NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. For a fuller discussion of this matter, see my With Respect to Readers: Dimensions of Literary Response (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 14-16. Part of the argument there runs as follows: “For one thing, real people are not quite so real and verifiable as we pretend for most practical purposes. Large parts of the lives even of those closest to us—wives, children, friends—are forever blacked out and unverifiable, even unknowable. Parts of our own lives are similarly unverifiable. Nor can we say of ourselves and others where we begin and end, what our limits are. Essentially our sense of a real person, like our sense of a fictional one, is a construction from a relatively limited number of observations of what he says and does. For another thing, we cannot really comprehend a novel or story without giving characters at least some of the attributes of living people, for much of the information we receive about them in the text itself makes it absolutely necessary to imagine that they have ongoing lives even when we aren’t watching them. If this were not true they would have to be created each time they appeared on the scene. On the most elementary level, we must imagine such a life when we are told something as simple as that Emma Woodhouse ‘had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her’ or when we are told simply that a character woke up in the morning or went to New York. In a more complex way we are encouraged to imagine a full person when we are told that a character lay awake much of the night, fitfully dreaming . . . or had a ‘susceptible temperament—without any neutral region of indifference in his nature, ready to turn everything that befell him into the collisions of a passionate drama.’ In fact one of the chief efforts of most novelists is to persuade us that their characters are live people.”


CHAPTER II


3. Ibid., p. 175. If Auden is referring to the passage in *The Confessions* I think he is (and I do not know what other it could be), he has reshaped it quite a bit. Every translation I can discover says that what Augustine held dearer than his friend was not his grief but his life. e.g. “I wept most bitterly, and found my repose in bitterness. Thus was I wretched, and that wretched life I held dearer than my friend. For though I would willingly have changed it, yet was I more unwilling to part with it, than with him; yea, I know not whether I would have parted with it even for him, as is related (if not feigned) of Pylades and Orestes, that they would gladly have died for each other or together, not to live together being worse than death” (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E. B. Pusey [New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1950], p. 62).

4. Ibid., p. 177.

5. Ibid., pp. 180–81.


10. *The Portable Chekhov*, ed. Avraham Yarmolinsky (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 380–81. In Tolstoy’s unfinished play “Light Shines in Darkness,” a wealthy landowner becomes so afflicted by his awareness of the suffering of his own peasants that he actually becomes such a man with a hammer to a group of young people who have been enjoying themselves: “All you here,” he scolds, “seven or eight healthy young men and women, have slept till ten o’clock, have eaten and drunk and are still eating; and you play and discuss music: while there, where I have just been, they were all up at three in the morning, and those who pastured the horses at night have not slept at all; and old and young, sick and weak, children and nursing-mothers and pregnant women are working to the utmost limits of their strength, so that we here may consume the fruits of their labor. Nor is that all. At this very moment one of them, the only breadwinner of a family, is being dragged to prison because he has cut down one of a hundred thousand pine trees that grow in the forest that is called mine. And we here, washed and clothed, hav-
ing left the slops in our bedrooms to be cleaned up by slaves, eat and drink and discuss Schumann and Chopin and which one of them moves us most or best cures our ennui? . . . Consider, is it possible to go on living in this way?” To which his daughter answers: “If one lets oneself think about it, one can’t live” (Plays, trans. by Louise and Aylmer Maude [London: Oxford University Press, 1928], pp. 351–52).


12. The story goes on for another thirty-six pages to tell of Richard’s further convolutions of conscience and consciousness as he and two other boys sneak off to a swimming hole, but they are similar to those we have already witnessed and I see no reason to patronize him further. This is not to say that the story itself fails to achieve a certain degree of resolution, but I do not believe it touches the issues I am concerned with. In fact, though the narrator of this particular story has gained some distance from the anguishings of his youthful counterpart, the adult Agee, as we shall see, remains afflicted by many of the same dilemmas and torments.


CHAPTER III


3. Ibid., pp. 388–89.


CHAPTER IV


3. I cannot help thinking here of the exchange between Father Paneloux and Dr. Rieux in Camus's *The Plague* after they have watched a child die in great agony. When the doctor says, "There are times when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt," the priest answers, "I understand.... That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand." Against this statement the doctor summons "to his gaze all the strength and fervour he could muster against his weariness" and responds: "No father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture" ([Penguin Books, 1977], p. 178).

4. James Agee, not surprisingly, reveals a similar perversity. In a letter to Father Flye, he describes his daughter's first day at school as "another reason I feel the year, and all of existence so far as I'm concerned, is taking a deep turn under. She's been a lovely and happy child so far; and I've felt, however foolishly, always within my sight and reach. I know that from now on will be just as before, the usual mixture of good and terrible things and of utterly indescribable things: but all I can feel is, God help her now. I begin to get just a faint sense of what heart break there must be in it even at the best, to see a child keep growing up" (*Letters to Flye*, p. 186).


7. *The Honorary Consul* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973), p. 197. There Greene speaks of an experience which "was like watching on the stage a scene, both sad and comic, from a remote seat at the back of the gallery. Distance removed the characters so far from him that he could be touched only by a formal compassion."


CHAPTER V


3. Ibid., p. 777.

4. Ibid., p. 778.


14. Ibid.


16. Ibid., p. 54.

17. Ibid.


22. Quoted by E. M. Forster in “Virginia Woolf,” *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951), p. 257. Forster, too, speaks to that subject when he comments thus in *A Passage to India* on Fielding’s and Hamidullah’s response to the death of Mrs. Moore: “They both regretted the death, but they were middle-aged men, who had invested their emotions elsewhere, and outbursts of grief could not be expected from them over a slight acquaintance. It’s only one’s own dead who matter. If for a moment the sense of communion in sorrow came to them, it passed. How indeed is it possible for one human being to be sorry for all the sadness that meets him on the face of the earth, for the pain that is endured not only by men, but by animals, plants, and perhaps by the stones? The soul is tired in a moment, and in fear of losing the little she does understand, she retreats to the permanent lines which habit or chance have dictated, and suffers there” ([New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Harvest Books, n.d.], pp. 247-48).


24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 767.

26. Ibid., p. 768.


**Chapter VI**

1. See *New York Times* 14 March (p. 26:4) and 27 March (p. 1:4) 1964. At least thirty-eight people admitted to having heard Catherine Genovese’s screams for help and having done nothing as she was stabbed in three separate attacks during a period of more than thirty-five minutes. The neighbor who finally did make the call, after she was dead, first called a friend for advice as to what to do, then tried to get another neighbor to call, and when asked why he waited so long, explained, “I didn’t want to get involved.”

3. Letters to Flye, p. 34.


5. Letters to Flye, pp. 61–62 (author’s ellipses).


7. Ibid., p. 432.

8. Varieties, p. 221.


10. Ibid., p. 297.

11. Final Harvest, p. 25.


13. “Personal Narrative.”


15. The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, p. 383.


17. Ibid., p. 322.

18. Ibid., p. 165.

19. Ibid., Lectures VI and VII.


23. See above pp. 94-95.


25. Ibid.


27. *Letters to Flye*, p. 117.


**CHAPTER VII**


6. In case someone is tempted to compile such an anthology, I must
include here two poems that should not be overlooked. One is Anne Sexton’s “When Man Enters Woman.”

When man
enters woman,
like the surf biting the shore,
again and again
and the woman opens her mouth in pleasure
and her teeth gleam
like the alphabet,
Logos appears milking a star,
and the man inside of woman
ties a knot
so that they will
never again be separate
and the woman
climbs into a flower
and swallows its stem
and Logos appears
and unleashes their rivers.
This man,
this woman
with their double hunger,
have tried to reach through
the curtain of God
and briefly they have,
though God
in His perversity
unties the knot.


The other is George P. Elliott’s “Versions,” which perhaps puts the blame more where it belongs.

He  Because she was abashed and friendly when
She blurted out of her clothes, because her voice
At midnight jumped in my lap and kneaded when
She said I was the meaning of her life,
I watched my fingers tell her face Don’t worry,
I’ll be this way again, and felt my words
You are my life perch in her heart like finches
Singing the break of day. What was her name?

She  Ignorant of your stillness, still desiring,
My words You are the meaning of my life
Drained me, I drank you, poured you into me.
Your words You are my life became my flesh,
That, when your blindman’s fingers stroked the braille
Of my skin, what they read there was yourself.
You stood up. I was shamed. A sudden fist
Clenched in your voice. Goodbye. You struck my name.

(From Reaching [California State University:
Santa Susana Press, 1979], unpaginated.)


9. Modern American Poetry, Modern British Poetry, p. 462. With respect to the matter, Auden is reported to have said: “Rereading a poem of mine, 1st September, 1939, after it had been published, I came to the line ‘We must love one another or die’ and said to myself: ‘That’s a damned lie! We must die anyway.’ So in the next edition I altered it to ‘We must love one another and die.’ This didn’t seem to do either, so I cut the stanza. Still no good. The whole poem, I realized, was infected with an incurable dishonesty—and must be scrapped” (B. C. Bloomfield, W. H. Auden: A Bibliography [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1964], p. viii).

10. “Thank God,” says Shreve in Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, “you can flee, can escape from that massy five-foot-thick maggot-cheesy solidarity which overlays the earth, in which men and women in couples are racked like ninepins, thanks to whatever Gods for that masculine hipless, tapering peg which fits light and glib to move where the cartridge-chambered hips of women hold them fast” ([New York: Modern Library, n.d.], p. 312).


13. Ibid., p. 91.


15. Ibid., p. 240.

16. Letter to Emanuel von Bodman, quoted in Dennis O’Connor (see chap. 6 above, n. 17) p. 129.


21. The most recent literary assertion of this notion that I know occurs in Alison Lurie's *Only Children* when one of the characters is explaining to a friend why she did not marry a man who said things to her like "'Marriage is the complete merging of two souls. . . . I want to know everything about you; all your thoughts, all your dreams, all your secrets. I want you to give yourself to me completely.' " She says, "'I can't imagine anything more terrible than being completely owned by another person. Or owning them. That's what the civil war was all about' " ([London: William Heinemann, 1979], p. 64).

22. *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 181. Succeeding page references will be incorporated in the text.

23. Another of Virginia Woolf's characters, Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, will never tell her husband that she loves him in so many words; but in her case it is less an inability to cross a gulf than a need to keep inviolate some space between them, to prevent him from absorbing her completely with his need for attention and sympathy.


26. Ibid., p. 140.


29. In connection with this, I think of William James's correlation between depths of melancholy and the degree of force required to reach the sufferer. For those suffering deeply from despair, he writes, "the deliverance must come in as strong a form as the complaint, if it is to take effect; and that seems a reason why the coarser religions, revivalistic, orgiastic, with blood and miracles and supernatural operations, may possibly never be displaced. Some constitutions need them too much" (*Varieties*, p. 159).


34. Something similar I think is true for the protagonist in Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown,” the story of another good man’s morbid fascination with man’s sinfulness. For despite some kinship with the communicants at the Devil’s Communion, Goodman Brown cannot be said to “exult” as they do (or as does the author of “Let’s All Join Sticky Hands”) “to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot.”


38. Clark E. Moustakas, *Loneliness and Love* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 40–42. It is interesting to compare this passage with Virginia Woolf’s so similar and yet so different description of Mrs. Ramsay’s experience of solitude in the scene beginning: “For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of—to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.” And ending with her decision to leave her solitude, “of her own free will” to join her husband in order to satisfy his need for her. (*To the Lighthouse*, pp. 95–100.)

39. Ibid., 145–46. There is considerable truth, of course, in such a view and in the more general notion that one can not truly encounter or connect with another without some distance or silence in which to know oneself. The trouble with Moustaka’s formulation is that it is so facile and that the beloved is so thinly present, so obliterated by the author’s concentration on his own states of being. Yet perhaps I should be more sympathetic, for this too may be viewed simply as one more human effort to remain simultaneously together and apart.

41. Ibid., p. 11.

42. Ibid., pp. 10–11. Dennis O’Connor (see chap. 6 above, n. 17) notes that neither Henry James nor his lonely characters will talk about, or even seem aware of, their loneliness.

43. Essays, p. 182.


47. To the Lighthouse, pp. 97–98.


51. Earlier in the book, Mrs. Ramsay has such a moment with Mr. Carmichael when “to her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus [Carmichael] too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them” (p. 146). And this moment helps to overcome the tensions and sense of separateness which had been afflicting her and the rest of the diners.

52. Sharply condensed, they occur somewhat as follows. Shortly after Cam experiences her feeling of pride as she thinks of her father’s courage, he bursts out as he often does with lines of poems and cries out loud, “‘We perished,’ and then again, ‘each alone’” (p. 247). For a moment “with his usual spasm of repentance or shyness,” he collects himself and tries to reach Cam by pointing at, and wishing her to look toward, their house on shore, which she does reluctantly. But a moment later, looking at the house and seeing himself there alone, seeming very old and bowed, he instantly takes on in the boat “the part of a desolate man, widowed, bereft; and so called up before him in hosts people sympathizing with him,” and he sighs and says “gently and mournfully,” and loud enough for all to hear:
"But I beneath a rougher sea / Was whelmed in deeper gulfs than he."

Shock and outraged, Cam moves abruptly on her seat, which rouses her father from his dream, and he exclaims, "'Look! Look!'" so urgently that James too turns his head, and they all look at the island. Cam can see nothing and, lost in a sense of the pastness and unreality of their lives on the island, murmurs to herself, "We perished, each alone," for her father's words broke again in her mind (p. 249), upon which her father, seeing her gazing so vaguely, begins to tease her about not knowing the points of the compass. Then, troubled by her silence and a frightened expression in her eyes, he determines to make her smile at him and looks for "some simple easy thing to say to her. But what? For, wrapped up in his work as he was, he forgot the sort of thing one said" (p. 250). Then he remembers that they had a puppy and asks who was looking after it.

At this, the space between Cam and her brother widens as James thinks "pitelessly . . . now she will give way. I shall be left to fight the tyrant alone . . . watching her face, sad, sulky, yielding" (p. 250). Torn between her father's "entreaty—forgive me, care for me" and James's stern message "Resist him. Fight him," Cam breaks her silence, but sullenly, and tells him who is looking after the dog. When her father persists, asking what she was going to call him and saying he had had a dog when he was a boy, called Frisk, James feels sure she will give way. But she does not, though

she wished, passionately, to move some obstacle that lay upon her tongue and to say, Oh yes, Frisk. I'll call him Frisk. She wanted even to say, Was that the dog that found its way over the moor alone? But try as she might, she could think of nothing to say like that, fierce and loyal to the compact, yet passing to her father, unsuspected by James, a private token of the love she felt for him. . . . For no one attracted her more: his hands were beautiful, and his feet, and his voice, and his words, and his haste and his temper, and his oddity, and his passion, and his saying straight out before everyone, we perish, each alone, and his remoteness. (Pp. 252–53)

Meanwhile her father, unaware of her struggle, gives up his effort to connect and reaches in his pocket for a book. Cam watches the reaching with an acute sense that in a moment he will have gone out of reach, but cannot forgive his tyranny and continues her silence, looking "doggedly and sadly at the shore." For a long time, Mr. Ramsay continues to read while the children go on embroidering their connection with him by thinking and thinking about him, Cam continuing to dwell on his protective, more gentle side, James developing that image of his father as a harpy and remembering his impatience and fury when his father would take his mother from him, but also remembering his increasing sense of late that he and his father were deeply alike somehow, and able finally to look at him and think that he "looked very old. . . . Like some old stone lying on the sand; he looked as if he had become physically what was always at the back of both of their minds—that loneliness which was for both of them
the truth about things” (p. 301). And as the boat nears the lighthouse and he finds it no longer the “silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye” (p. 276) he saw as a child but a stark tower on a bare rock, he feels satisfied for it confirms some obscure feeling about himself and about the ultimate truth of life. “It’s like that,” he thinks and looks at his father “reading fiercely with his legs curled tight. They shared that knowledge. ‘We are driving before a gale—we must sink,’ he began saying to himself, half aloud, exactly as his father said it” (p. 302). Still, a moment later when Macalister praises him for steering well, he thinks “grimly” that his father never praised him.

As they approach the island, Mr. Ramsay puts down his book and passes the sandwiches among them. “Now he was happy, eating bread and cheese with these fishermen. He would have liked to live in a cottage and lounge about in the harbour spitting with the other old men, James thought, watching him slice his cheese into thin yellow sheets with his penknife” (p. 304). And Cam keeps feeling, “This is right, this is it . . . as she peeled her hard-boiled egg . . . Now I can go on thinking whatever I like, and I shan’t fall over a precipice or be drowned, for there he is, keeping his eye on me” (p. 304).

A few moments later, Macalister tells them that they are passing over the spot where three men had drowned in the storm, and James and Cam are afraid as Mr. Ramsay looks at the spot that he will burst out with “But I beneath a rougher sea.” This they feel would be so unbearable that they would shriek aloud. But to their surprise all he says is, “‘Ah,’ as if he thought to himself, But why make a fuss about that? Naturally men are drowned in a storm, but it is a perfectly straightforward affair, and the depths of the sea (he sprinkled the crumbs from his sandwich paper over them) are only water after all” (pp. 305–06). Then, after lighting his pipe and looking at his watch, he says, “triumphantly: Well done! James had steered them like a born sailor” (p. 306).

CHAPTER VIII

1. Reading a passage like this, one realizes that Whitman is not quite so uniquely flamboyant as he is sometimes made out to be and that the kinships of youthful romanticism are perhaps closer than the ones of genre and nationality. Another close cousin is Paul Morel, whose epiphany at the end of Sons and Lovers has some remarkable affinities with Stephen’s, even to the phrase “Where was he,” which just precedes the passage quoted, and a similar answer: in Joyce, “Alone”; in Lawrence, “one tiny upright speck of flesh, less than an ear of wheat lost in the field” (Modern Library ed., p. 491).

2. Stephen had also been feeling particularly lonely and apart from others earlier in the book when he brooded on the image of Mercedes and yearned to meet that “insubstantial image” in the real world (pp. 64–65), a
yearning that foreshadows, and is largely appeased by, the present epiphany.


4. Ibid., p. 585

5. Not all poets find such comfort in daffodils, as is revealed in this poem by Emily Dickinson:

   I dreaded that first Robin, so,
   But He is mastered, now,
   And I'm some accustomed to Him grown,
   He hurts a little, though

   I thought if I could only live
   Till that first Shout got by—
   Not all Pianos in the Woods
   Had power to mangle me—

   I dared not meet the Daffodils—
   For fear their Yellow Gown
   Would pierce me with a fashion
   So foreign to my own—

   I wished the Grass would hurry—
   So when 'twas time to see—
   He'd be too tall, the tallest one
   Could stretch—to look at me—

   I could not bear the Bees should come,
   I wished they'd stay away
   In those dim countries where they go
   What word had they, for me?

   They're here, though; not a creature failed—
   No Blossom stayed away
   In gentle deference to me—
   The Queen of Calvary,—

   Each one salutes me, as he goes,
   And I, my childish Plumes
   Lift, in bereaved acknowledgement
   Of their unthinking Drums—

   *(Final Harvest, pp. 75-76)*

6. Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies
   Let them live upon their praises;
   Long as there's a sun that sets,
   Primroses will have their glory;
   Long as there are violets,
They will have a place in story:
There’s a flower that shall be mine,
’Tis the little Celandine.

(The Norton Anthology of Poetry, p. 584)

7. As in his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” which ends:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

(Ibid., p. 583)

references will be incorporated in the text.

9. Though it is not really germane to this discussion, I must observe that
the imagery of the passage is troublingly suggestive of Virginia Woolf’s
own suicidal death, a connection made even more startling when it is
followed immediately by the narrator’s decision to have Minnie con­
template taking her own life.

10. There is considerable evidence that Virginia Woolf did know and
admire Whitman’s work, evidence including a review of a book about
Whitman in which she writes: “In Whitman the capacity for pleasure
seemed never to diminish, and the power to include grew greater and
greater; so that although the authors of this book [who visited Whitman in
1890–91] lament that they have only a trivial bunch of sayings to offer us,
we are left with a sense of an ‘immense background or vista’ and stars shin­
ing more brightly than in our climate” (Granite and Rainbow: Essays by


12. In his lonely prowling of the streets of Winesburg, his fascination
with the lonely figures whose stories he tells and his separateness from
them, the ease with which he relinquishes or avoids real embraces in
favor of verbal ones, and his tendency to experience a sense of
brotherhood when he is feeling most detached and apart, George
Willard is a particularly revealing portrait of the young artist as a lonely
embracer.

13. See above, p. 166.


17. When Logan Pearsall Smith told Henry James of his desire to be a writer, the latter is reported to have said: "My young friend . . . and I call you young—you are disgustingly and, if I may be allowed to say so, nauseatingly young—there is one thing that, if you really intend to follow the course you indicate, I cannot too emphatically insist on. There is one word—let me impress upon you—which you must inscribe upon your banner . . . That word is Loneliness" (quoted in Stephen Donadio, *Nietzsche, Henry James, and the Artistic Will* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978], pp. 226-27.


21. Quite another perspective is suggested by Gotesky's notion of "survival isolation," which he defines as the "rational recognition that loneliness is essential in order to survive whether the survival is biological, psychological, intellectual, or moral. It is the recognition that if others knew us for what we are, they will seek to punish or destroy us. Criminals, espionage agents, political revolutionaries, nonconformists of all sorts—whether their opposition is moral, artistic, religious, political, or social—are frequently compelled to live in this state. They cannot usually afford to let most men know who they are and what they are doing—if they are to succeed in their objectives or even survive" ("Aloneness," p. 230). To some degree this is true for nearly all artists and for most sensitive adolescents. They face not only the outward manifestations of their difference and their sense of difference but the loneliness that comes from hiding crucial aspects of the self. (See Flaubert's letter to Colet, below, p. 227.)


24. Ibid., p. 171. Beja comments that "despite the many moments in which Eugene or George feels an overpowering communion with other people, one's general impression is that of a bitter man more capable of abhorrence than of sympathy. For every stranger in the streets of Boston or New York to whom he feels his heart go out, there is someone, barely an acquaintance, perhaps, whom he knows and—consequently—hates, fears, and despises. As a result, the sudden insights during which he is said to fathom completely some person or object are frequently unconvincing" (p. 171).
25. It is worth observing too that the epiphany usually provides a relatively limited way of knowing and defining other people. It tends to illuminate or realize them rather than to examine or explore them, and to define them in relation to an observer rather than from their own point of view.


27. Ibid., p. 129.


30. Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.


**CHAPTER IX**


6. P. xiv. Succeeding page references will be incorporated in the text.


8. Ibid., pp. 96–97.


10. The most exquisite music, perhaps, is that in the passage near the end of the book describing Squinchy Gudger and his mother and then Ellen Woods, and the section "(On the Porch) 3," which ends the book.

12. Although *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is Agee’s most sustained effort to convey that “roar,” another of his works, “A Mother’s Tale,” is the most extreme and intense. The tale, which is repeated by a mother cow to her son and a group of other calves, is the story of a steer who somehow remains alive when he is brought into the slaughterhouse and escapes after being hung on a hook by his heels and almost completely flayed. In terrible agony, he heroically makes his way back to the ranch on which he was born to tell of his ordeal, starting with the terrifying journey in the cattle train without food or water or room to lie down, and to warn his fellow animals never to let themselves be taken by man. In that story it is as though Agee had placed himself and his chief characters and his readers in the very midst of the “roar” and in fact the story is nearly unbearable. It could be said also that both in that story and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* Agee makes the effort, which Conrad and others draw back from finally, to speak the unspeakable. And that in doing so he is not unlike that torn, nearly skinless, bleeding steer, who “with his desperate concern to warn us while he could . . . rolled his eyes wildly while he talked, and looked piercingly from one to another of his listeners, interrupting himself to cry out, ‘Believe me! oh, believe me!’ for it had evidently never occurred to him that he might not be believed, and must make this last effort, in addition to all he had gone through for us, to make himself believed; so that he groaned with sorrow and with rage and railed at them without tact or mercy for their slowness to believe. He had scarcely what you could call a voice left, but with this relic of a voice he shouted and bellowed and bullied and insulted us, in the agony of his concern.” CSP, p. 269.

13. P. 112.

14. He uses this phrase in a letter to Father Flye in which he explains that he tried to write the book in language anyone could read, but failed and feels guilty about that. The passage reads: “The lives of the families belong first (if to anyone) to people like them and only secondarily to the ‘educated’ such as myself. If I have done this piece of spiritual burglary no matter in what ‘reverence’ and wish for ‘honesty,’ the least I can do is to return the property where it belongs, not limit its language to those who can least know what it means” (*Letters to Flye*, p. 117).

15. Agee changed the surnames of the families and to a lesser degree the first names of the people, but did little else to disguise them. Not much is reliably known about the extent to which the various people became aware of the book or were able to read it, or about their attitudes toward it. It seems clear that he remained friendly with some of them and that there were exchanges of letters and gifts between him and them at least at Christmastime. It is also clear that while some of the surviving people remember Agee with fondness, at least one of the children, now grown up, feels she was unfairly used, and that there was talk from time to time in one
or more of the families of suing for some of the money the book was believed (incorrectly) to have made. Since those who have “investigated” these matters were all less scrupulous than Agee about protecting the living people, I shall not add to their exposure by citing such sources here.

16. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.”

CHAPTER X

1. See above, chap. 9 n. 15.


4. Ibid., p. 70.


6. Although I doubt Buber would fully agree, I would add that depending on the nature of the “address,” the answering could be as immediate, personal, and direct as Dorothea Brooke’s visit to Rosamond Vincy after the sleepless night that leads her to ask: “What should I do—how should I act now, this very day, if I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence and think of those three [the others involved in the painful experience]?” (George Eliot, Middlemarch [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956], p. 577) or as circuitous as the pilgrimages to Hiroshima of some of those who helped build and drop the bomb. Depending on the character of the answerer, it might involve a desperate effort to understand fully another’s point of view or a far more generalized warmth or melting of heart. For some it would mean a giving of self, for others a subduing or renunciation of it. On a few occasions, when no fuller encounter was possible, serious answering might even take the form of a check.

7. I do not want to press the similarities between Agee and Buber too far, but they often seem to think and feel alike and even talk alike about the ordinariness and concreteness of the sacramental communion. I can imagine it is Agee writing when Buber claims he is not concerned with the pure or with perfection but with the “breakthrough,” and goes on “Whither? Into nothing exalted, heroic, or holy, into no Either and no Or, only into this tiny strictness of grace of everyday, where I have to do with
just the very same 'reality' with whose duty and business I am taken up in such a way, glance to glance, look to look, word to word, that I experience it as reached to me and myself to it. And now, in all the clanking of routine that I called my reality, there appears to me homely and glorious, the effective reality, creaturely and given to me in trust and responsibility. We do not find meaning lying in things nor do we put it into things, but between us and things it can happen" (p. 36).

8. T.S. Matthews, his editor at *Time* magazine, writes thus of Agee: "By the seriousness of his intention, a seriousness which pervades his writing as veins and arteries branch through a body, he makes us feel like the liars we are. [¶] Perhaps he was torn apart by all the things he was or might have been: an intellectual, a poet, a cineaste, a revolutionary, God's fool. A wild yearning violence beat in his blood, certainly, and just as certainly the steadier pulse of a saint. He wanted to destroy with his own hands everything in the world, including himself, that was shoddy, false, and despicable; and to worship God, who made all things" (*Remembering James Agee*, ed. David Madden [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974], p. 118).

9. In this connection I think of Sainte-Beuve's listing of the qualities common to those who have received grace, which includes "an inner state which before all things is one of love and humility, of infinite confidence in God, and of severity for one's self, accompanied with tenderness for others" (quoted in William James, *Varieties*, p. 255).

10. Ibid., p. 262.

11. In one of his letters to Father Flye, Agee writes: "I imagine, though, that my mental disease, if I have one or ever collapse into one, is melancholia—in which one is distinctly too liable to self-pity, naked or in any one of its ten thousand disguises. In one way I can't see why on earth one shouldn't pity oneself. Nearly everything I see or can conceive of is terribly pitiable: I can't suppose I'm an exception. However, I'd rather pity myself than be pitied by others—and knowing the nasty uses to which pity can be put, think it may well be better to squirt it on oneself than on others. All the same there is something not just vitiating about it but definitely unclean—whether intrinsic, or through all but inevitable misuse, I don't know. It's the one thing that makes me weary about Stoicism (which in most other ways is so attractive—mainly because so aware of the truth; it is so often blended with, or a disguise for self-pity—a sort of self-pity with its fly buttoned)" (*Letters to Flye*, p. 199).

12. Agee writes to Father Flye that he expects he will sooner or later need some psychiatric help to deal with his drive toward self-destruction, but says he would rather die than undergo full psychoanalysis, for he sees "in every psychoanalyzed face a look of deep spiritual humiliation or
defeat; to which I prefer at least a painful degree of spiritual pain and sickness" (ibid., p. 131).

13. Ethan Brand, in a story of the same name, is Hawthorne's investigator of human nature who becomes a "fiend" when his intellect so far outstrips his heart that he loses "his hold on the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets . . . " (Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 353).


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16. I am thinking of Dante's use of the rose throughout the Paradiso to symbolize heaven and particularly of the closing lines of Eliot's Four Quartets.

    And all shall be well and
    All manner of things shall be well
    When the tongues of flame are in-folded
    Into the crowned knot of fire
    And the fire and the rose are one.

17. See above, p. 121, and chap. 5 n. 17.


19. See above, p. 143.


21. Ibid., pp. 6-7.