and on about the "rare North Penis." It is a moment of pleasure to see Allert looking at the bats as if into a mirror.

Moreover, because we sense his overwhelming self-disgust after the incident, it is clear to us that he might also have murdered Ariane in an attempt to alleviate his distaste for his sexual preferences which she seems to accept. In a sense, she may merely be a surrogate victim for Allert. At first, this suggestion might seem strange until we realize that Allert often links himself with death. He refers to himself as the "Dutch corpse" (p. 126) and often wonders if he even exists (p. 156). Moreover, he seems to identify with characters in the novel who die. For example, even though Allert and Peter are physically very dissimilar, their characters often merge. They are the same age (p. 156); Peter wears Allert's socks when he is about to seduce Ursula (p. 133); and Peter and Allert confuse their identities and roles in two different scenes (pp. 82, 136). Moreover, Allert says that he is the "dead man's [Peter's] legacy" (p. 168), as if to stress kinship
between them.

Allert also identifies with Ariane's interest in suicide. In one scene, he is leaning over the rail of the ship, in a manner similar to the way Ariane leans out of the porthole. Ariane approaches him, clings to his arm, and says, "'So you too have those feeling . . . I thought you did!'" (p. 86). Allert becomes so upset that he throws her into a stateroom onto a "disheveled bed." He tells us that he then "bruised her in the agony of my desperate embrace" (p. 86). When we consider that this is the same ship's rail over which Allert drops Ariane, we can suggest that he rids himself of suicidal notions by offering up a surrogate victim. In this sense, Allert is like Cyril, who watches and perhaps brings about the death of Hugh, who himself represents Cyril's latent anger and jealousy. Allert also looks forward to Papa in Travesty, who, with calculation and pride, murders his friend, Henri, who possesses Papa's wife and daughter as he never will.

But among these three narrators, I would argue that Allert is the least appealing. By the end of Death, Sleep & the Traveler, he is rendered completely odious. He tries to assuage himself with platitudes, with the hope that all things cohere and that he will find another woman to guide him to the end of his "journey" (p. 179). We, however, realize that his journey will not take him very far outside
of the self. Instead, as he says, he will "think and
dream, think and dream" (p. 179) until he may, in truth,
no longer exist.

In one sense, then, the comedy we have followed in
Death, Sleep & the Traveler seems to fulfill some of
Hawkes' expectations of the comic method in general. This
comedy certainly "exposes, ridicules, and attacks" Allert's perspective, so that we see how his narcissism
destroys both love and sex; but, on the other hand, it
fails to create sympathy for characters, a job which Hawkes
also has said comedy should perform. From the very
beginning of Death, Sleep & the Traveler, we are the
implied author's readers and share his distaste for Allert.
The advantage of this reading position is that it is easy
for us to judge Allert, since we are so detached from his
perspective. And, as we have seen, there is a certain joy
in watching him get undercut by his recounting of silly
dreams, by other characters' responses to him, and by his
inability to make important connections between images and events.


\[17\] Enck, p. 146.
But there is also a disadvantage to this type of comedy. Because we are emotionally distanced from Allert, we never really "feel" his perspective. As odious as auto-eroticism may be to us, we must realize that we have the potential for it as much as we do for sex-singing. In *The Blood Oranges*, we realized that sex-singing itself wasn't morally under attack; Cyril's egotism was the thing being assaulted. But in *Death, Sleep & the Traveler*, we are made to feel that only on a theoretical level is there a place for Allert or his sexual preferences in the sexual tapestry. Thus, we really end up judging Allert from a very moral and conventional stance. When all the evidence is in, we must find Allert criminal, and his approach to sex even more distorted than Cyril's approach to love.

Consequently, we are not left with contradictory feelings for characters and events at the end of *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* as we were in such novels as *Second Skin* and *The Lime Twig*. We laugh at Allert with the superiority characteristic of Bergson's notion of humor. Thus, we experience comedy on a formal or intellectual level, watching as all of Allert's faults are unconsciously exposed by his dreams and philosophies and cunningly revealed by other characters and the author. In *Travesty*, nearly all of the comedy is experienced on a formal or intellectual level, and yet, paradoxically, I will argue that Papa is a more attractive character than Allert, or put more accurately, Papa is
a more attractive "fictional construct" than Allert.

Travesty

After dealing with so many first person narrators--Hencher, Skipper, Cyril, and Allert--who consciously or unconsciously suppress information or delude themselves, it is a relief to meet a character like Papa who seems to be conscious of and honest about his motives. Unlike Allert, Papa, quite early in Travesty, explains that the death-drive he embarks on is a "suicide and a murder." He doesn't seem to care about our opinion of him, and he appears to have the confidence and presence of mind that Skipper, Cyril, and Allert lack.

Among the narrators of the trilogy, Papa is perhaps the most curious to discuss in terms of Hawkes' comedy. From a moral point of view, we must consider him to be more hateful than Allert and certainly not very comic. He admits that he is a murderer and a pornographer; he has a special attraction to sex and death, as shown by his fondness for pictures of both nudes and accident victims. Moreover, besides driving his daughter and best friend to their deaths, he also is mean enough to taunt them along the way. Our dislike for him is further intensified because of the form

18 John Hawkes, Travesty (New York: New Directions, 1976), p. 20. All further references will be in parentheses.
his narrative takes. *Travesty* is a dramatic monologue which makes us feel as if Papa is speaking directly to us, as if we are in the car with him, and thus as much threatened as Chantal and Henri.

It would seem, then, that there is no comedy in Papa's character, and that, in a sense, there is no need for comedy to expose what he is up to. We do not have to figure out the particularities of a murder or suicide as we did in *The Blood Oranges* or *Death, Sleep & the Traveler*. Papa gives us all of the information he thinks we need, and even accepts responsibility for his actions. But, besides the nasty side of Papa which we experience with our emotions, he also has an attractive side which comes across on an intellectual or aesthetic level. For one thing, even though the dramatic monologue increases our anxiety as we read, we also are drawn to its immediacy. We get caught up in the rush of Papa's words, just as he, Chantal, and Henri are caught up in the rush of the automobile. Moreover, just as we are attracted to the pleasant notes of Cyril's sex-song, even if we disagree with his theories, so also Papa's calm, persuasive rhetoric, his distinctive way of "seeing," is, at times, attractive. Most important, though, Papa possesses something no previous narrator has had: a sense of humor and a feel for paradox. And, on an intellectual level, we can appreciate the fine distinctions, the ironies and paradoxes, which inform his theories on and execution of murder
and suicide.

Given these two sides of Papa and our responses to them, we can argue that comedy occurs when our two opposite responses to Papa and his narrative clash. But this description of the comic moment in Travesty doesn't tell us much about how comedy functions in the novel. To me, in Travesty, comedy works as it did in the two previous novels of the trilogy. It exposes Papa's real nature, his true motives, and his own brand of narcissism, which leads him to create elaborate theories to defend an action that, in reality, can be simply explained. At first it may seem as if I am contradicting myself, since I already have suggested that Papa appears to be honest when he reveals his intentions. Certainly it is hard to question the reliability of a narrator who confesses in detail the hows and why of his murder-suicide, especially since he is so proud of his explanations, unlike Allert who seems ashamed of his disclosures. But as in Cyril's and Allert's cases, we will discover that Papa is, in his own way, both unreliable and guilty of self-delusion. His calm rhetoric and complicated theories on love, sex, death, and murder represent his attempts to distract us from the real motives of his murder-suicide, which are the same motives as Cyril's and Allert's. That is, one of the reasons Papa undertakes his death-drive is because he is angry and jealous and he
wants revenge.

To generalize, I might offer this way of approaching *Travesty*. First, once we discover what Papa is going to do (very early in the novel), on a moral level, we distance ourselves completely from him. We can never be his ideal reader. But then, if, for a moment, we overlook the obvious immorality of his death-drive and shift our attention to the attractiveness of his language and theories, which themselves are sometimes comic, we begin to move closer to Papa's perspective. Finally, however, we must become the implied author's reader, and this author leads us to believe that even on an intellectual level Papa has duped us. His theories, which at first intrigue us, eventually become very unimportant. Their only purpose is to make Papa feel that he is committing a murder-suicide for aesthetic rather than emotional reasons. Comedy occurs in the way that we discover Papa's self-delusion and recognize his true situation. More generally, comedy, as in other novels of the trilogy, allows us to examine and reexamine notions of love, sex, and death from different perspectives (Papa's, our own, the implied author's), seeing again how mean egotism, preoccupation with the self, perverts these concepts.

I am not arguing, of course, that our responses to Papa must or do follow the above pattern in some sort of chrono-
logical order. In fact, *Travesty* often becomes complex and challenging when our emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic concerns clash in different sections of the novel. But I am suggesting that how we eventually judge *Travesty* depends on our distance from Papa. And one important way the author plays with distance is by using comic techniques, which sometimes detach us from Papa's perspective, and other times draw us to it. We can see how this distancing works by noting our reactions to Papa's good and bad sides revealed explicitly by Papa himself and implicitly by the author.

Once we perceive the narrator of *Travesty* to be morally wrong (which occurs immediately), we find ourselves in a situation opposite to the one we experienced at the beginning of *The Blood Oranges* and *Second Skin*. At the start of those novels, we were closer to Cyril's and Skipper's perspectives than we were to the perspectives of other characters. Although we eventually ended up disassociating ourselves from Cyril and Skipper, we never completely sided with other characters in these novels. Instead, in an attempt to understand these narrators, we had to situate ourselves in between the perspectives of the narrators and characters, and watch these points of view play off each other. We had to approach the perspective of the implied author, who himself balances between the contradictions and inconsistencies in these novels.
In *Travesty*, however, the situation seems reversed. We begin by sympathizing with Henri and Chantal instead of Papa, and we, like them, try to figure out Papa's psyche and prevent him from driving Chantal, Henri, himself, and even us into a concrete wall. Thus, in the beginning of *Travesty*, forced to share a seat with Chantal and Henri in Papa's speeding motor car, we find it easy to despise Papa. Papa's calm, rational, paternal tone of voice seems monstrous when contrasted with Chantal's nervous vomiting and Henri's wheezing. When Henri or Chantal groan or ask for mercy, Papa retorts, "Spare me, you cry. Spare me. But the lack of knowledge and the lack of imagination are yours not mine. And it will not be against a tree. There you are even more grossly mistaken" (p. 21).

We seem to be overhearing the monologue of a sick man here, the kind of man who gets excited by:

periodicals depicting the most brutal and uncanny destructions of human flesh (the elbow locked inside the mouth, the head half-buried inside the flesh, the statuary of severed legs, dangling hands) and those other periodicals depicting the attractions of young living women partially or totally nude. (p. 21)

Like Hugh and Allert, Papa sees a close relationship between sex and death, and so it makes sense that he should revenge what he considers to be humiliations and infidelities by his wife, daughter, and best friend through an act of suicide and murder.
But Papa is more complex than the above description suggests. His rational tone of voice which makes him so monstrous is, I think, also amusing and even likeable at times. And if, for a moment, we suppress our moral indignation at him, we may even find ourselves able to identify with his point of view. We may also find ourselves laughing with him as he taunts Chantal and Henri. Thus, emotionally, we may be repulsed by Papa's design, but, on an intellectual level, we can find his ingenious planning and his penchant for irony and paradox to be quite appealing. For example, we must be amused at the methodical manner in which he has planned the accident. He will drive with his daughter and his best friend (who is lover to both Papa's daughter and wife) for over an hour at 149 kilometers per hour. This arrangement gives Papa enough time to watch his friend and daughter suffer sufficiently for their misdeeds (though Papa denies that these are his intentions), and the tremendous speed the automobile travels at insures Papa of a captive audience—no one is going to walk out on him. He has ultimate control, and, indeed, his whole narrative represents his desire to inflict an artificial control (the car) on a situation which he, more than likely, was previously controlled by. He is most attractive to us when he gives us the illusion that he is in control of himself and his plan of action—something Cyril and Allert failed to do.
Papa maintains this illusion of control in a number of ways. First his tone of voice sets us at ease. Consider how the monologue opens with Papa speaking to Henri:

No, no, Henri. Hands off the wheel. Please. It is too late. After all, at one hundred and forty-nine kilometers per hour on a country road in the darkest quarter of the night, surely it is obvious that your slightest effort to wrench away the wheel will pitch us into the toneless world of Highway tragedy even more quickly than I have planned. And you will not believe it, but we are still accelerating.

As for you, Chantal, you must beware. You must obey your Papa. You must sit back in your seat and fasten your belt and stop crying. And Chantal, no more beating the driver about the shoulders or shaking his arm. Emulate Henri, my poor Chantal, and control yourself. (p. 11)

If we remain emotionally detached from the death-drive for a moment, we can see the comedy in the contrast between the narrator's calm, paternal tone of voice and his passengers' attempts to grab the wheel and beat Papa about the shoulders. Not only is Papa's exaggerated grace under pressure comic, but so, too, is his language because of its inappropriateness to the literal events taking place.

On the other hand, though, Papa's rhetoric is consistent with the way he handles himself throughout the novel. He is indeed "Papa," a calm authority or father-figure, as he speaks to Chantal and Henri as if they are children. Phrases like "after all" and "surely it is obvious" suggest that Papa is in control while Henri is the confused, excitable party, unable to reconcile himself to the inevitable. Papa is even ready to shift the blame for the crash onto
Henri, warning him that any irrational move will cause an unnecessary tragedy. Papa implies that there is nothing wrong with a planned car crash that carries with it its own logic, but he finds an accident caused by an emotional outburst to be uncouth.

Papa uses similar techniques of persuasion on Chantal, but instead of appealing to her logic, he employs the language of the father-daughter relationship. He treats Chantal as if she is a temperamental child who is throwing a tantrum, instead of a grown woman who fears for her life. We almost side with Papa's point of view here because his reassurances to Chantal are couched in a language of concern. He tells her to "beware" and he affectionately calls her "poor Chantal." Later, he acts as if his plan to crash the car is a sign of his "devotion" to her. "No one can rob you now of your Papa's love" (pp. 40-41), he maintains.

The first two paragraphs of the novel, then, preview what we should expect from Papa. He knows that his murderous act, his "design," is shocking to his passengers, and so he tries, in a very calm manner, to convince them of what he has convinced himself--that there is a logic to the death-drive and a certain beauty in all of the ironies and paradoxes the crash embraces. On a purely aesthetic level, I think we can argue that the ironies and paradoxes of the crash are indeed fascinating, as is Papa's ability
to express them, a talent not possessed by Cyril or Allert. We must recognize that even murder may have certain aesthetic standards. Papa himself argues that he is not an "aesthetician of death at high speed" (p. 18), but his theories on the crash suggest the opposite. Like Cyril, the "sex-aesthetician," Papa has created an entire philosophy to account for the drive which is clever, amusing, attractive, all at the same time.

Papa, of course, recoils from the banal term "murder," which he calls the "most limited of gestures" (p. 14). Instead, professing to be superior to Henri and Chantal in his ability to embrace paradoxes, Papa describes the drive as "merely a phobic yearning for the truest paradox, a thirst to be at the center of this paradigm:"

one moment the car in perfect condition, without so much as a scratch on its curving surface, the next moment impact, sheer impact. Total destruction. In its own way it is a form of ecstasy, this utter harmony between design and debris. (p. 17)

In order to achieve this harmony of design and debris, Papa must become a death-artist, a death-aesthetician, and bring about an "'accident' so perfectly contrived that it will be unique, spectacular, instantaneous, a physical counterpart to that vision in which it was first conceived" (p. 21). By this creative act, he plans to preserve the "essential integrity" of the "tableau of chaos, the
point being that if design inevitably surrenders to debris, debris inevitably reveals its innate design" (p. 50). Finally, convinced of his ability to create such a paradoxical work of art, he marvels at the ironies it embraces: that the eventual debris from the crash will be the only proof of the design in his head, that the "protective parent [himself] turns out to be the opposite" (p. 39), and that he, the "man who disciplines the child, carves the roast" and not the poet Henri, is the creator and administrator of the plan. Henri has his poems, Papa his crash.

Perhaps anticipating criticisms of his plan, Papa develops a language to protect himself, and, in this sense, he is like Cyril. In order to make his theories on love and sex more palatable, Cyril often employed euphemisms, and thus spouse-swapping became "sexual extension." Papa does similar verbal tricks with the term "murder," which becomes "harmony between design and debris" or a perfectly contrived "accident." Likewise, Papa is offended when Henri accuses him of using the hour ride to make a "confession" to him and Chantal before the car crashes. Papa offers a more rational definition of the term. He says to Henri: "No, cher ami, for the term 'confession' let us substitute such a term as, say, 'animated revery.' Or even this phrase: 'emotional expression stiffened with the bones of thought'" (p. 36).
I am amused by Papa here. Moreover, when he theorizes as a death-aesthetician, I feel that I can trust him. I do laugh at his theories, but I don't find him ridiculous yet. On a purely intellectual level, I appreciate the way he has arrived at his design and has created a theory which is as engaging as Nietzsche's description of the superior man or Mailer's profile of the white Negro. I also must admit that I share in his obvious joy in revealing his theories to his quivering passengers.

But just as I sometimes laugh with Papa, I also find myself beginning to laugh at him and question his reliability. I wonder why he needs the same verbal tricks as Cyril and Allert if, indeed, he is as confident of his plan as he argues. I begin to see that Papa does not wear the persona of the calm and cool theoretician for long. Moreover, when he explicitly tells us his motivations for beginning the death-drive, I find him to be just as unreliable and emotional as the other narrators of the trilogy. And, more important, like Cyril and Allert, his actions seem traceable to his relationship with his wife, for Papa, too, appears to be suffering from jealousy.

Early in the novel, Papa speaks fondly of Honorine and of the "lasting strength" (p. 47) of their marriage. He also praises Honorine in great detail (p. 48) and maintains that she is "faithful" (p. 95). In fact, Papa, the master of paradoxes, explains that he loves Honorine so much that
he has planned the entire crash out of devotion to her. This is why the car will crash close to the chateau where Honorine is sleeping.

He explains this strange act of love as follows. Recalling a conversation he had with Honorine, Papa tells Henri that she once said that she "loved us both . . . and was willing and capable of paying whatever price the gods, in return, might eventually demand of her for loving us both." Consequently, in Papa's mind, the crash will be the price the gods demand; it will unite them all, even in death, with Honorine. He further explains his reasons for the crash:

first, Honorine is now more "real" to you [Henri], to me, than she has ever been; second, when she recovers, at last, she will exercise her mind in order to experience in her own way what we have known; but third and most important, months and years beyond her recovery, Honorine will know with special certainty that just as she was the source of your poems, so too was she the source of my private apocalypse. It was all for her. And such intimate knowledge is worth whatever price the gods may demand, as she herself said. (p. 125)

By listing his reasons with such precision, Papa is trying to maintain the methodical, rational persona he has been constructing since the beginning of the novel. Yet even this artificial numbering and calm delivery of his arguments do not obscure his real motives for the death-drive. By the time we have gotten to Papa's explanations,
we are no longer convinced by his cool exterior. His surface calm, like Cyril's exaggerated pose as sex-singer, becomes more comic than believable. I am suggesting then, that on an aesthetic level, we could have found credible Papa's rationale for his actions. Murder is wrong, and yet when described as Papa describes his design, we can appreciate that murder, too, can have certain aesthetic standards. But Papa is a false aesthete. Like other narrators of the trilogy, he is only interested in self-gratification. This becomes clear when he calls the crash his "private apocalypse" (pp. 110, 124). And, in fact, Papa doesn't begin the drive to prove a theory or to experiment with irony and paradox, or to offer homage to Honorine. He designs and carries out the death-drive in an attempt to revenge himself. Consequently, the crash is his way of placing one large, bloody exclamation point at the end of an otherwise ineffectual life.

Thus, Papa's last act is an extreme form of narcissism. Beneath Papa's profession of genuine affection for others, beneath his calm exterior, and behind the guise of good-husband-father-friend, he, like Cyril and Allert, is only interested in inflicting his will on others. He only cares about pleasing and avenging his "self," which is why the dramatic monologue form is so appropriate for him, being
by its very nature a "showcase for the self." Papa's narcissism, like Cyril's and Allert's, is connected to the idea of control. The only way Papa can please his "self" is by existing at the center of attention, like the "fat raisin that becomes the eye and heart of the cookie" (pp. 32-33). Since Papa seems ineffectual in real life, he tries to get attention and control by making himself the driver of a speeding automobile with the fate of three lives at his finger tips. In the driver's seat, Papa can restrict other people's movements and control time. Moreover, characters who normally would have felt superior to Papa now must obey him.

The comedy and pathos of Papa's situation, of course, is that all of the control that he finally achieves comes from an artificial device (the car) and from false reasoning and specious rhetoric. The only way he can get attention and respect is by trapping two people in a car going 149 kilometers per hour and threatening to kill them. When we realize Papa's real impotence, then, we no longer can identify with his methodical pose. We realize that, in reality, Papa has no control over events; he is weak and insecure, a man who once "required recognition from girls behind counters, heroes in stone, stray dogs" (p. 84).

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Moreover, in truth, he embarks on the death-drive not for aesthetic reasons, but for an emotional one: he is jealous of Henri.

It might at first seem difficult to accuse Papa of jealousy, since he defends himself so eloquently against the charge. "Jealousy? Jealousy?" he asks Henri.

After all I have said . . . after my women of luxury . . . after Monique . . . after all my fervent protestations of affection . . . after all I have done to clarify our situation and to allay your fears—now—as a last resort, you are finally willing to accuse me of mere jealousy? As if I am only one of those florid money-makers who is afraid to thrust even his fingers into the secret places of his stenographers attractive body and yet turns green . . . whenever he imagines that his lonely wife harbors in her heart of hearts the quivering desire to watch while her husband's best friend climbs nude and dripping from his tub-ful of hot water? Is it with such implications that you expect to stop me, to bring me to earth, so to speak? As if on this note I will suddenly recognize myself and bow to your judgment, exclaiming that, yes, for all these years I have been an excellent actor outwardly while inwardly nursing the most unpleasant banalities of sexual envy? As if you are the hero and I the villain, the one openly and, I might say, foolishly accepting the favors of the other's honest wife and naive daughter until the other has finally spent enough years drinking slime (in his toilet, in his monastic bed chamber, in his cold automobile parked side by side with his wife's in what was once the stable) in order to act. (pp. 105-06)

The comic irony of this passage, unnoticed by Papa, is that we can indeed imagine Papa fitting into the role he argues so strongly against; we can indeed see him drinking his fair share of slime until he can stand no more; we can imagine him lying alone on his monastic bed or sitting in a cold
automobile as Henri makes love to Honorine in the chateau. All of these indignities would explain the sexual envy we must accuse him of.

Granted, we could argue that his envy and jealousy are justified. Honorine might have been wrong to take Henri as a lover, though it does seem difficult to blame her for this infidelity when we discover how poorly she and Papa get on sexually, and how distorted Papa's view of sex is. At the beginning of the novel, Papa tells Henri that as a child Chantal was "forever stumbling into the erotic lives of her young parents. Or perhaps I should say the illusory lives of her young parents" (p. 13). Later, Papa discusses his literal "coldness" in bed, which we also can take on a metaphorical level. He tells Henri that

> it is embarrassing to be unable to touch your wife at night without first warming your hands in a sinkful of scalding water. It is not pleasant to feel your wife flinching even in the heat of her always sensible and erotic generosity. (p. 45)

Perhaps Papa's coldness in bed is partly responsible for his and Honorine's "illusory" sex lives, which, in turn, may have driven him to begin, as he says, that "rare pornographic study which I prepared over the years of Honorine's own erotic womanhood" (p. 67). Like Hugh and Allert, unable to participate normally in sex, Papa becomes a voyeur of sorts, and this tendency sometimes makes him absurd. For example, there is one long passage in the novel where Papa describes, in very sensuous language, Honorine undressing. "Just think
of it," he begins, "you sit behind her on the cream-colored leather divan; you remove the owlish eyeglasses . . . your head grazes the chaste white linen of the blouse . . . ."

(pp. 50-51). What is comic about this description is that Papa employs the second personal pronoun "you" throughout his narration of Honorine's strip-tease (which goes on for two pages). As a result, he unintentionally becomes the voyeur and Henri the lover, which mirrors his real-life situation.

In general, as far as Papa's sexuality goes, we might compare him again to Hugh and Allert. Like them, he experiences sexual release better by looking at pictures than by participating in the real thing, and when given the chance to have sex he plays games with Monique (his mistress) which are reminiscent of Allert's encounters with Ariane. Thus, he seems to be as unsensual as Allert and as sterile as Hugh. Hugh is missing an arm, Papa a lung. And Papa, speaking about amputation in general, maintains with great pride that for him the "artificial arm is more real . . . than the other and natural limb still inhabited by sensation" (p. 27). This revelation should not surprise us coming from a man who confesses to being a "specialist on the subject of dead passion" (p. 74).

He also seems to specialize in incest, and, in this respect, he resembles Skipper. Skipper has his "majorette" Cassandra, Papa his "porn-brat" Chantal, his "Queen of
Carrots," a name given to her because of the extraordinary things she can do with her mouth when, blindfolded, on her knees and hands behind her back, a carrot is dangled in front of her nose (pp. 115-19). When Papa recalls this scene, no doubt we are meant to realize that he views Henri to be just as much of a threat to Chantal as Lulu was, the night club owner who persuaded Chantal to participate in the carrot game and later seduced her.

Given all of this information about Papa, we can understand why he might be jealous of Henri. On the surface, Papa controls his verbal attacks on Henri, but we can detect anger behind his calm facade. We recognize his jealousy for Henri who has, as Papa says, "imagined so much more in life than I myself have lived" (p. 32). Papa tries hard to discuss objectively Henri's stay at a mental institution, though he thinks it is a gimmick whereby Henri can get sympathy from female admirers. He tries to hide his anger through abstract language, as when he says to Henri, "Of course your suffering is your masculinity, or rather it is that illusion of understanding earned through boundless suffering that obtrudes itself in every instance of your being and that inspires such fear of you and admiration."

But in the next sentence his anger comically breaks through. "Another way of putting it," he says to Henri, "is to say that you have done very well with hairy arms and a bad mood" (p. 42).
To put Papa's narrative in its proper perspective, then, we might say that, in spite of his protestations, he is jealous of Henri's relationship with Chantal and Honorine, and so he decides to kill them and himself. He is too much of a coward to deal with his anger for them. Moreover, he plans to destroy Honorine's life, too, but in a more ingenious manner than a crash would allow. When the car crashes into the concrete wall just outside her chateau, Papa knows that Honorine will have to live the rest of her life with guilt at the loss of her daughter, lover, and husband. Behind his calm rhetoric, we can almost hear Papa thinking to himself that death is "too good" for Honorine, and so he provides her with a living nightmare.

It seems, then, that Papa is just as unreliable and just as guilty of moral crimes as Cyril and Allert are. But of all three narrators, I think Papa comes closest to fooling us with his calm rhetoric, which asks for neither reassurance nor pity. In the long run, however, we see how dangerous he is. Ironically, it is our perceptions of the ironies and paradoxes in the book, which Papa does not see, that allows us to distance ourselves from him and recognize him as being both comic and horrible. The true comic irony of Travesty is that Papa, the supposed master of irony and paradox, misses the one big contradiction in the book, the coupling of his desire to murder with his refusal to accept this desire. We uncover Papa's true
identity when we watch this contradiction play itself out. Whereas Papa believes the crash to be a creative act, his poem to Honorine, we realize that he deludes himself, and that the art of the crash and the aesthetics of his design, known only by him, quite appropriately also die with him. Ultimately, the importance of his abstract design is undercut by the physical debris left behind: broken bodies, severed limbs, a woman without a daughter, lover, or husband.

Like *The Blood Oranges* and *Death, Sleep & the Traveler*, it seems that *Travesty* ends on a terribly bleak note. Even though we see through Papa's pose and laugh at him, we are also made to face his overwhelming egotism, which destroys love, sex, friends, families, and even himself. Certainly, there is very little comedy in Papa's last line, "But now I make you this promise, Henri: there shall be no survivors. None" (p. 128). It would seem strange, then, to argue, as I have done earlier, that Papa is more attractive than Allert and that *Travesty* is perhaps the most comic book of the trilogy. And I admit that this analysis of the novel and its narrator makes little sense if we experience *Travesty*, from beginning to end, solely from a moral and emotional perspective.

But there is another way to look at the ending of *Travesty*, one that finds it to be really quite comic. We have already seen that part of the novel's comedy occurs on an aesthetic level. It is fun watching the intelligence
behind the book slowly revealing Papa's true nature, making fun of it, and also hinting at its destructive capabilities. Moreover, one of the reasons I laugh with Papa as he toys with Henri and Chantal, is that I never really believe that the murder-suicide is happening in the first place. On one hand, I have treated and judged Papa as a flesh and blood character. But on the other hand, the author's artifice is more evident in *Travesty* than it is in the earlier novels we have looked at. Consequently, I often view Papa as more of a "fictional construct" than anything else, a theoretical consciousness that Hawkes wants to examine. Thus, I find it easy to detach myself from Papa's perspective and move toward the perspective of the author, whose presence is constantly felt.

Keeping this distinction in mind, we can look at the ending of *Travesty* in two different ways. On an emotional level, it is comic, because, when the car crashes, we no longer have anyone with whom to identify. All the characters are dead, which leaves us uncomfortably detached, wondering what comes next. There is a half page of blank space before us that we know will continue indefinitely. And it's as if Hawkes himself has played out the ultimate joke—on us.

I think that it is important for us to understand this formal aspect of *Travesty*'s comedy; it hints at the
development of Hawkes' humor from *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin* to *Travesty*. In *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin* we note the author's artifice, but we are also involved, on an emotional level, with characters and thematic concerns. In these novels, comic techniques surprise and frustrate us, force us to look at events differently, expose truth, but, most of all, allow us to sympathize with characters even as we laugh at them. We are never completely distanced from Michael Banks or Skipper.

In the trilogy, however, our emotional concerns for characters and events become more and more subordinate to our intellectual and aesthetic concerns. Put simply, to understand the trilogy, we are forced to pay more attention to style than to content; and by the time we come to *Travesty*, sometimes it doesn't seem important whether or not Papa's theories on the death-drive are plausible or not. It seems more important to the author that we watch the comedy being perpetrated by him on Papa and us, for that matter.

Personally, I enjoy the earlier comic methods of *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin* more than those of Hawkes' later novels, and I think his earlier comedy lives up to his own expectations of what comedy should do: expose and ridicule, make us sympathize with characters, and also make us face our own destructive capabilities.\(^{20}\) In *The Lime Twig* and

\(^{20}\) Enck, p. 146.
Second Skin there seems to be so much at stake that I am torn between comedy and horror. I feel that it is hard to judge characters and events when I realize that things truly are more complicated than they originally appear. Comedy exposes the faults of characters like Michael and Margaret Banks, and yet I recognize these characters' fears and frailties in myself and those around me.

As we move from book to book in the trilogy, comedy still reveals the ironies and paradoxes of different narrators' perspectives, and also discloses their distinctive and destructive ways of looking at love, sex, and death. But we begin to experience these comic moments more on an intellectual than an emotional level. We are very close to the author of these novels. Detached from Papa, for instance, we find that much of the comedy exists outside the book, as if we and Hawkes are nudging each other, saying, "Did you get that one?" How this change in comic function and emphasis affects Hawkes' work becomes most clear when we glance at his last two novels: The Passion Artist and Virginie: Her Two Lives. In these novels the complex, dark comedy which makes Hawkes work so worth reading seems replaced by more aesthetic concerns.
CHAPTER VI

EARLY AND LATE NOVELS: A SUMMING UP

In the first chapter of this study, I suggested that we can observe the motion and meaning of John Hawkes' comedy by examining the interplay of four elements or perspectives, which continually overlap and modify each other. These elements are: the literal action of the text, its events; the way characters respond to these events; the way Hawkes presents character and action; and the way we react to his manner of presentation, the expectations we bring to a text, our knowledge of comic, literary conventions and our moral prejudices. As we have seen, comedy in one of Hawkes' novels is often the result of a discrepancy between our own and a character's perception of action; and when we become aware of this discrepancy, we frequently are forced to reexamine and re-evaluate characters or events. Sometimes, as in The Lime Twig, we are caught between a character's subjective perception of action (Hencher's description of his mother on fire, for instance) and a more detached, objective outlook offered by the author. Hawkes uses many different comic techniques to make us respond in this uncertain
manner, and one way that we can discover how his comic method functions is by watching how these techniques play themselves out.

After looking at a number of Hawkes' novels, describing their comic methods, and suggesting how these methods reveal thematic concerns, I think we must now decide if certain methods are more effective than others for achieving the kind of complex and profound comedy Hawkes himself has described. I believe that it is necessary to make quality judgments on Hawkes' techniques from novel to novel, because his technical choices determine the kind of comedy we experience and ultimately the way we receive and judge a novel. And as guidelines for our evaluation, I suggest we use Hawkes' own explanation of the ideal comic method which I have discussed in Chapter I.

Out of all of Hawkes' comments on comedy, his description of the function of the comic method is perhaps most useful to us when we attempt to evaluate the success of his techniques from novel to novel. He argues that the comic method functions in several ways; on the one hand it serves to create sympathy, compassion, and on the other it's a means for judging human failings as severely as possible; it's a way of exposing evil (one of the pure words I mean to preserve) and of persuading the reader that even he may not be exempt from evil; and
of course comic distortion tells us that anything is possible and hence expands the limits of our imagination.¹

Thus, according to Hawkes, comedy provides us with a way of simultaneously accepting and rejecting character, action, and idea. And, as he says in another interview, when we are torn between opposite responses of acceptance and rejection, attraction and repulsion, we feel the "multiplicity of experience," "the fact that any action may be more complex than we would originally think."² We accept, then, even if begrudgingly, life's contradictions and paradoxes instead of trying to order or reconcile them.

In all of Hawkes' novels I have discussed, our experience of this sort of comedy seems partly determined by our sympathy for or distance from certain perspectives in the book—those of a character, narrator, or implied author. In The Lime Twig I think the kind of comedy Hawkes aspires to is maximized because our sympathies are tugged at from many different directions. That is, we are sympathetic to Michael and Margaret Banks but also distanced from them by comic techniques in such a way that we participate in exposing and judging their


unattractive sides. More importantly, by experiencing the action of _The Lime Twig_ from opposite perspectives, we are also made to examine the book's concerns—the results of succumbing to our darkest wishes, for example—from a variety of angles. We fluctuate in our acceptance or rejection of these perspectives or angles of vision right up to the end of the novel. Even after the narrator intrudes at the racetrack scene and implies that Michael's final gesture is positive, perhaps even redemptive, we are not able to hold onto a good feeling for that gesture. For after Michael's death, in the last scene of the book we are confronted again with the unpredictability and injustice of Larry's and Sybil's world, which persist in the figures of the detectives (symbols of order and right) who go off in the wrong direction to solve Hencher's murder. Although we smile at these bumbling, their ineptitude undercuts the idealism behind Michael's metaphoric crucifixion (both his arms are extended outward).

It seems, then, in all of Hawkes' novels, that his comic techniques control our distance from characters, regulate the degree to which we participate in a text, and, ultimately, lead us to where the author wants us to stand in a book, even if that stance is uncomfortable. Moreover, through comic techniques, Hawkes continuously undercuts our expectations of characters and action, and
he toys with our preconceived notions of rape, spouse-swapping, onanism, and so on. And yet he creates all of this havoc for a good reason: to make us look at human nature in new ways and question traditional morality. We have seen some of his specific comic methods in practice. Often the language that a narrator or character uses to describe an action results in comedy when it runs counter to our emotional responses to that action; or an overtly comic scene (like Michael in bed with Sybilline) suddenly becomes frightening when we recognize in it echoes from Thick's beating of Margaret or Rock Castle's trampling of William Hencher.

This dark comedy, as I have said, is maximized when we feel as if we are never on solid ground. Throughout a book like The Lime Twig, our emotional, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and practical concerns are at odds with each other. One of these concerns alone never controls our response to particular scenes or to The Lime Twig as a whole. On an emotional level, we never completely sympathize with a character, nor, on an aesthetic or formal level, do we, by noting the author's comic style, completely distance ourselves from characters or events. Although, to different degrees, we experience this conflict of concerns in all of Hawkes' novels, I think The Lime Twig, more than any other novel by Hawkes, utilizes, equally, both our minds and our hearts. It is perhaps
Hawkes' most intelligent and humane novel. Hawkes seems to treat the situations of Hencher and Michael and Margaret Banks with a certain respect and compassion even as he makes them appear ridiculous. Consequently, we, too, easily identify with these characters' desires to live out their darkest dreams, though we also recognize the disastrous results when these dreams become real. It seems, then, that in The Lime Twig we find all the contradictory functions of Hawkes' comedy at work: to create sympathy for and yet also to expose and ridicule characters, and to make us admit to our own potential for evil.

But in the novels after The Lime Twig, the nature of Hawkes' comedy seems to change. As we become more distanced from his characters, and more interested in Hawkes' techniques, our emotional involvement takes a secondary place to our intellectual and aesthetic interests. I am not arguing, of course, that there is a sudden or drastic change in Hawkes' comedy from book to book. As I have shown, the movement away from reader-identification is gradual from Second Skin to Travesty. But this change in comic method tends to simplify our responses to later novels. When we become so aware of a writer's artifice in a book that we never are very engaged with character or action on an emotional level, then we don't feel that much is at stake. Moreover, we don't feel the seductive
power of "evil" that Hawkes wants us to experience in his works, nor do we ever sense our own potential for evil. When we read books like *Death, Sleep & the Traveler* and *Travesty*, then, we feel as we did in *Charivari*, that the narrative structure itself becomes the subject of the novel. For instance, we know very early in these novels that Allert and Papa are morally suspect, and so we tend to judge them quickly, and we become mostly interested in how their reprehensible natures will be rendered by Hawkes. Granted, it is entertaining to watch each narrative unfold and listen to each narrator make a fool out of himself whenever he becomes philosophical, but the surprise or the "quickening in the presence" of evil, which we find in *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin*, seems lessened in the last two novels of the trilogy.

As much as Hawkes disdains traditional devices of plot, character, and setting, it appears that his most successful comedy occurs when characters are created in such a way that we identify with them. These characters don't have to be presented with all the trappings of realism, nor be engaged in familiar pursuits--or even be expressive of familiar attitudes. But if Hawkes truly believes that the

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comic method functions to create sympathy and compassion as much as it does to expose and ridicule evil, then he will have to give us characters who demand—or at least make possible—this compassion and sympathy.

In many of Hawkes' novels before The Lime Twig Hawkes' comedy falls short of his own demands of the comic method when he does not force us to become emotionally involved with characters or action. For example, although on the surface in The Goose on the Grave, The Owl, The Cannibal, and The Beetle Leg there are many grotesque events, we still feel very distanced from them. As in the case of Travesty, in Hawkes' early novels we often feel the presence of an author who seems to use character and action to work out some personal, aesthetic concerns. Consequently, we shift our attention to this playful and self-indulgent author and away from the literal action of his novels. In this sense, we do detach ourselves from the violence of these early novels (very often the first step in experiencing Hawkes' strange comedy), but we become so distanced from characters (who seem to be nothing more than fictional constructs) and action that we do not feel threatened by the visions of these novels. Even a scene as horrible as the Duke's cannibalization of the young boy in The Cannibal doesn't arouse our compassion or fear because, instead of being appalled by the cannibalization, we focus on the virtuosity of an author who can describe such a scene in cold, impersonal language. In contrast to this cannibal-
ization scene, in *The Lime Twig* there is a narrator who distances us from Margaret's beating by employing impersonal language and playing with point of view, but, through other techniques, we are also made to sympathize with her. And a strange comedy results when our two opposite responses to Margaret clash.

I am arguing, then, that the complexity of Hawkes' comedy is lessened in his early novels when we become too aware of his presence and less concerned with the actual events taking place. We do, of course, laugh at the slapstick battle between Jacopo and Edouard in *The Goose on the Grave*, or at the powerlessness of the fathers of Sasso Fetore against Il Gufo in *The Owl*, or at the sheriff's comic monologue in *The Beetle Leg*, or at Zizendorf's need to have the Census Taker watch him and Jutta make love. But during these comic moments we never feel that these characters are in danger or that our own values are being threatened. We know all along that Jacopo, Zizendorf, the sheriff, and all of the characters of *The Owl* are not very important in themselves. We know that we are meant to be more amused at Hawkes playing with language and form in these novels than we are meant to identify with the characters and actions.

I stress in this last chapter how Hawkes' obtrusive presence adversely affects the comedy of his early novels because I see the same problem causing us interpretative problems in his last two novels: *The Passion Artist* and
Virginie: Her Two Lives. Sometimes, especially in The Passion Artist, I think that Hawkes speaks so often about his desire to be Satanic and his penchant for nihilism that he has worked out his theories on paper at the expense of creating believable characters or offering any positive values. No matter how bleak the novels of the trilogy may seem, they still are worth reading because of the values of the implied authors. In the trilogy, I consider the saving grace of comedy to exist in the conflict between the perspectives of self-serving first person narrators (Cyril, Allert, and Papa) and the perspectives of the implied authors. We, presumably sharing the values of these implied authors, recognize on an intellectual level the appeal of Cyril's, Papa's, and Allert's rhetoric and distinctive way of seeing things. But we eventually reject Cyril's brand of sexual extension, or Allert's ramblings on the unconscious, or Papa's theories on murder and death. No matter how much Hawkes himself goes on about nihilism or his desire to destroy conventional morality, the images he creates of himself in the trilogy, discernible through his comic method, seem to be opposed to the values that Cyril, Allert, and Papa offer.

Before dealing directly with The Passion Artist and Virginie, it might be best to consider some of the specific and shared values and attitudes of the implied authors of the novels we have discussed. To generalize, it seems
that Hawkes creates an image of himself in his works of an author trying to embrace the kind of morality which he himself sees in Edwin Honig's poetry. It is a morality which "holds in some mercurial suspension, suspension, the two deplorable and astounding processes--that of dying and that of birthing." But although the implied authors try to hold in suspension these two "astounding processes," the characters in Hawkes' fiction seem restricted in their responses to sex and death, mostly because they place a premium on their own selfish desires and personal visions. Consequently, these characters become so myopic that they do not recognize the implications of their theories or actions.

As we have seen, comic techniques lead us away from the private visions of a character to the perspective of an implied author who sees the "big picture." That is, in The Lime Twig, we, sharing the knowledge of the implied author, sympathize with all of the characters' sexual urges, and yet we also understand what the characters do not, that the fulfillment of their darkest sexual desires can cost them their own lives or the lives of others. Similarly, in Second Skin and in the trilogy, like the implied authors of those novels, we recognize and appreciate each narrator's attempt to control the processes of dying and birthing through
rhetoric. But we also see that no matter how appealing certain theoretical approaches to love, sex, death, and the unconscious are, that these theories fail miserably when put into practice.

So far, one of the functions of Hawkes' comic method has been to help us distinguish between the perspectives of a character, a third person narrator, and an implied author, so that we do not blindly succumb to one character's vision of things. And whether or not we like any of the novels I have discussed, I think we can agree that the comic techniques Hawkes uses tell us where to stand in a novel. In The Passion Artist and Virginie, however, I find it more difficult to make the above distinctions. Moreover, the comic techniques which usually lead me to the values of the implied authors of Hawkes' works are either missing from these novels or work in ways that are not clear.

Wayne Booth discusses the problems that occur when we have trouble differentiating between characters and narrators (especially first person narrators) and authors. Referring to Celine's Journey to the End of Night (one of Hawkes' favorite books), Booth argues that Celine is never undeniably in the book, even in the long-winded commentary. But he is never undeniably dissociated, either, and therein lies the problem. The reader cannot help wondering whether Ferdinand's moralizing, of which
there is a great deal, is to be taken seriously or not. Is this Celine's view? Should it be mine, at least temporarily, so that I can go along sympathetically with this hero? Or is it simply "life seen from the other side," as the epigraph has promised? Even assuming that the reader knows nothing of Celine's personal life, he must find it hard to believe, after a hundred or so pages of moralizing... that Celine is merely dramatizing a narrator who is completely dissociated from him.4

Some readers of Hawkes' trilogy may ask similar questions about Cyril, Allert, and Papa, who very much resemble the narrator of Journey to the End of Night. However, I think I have shown that the comic techniques of the trilogy, which undercut each narrator's perspective, lead us to the values that we are supposed to judge those books by. But this separation between a character's perspective and the implied author's is not so clear in The Passion Artist. In a sense, the point of view of The Passion Artist offers more comic possibilities than many of Hawkes' earlier works; it also, at first glance, seems to provide us with a ready-made position from which we can judge the main character, Konrad Vost. The novel opens with a description of Vost.

Unlike most people, Konrad Vost had a personality that was clearly defined: above all he was precise in what he did and correct in what he said. But Konrad Vost was only a middle-aged man without

distinction or power of any kind, so that to others these two most obtrusive qualities of his personality were all the more odious. And since Vost also possessed self-insight and understanding of the feelings of friends and family, such as they were, he too found odious the main qualities that were himself. But the joy of being always precise and always right was insurmountable, so that he detested himself fiercely yet could hardly change. At times he thought that he was like some military personage striding with feigned complacency down a broad avenue awash with urine.

The circumstances of Konrad Vost were as oddly defined as his personality. He was a man who spent his life among women, or whose every move and thought occurred only in a context of women.5

I say that there are many comic possibilities in these opening paragraphs for several reasons. For one thing, in the character of Konrad Vost we find someone who is as precise as Papa, as odious and as aware of his odiousness as Allert, and as possessive of self-understanding as Cyril. More importantly, we know right away that the action of the novel will be filtered through Konrad Vost's consciousness, and yet we also sense the presence of a narrator who, at least in the opening pages, is sometimes close to Vost's consciousness, other times detached from it. For example, in the above passage we hear the narrator's voice in the description of Konrad Vost as "only a middle-aged man without distinction or power of any kind," while

it seems to be Vost who considers himself to be "like some military personage striding with feigned complacency down a broad avenue awash with urine." There is the potential for much comic irony in this point of view if the perspectives of the narrator and Vost are at odds with each other and if we are forced to move continuously back and forth between these two perspectives. There is also the possibility of irony within Vost's own nature. He seems at odds with himself, as lost in the sea of self as some of Hawkes' other characters. Indeed, The Passion Artist seems to be about Vost's attempts to reconcile his opposite responses of attraction and repulsion to women.

Coming right from a reading of the trilogy, familiar with many of Hawkes' comic techniques, we might expect that we will follow Vost's dealings with women and judge him with the help of this narrator. In the opening of the book, the narrator's tone suggests that he constantly will be placing Konrad Vost's thoughts and actions in perspective, while at the same time allowing us to experience action through Vost's consciousness. And certainly that consciousness is like the various narrators of the trilogy. Like Papa, he has incestuous desires for his daughter; like Allert, he is preoccupied with his penis; and like all three narrators, he is a "stationary
traveler," moving slowly and in total darkness down the road within" (p. 67).

But although on the surface Vost resembles Hawkes' previous comic protagonists, he is presented very differently than Cyril, Allert, and Papa were. It seems that the narrator of The Passion Artist, an agent of the implied author, is never detached more than momentarily from Vost's consciousness. Sometimes he even appears to reinforce the seriousness and importance of Vost's absurd vision. For instance, at one point in the novel we find a nymphet, Claire, leading Konrad Vost over to what he thinks is a couch. But then he realizes,

not to the couch as he had expected but instead to the anomaly of the chaise lounge that extended into the room like an ornate tongue, like the narrow prow of an entombed boat, like the reclining place of a courtesan with feathers and painted skin. (p. 37)

In this passage, related from Vost's point of view, we see a comedy of language that we have become used to in Hawkes' work. The comic and inappropriate similes used to describe the chaise lounge suggest Konrad Vost's conflicting attitudes toward sex. The lounge is sexual like an ornate tongue, exotic like a courtesan's bed, but also ominous like the narrow prow of an entombed boat. And, in reality, we realize that it is in fact only a chaise lounge.
Now we might expect the narrator to emphasize Vost's comic nature as the seduction continues, but he doesn't. After Claire leads Vost over to the lounge and performs fellatio on him, she then kisses him and returns to him "his own seminal secretions, his own psychic slime" (p. 40). As this scene unfolds, it would offer great comic possibilities if Vost's perception of the incident were contrasted with the narrator's or another character's. But we view the scene through Vost's consciousness, feeling with him. On one hand, we might argue that when we see Vost receiving his own "seminal secretions" we are supposed to consider the event to be a negative statement on Vost's sexuality. But as we read on in _The Passion Artist_ we begin to feel that this incident is indeed a necessary stage Konrad must pass through to atone for his previous treatment of women. That is, it seems that many of the same sexual acts that were handled comically in the trilogy are taken seriously in _The Passion Artist_.

In this sense, _The Passion Artist_ resembles _Lady Chatterley's Lover_. In Lawrence's book, even though we may laugh, as Wayne Booth does, at Mellors' pronouncements on "the peace that comes of fucking," we know that

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6Booth, pp. 79-81.
Lawrence wants us to take Mellors seriously. In *The Passion Artist*, Hawkes, too, creates an image of an author who wishes us to appreciate Vost's theories on what he calls the "psychological function," and also to judge Vost's journey into the self as being successful. But the problem with this change in Hawkes' approach to one of his main characters is that it is very difficult to see any positive values in Vost's trials and tribulations when they include his swallowing his own semen, being urinated on by a horse, or being tortured in a filthy barn by his mother and another woman. Moreover, in contrast to Hawkes' previous novels, in *The Passion Artist* Vost's scatological trials do not seem to be cruel, but instead are necessary steps he must undergo to come to a true understanding of women. And I think we are, for the most part, supposed to sympathize with him as he progresses from stage to stage.

Certainly it is clear that the implied author of *The Passion Artist* sympathizes with Vost. I would even suggest that Hawkes himself uses Vost as a spokesman for his own ideas on sex and love. It seems that the philosophical, free-loving side of Hawkes, represented in *Cyril of The Blood Oranges*, controls the vision of *The Passion Artist*. Consider these passages from the novel.
But how could he detest the matron of the farm for disordered children while nonetheless loving the notorious Eva Laubenstein? For every child there must be the mother and the anti-mother. In his case both women had been anti-mothers. Why love one and not the other? (p. 152)

Why was it that when a man of his age saw for the first time hair and light glistening between a woman's legs he felt both agitation and absurdity? And yet was he even now beginning to learn that what he had thought of as the lust of his middle age was in fact the clearest reflection of the generosity implicit in the nudity of the tall woman? (p. 178)

When she encouraged him to discover for himself that the discolorations of the blown rose are not confined to the hidden flesh of youth, it was then that in the midst of his gasping he realized that the distinction between the girl who is still a child and the woman who is more than mature lies only in the instinct of the one and the depth of consciousness of the other. (p. 180-81)

In the trilogy, when narrators spoke so theoretically about the sexual relationships between men and women we were supposed to be amused by their theories, though, with the aid of comic techniques, we were also supposed to realize that these theories didn't help characters to get on with their lives. In fact, narrators often used their theories—went on talking and talking and talking—in an attempt to avoid self-recognition. But in The Passion Artist it seems as if we are supposed to take the above pronouncements seriously, as if they are genuine insights into the bonding of the sexes. Moreover, since
it is difficult to determine whether these observations on women arise solely from Vost's consciousness or if they are also reflections of the narrator, we must believe that these observations represent the attitudes of the implied author of The Passion Artist.

Thus The Passion Artist doesn't seem to be a very comic novel. And certainly it is difficult to guess why Hawkes abandons many of the comic techniques that he uses so effectively in earlier works to complicate our reading response and to explore very difficult subjects. In the trilogy we often shared the author's attraction to the theories of first person narrators. But these theories were always qualified and found lacking, though we were still forced to look at sexual extension, the psychosexual life of a man, and suicide and murder in ways we never had done before. But in The Passion Artist Hawkes seems to have a stake in Vost's predicament. And we wonder if Hawkes himself isn't a bit like Vost. Is he apologizing for his fictive treatment of women through the character of Konrad Vost? Does he, like Vost, feel the need to pass through the sexual cesspool of his psyche and come to a new understanding of women? Is this the direction in which the trilogy has been heading?

It is, of course, impossible to answer these questions, but we can make some generalizations about The Passion Artist's method of composition. On one hand, when Hawkes
doesn't employ comic techniques which often complicate action, he achieves a clarity of vision that we do not find in his earlier novels. We do not fluctuate in our response to Konrad Vost. We know what he stands for, we know the implied author supports this stance, and we can either accept or reject Vost, his theories, his journey, and the values of the implied author. But the cost of this clarity of vision seems high to me. In achieving it, Hawkes doesn't tap our emotional or moral sides.

The Passion Artist reads like an intellectual treatise on the battle between the sexes, with Vost and other characters representative of certain consciousnesses. And, as we have seen, Hawkes' best work occurs when he utilizes both our minds and our hearts, when our emotional, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and practical concerns are at odds with each other. We also have seen how comic techniques work so well to set this rewarding reader-response into motion.

In Virginie: Her Two Lives, Hawkes again relies on many of the comic techniques we have become accustomed to, and although the novel does pose some problems, I think that because of its comedy it presents a more complicated look at the sexual relationship between men and women. There are two stories in Virginie, one occurring in 1740 and the other in 1945. Both of these stories are narrated by Virginie, an eleven-year-old girl, who
obviously has been reincarnated in the 1945 story. She writes one journal with her right hand, the other with her left.

In the 1740 story Hawkes examines the paradoxical nature of love and sex with some of the same comic irony he employs in the trilogy. On one hand, we find a nobleman, Seigneur, whose theories and the way he articulates them remind us of Cyril's sex-song, except that Seigneur is against marriage. He declares it to be "anti-theitical to love." Seigneur, in truth, is the real passion artist of Hawkes' work. He explains the nature of his calling to Virginie, that

the man who creates women is an artist clearly comparable to artists who create images or coerce solid matter into new and startling forms. Is it actually not more difficult to work with a woman's living flesh than to squeeze paint from tubes or chop away at blocks of stone or chunks of wood? . . . No, Virginie, there is no turning back or starting over for the one who creates women. There is no higher form of art than this, no greater responsibility. (p. 24)

Seigneur considers it to be his task to form the flesh of certain women into aesthetic and sexual objects for wealthy, aristocratic patrons. He is, in a sense, a philosopher-pimp, though he, of course, would be offended

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by the crudity of that description. He is very serious about his work and he has developed a school of sorts with an extensive curriculum, which, as he explains to a prospective student, is demanding. "You will find me cruel," he tells her,

exact aging, dogmatic, brutal, even from your point of view perverse, as well as inspiring. The regimen of true eroticism is strenuous. You shall be made to rise early, to practice special and occasionally painful devotions appropriate to the astounding purpose of our retreat, which is nothing less than to create of you . . . a person of true womanhood: a person, that is, indomitable in taste, speech, intelligence, and the art of love . . . There shall be punishments, both mild and to you unthinkable. You shall be trained in music as well as in the multitudinous forms of the erotic embrace; you shall know the beast of farmyard and field . . . you shall have human intimate experience not with myself, ever, but with a partner or partners whom I shall designate; until through such long and difficult exertions devised by me, supervised by me, you shall attain at last that shape of womanhood which is art itself, and then, as Noblesse, become at last the prize of someone even higher in rank than Seigneur. (p. 29)

In Virginie, we witness many of these experiences that Seigneur's students undergo at his school, and, as could be expected, critics have questioned the purpose of relating all of these sexual experiences with such gusto and vividness. As we have seen in Chapter I, James Wolcott believes that the vivid portrayals of fellatio and bestiality in Virginie suggest that Hawkes is sympathetic to Seigneur's cause and that Hawkes himself enjoys what goes on in the book. On one hand, we can understand why
Wolcott connects Seigneur with Hawkes, since oftentimes Seigneur's discourses on topics like bestiality and innocence sound similar to the paradoxical language Hawkes himself uses when he discusses innocence or the necessity of evil. For example, at one point in *Virginie* Seigneur tells a student that:

No creature is too deformed to love. No act is too unfamiliar, too indelicate not to perform. Repugnance has no place in the heart of a woman such as you. By embracing an animal, or several animals, you do no more than to embrace the very man, those very men, for whom you are now preparing yourself in the art of love. Adoration cannot live without debasement, which is its twin. (p. 109)

Then, at the end of the novel, right before his death, Seigneur explains that:

Innocence is the clarity with which the self shows forth the self. Love is the respect we feel for innocence. (p. 206)

Anyone familiar with Hawkes' comments on love and evil could imagine these two passages coming out of his mouth. But as interesting as these ideas are and as much as they, in terms of language, sound like Hawkes, I think that we make a great mistake if we argue that Hawkes shares the same values and attitudes with Seigneur. On one hand, as in *The Blood Oranges* and *Travesty*, we, like Hawkes, are amused on an intellectual level by Seigneur's
ideas, which often seem theoretically sound. But our amusement at these ideas is also undercut. On one hand we realize that the effort to "create" women is reprehensible in itself. Moreover, even from an intellectual perspective Seigneur's apparently harmless theories become quite disturbing when they are put into practice. His pupils are forced to embrace pigs, dogs, bee-hives, and one young woman is made to get on all fours and wear a horse's bit while little Virginie mounts her back and rides her like a jockey.

In Virginie, then, I think the author wants us to consider in a serious manner Seigneur's distinctive way of seeing things, but he also wants us to see the destructive results of this kind of vision. The author's stance becomes clear when we look at a scene in which one of Seigneur's students, Noblesse, having graduated from Seigneur's school, is about to leave him for Le Baron. Neither Noblesse nor Le Baron thank Seigneur for all the work he has put into her. Instead, they seem to despise him. Because this incident happens early in the novel, we do not understand the reason for their hate. Once we read on, however, and learn what Seigneur demands of his students, we understand the responses of Noblesse and Le Baron. The scene also becomes comic. We must laugh at Seigneur's reaction to Noblesse. Blinded by his complete trust in his calling as a sculptor of human flesh,
he cannot understand why Noblesse, who has been made to embrace pigs and bee-hives, hates him. At the end of *Virginie*, Seigneur is comic for similar reasons when he continues to philosophize on love and innocence even while his pupils are about to set him on fire. We find it hard to blame them.

But our responses to Seigneur are even more complicated than the above analysis suggests, since we often perceive him from Virginie's eyes, and she, as his young co-conspirator, is often sympathetic to him. Indeed, one reason I think that the 1740 section of *Virginie* is so successful is that we are forced to view Seigneur and his theories from many different angles. On one hand, on a detached, intellectual level, we are amused at Seigneur's persistence in this theories, which often makes him appear absurd. And yet we recoil from the tests he inflicts on his charges. Comedy in *Virginie* often occurs when these two opposite ways of looking at action clash in certain scenes. We often feel like Virginie herself who says that she is disturbed by the degradation she watches even though she sometimes participates in it. In this sense, the point of view of *Virginie* exposes evil, and yet creates compassion for certain characters, especially Virginie. More importantly, though, because Virginie's narrative eye itself is so innocent and appealing, we find it easy, like her, to participate in Seigneur's tests, thus forcing us to see
Seigneur's own faults in ourselves. In the long run, however, we must laugh at Seigneur's inability to see what all of the other characters in the novel see: that his philosophy on love violates human nature and that his persistence in carrying it out is perverse.

In the 1945 section of *Virginie* the function of Hawkes' comic method is not as clear as it is in the 1740 section. There actually seems to be a different implied author in each section. Whereas the implied author of the 1740 section seems to be both attracted to and repulsed by what Seigneur calls "charades of love" (p. 35), the implied author of the 1945 section completely approves of the sexual shenanigans and the comic, dirty stories which are shared by Bocage and his motley crew. Unlike Seigneur's tests, there is no physical threat implied in the sex of Bocage's group. They all are just having fun, and I think we are supposed to share in that fun.

As stated before, James Wolcott took issues with *Virginie* because he always felt as if Hawkes himself were in the background of the novel conducting and participating in its sexual happenings. Although I think Wolcott's comments would represent a misreading of the 1740 section of *Virginie*, they may be applicable to the 1945 section. That is, there is nothing in the 1945 section which suggests that we should reject what goes on at Bocage's house. I think we are meant to laugh with the characters. Like them, we are meant to sit back and
tell a few dirty stories of our own, or maybe even invent some new names for sexual organs to complement the ones that the characters propose: "bone," "zizi," "apricot," "twig," "miniature mummy" (male organs) or "hand-sized sphinx" (female).

But although it is clear that the implied author of this section wants us to laugh at all of these shenanigans and ribald stories, it is not clear what the purpose of this comedy is. Is Hawkes offering this kind of locker-room humor as an antidote to Seigneur's empty philosophizing and sexual brutality? If so, then we might say that we can perceive two opposite approaches to sex when we contrast the two sections. This juxtaposition certainly complicates our responses to each section and makes us reexamine each section in new ways, but it still doesn't make it clear where we should stand in terms of the 1945 section. Thus, in one respect, *Virginie* leaves the reader frustrated. It is not as if we need to have everything laid out for us. We can accept the implied author's values and attitudes in the 1740 section, which seem to suggest that Seigneur's sexual aesthetics are both amusing and repulsive, and that we can come to a new understanding of the fine points of sex and love by experiencing both amusement at and repulsion toward Seigneur. But we cannot become the reader the author of the 1945 section wants us to be.
That section certainly is comic, but not in any complicated or deeply rewarding way. We may realize, as Alan Friedman points out, that the 1945 section parodies such forms as the ribald tale and the long filthy joke, but unless we can see the purpose of this parody—what thematic concerns it is directed at—the section ironically becomes what it is trying to parody.

Nevertheless, in terms of comedy, Virginie has much more to offer than The Passion Artist, and it makes us favorably anticipate Hawkes' next novel. In Virginie, Hawkes succeeds when he forces us to view characters and action from many different conflicting perspectives. I also like the way he disappears in the 1740 section, unlike in The Passion Artist where his presence is always felt so that the book ends up sounding like a treatise on the relationship between men and women. Hawkes, of course, like any author, is to different degrees present in all of his works, but I think his novels which are most effective are those in which life's paradoxes and contradictions, which he maintains he wants us to experience, are presented in a subtle manner. The comedy of his novels seem to suffer when he intrudes too force-

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fully on them.

I don't, of course, believe that I can tell John Hawkes how to write a comic novel, much less how to write the best comic novel. But after looking at a number of his books in terms of comedy, I think we can suggest that the profundity of Hawkes' comedy is maximized when his techniques work in such a way as to create and maintain paradox, to expose and explore our dual natures. Hawkes recognized this dual aspect of himself when writing *The Blood Oranges*. Concerning the composition of that work, he said that he wanted to see to it that "what Cyril would call sexual extension is punished by death and total cataclysmic collapse, which is the mighty backlash of my Puritan upbringing."\(^9\) And yet he also said that he is "interested in destroying puritanism, overcoming puritanical morality."\(^{10}\) These two opposite impulses of Hawkes are represented by Hugh and Cyril in *The Blood Oranges*, and it is precisely the clash between these two perspectives that causes most of the comedy in the book and makes it worth reading.

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\(^{10}\) Kuehl, "Interview," p. 158.
Similarly, in all of Hawkes' best novels, two opposite impulses work on each other. Like Hawkes, we value traditional morality and yet sometimes want to subvert that morality; we all have emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic concerns which are sometimes at odds with each other. Hawkes' most profound comedy occurs when these concerns clash, and we are not sure how to respond to certain scenes. These responses occur on an uncertain terrain to which Hawkes leads us, quite appropriately, through comic methods.

As an admirer of Hawkes' fiction, my greatest fear is that, encouraged by post-modernist critics, he will cling to his pose as spokesman for nihilism and continue to praise works created out of "nothingness" and having a "zero source." Certainly, Hawkes' best novels go beyond this purely destructive nihilism and plumb the universal values he once said he was after. In Hawkes' best fiction, we find purity, innocence, idealism, and strength co-existing with the threat of evil and nothingness. And it is in this strange partnership between opposites that, as Father Lynch says, we find man's "rock bottom reality," that comedy that "has no need above itself . . . It is ugly and strong."^11 It is a comedy which, in Hawkes'

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own words, "challenge[s] us in every way possible in order to cause us to know ourselves better and to live with more compassion."\(^{12}\)

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