FRAMES OF REFERENCE

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For all of us--
   In hopes that we may
   come to realize
   that which we already know

And for Cindy--
   The lady whom luck brought
   and who brought myself
   to me
Acknowledgements

Although they may be among the first words you will read in any book, the acknowledgements are always the last to be written. This is so for good reason. As I've slowly assembled the introductions, stories, and reviews under this cover, I've found that the help received along the way can be as or more important than the actual execution of the task.

This must be the reason that authors always start with thanking people in the end and begin by having the last word.

As always, there are too many to whom I am indebted to name, or even recall, everyone, but I feel I should mention a few principal contributors.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>. . . . . . . 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>. . . . . . . iiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>. . . . . . . 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Ethnic Relations</td>
<td>. . . . 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Bayonets and Brass Buttons&quot;</td>
<td>. . . 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Bayonets and Brass Buttons:&quot; A Critique</td>
<td>. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Conformity and Deviance</td>
<td>. . . 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Resolute Resurrection of Alan Anderson&quot;</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Critique of &quot;The Resolute Resurrection of Alan Anderson&quot;</td>
<td>. . . . 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Role Conflict</td>
<td>. . . . 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Chains&quot;</td>
<td>. . . . 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Chains:&quot; A Review</td>
<td>. . . . 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and Its Functions</td>
<td>. . . . 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Meeting&quot;</td>
<td>. . . . 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Meeting:&quot; A Critique</td>
<td>. . . . 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>. . . . 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>. . . . 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>. . . . 86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction (or, What I Painted And Why I Framed It)

Here it is.

I've finally finished it, and now that I have, I find myself faced with the task of explaining myself. Instead of the vague rationalizations that justified the project in my own mind while it was being written, I have to find, file, and fill in with real reasons that can be rendered into pica type.

Well, I guess that when I conceived the format for this project, I wanted something that would be a worthy culmination of my under-graduate studies at the university. I thought that I should at least try to correlate and apply some of the information that I'd acquired in my years of college education. I settled on attempting to join my two major areas of study: Sociology and English. The final decision on how I should do that was to write short stories that embodied or explained one or more sociological concepts.

Beside being the summation of my under-graduate study, I attempted this because I have certain ambitions to become a good writer, recognized or not, in many areas of writing. Along with poetry, plays, and songs, I'd like to be able to write a good short story someday. So, I pledged myself to
take my first shot at it in something that I would feel obligated to finish. After two years, I guess I finally felt obligated enough.

During the writing of most of this paper, I had a sign that I would tack up to prevent anyone from interrupting me. It would hang upon the door announcing in large green letters to all who approached:

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DO NOT DISTURB

EXORCISM IN PROGRESS
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I'm not sure how this was interpreted by passers-by, but, although it might be interesting to speculate, the important thing is to reveal what it meant to me. Here it goes.

In a way, I saw the application of sociological concepts to fiction in the form of short stories as an opportunity to explore my own past. Perhaps that's why none of the stories fit neatly into the category to which they're assigned. They all need tucking in as much as the sheet in an unproperly made bed, but I made the bed, and now I have to lie in it. They may be sloppy, but I found something in each one.

Another reason, the one that carries the weight of the title, is that I wanted to attempt a new way to teach and
learn the concepts through seeing them in action. We may live out many of these concepts and never realize it, but by "framing" them in a short story maybe they will be easier to identify and understand. The "reference" in the title points to the fact that the stories may be referred to in study, and, also, as the embodiment of the concepts, they become reference materials for teaching.

And, of course, the title revives the phenomenon of directing attention to and increasing the vividness of anything by placing a frame around it. Witness the hanging of an empty frame and the subsequent study of the wall it borders by the observers as an example.

More than anything else, I embarked on this as a learning experience. With the 20-20 hindsight that comes from concluding the project, I see that my initial ideas of what it would finally become were laughably naive; yet without question, I have had many experiences that have had considerable impact on me as a result of the initiation of this project. I would not bore you or even pretend to know what all of these changes were, but I feel as though this personal and very satisfying achievement has helped me to grow.

And this is what I did.
Section I:
Race and Ethnic Relations

"It is not uncommon for the members of a society to believe that they, and they alone, belong to the "best people." Among even the most primitive peoples, this formula frequently emerges as an integral part of their whole life experience. This tendency for a people to put their own group in a central position of priority and worth is known as ethnocentrism."¹

"Ethnocentrism entails strong positive feelings toward an in-group. It is often, though not inevitably, accompanied by prejudice—negative conceptions, feelings, and action orientations regarding the members of a particular group (especially an out-group). Prejudice is an attitude, and as such it involves a state of mind. It is to be distinguished from discrimination, which entails overt action in which members of a group are accorded unfavorable treatment on the basis of their religious, cultural, or racial membership."²

"Discrimination occurs without prejudice and prejudice without discrimination. Overall, however, a correlation exists between prejudice and discrimination such that the more prejudiced are also more likely to practice discrimination."³
Examining the causal chain of the origins of prejudice, the text goes on. "First, it is essential that two relatively distinct social categories exist--that is, there be some visible and conspicuous feature or features present by which people come to distinguish one another. Second, where two groups come to perceive their claim to certain valued things as mutually exclusive and legitimate, competition is likely to take place between them. Third, where two groups are unequal in power, the more powerful group is able to actualize its claim (in the absence of other restraints) to an unequal and larger share of the socially valued things." 4

"Prejudice and discrimination may continue within a society even when the initial sources contributing to their origins disappear or become minimized. New factors may come into play perpetuating or even intensifying prejudice and discrimination, such factors as conformity to discriminatory norms, self-fulfilling prophecies, vested interests in inequality, and personality needs met through prejudice and discrimination." 5
Bayonets and Brass Buttons

With narrowed eyes, the officer watched the car as it crested the hill, descended into the small valley and sped up the incline to pass him. Noting detachedly the make, condition and driver of the car, he wondered idly how anyone could be brazen enough to travel at such a speed. He glanced at his Vascar unit and read the registered speed which was flashing white on the black screen: 84-84-84-84. He felt the immediate arousal of exhilaration and apprehension. Ruthlessly, he cornered the apprehension in the dimmer territories of his mind. That done, he allowed himself to feel the elation at the commencing of the chase. His muscles tensing, he started his engine, eased onto the highway, and accelerated
The officer enjoyed the predatory nature of the chase and did not attempt to conceal the fact from himself. He likened the law of man to the law of survival at these times, neatly comparing the speeding vehicle to an incautious animal oblivious that it was being stalked by the larger, unyielding predator that he saw his cruiser to be. The prey, according to his thought, is chased, caught and cached in one way or another by its relentless pursuer. He felt throughout his entire being that this was the correct order of nature and law. As a law officer, he was required to hunt offenders by the law of men as much as any beast hunts another by the law of survival. His hunt was not fatal to the prey as the rules of sheer existence can be to the lower animals. In nature, there is no justice, but restrictions are placed on men, by men, for men through the use of reason. In order to enforce these rational regulations, though, a reversion to the tactics of the hunt is necessary for the benefit of all.

In spite of the closing distance between himself and his prey, he was acutely aware of the power that still lay dormant in the engine, overshadowing that of the speeding car. The possession of the excess motive power seemed to echo the authority that he carried with him for such encounters on the gray strip of concrete that whined submissively as he passed over it.
Increasing his speed to overtake the speeding vehicle, he leisurely surveyed the country-side scudding past the wind-shield on either side of the charging cruiser. The afternoon was dark, dulling colors in the lack of light caused by the obtruding clouds. In the sky, militant masses of blue and gray clouds were warily converging, as if preparing for battle. In the distance, lightning glinted like sunlight on the bayonets and brass buttons of an approaching army, returning righteously to their harried homeland. The wind had risen and grown cold carrying the cannon-fire of thunder-claps volleying in the rain-blackened mountains. Beneath the clouds, the fields flickered nervously, and the trees stood cringing in the shadow of the impending storm. Like peasants trapped between opposing armies, they shivered in the cold rush of the wind waiting for the clash between the advancing fronts.

As the cruiser crept up behind it, the driver of the car seemed aware of its presence but not sure of its identity and had slowed to investigate it. Like a lion pouncing, the cruiser sprang forward as he floored the pedal to reveal to the driver's furtive glance his uniform and his erect thumb jerking toward the shoulder as an emphatic signal for him to pull over. He decelerated, pleased that, even if the vehicle had tried to outrun him, he would have easily caught it and forcibly stopped it. He guided the cruiser onto the shoulder of the highway with an ease that evidenced much practice.
and contrasted jarringly with the jolty slowing of the other car. He was also pleased that he had been able to approach so closely without being identified. The unobtrusive tan, invisible to the wariest eye, made the chase so much less obvious than the black-and-whites of the city.

He sat quietly observing the driver of the car, waiting for the appropriate amount of time to pass for the driver to ready himself for his unexpected encounter with the law. He examined the car, a gleaming tan and chrome Buick Electra, and absently went over the mental checklist for each car he stopped. With part of his mind engaged in the routine, the anxiety that he tried to ignore resumed its persistent irritation. From the beclouded memories of his past, the old fears intoned their endless warnings. He always tried to reason them away, but they would continue in heedless monotony. "I'm a police officer," he would say to himself; "You're a black man," they would return, and the words would reverberate through his thoughts, echoing until his heart pounded in his ribcage like a drum with a frantic message. He gripped the door handle as he gathered himself together thinking fiercely, "I have the authority!"

He opened the car door and stepped out looking down the empty highway. It seemed to stretch to infinity or some other indefinite end where cloud merged with concrete on the hazy horizon just beyond the reach of sight. The gravel on the shoulder grated under his weight as he walked alongside the
halted car. In the driver's window he saw his reflection. His uniform, with the standard creases pressed carefully in place, didn't hide the darkness of his skin. The curve of the glass exaggerated the badge and the rest of the crisp, gray uniform while dwarfing his head and hands to look less than the human appendages that they were. The nameplate over the left breast pocket of the image in the glass had reversed his name into unreadable gibberish. In reflection, he resembled a large, gray balloon adorned with a black plastic label inscribed with meaningless white characters attempting ineffectually to fade into the background of the flat gray sky.

He leaned forward and tapped on the glass. The driver turned lead-colored eyes to him, hesitating long enough to show his vexation with being stopped, before pressing the button that lowered the window halfway with the buzz of hidden machinery.

"Yes, . . . Officer?"

After the hesitation of lowering the window, the pause appeared disrespectful. The insolent pause is an occurrence that every police officer learns to deal with individually, but his darker reflections always made him wonder whether the contempt that prompted it was for the badge or the skin.

"You seemed to be travelling a little faster than everyone else today. Do you know how fast you were going?"
The man looked steadily at the turmoil in the sky and did not answer. With an inadvertent glance at the sky, the officer noted that the storm was about to break and continued. "You were going 84 miles per hour."

"Was I?" asked the man facetiously. Turning toward the officer, he smiled, baring his teeth like a cornered animal. "Yes, you were," the officer confirmed. "That's a little quicker than the speed limit around here and especially dangerous because of the hidden drives in the country. There are slow-moving vehicles, mostly farm machinery, that travel this road, too."

The man gazed at the fields circumscribing his vision as if to assure himself of the truth of what he was hearing. He made no comment.

"May I see your driver's license and registration?" said the officer curtly, uncomfortable with the exchange and desiring to curtail it.

After fumbling through the various compartments of the car long enough for the officer to shift his stance and place his hands on his hips in annoyance, the man produced some papers which he held out the window. The officer examined them cursorily and handed one back saying, "This is out of date."

"Oh, excuse me!" said the man, letting the emphasis of his remark fall in such a way as to make the innocuous comment
a taunt. The wind ruffled the paper as he produced the correct one almost immediately. The officer took it brusquely and stepped briskly back to the cruiser.

Seated in the cruiser, he became aware of the full force of the strain within him. The forced meetings on the highway always generate some friction; it is a natural situation for police, but the added dash of his color served to unbalance the most earnest encounters for him. After experiencing and analyzing these incidents before, he thought he recognized it for what it was: the furious frustration of the trapped prey. In the last attempt to perpetuate existence, the cornered victim uses all weapons at hand, be they physical or psychological.

In nature, the predator triumphs with nature as a whole because every kill reaffirms the system for survival, making it vital and perpetual. No matter how firmly a law is founded, though, natural or otherwise, the base will be surrounded by the detritus of its building and maintenance. These remnants collect in a continuous process, threatening to bury the structure in a heap of its own rubble. These fragments though, rather than detract, can actually enhance the permanence of the foundation, much like the stone chips at the foot of Mt. Rushmore. The job of the officer of the law is to keep the visible refuse to a minimum, to maintain the balance between enhancement and entombment. In doing so, he reinforces the law,
Retrieving his drifting thoughts, he pressed his concentration to writing the ticket, letting the paper and ink absorb him. After completing the ticket, he opened the door to step out. A drop of rain splashed on his hand, and his eyes were drawn to the sky. The storm was not going to blow over.

He walked slowly to the driver's window, his back stiff as though a silver steel rod had replaced his spine. Looking in the half-closed window he saw the driver idly twiddling his thumbs. He cleared his throat, and the leaden eyes turned to him.

"Here you are, . . . sir," he said, holding out the ticket and the pause with the same derision.

The man's face whitened, and the officer smiled thinly. Handing the man a pen, the officer showed him where to sign; then accepted the ticket back, tore off the driver's copy and held it out to him.

The huge drops of rain now beginning thumped hollowly on the roof of the Electra, beading instantly on the polished surface. The man leaned to the window and squinted scowling at the officer's face.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked in an exasperated tone.

"No," replied the officer simply.

"Well, look!" the driver directed with vehemence.
The officer stood quietly a moment; then raised the man's license to examine it again. His eyes brushed the information carefully, noting the name. It was a name that appeared occasionally in the newspaper and was associated with either the county treasurer or the state representative's office. Familiar with this situation, the officer grew more visibly angry.

He looked up as a drop splashed on the man's forehead, making him more aware of his own increasingly wet condition. A monogrammed handkerchief appeared in the driver's hand, and he wiped the moisture from his brow. The man was starting to inflate himself preponderantly now that the officer knew his name.

"Well . . .," he said expectantly.

The officer spoke looking at the man's face which was growing more obscure as the clouds further blocked the light with falling water.

"This summons declares that you are to appear in the Court of the municipality of Watertown, Virginia, on the 7th of September of this year at 6:00 p.m. If you are unable to be present at that time, you are required to notify the Court Secretary at least two weeks in advance for re-scheduling. If you would like to address the matter by mail, you may post a bond now and write in your plea to the Court which will notify you of their decision and fine if there be any."
The man held his lips together tightly, his eyes bulging as though to keep his captive breath from escaping into the air impotently.

Aiming his eyes at the officer, he demanded, "What do you mean by this?"

"Would you like me to repeat it?" asked the officer with translucent sarcasm.

"No! I would not like you to repeat it," retorted the driver heatedly. "I don't want to hear anymore about it!"

He sat back heavily.

Lightning was crackling through the sky, and, nearby, one of the blue bolts slammed into the ground. It struck with the sound of a warring of the elements of the earth fighting for dominance. The storm echoed grimly between the two men.

"How much will this cost me?"

"The bond is twenty dollars."

"No! the bond!" ejaculated the man, his anger erupting.

"How much will it cost for you to forget this?"

The officer's face grew taut as he replied.

"I will not accept a bribe, if that's what you are suggesting. As for me forgetting, I am certain that you offer will help me remember much more clearly."

"Oh, really," said the man, a threatening silver edge in his voice.
"Yes," returned the officer, standing stiffly in the storm.

With the slight whirring sound of the meshing of gears, the window rose between them and sealed. The officer turned angrily on his heel and walked back to the cruiser.

"The goddamn bastard," he muttered savagely to himself over the deafening drumming of the rain as he re-seated himself in the cruiser. He jammed the key brutally into its sheath, twisting the engine into roaring life. Gunning the engine, he slammed the car into gear. The tires spurted gravel unevenly behind as they fought for a grip on the wet pavement. Screaming in protest, they gained, and the car shot forward onto the highway, showering the other car with stones, and steadily accelerating toward the place on the horizon where the road and the sky consummate their vagueness.
"Bayonets and Brass Buttons:" A Critique  
by Tracy Chappelow

From the title of the story to the predatory chase in the first paragraphs, we are led into a land of the hunter and his prey. In this land, the facets of power are explored—the legal power of the police officer and the power of the politician as he tries to buy his way out of his predicament.

Color is a dominant element of the story. Black, grey, and white make up the color scheme, from the blending of all colors to the absence of all colors. There are no bright colors in the story, and the somber tones left us paint a desolate landscape. The masses of "blue and grey clouds warily converging," "the rain-blackened mountains," "the unbotrusive tan" of the police car, and the "lead colored eyes" of the speeder make a joyless picture.

The use of two particular colors in the "blue and grey clouds converging for battle" evokes images of the Civil War, the war between the states, the war between brothers. And the two men, the black police officer and the white speeder, are brothers (beyond all racial and social barriers) who never win a clear victory, but who both suffer the wounds of their conflict. The conflict between the two men begins with the
authority figure reprimanding the violator, but becomes more complicated a matter as the black officer wrestles with his feelings of racial inferiority. He has to fight the insolence of the white man and his own insecurity in his role as the law.

The use of vision, how the officer perceives his world in this confrontation, emphasizes the uncertainty of the black man. In the beginning of the story, the "narrowed eyes" of the officer "noting detachedly," the situation while he "leisurely surveyed the countryside" all indicate his command of the situation. He is confident of his place in the laws of nature (the hunter and the hunted) and in the laws of man.

But when he climbs out of the security of his patrol car, away from the power of its speed and flashing command of its symbolism, his confidence fails him, and he is filled with the self-doubt of a man who questions his own authority. His vision towards the world begins to change, and objects (and his authority) become less defined. "Clouds merged with concrete on the hazy horizon just beyond the reach of sight." He can't see the future, can't foretell the result of this encounter because of the duality of his role as a police officer (man in authority) and black man (man in submission).

The officer gazes at his image in the reflection of the white man's car window and sees a caricature of himself "dwarfing his head and hands to look less than the human
appendages that they were." The view dehumanizes him, exaggerating the uniform and warping the individual, as is often the case with authority, where the symbol engulfs the person representing it.

"The officer looked at the man's face which was growing more obscure as clouds blocked the light with falling water." The individual becomes more obscure as the policeman steps further back into his role, like a turtle drawing his head into his shell for protection. When the officer first began talking to the speeder, his language was casual and informal. As the man provokes the officer with his truculence, the officer's language formalizes and slips into the jargon of law, of authority. He recites his proper lines like a machine programmed to respond predictably to a set formula. Metal replaces nerves and bone as he feels as if a "silver steel rod had replaced his spine." The officer becomes engulfed by his role.

He is engulfed by the symbol of power. Throughout the story images of predator and prey jump out like the story's figurative lion pouncing on its victim. But, while the officer "neatly" compares the speeder to an "incautious animal" and himself to an "unyielding predator," his feelings did not fit so neatly into this hierarchy of animals. To him, this, the "correct order of nature and law" did not always result in an orderly and predisposed outcome. The officer,
though, could not let the speeder see his feelings of self-doubt, let him see the "fragments and rubble" of his insecurity, for, after all, the "job of the officer of the law," in his own mind, "is to keep the visible refuse to a minimum."

He senses that Man does not fit into the biological classifications of predator and prey just because of a series of laws passed by men.

It seems that this confrontation between victim and victor is not just a matter of a speeding violation, but a foreboding of some future confrontation on a larger scale. In the sky, the storm clouds build up as the men thrust and parry in their psychological battle. "The storm was about to break"—a storm of men as well as nature. "The storm was not going to blow over." One gets the feeling that the conflict between black and white, woven inextricably together, will continue to build up, like a giant thundercloud, until a momentous clash will take place. This image is strengthened by the trees "cringing in the shadow of the impending storm. Like peasants trapped between opposing armies, they shivered in the cold breath of the wind waiting for the clash between advancing fronts."

So is Man trapped, like a peasant in a battle of his own making. He is the aggressor and the victim.
Section II: Cultural Conformity and Deviance

"If humans are to live with one another, there must be norms, and people must assume that, by and large, these norms will be observed. We tend to conform to norms for any number of reasons: (1) we internalize many norms; (2) we often are unaware of alternative modes of behavior; and (3) we may realize that to violate norms may result in our incurring punishment while conformity produces rewards."\(^6\)

To paraphrase the text, we know that people don't always conform to norms. This, of course, is known as social deviancy. Behavior, though, is judged by its conformity and not by any intrinsic reasonableness.

"Social deviancy may be a product of anomie--a condition in which there develops a weakened respect for some norms. Robert K. Merton suggests that anomie arises out of a disparity between the goals held out to the members of a society and the institutionalized means by which these goals may be achieved."\(^7\)

Merton enumerates five possible types of individual adaptation to the pressures produced by "anomic stress." These follow: 1) conformity, 2) innovation, 3) ritualism, 4) retreatism, and 5) rebellion.
The type of individual adaptation that is dealt with in the story is retreatism. "Retreatism involves the rejection of both cultural goals and approved means but without the substitution of new norms--for example, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, drug addicts, and chronic drunkards. Such individuals 'are in society but not of it.'"
The yellow light of the morning set black shadow bars from the casing of the window firmly upon the closed door, giving it a falsely secure look. The brightness in the room swelled like an infected sore to the point where the snoring figure of a naked male in the bed erupted into irritated motion, flinging an arm across sleep-sealed eyes. Presently, with a moan and a whispering of sheets, the tousled young man rolled onto his stomach, pulled the pillow over his head, and held the corners down tightly, hiding from the sight of the sun. A frustrated whine smothered vaguely by the pillow was followed a moment later by a furious thrashing lurch to a sitting position which revealed a dark young man glaring
at the oozing light, cursing it audibly but not intelligibly.

Through the door drifted the sound of the clatter of the preparation of the breakfast that his mother fixed for him every morning so that he could stay in bed a few minutes longer. He flopped angrily down on the bed insinuating himself into the mounded covers until he was completely swathed in them. His mother's footsteps paced toward his door. He heard her stop and knew she was leaning forward, her ear to the door, listening for the rustle of his dressing for work. He lay still waiting for her to call.

"Alan, are you up?"

He allowed a moment to pass.

"I should be a prophet," he declared aloud, smiling to himself.

"What?" she questioned from the other side of the door.

"Come in, Mother," he said, mildly annoyed.

The knob rattled as the door swung open slowly. She peeked timidly around the edge; then stepped in as quietly as the shadow of a cautious animal. Squinting in the brilliance of the rising sun, she stood gazing at him, wrapped loosely in an ancient chenille robe that hung from her like the folds of skin at her throat. She stepped out of the blinding light and looked to the bed where her son lay in shadow, watching her.
"It's getting late, Alan," she said softly. "You'd better get started, or you'll be late."

He regarded her with distant indifference for a few moments; then announced quietly, "I'm not getting up this morning."

With immediate concern, she sprang toward him, her hand cupped and extended to touch his forehead and check his temperature. He caught her hand gently as it began to descend to his head.

"I'm not sick, Mom. I'm just not getting up this morning to go to work today."

She stepped back like a vigilant deer alert to an unfamiliar scent, and he released her wrist, letting his hand drop to the bed beside him.

"Not sick?" she said, laying a forefinger on her lower lip and supporting her elbow with the other hand: a study in puzzlement.

"Not sick?" she repeated stupidly. Gathering herself, she asked, "Well, if you're not sick, then what is it?"

"I just don't feel like getting up," he replied tonelessly.

The perplexed expression returned to her face, and she stood silently wondering. Suddenly, she leaned forward, her face illuminated from within with an idea.

Fixing her eyes on his, she queried, "Is something happening at work you're trying to avoid?"
He forced a weary smile.

"No, Mom," he said. "Well, yes and no. There's nothing in particular going on at work that I'm afraid of, but that's part of why I'm not going. I'm getting tired of the same old nonsense every day, and I just don't want to go anymore. It makes no sense! Hell, the only reason I know the days are going by is that I change my clothes every day!"

After a pause, he gazed into space and queried aloud to no one in particular, "I wonder how they know?"

"How who knows what?"

"How the people I work with know the days are passing," he shrugged. "Everybody," he stated in the same directionless tone.

"What do you mean?" demanded his mother in uncharacteristic aggravation.

Startled by her voice from his pondering, he looked at her closely. Standing at the foot of his bed, out of the sunlight, she looked very soft. All of her edges were smoothed, worn away by the friction of the days that had pushed her relentlessly through the years. Like the robe she was wearing, she had been used to a washed-out comfortableness. He was surprised at the sudden clarity of his vision of her.

"I mean, Mother," he began gently but with a determined tone, "That I'm not going to work today, tomorrow . . . or ever."
Her mouth opened, and her head tilted to the right in wonder.

"Not ever?" she whispered. "Oh, Alan, you don't know what you're saying!"

She looked closely at the set of his jaw.

"But, Alan . . .," she floundered. "What will I do? You can't just stay in bed forever! Can you? It's not healthy, Alan! What would I do for money?"

"What would you're father say?" she demanded finally.

"I don't know what he would have said, but I do know that he's not going to say anything now, seeing that he's been dead for, oh, nine years now."

"Alan!" she squeaked.

"Well," he said savagely, "Don't ask questions that you don't really want answers to!"

She stood wavering, upset and unsure of what to do; then with conviction set in her face, she bolted from the room saying, "I'm going to call Dr. Lawson, Alan. He always knows what to do."

He sat forward starting to call to her, but he stopped himself, knowing that it would be useless. He lay back resignedly and listened to her retreating down the stairs. He could hear the clicking syllables of the telephone as she dialled and her quietly appealing voice rising and falling like the birdsong outside his window. Soon, he heard the
phone laid gently to rest in its cradle, and her steps receded into the quiet of the morning.

For awhile he contented himself with watching the sunlight creep down the wall like some luminous slime and then advance across the floor with cancerous imperceptibility, but he grew tired of it and wriggled further into the bed, pulling the covers over his head. He drew his knees up and clasped his hands over his shins. Closing his eyes, he began to doze.

The light was soon on the bed, and beneath the covers the warmth began to increase. He started to sweat, the droplets sliding greasily on him like wax on a burning candle. The covers grew damp, and he stirred uncomfortably in the moist heat and began to dream.

He dreamed he was slipping slowly through a bright constricting passage toward a small circle of darkness marking the tunnel's end. He was vainly trying to stop his slippery, declining progress, clutching vainly for something to grasp. A feeling of urgency gripped him as the blackness expanded, and he whimpered to himself while trying to brace his body against the softly yielding walls which frustrated his every attempt. He was angry, then afraid, and finally in helpless terror as he drifted from the mouth of the tube, making a final desperate grab at its lip. The darkness circumscribed him, and it seemed to him that he floated in the center of
a black glass egg. Soon, as if his eyes were adjusting to
the darkness, points of light became visible wheeling insanely
around him, and suddenly a blue globe drifted waveringly
through his vision. He recognized its features and said to
himself, "Good old Mother Earth." With that thought, the
realization struck him that it was not the stars that were
circling him like a restless cloud of fireflies but he who
was tumbling toward the planet at an incredible velocity,
like a sperm seeking swift union with the egg. He dropped
into the outer atmosphere and sped downward. The air rushing
past him caused his skin to grow hot with its friction. He
catched fire and began to burn: a falling star. "Ashes to
ashes; dust to dust," he thought perversely as began a scream
of agony——

He awoke with a start, already clawing at the covers
enveloping him like a caul, and sat up in a single motion.
He breathed the cool air in shallow gasps and drew himself
up to sit on his pillow in the shadow provided by the wall.
He sat staring emptily at nothing, letting the dream terror
evaporate with the clamminess on his skin.

Slowly, like the thawing of a frost-bitten hand, the
transition between the reality and the dream was completed.
He turned and looked out the window at the morning. The
doorbell tolled deeply, and his mother's footsteps hurried
to the door. He heard the door open, and the words of greeting
exchanged in prelude to the anxious alto of his mother's voice and the comforting bass of the doctor's. The rounded notes rose from the foyer through the stairwell to him like a concert of concern for his well-being. He felt like a spectator seated comfortably in the balcony listening to a symphony of sympathy from below.

Hearing the two sets of footsteps ascending the stairs and the hushed reverent tones of their voices, he sighed as though giving up his last breath and lay down covering himself. He closed his eyes and waited. He could hear the conversation clearly now.

"I don't know what's wrong with him, Doctor," his mother was saying as they paused outside the doorway. "When I went to wake him this morning, he refused to get up. At first, I thought he was sick, but he said he wasn't. Then he told me that he was never going to work again. I didn't know what to do except call you."

"It's all right, Mrs. Anderson. I can afford to make house calls for old friends. It won't take long, and I'll find out what the trouble is. Now, let me go take a look at the patient."

Mrs. Anderson returned downstairs, and Dr. Lawson entered Alan's room.

"Well, Alan," he inquired expansively, "what seems to be the problem?"
Alan opened his eyes and regarded the doctor harshly. Dr. Lawson looked as he always had to Alan. He was neatly outfitted with a tailored suit, therapeutic smile, and the ever-present black bag. He'd looked the same way when Alan had first seen him during a bout with some childhood disease. His mother had been reading Alice in Wonderland to him, he remembered, and the Cheshire cat was fresh in his mind when Dr. Lawson had appeared. Throughout the examination, Alan had expected him to disappear leaving his disembodied smile floating in the air like an open wound. He smiled to himself at the memory of that childish imagination, but now the comforting guaze of memory was torn away by Dr. Lawson's voice.

"Alan, are you all right? I notice you're smiling. Is this some kind of joke you're playing on your poor mother?"

"I always smile in bed," retorted Alan irritably.

"Come now, Alan."

Dr. Lawson turned and picked up the chair from Alan's desk and set it by the bed. He set his bag beside it and sat down.

Assuming his professional manner, he asked pointedly, "How do you feel?"

"I feel fine."

"Your mother says you refused to get up this morning but that you weren't sick. Do you mind if I examine you anyway?"
Alan looked at him appraisingly. He seemed about to refuse but sighed, "Go ahead."

The examination was an eternal ten minutes of listening to heartbeats, checking blood pressure, peering into ears and throat, and, all the while, questioning about pains, dizziness, and aches: all of which were answered negatively.

The doctor sat back in the chair.

"Well, Alan, as far as I can tell here, you were right. You're as healthy as you should be."

The doctor contemplated him speculatively, blinking in the morning light that spread through the window. His shadow was distinct, distinguished in its cut. It moved with the same manner of confidence as the man who cast it. It seemed to Alan that there were not one but two here to examine him, both scrutinizing him as unmercifully as the sun beat on his shadowless figure in the bed.

"Isn't it rather warm in the sun, Alan?"
"Yes, but I like the feel of this one," he replied.
"Why didn't you get up and go to work this morning?" asked the doctor straightforwardly.
"I didn't want to," answered Alan.

The doctor took on a pedantic tone.
"Alan, we must all do things that we would prefer not to, but it's all for good reason."
"Okay, why?" asked Alan defiantly.
"Alan, you know that your mother depends on your support in maintaining this house. Since your father died, it hasn't been easy on her. This making ends meet can be trying."

"I know that very well," said Alan sarcastically, "but does that mean that I have to prostitute myself to the god-damned mortgage?!"

"For a while ... yes. That's just the way things are, Alan," returned the doctor weakly.

"I don't believe it," he stated vehemently, "and I'm not going to do it anymore!"

The doctor stood, startled, and walked to the open door where most of the bars had disappeared with the sun's ascent. His shadow followed him uncertainly now, vanishing in the unlit portion of the room. Dr. Lawson turned, started to speak, stopped, and then began again.

"Alan, I knew your father very well, and he was a fine man. He loved you and your mother very much. He worried sometimes after he learned of his illness, wondering what would happen to the two of you when he was gone. That day when he was dying in that room down the hall," he said, pointing for emphasis, "I was there." He said to me that he need not worry anymore because he trusted you to carry on for him and take care of your mother. Almost his last words were about what a fine young man you'd turned into and how lucky he was to have you to succeed him," he finished expectantly.
Alan lay completely still, staring at the ceiling and listening impassively.

"Now, Alan, he put his faith in you. Are you going to disappoint him and make your mother miserable wondering what to do?" the doctor demanded.

Alan turned his face to the doctor to gaze at him stonily.

"I am sure you know that my father is now too cold to be disappointed, and, except for some who refuse to let his memory pass," he glared meaningfully at the doctor, "he is quite gone. As for me, I am through with being about my father's business. It is over."

The doctor waited, and Alan continued.

"Look, I never questioned what I was here for in my life," he began quietly. "I went to school every day: the way I was taught, and when I grew too old for that, I went to work every day: the way I was told. Now I know that there is more to life than report cards and pay-checks, but I did it because I was supposed to, and it never meant anything to me. I went through the motions because everyone else did, but it never made me happy. And you know what I realized the other day?! No one is happy! I asked myself, "Why do we do this if it doesn't make us happy?" I couldn't answer; all I knew was that I was unhappy, and this morning when I woke up, I decided that I wasn't going to do it anymore. No more! I'm going to
lie here until I think of something else to do, so please just leave, Dr. Lawson, and leave me alone," he finished with the same calm tone.

The doctor stood in silent consternation in the center of the room, staring at Alan lying in the light. Without a word, he gathered his equipment and packed it in his bag. His shadow trembled slightly in the sunlight like that of an elderly or ill man. He stood quickly and strode to the door, turning on the threshold as though to speak. Raising his hand as if to reinforce some thought with a gesture, he suddenly sighed dismissively and threw his hand out weakly as if shooing a fly from the lips of a dead man. He turned again and disappeared from the doorway.

Alan's mother met him on the stairs, and they spoke in the murmuring tones of the priest and the confessor. Then, the doctor raised his voice for Alan to hear.

"He's perfectly healthy, Mrs. Anderson. He's just feeling sorry for himself. In three days, he'll get so tired of lying around all day that he'll be up and going to work again to relieve the boredom."

Their steps proceeded down the stairs and stopped briefly in the foyer while his mother retrieved the doctor's coat. Alan heard her thank him three times while the door opened and closed.
A Critique of "The Resolute Resurrection of Alan Anderson"
by Tracy Chappelow

"Contrast is the essence of vision," says Frances Fitzgerald in his book, *Fire in the Lake*. Alan Anderson tries to escape the vision of the conventional world, symbolized by his mother and the doctor. He tries to escape the contrast of sun and shadow by avoiding the light of the sun. The image of the sun and its illumination is likened to the appraisal and judgement of Alan by the "normal" people in our society.

Alan is uncomfortable in the light. He'd rather take refuge in the shadows where he cannot be seen and held out for inspection. The people who evaluate him, his mother and Dr. Lawson, are misguided people, sure of the righteousness of their goals and norms and critical of Alan's refusal to any longer go along with those norms.

The sun, from which Alan shrinks, is seen as an unhealthy force, "oozing light, luminous slime, cancerous," perhaps given this connotation because it has always been a symbol of power, productivity and life, all of which are elements "normal" people hold important. The sun and the doctor "scrutinize him (Alan) unmercifully." Alan escapes the sun's
glare by pulling the covers over his head several times, and by huddling in the shadows provided by the wall, but the sun searched him out and "beat unmercifully on his shadowless figure in the bed," just as society's judgements are dealt out to individuals.

Alan is portrayed as a figure without shadow while his mother and the doctor both possess shadows—the seemingly inescapable shadow of cultural inheritance we have acquired from the development of our society. Alan escapes this shadow of predetermined behavior by rejecting his past and refusing to any longer play the role of the dutiful son.

The sun casts a shadow of bars across Alan's door giving the room a "falsely secure look," just as shadows are false images and can be distorted by the sun's angle, so can our convictions be false that society's rules are right and true. We can be secure in our interpretation of truth, but that interpretation can be based on illusion, on a malleable shadow, rather than on solid truth. The change in the doctor's shadow demonstrates this. When he first confronts Alan, "his shadow was distinct, distinguished in its cut. It moved with the same manner of confidence as the man who cast it." After the doctor fails to provide a logical reason to refute Alan's declaration that "I don't believe (that's the way things are), and I'm not going to do it anymore," his shadow followed the doctor uncertainly, just as the doctor became uncertain in
his convictions. As he stood looking at Alan, his "shadow trembled slightly in the sunlight like that of an elderly or ill man." Alan's resoluteness weakened the convictions of one who was so assured in the propriety of his world.

On the other hand, Alan's mother lacks substance and strength from the very beginning of the story. She is compared to "the shadow of a cautious animal," her actions are like that of a "vigilant deer," and she "bolts from the room" when Alan confronts her with his rejection of life.

Alan rejects their life-styles and is reborn in his dream. As he begins to dream, he draws his body into the fetal position, has the sensation of slipping through the birth canal, and tries to resist his birth. He fails, slips out of the womb, and falls through space to earth. He claws at the covers "enveloping him like a caul," and is reborn into the world. Awakening, he hears the doorbell "tolling deeply" like a funeral dirge, announcing the doctor's entry, but also announcing Alan's death from one life and rebirth into another.

He is naked in his rebirth, just as newborn babies come into the world unencumbered by the costumes of the play in which they are about to participate. Alan's mother is clothed in "an ancient chenille robe" that fit her like the wrinkles of her skin--worn, eroded by time and labor. She was like her robe, "all her edges were smooth, . . . a washed-out comfortableness." The doctor's tailored suit reinforces his image
as a man who knows his place in a well-ordered world.

Dr. Lawson gives Alan his final rites as Alan leaves the doctor's world and enters his new one when the doctor throws his hand out in leaving Alan's room, "as if shooing a fly from the lips of a dead man." The doctor and Alan's mother leave speaking in "the murmuring tones of the priest and the confessor," the priest administering the last rites.

The sun, symbol of the "normal world," relinquishes its power to the night, "bleeding slowly to death on the scalpel edge of the horizon." The old ways give way to the new, as Alan re-reads the story of a world seen through a looking-glass, a world where "normal" no longer applies. As he reads Alice in Wonderland, his new life begins.
Section III: Roles and Role Conflicts

"Human interaction constitutes the focus of sociological inquiry. For descriptive and analytical purposes, we find it useful to conceive of human interaction as social structures--configurations in which different categories of people are bound together within a network of relationships. A position is a location in a social structure; it is the behavior that is socially expected of a category of people in relation to certain other categories of people. Role refers to how an individual actually performs as the occupant of a position. The concept "social structure," then, encompasses not only the notion of position but also of role. It implies that people are bound within networks of relationships (groups) in which they interact with one another (role-play) in terms of certain shared understandings (cultural patterns) that define the behavior expected of them as given kinds of people (positions).

Usually, each position has more than one associated position--a position-set. By a position-set, we mean that array of interdependent, complementary positions associated with a given position... Since generally a position is closely associated with more than one other position, we find it useful
to distinguish between differing position-sectors. A position-sector is a set of cultural patterns that applies to the behavior of a category of people in interacting with the occupants of a counterposition. These conceptual tools can be applied to an analysis of role strain.

Role strain refers to difficulty that an individual experiences in meeting the expectations associated with a position. Two sources of role strain are position conflict and position ambiguity. Position conflict occurs where individuals are exposed to incompatible expectations: (1) where the expectations of a position are uncongenial with one's personality, (2) where conflicting expectations derive from the simultaneous occupancy of two or more positions, (3) where conflicting expectations are associated with multiple position-sectors, (4) where conflicting expectations derive from a single-sector relationship, and (5) where conflicting expectations arise from a lack of interpositional consensus. Role strain may also stem from positional ambiguity—a situation in which the guideposts by which an individual finds direction and social anchorage are ambiguous and nebulous. Three sources of position ambiguity are (1) lack of clarity deriving from the newness of a position, (2) lack of clarity stemming from rapid social change and cultural change that alters the established expectations associated with a position, and (3) lack of clarity deriving from discontinuities in passage from one position to another."
Chains

The room at the top of the stairs was a cluttered one. From the doorway directly ahead a shapeless bed was shoved into the corner. To the right a desk was hidden beneath an autumnal pile of books, clothes and leaves of strewn paper. A desk lamp arched malevolently from the debris like a serpent poised to strike. In the remaining corner, a dresser stood like a mute monument to the huge oval mirror suspended above it regarding the room with a candid but indifferent stare. Within its scope all the dark disarray of the room was revealed in minute detail.

A lean young man with wavy yellow hair entered and walked to the dresser. Setting his hands on the top as though
to support himself, he watched the flat silver eye and what it held before him. From the desk behind him, the hooded bulb seemed to ponder him like the omniscient eye of a implacable god.

Standing in the dimness of the drawn curtains, he gazed critically at his reflection. The same lack of light that made the furniture seem ponderous and immovable made him seem quite insubstantial, more like his shadow than himself.

"No, I don't recognize you," he said. "I have no idea who you are."

The image regarded him pensively, biting at its lower lip. Thoughts swirled in his head like leaves in the harvest wind as he contemplated the paradox that the mirror presented. Muttering vaguely to himself, he turned to his desk, and withdrew his journal from the bottom drawer. Setting it atop the tangle on the desk, he sat and began to write:

"Thought: In the mirror I see a perfect representation of myself and what's behind me, true in every detail. Nothing is left out; everything is revealed at once. Any changes or motion are reported immediately on its face as though it were an open history book to the moving eye of the present. To the careless observer, it would appear that the mirror has no secrets; yet the sinister thing about it is that, in spite of the apparent honesty and meticulous reproduction of the
scene, it stealthily reverses the image. It is as though the
detail of the reflection would belie the fact that it has
been turned around."

After re-reading the entry, he dropped the pen, closed
the journal and deposited it again in the drawer. Turning,
he rose and smiled faintly at the mirror.

"Simon says: raise your right hand." He did so as he
spoke.

The image raised its left hand and grinned widely.

"Nope," he confirmed, "you don't think quick enough to
be anyone I know!"

Still smiling, he walked to the bed and threw himself
on his back. He folded his arms behind his head and closed
his eyes.

He always felt safe within the confines of his room,
possibly because it was an obvious extension of himself.
Every afternoon on his return from school, he ascended the
stairs, closed the door, drew the curtains and dreamed.
His darkened room seemed the only safe place for dreaming,
with or without sleep. It was as though the illusions he
created and the ideas he examined would not withstand the
harsh light on the opposite side of the door. In the meager
illumination which was just enough to see things in black
and white, he paraded his colorful visions of himself and
his future outside the room after he was free of the dependence that restrained him.

He was lying nestled securely in the darkness of the bed when he heard the sharp tinkling of the dinner bell. It rose through the stairwell and glided through the door reminding him distantly of the bells rung at Mass to announce that the Host is being held aloft for the inspection of God. He held his breath and waited wishing fervently that he was somewhere else.

A car door slammed outside, and, a few moments later, the front door downstairs banged open. The bass rumble of his father's voice vibrated through the house, and the boy sighed.

The tinkling sounded again, and, immediately after, his mother's voice intruded, breaking the waiting silence in the room.

"John!" she called. "John Howard!"

The voice sounded strangely unfamiliar, and he wondered briefly how well he really knew her.

"John! Come down to supper! Your father's home, and he's hungry! Jo-hn!"

He swung his feet to the floor with a thump that he knew she would note as an affirmative reply. He walked to the door and put his hand on the knob, hesitating to take a deep breath as though he were about to dive into deep, icy water
to retrieve some glittering object from the bottom. Descending the stairs, he felt the coldness surround him at each step. He entered the glare of the dining room and expelled his breath slowly.

For all the light that illuminated the room, the only objects he saw were the polished mahogany table and his father's head hanging over it like an angry cloud. He saw himself reflected in the silver glare of his father's spectacles in the act of sitting down. In the face of his father, he could see himself as though in cloudy water.

"Hurry and sit down, John," chirped his mother, "I'm sure your father would like to get started."

The table was a ravaged battlefield over the range of which he and his father glared like old enemies, fresh in contempt of each other; unaware yet unconcerned with how they had arrived at their present positions. They were aware only of the impending confrontation; heedless of whatever the original transgression had been. John lowered his eyes to his plate breaking away from the locked gaze of his father.

His mother began to pass the various dishes of the meal around with light comments to cover the ominous silence.

"How was your day today, Bill?" asked his wife.

The son glanced up briefly but returned to his eating after hearing his father's pre-emptory snort of disgust.

"Lousy," replied her husband.
"Oh, that's too bad. What happened?" sympathized his wife.

"Oh, everybody and his bastard brother jumped me today. All this administrative shuffling has everybody on edge wondering who's gonna get canned next--"

"Could someone pass the salt, please?" interrupted John. His mother complied quickly trying to prevent the menacing look on his father's face from turning into actions or words.

"Go on, Bill," she coaxed, trying to appease him. Moving closer to the table, elbows on its top, his father began again.

"Well, you'd think a pencil-pusher in Accounting wouldn't have to worry about that shit, but this morning I came in to find a note from the Big Man waiting for me. Whatever the problem was, it must not have been too important because when I went to see him, his secretary said that he'd cancelled all his appointments, and he'd get in touch with me again soon. What a crock! Didn't even finish my books today because of that."

"Well don't worry about it, Hon," said his wife. "I'm sure you'll catch up tomorrow."

"It's still a hell of a way to start the week, behind the eight ball already," summed up her husband morosely.
His wife murmured more soothing words to him, but neither father nor son could catch what they were. She turned to her son.

"And how was your day, John?"

"Okay, I guess," he responded non-committally.

"Didn't anything exciting happen at school today?"

"Like you making it to class for a change?" inserted his father nastily.

Ignoring his father's comment, he asked in mock incredulity, "Something exciting? At my school? If it did it would get sent to the Dean's office."

"Well, something must have happened!" she persisted.

"He wouldn't know about it," stated his father quietly into his glass as he raised it to drink.

Feeling pressured to say something, John volunteered, "Well, Cabarino got thrown out of study hall again for making weird noises."

His father snorted derisively as his mother continued to question him.

"But didn't anything happen in your classes?" she insisted.

He sat there in quiet desperation, searching for something to satisfy her.

"Well?" she prodded.

"Damn it, Mom! Nothing happened!" he finally exploded in exasperation.
His father leaned toward him like a coiled snake.
"What'd you say?" he demanded. "What?"

John was silent.

"Don't worry about it, Bill. It was nothing," said his wife, eager to appease. "Let's forget it."

Her husband brushed her comment aside with an impatient wave of his hand without taking his attention from the son.

"You don't talk to your mother like that, you hear?"

John stared angrily at his plate.

"You hear?" pressed his father.

Raising his head to stare furiously at his father, John spat, "I hear!"

"And don't you use that tone with me either!" his father hissed venomously.

Again, John was silent.

"Don't you ignore me, you little bastard. I'm not one of those damn teachers of yours. I expect you to pay attention when I talk. Damn you, listen!"

"Bill . . . ," began his wife apprehensively.

"Stay out of this, dammit!" he said, turning on her abruptly. "You are forever taking his side on everything! It's no wonder that I never get anything accomplished with him. You're always protecting him. He's a sensitive boy, Bill," he mimicked, "He's a sensitive boy."
Dismissing her with a disgusted sigh, he turned back to the son.

"Sensitive, huh? Bullshit! What in the hell do you do up there with the door shut and the curtains drawn all the time? Jerk off? If that's it, why aren't you out in the afternoon chasin' some ass!"

"Bill!" breathed his wife in a shocked whisper.

"Be quiet!" he screamed furiously, the light flashing from his glasses as he turned to her briefly. She fell into rigid silence as he returned to John.

"Every night when I'm coming home from work, I see all the young guys out enjoying themselves while they can. Shit! That's fine; I got my chance. It's only right that they get theirs! But I know when I turn that corner at the bottom of the hill, I'll see the house at the top and your curtains always closed. I think of you hiding in your goddamn room in the middle of the afternoon, and it makes me sick! Hiding, goddamn it! My own fuckin' son is afraid to come out in the sunlight and enjoy the little time he has before he has to go to work for the rest of his life! Oh, Jesus!!!"

During a brief pause, he shifted in his seat.

"Oh, but he's smarter than the rest of us," he began again. "He sits up there with a light on in the middle of the day reading Shakespeare or some other damned crap from
four hundred years ago! Sometimes I wish I could forget that you're my son!"

He looked into the light over his head for a moment. At his side, his wife was dissolving into tears.

"Bill, please . . . .," she said.

"He can't speak civilly to me or his mother," he stated rhetorically, ignoring her entreaty, "or even bring home a decent report card. You'd think he'd learn something all shut up there at the top of the stairs, but not him. When he's at school he skips all his classes, except his English class for Christ's sake! Even then he reads whatever he pleases and doesn't even know what he's assigned to do!"

He paused again as though enraged beyond the point of speaking. John's mother wept silently, almost an innocent bystander. Her distress was always present and would have been noticed only in its absence. Even that would have elicited only mild surprise and little concern as though noting that the moon had vanished from the sky.

This time though the water on his mother's cheek reminded John of his first clear remembrance of his father. It rose unbidden from the murky depths of his unconscious mind into his awareness like some dead thing, bloated and rotting, that was assumed to be safely and well hidden but had worked free of its entanglement to rise to the calm surface reflecting
the sky and smash it to glittering shards as though it had been gasping and choking in the enforced darkness and needed to rise and air itself.

Through a chain-link fence, he was watching his father walking down a shining street with a brief-case and a purposeful stride. Rain was tapping on his shoulder as though insisting that he had something more important to do, but he pressed his face harder against the cold, gritty metal strain- ing to keep the receding figure in sight. He was too young to work the gate latch or, like thunder after lightning, he would have followed his father's path wherever it led.

Before his father had departed, he'd crouched before John and gravely shaken his hand. He had never done that before or after that time. It was important somehow, and John had wanted the moment to linger longer. His father had risen though, donned his coat, picked up his brief-case and let himself out the door and gate, closing them behind him. Some unnamed need prompted the boy to push through the unlatched front door and run to the fence calling to his father, but the pace never altered; the head never turned. It was as though his father, already on his way, had never heard him at all.

When he returned to the house, he was drenched with rain, and the water that dripped from his hair to his face
and slid slowly to his chin was indistinguishable from tears. His mother had admonished him severely at the door, but he heard nothing at all. She towelled him dry in silence, never asking if he'd been crying. He had realized even then that the distance was between his father and himself with his mother a seemingly inconsequential addition.

His father sat at the end of the table like a judge who assigns retribution for crimes he himself has committed; yet has no remorse for his nor pity for another in the same situation. The light over his head seemed brighter though not as glaring as before. John felt his anger rising like hot vomit in his throat demanding release.

"God damn it!" he cried. "I didn't do anything! Can't you just leave me alone for once!?
"Why should I?" roared back his father.
"Why not?" screamed John, his voice breaking.
"You ungrateful bastard, don't you dare scream at me in my own house!"
"That's it! That's it! Give me another piece of your goddamned advice! Not that way, John. Don't do that, John. Wrong again, John. Give me a chance!"
"You've had all the chances you're gettin' from me, you little son of a bitch! I can't stand the fuckin' sight of you!!!
"Well I'm still here," he screamed in hysterical fury. Jumping to his feet and jabbing his sternum with his thumb, he yelled again, "I'm still here! What are you going to do about that!?"

"Don't you speak to me like that, you bastard!" his father hissed. He rose with such abruptness that his chair leapt from under him and crashed to the floor. He stood shaking like a steeple in an earthquake. "Don't try to defy me. I'm your father, and I won't stand for it!"

Father and son stood frozen as though their rage had gripped them so firmly they could not move. The mother looked bewilderedly from face to face as though she held two mirrors and was attempting to resolve infinity.

The silence was finally sliced by his father. Like a viper, his arm struck out pointing to the stairs. As softly as ice on a river that flows swiftly beneath, he whispered, "Get out of my sight!"

John stood defiantly for an infinite moment; then, without thought, turned his back on his father and left the glare of the room.

At the foot of the stairs, John glanced back into the dining room. His father sat, both hands gripping the table, steadying himself. His eyes were sunken in their sockets as though he heard someone calling him from behind but wasn't sure enough to turn and see.
He ascended the stairs feeling lighter as he did. In his room, he closed the door and stood with his back to it. He took a deep breath, like a diver returning from his own depth record. His eyes adjusted quickly to the darkness, and he crossed the room to open the curtains with a jerk. He bent and lifted the window allowing the cool of the evening air to enter the room in a quiet stream. He leaned out into the red closing of the day's eye, bathing in the color.

He drew back in and stood again before the mirror. His figure, half in shadow, was the color of clay etched in midnight. In the almost palpable silence he stood regarding the silver glass that seemed to reveal impassive truth. The hooded lamp on the desk was a gleaming eye from the blackness over his shoulder. He stood there and had a vision.

In the vision John saw his father standing behind him, and his father behind him, and his father behind him, and his father behind him until the chain of figures receded into the obscurity of the distance or the past. Each of them was both a father and a son; a son and a father joined together serially; the way a chain does.

He turned suddenly and swept the mess from his desk. Removing his journal from the drawer, he opened it and wrote:

"Thought: A chain is a series of links. Each is a connector of two, the one before and the one after, and a part of both. A link is meaningful in itself, and the forging of the
links into the chain reinforces the single link's identity while multiplying it in the mutual dependence that insures the integrity of the chain. It is not necessary to break the chain to give the link identity because it holds its own. The link would even lose part of its identity in the sundering of the chain because of the lost inter-dependence."

When he finished writing, the light was fading steadily in the room, but he sat for a few long moments oblivious to the gathering dusk. He stood finally and returned to the mirror. He closed his eyes briefly and opened them again to see himself cast in the dusky crimson of the setting sun as though he were a statue of bronze come to life. In the vague twilight, he gazed at the reflection, and it dawned on him that the image was beginning to look familiar.
In this story of conflict between father and son, John, the son, must reconcile himself to the fact that he is both his father's son, and his own person. This duality at first seems irreconcilable, but John comes to realize that "it is not necessary to break the chain to give the link identity because it holds its own." John does not have to deny his father's ties with him to assert his differences from his father.

John lives in a darkened world (his dimly lighted room) that insulates him from the criticisms of the outside world. His father represents the outside world: disapproving of John's unconventional nature, his love of classical literature, and nonconformity to the rules and norms of school and "typical" teen-aged behavior. As his father crudely puts it, John is not a normal boy out "chesin' some ass."

As a small boy, John sought approval from his father, "would have followed his father's path wherever it led," but John was separated from him by the chain-link fence of his father's preoccupation with other matters. In a flashback, John watches through a chain-link fence as his father walks
down the street to work "straining to keep the receding figure in sight." The figure continues to recede from John's vision as he grows up, and the chains that separate them grow larger and more steely. Yet, after an explosive confrontation at the supper table, John realizes that while they are still separated by the chain-link fence of their conflicting philosophies, they are joined together in the chain of biological ties. He could love his father, recognize his link to him, and yet remain independent and not conform to his father's wishes of what his image should be. In fact, "the link would even lose part of its identity in the sundering of the chain because of the lost inter-dependence."

As this chain is forged between John and his father, sparks are given off, just as sparks, flames, heat and a deafening clamor are all involved in forging a chain of steel. In mythology, the thunder and lightning of a storm was said to be caused by Vulcan working at a forge, hammering lightning bolts. The storm image is seen in "Chains," where at dinner "the table was a ravaged battlefield over the range of which he and his father glared like old enemies . . . aware only of the impending confrontation." In the flashback to his childhood, John would have followed his father like "thunder after lightning." It is in the calm after the storm of John's confrontation with his father that he resolves their conflict and is able to accept his father while rejecting his philosophies. He is able
to get a clearer vision of himself: "In the vague twilight, he gazed at his reflection, and it dawned on him that the image was beginning to look familiar."

This clarity of image contrasts with his reflection in the beginning of the story where in the dim light of his room his image seemed "quite insubstantial, more like a shadow than himself." The "lack of light" represents his lack of enlightenment concerning his own identity. He could "parade colorful visions of himself" in the darkness of his room: "the only safe place for dreaming." When, in the end of the story, he opened the curtains and "leaned out into the red closing of the day's eye, bathing in the color," he is no longer given color and life by his dreams but by reality. In the reflection of the mirror, he saw "himself cast in the dusky crimson of the setting sun as though he were a statue of bronze come to life." He is awakening to his own identity, surfacing "like a diver returning from his own depth record."

He has been diving to the depths where light does not shine. When he must face his father, he feels as though "he were about to dive into deep, icy water." His vision is obscured, and "in the face of his father, he could see himself as though in cloudy water." Animosity for his father "rose unbidden from the murky depths of his unconscious mind ... as though it had been gasping and choking in the enforced"
darkness and needed to rise and air itself." John had to bring
these feelings to the surface before he could deal with them.

One aspect of his life that he hardly has to deal with
is his relationship with his mother. When she calls him to
dinner, "the voice sounded strangely unfamiliar, and he won­
dered briefly how well he really knew her." Her voice "chirped"
at him, birdlike and insignificant, "murmured" indecipherable
words and tried to smooth things over between father and son,
only to be told repeatedly to shut up by her husband. She
weeps "silently, almost an innocent by-­stander." When, in the
flashback, she towelled her son dry, not asking if he'd been
crying, John "had realized even then that the distance was be­
tween his father and himself with his mother a seemingly in­
consequential addition." Like her distress, she would have
been noticed only in her absence.

She has none of the power of her husband who "snorts" like
an angry and belligerent bull or hisses venomously like a
"coiled snake." His power is animalistic; that of brute strength
rather than reason.

The father sits in the glare of a harsh light, and John's
image is reflected in "the silver glare of his father's spec­
tacles." John must descend from the protective darkness of his
room to confront his father who "sat at the end of the table
like a judge who assigns retribution for crimes he himself has
committed; yet has no remorse for his nor pity for another in the same situation." Perhaps the father was thinking of his past, of his chains to his father and father before him, when he sat at the table with "his eyes . . . sunken in their sockets as though he heard someone calling him from behind but wasn't sure enough to turn and see." While John's father could not reconcile his son's philosophies to his, John was able to reconcile his ties, his chains, to his father.
Section IV:  
Religion and Its Functions

"We may view religion as a system of behavioral patterns by which a group of people undertake to deal with the ultimate problems of human life. Religion, then, is concerned with those aspects of experience that transcend the mundane events of everyday existence—with the comparatively vague and intangible features of life. Put still another way, religion involves those socially standardized ways of feeling, thinking and acting that pertain to some kind of "beyond," to some sort of non-empirical or supraempirical reality."\textsuperscript{10}

"Let us consider some of the functions that religion provides for society and its members:

1) Dealing with the "Breaking Points." As we have already noted, man lives under conditions of uncertainty—human ventures, no matter how carefully planned or expertly executed, go awry. Further, man's capacity to control and affect the conditions of his life, although technologically increasing, are limited; in some respects, then, man is powerless. In brief, the human condition brings man face-to-face with situations in which established, mundane techniques and prescriptions are simply inadequate."\textsuperscript{11} The text continues. "At these "breaking points" beyond ordinary, daily experience, religion
and magic can fulfill a real social need. They provide men with "answers"—the "will" of spirits, the workings of malevolent magic, etc. And they also offer the prospect of hope—of spiritual intercession, magical control, etc.

2) An Integrator of Society. An abiding proposition of sociology has been that religion serves the central and critical function in society of supporting what has been variously called social integration, social solidarity, and social cohesion. Underlying this proposition is a still more general one, namely, that, in order to maintain itself, every society must realize some degree of consensus around a set of basic values—in brief, an agreement upon ultimate meaning that affords a foundation for social organization and common action. According to this view, religion contributes to social integration in a number of ways. First, its belief system affords support to basic societal values. Second, its ritual provides for the periodic reinforcement of identification with and commitment to these values. Third, its system of supernatural rewards and punishment often helps to insure the embodiment and acting out of the values in behavior."
The Meeting

Even now when I try to remember travelling from K.C. to New Mexico, I see a hazy rush of images passing like headlights on a dusky highway. I'd had three sleepless days and nights before I finally got a ride with a guy who had an equally avid dislike for main highways and conversation. As we drove into the warm desert evening, I dropped blissfully to sleep.

Seeming seconds later, I was roused in the half-light of dawn.

"Hey, friend. This is my turn-off."

Hardly able to gather my sleep-sackened wits and other assorted gear about myself, I mumbled my thanks and watched
his tail-lights disappear into the last grip of darkness in the west. I moved off the road, unrolled my sleeping bag and was asleep before I was in it.

I awoke staring the sun in the eye. It blazed over me hotly as I rose and wiped the sleep out of my eyes with the sleeve of my shirt. Looking about myself, I saw an aging junction of two-lane highways that the sand was slowly erasing from the picture of bright desolation around me. Mesquite and stunted cactus filled the incredible distance to the horizon. Beyond them, an indistinct range of mountains blued out of sight. The same scene, minus the junction, surrounded me as I turned. It was a place I designated humorlessly as definitely nowhere.

With not even a sign to tell me my location, there was nothing to do but wait. I sat. I yawned. Still tired, I dragged out a limp pair of jeans and sat on them, leaning against the pack. Reaching into the pack flap, I extracted one of the ten apples I'd purchased somewhere a few days back. Counting the ones still in the flap I realized that this was apple #7. I took a huge bite and settled in, watching for traffic.

Long after the core of that apple lay drying in the dust with companions #8 and #9 in the mid-day sun, I sat still, shirted in sweat and waiting. I was dreaming idly, or maybe deliriously, of a one-mile ice cube on which to rest my head.
As I sat there roasting on the spit of the sun, I thought I saw something moving toward me through the shimmer of the heat, waving in and out of existence. I rubbed my eyes and stood. The form took on the more definite shape of a figure from that angle, and I was certain it was walking toward me too. As it grew and the distance shrank, the figure became a bearded young man who wore what looked like a white nightgown and sandals. Eventually, he walked up to me halting six paces away and regarding me curiously.

I was dumb-founded. My mouth opened and closed several times before I finally rasped:

"Who in the hell are you?"

He blinked but didn't answer, and I relented. Instead, I found another question.

"What in the hell are you doing out here?!"

He inspected me seriously.

"I am fasting for forty days and nights," he paused shortly, "May I also ask you the same questions?"

"Oh, damn," I cried suddenly, grabbing my head with both hands, "I don't believe this!"

He stepped back a few paces in astonishment with a puzzled look on his face. He reminded me of something I'd seen, beads and bells, somewhere . . .

"Hare Krishna!" I exclaimed triumphantly.

"Hare Krishna?" he questioned.
"Yeah, Hare Krishna. You know, bells, chanting, bald heads, white robes, sandals, begging money to keep it all going?! You must know!!"

He looked perplexed.

"Hare Krishna! You know!!" I screamed in capital letters.

"I know no Hare Krishna," he stated dubiously.

I stared at him.

"Come to think of it," I said, "you're not bald."

There was an uneasy silence until he cocked his head inquiringly toward me.

"Satan?" he asked slyly.

I double-stared, rubbed my eyes and realized my jaw had dropped again.

"Christ!" I yelled leaping three feet backward. "A devil-worshipper!!" I declared, pointing a shaky finger in his general direction.

Drawing his dignity tightly about him, his robe fluttering in a non-existent breeze, he raised his arm and pointed down at me. We were standing on a level desert three feet apart, but it seemed as though he was at a great height a great distance away.

In a thunderous voice, he proclaimed:

"Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and his only shalt thou serve."
"What!?!" I exclaimed unbelievingly, rubbing my eyes again; they must have been red that day.

"You heard me," he said in quiet fury. Even though the special effects were gone, he gave me a scorching look that must have been hard to muster in that hellish heat.

"I thought you were the devil-worshipper," I reiterated. "I'm sure as hell not S--"

"Get thee hence--" he began again.

"Hold it!" I cut him off, waving my open palm between us. Hold it, hold it! Hold it!!

We stood watching each other warily for a moment; then, with what I consider great deference, I spoke again.

"Who are you anyway, friend?"

He looked surprised.

"Why, I'm Jesus of Nazareth."

I groaned and sat down hard, holding my head in place.

"What's wrong? Are you all right?" he asked, suddenly solicitous.

"Did you say: Jesus?"

"Yes."

"Of Nazareth?"

"Yes."

I groaned again; he waited quietly.

"Oh, shit," I moaned, "Stuck in the middle of the damned desert with a misguided messiah. Oh, shit!"
I kicked out listlessly at a stone near my foot.

"Are you all right?" he asked again.

I looked up at him. The sun made a halo around his head. I immediately rubbed my eyes. He was still there when I looked again.

"No, I'm not all right."

"Oh," he said.

"Oh," I repeated. "Is that all you can say: Oh?"

New Mexico is quite a state, but it couldn't match the one that I was in then. I began to giggle uncontrollably, chanting, "Oh. Oh. Oh," while mimicking his blank face.

It took a little while for me to recover, but he waited patiently. When I could see straight again, he had seated himself directly across from me and was absently inspecting his toe-nails.

"Jesus," I sighed, the last of my mirth evaporating.

He looked up at me, eyebrows raised inquiringly.

"Wha--Oh, nothing," I said.

We sat in silence. Sweat slid on us greasily like wax on a burning candle.

I have known some strange characters claiming to be any number of weird things, but I hadn't ever met someone claiming to be the one and only Son of God. It was oddly awe-inspiring to think that someone thought enough of himself to claim to be the original Superstar of Bethlehem.
Of course it appealed to my sense of humor too. I was tempted to test him a bit to see how well he'd studied for his part. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed the best way to pass some time in the desert. I confess it was too much for me. I dug into my childhood catechism for pertinent information.

"Can I ask you a few questions there, uh, Jesus?"

"Yes, of course, my friend."

"Do you know that it's sacrilegious to claim to be the Son of God?"

He smiled.

"I'm sure that's true if you're not."

"Why do you say you are?"

"Because I am," he replied matter-of-factly. His eyes shone contained mirth.

"C'mon, man. Who are you, really?"

"Why do you find it so hard to believe?"

I began an angry retort, but suddenly I felt transfixed by the question. If you're ever talked to someone who was absolutely sure of one thing that you were absolutely sure of the other, you know how frustrating it can get. It can also be very confusing. I decided to drop it.

"Let's drop it," I said.

"Okay."

"Wait a minute."
he watched attentively.

"Why'd you do all that?"

"All what?"

"You know, man. The miracles, the parables, the mass. Why'd you talk about life after death, heaven and hell, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," and all that stuff. Why'd you start the whole religion. Why?"

"I was only trying to help," he returned, obviously piqued.

I was aghast.

"You were only trying to help," I repeated tonelessly.

"Sure," he said, "And I wish you'd stop repeating everything I say. You sound just like Matthew. He does that, too."

Embarassed, I asked him to go on.

"I wish you could've been there," he continued. "It was absolute chaos. All of those people, my people, milling through their lives in a kind of hopeless despair appealing to a God who obviously couldn't stand the sight of them. I felt sorry for them. I decided to try to help, to give them something to believe in, to hope for. I began to give these informal talks which became formal lectures which became, eventually, the Sermon on the Mount. You know how it is once people take a liking to you. They'll do almost anything for you if you tell them that death is not the end."
"You mean it isn't?" I asked. I was filled with wonder, partly at the enormity of what he was saying and partly that he had the gall to say it.

"You asked why. There are some reasons: to give them something to believe in and to give them hope."

"Hope," I echoed stupidly, "How hope?"

He glared at me in annoyance, and I remembered Matthew with a humiliated flush.

"I have them answers! I told them that it was the Will of God that events occur as they do and that they have a hand in it by having faith. All right?"

Irritated by the tone of his voice, I shook my head vigorously to clear it.

"C'mon man! What are you trying to hand me? Hope," I said derisively. "Back then what they needed was a little stability!"

"Very perceptive," he stated sarcastically.

Stung by the sarcasm, I shut my mouth while he continued.

"Hope is not a small factor, but it does need reinforcement so I told some storied--"

"Parables," I corrected vindictively.

"Yes, parables. Well, I told them these parables," he said with a severe look at me, "which, of course, all had morals and attempted to illustrate to the listener the correct way to live."
"Oh, the correct way to live," I said, taking my turn at sarcasm.
He glared at me briefly.
"The parables were stories that incorporated the beliefs that my people already had. I just tried to organize them and make them clearer by illustrating them one at a time."
"Clearer, huh?" I said. "How come there are so many stories allegedly from your mouth that seem to contradict each other?"
"Poor reporting," he replied.
I stared wordlessly again.
"One of the worst things about leaving here is that the second you're gone, people, and some disciples, start to stick words in your mouth that you never said, or they misunderstand by taking the literal meaning figuratively or the figurative meaning literally, and, of course, there's always the problem of stamping out old words when you've changed your mind."
"Changed your mind, huh?" I said, barely suppressing a smile.
"Yes, I changed my mind," he averred angrily. His robe began to flutter.
"Now don't get excited," I said, and, anxious to change the subject, I asked, "Are you hungry? I've got an apple--"
He leaped to his feet as though he'd sat on a snake, turned on the special effects, and majestically intoned: "It
is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every
word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

It was as impressive as the first time had been, but after
the initial surprise wore off, I was irritated.

"Oh, I see. Not only are we forced to eat our own words
but yours as well. Damn, you're touchy."

In a fit of anger, he turned his back and re-seated him-
self with his arms crossed and his lower lip petulantly pro-
tuberant.

I drew the apple out of the pack and shined it up on my
knee. I devoured it noisily while we steamed in anger and
baked in the sun for about a half hour. I was playing dis-
tractedly with the core in the dust when he spoke again.

"You knew I was fasting," he said in a faintly accusing
tone.

I sat unresponding, goading him with silence. Ten min-
utes passed.

"There were other reasons, you know."

I sat still.

"Aren't you interested?" he asked after another dusty
interlude.

"Okay. What else?"

He turned toward me almost eagerly as he started to explain.

"I told you about the parables and how they illustrated
certain values, right?"
I nodded, and a drop of sweat fell from my nose and slithered across my stomach.

"Well, I tried to help them get their moral laws and their temporal laws together so that they would both last longer. It seems that if you make a crime a sin too, it's a better deterrent, especially when the crime will be punished both temporally and eternally."

He grinned.

"How," I inquired, "did you decide what a sin was?"

He looked surprised.

"Well, that's a thorny question, if you'll pardon the expression."

I winced involuntarily; he continued.

"There's a lot to it that I'd prefer to avoid right now, but let's say that it all boils down to this: a sin is whatever makes one feel guilty."

"Oh."

"Um-hmm, and it worked out pretty well considering the short time I had and the slip-shod manner in which it came together."

I was composed enough to reply, "Bullshit."

He sighed and began mounding dirt, smoothing it; then mounding it again. We sat quietly until the sun began to relent by leaning heavily to the west as though weary of its
own heat, and, as it moved on, our panting became more like breathing.

He rose suddenly, gazing in the direction from which he'd come and rubbing his hands in the small of his back. He gave me a sidelong glance and began to walk off.

I watched him go.
"Hey, Jesus," I called.
He turned.
"Was it worth it?"
A crooked smile came to his lips.
"It's too early to tell," he called back.
We looked at each other until we grew uncomfortable in the mutual gaze.

He turned to go, and I yelled again.
"See you in heaven!"

He grinned widely over his shoulder and started to walk away again. I watched him until the heat twisted his figure grotesquely like an oft-repeated tale and finally wavered him out of existence.

About half an hour later, two trucks passed; one east, one west.

I went west.
"The Meeting:" A Critique
by Tracy Chappelow

Differentiating between illusion and reality is an impossible task in "The Meeting." The hitch-hiker sees, like a mirage rising from the heat of the desert, a man approaching dressed in what looks like a "white nightgown." This stranger claims to be Jesus Christ, admits to having changed his mind while preaching his philosophy, and, when asked "Why'd ya start the whole religion?" replies, "I was only trying to help:" disturbing remarks for a man claiming to be the Son of God. His claims are not validated during the story, and any conclusions about his being Jesus Christ are left as purposefully hazy as the setting and the identity of the hitch-hiker. The whole encounter could easily have been a heat-induced mirage, but the reader is left with the uneasy feeling that it just might have taken place.

"The Meeting" is made dream-like by the anonymity of the location and the characters. The setting is a vague "somewhere between K.C. and New Mexico;" the intersecting highways disappearing in "the sand . . . slowly erasing from the picture of bright desolation," and in the distance, the "indistinct range of mountains" form a blurred border for the picture.
The hitch-hiker has "not even a sign to tell his location"—no sign, perhaps, other than the questionable sign of the self-proclaimed Messiah, and this man seems somewhat without direction himself. The hitch-hiker is not given a name; we learn nothing about who he is, where he is going (other than the name of the state), or why he is going there. All we know is that he is in transit, occupying no set time or place. The other character is a nameless, faceless driver whose identifying characteristic is merely an "avid dislike for conversation."

The hitch-hiker may be seen as an Everyman as he questions "Jesus" sceptically about his incredible role in changing the faith of man. He asks him questions that theologians and laymen have been asking each other since Jesus first began teaching the Gospel: why he started the whole thing; is death the end; what purpose does hope serve; do the parables contradict each other; and, ultimately, was it worth it?

The answers seem to be those of a tolerant agnostic whose humanitarian instincts led him to give hope to a suffering people so they could struggle through life with some feeling of worth. This could lead the reader to doubt the validity of a man claiming to be Jesus Christ since his replies are not what traditional religious views would imagine his replies to be.
The interpretations of the "Jesus" talking with the hitch-hiker seem to be lacking the divine purpose of gaining entry to heaven. "I tried to help them get their moral laws and their temporal laws together so they would both last longer," he says. He appears to be working for earthly, rather than heavenly, goals, but one must question the requirements preparing us for heaven when they make life miserable on earth. All of this "Jesus!" motivations seem to be working for practical, rather than idealistic, aims. "If you make a crime a sin too, it's a better deterrent," he adds in the tone of a probation officer; and a sin is, he intones, "whatever makes one feel guilty."

Interpretations of the teachings of Christ are as numerous as there are individuals to read and draw conclusions from the teachings. The identity of God depends on the individual's point of view, depends on his "angle." The hitch-hiker sees a figure moving toward him, and "the form took on the shape of a figure from that angle." The shape in which God manifests Himself to man depends on the angle from which man views Him.

The confusion of identities is added to when the hitch-hiker mistakes "Jesus" for a Hare Krishna and "Jesus" in turn mistakes the hitch-hiker for Satan. In the beginning of the encounter, as in the end, identities are unclear. As "Jesus" walks off into the vague horizon, the "heat twisted his
figure grotesquely like an oft-repeated tale and finally wavered him out of existence." Earlier in the story, "Jesus" says that people twisted words he said or misunderstood his parables. Like the heat, they "twisted his figure grotesquely," twisted his teachings, and by doing so, twisted his image as a religious prophet. The questions is left unasked: will the misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus Christ make his lessons obsolete for a doubting society? Will they endure time's distortions?

Death also distorts the encounter. Their tempers flare as the two strangers "steamed in anger and baked in the sun." Only when the sun began to sink in the western horizon did "Jesus" walk away from the encounter.

In the heat of their give-and-take, "Jesus" explains how religion supplies an official answer for the function of religion in society--"to give them something to believe in, to hope for . . . that it was the Will of God that events occur as they do and that they have a hand in it by having faith."

Religious puns are scattered throughout the story. "Jesus" gives the hitch-hiker a "scorching look that must have been hard to muster in that hellish heat." At the beginning of their encounter, when the white-clad figure first proclaims himself as the Son of God, the sceptic sees a halo around his head made by the sun. The hitch-hiker offers an apple to the "Messiah," and "he leaped to his feet as though he'd sat on
a snake," referring, of course, to the temptation in the Garden of Eden. "Jesus" says one of the hitch-hiker's queries is "a thorny question."

As they part company, "Jesus" walks off in an undetermined direction. The hitch-hiker goes west, continuing his progression, symbolizing what east-to-west travel generally does.

We know little more than we did in the beginning of the story. This "Jesus" has explained his philosophy, certainly in a different light than one might discern from the verses of the Bible or the preaching of our ministers. Has time really distorted his teachings so much that they no longer have the same meaning they did when he spoke before the crowds?

Is this figure a mirage in the dust-blown imagination of the traveller? The reader is left to draw his own conclusions based on his "angle" as he read the story.
Conclusion (or, Stepping Back For A Better Look)

As is true of all undertakings of this magnitude, the completion leaves me staring at the October afternoon framed in my bedroom window in a strange melancholy retrospection. I wonder if the purpose incorporated and the poetry intended have shone through as I had hoped.

Though this paper is a beginning much more than an ending, the sadness remains like a yellow leaf on the limb of Autumn. It must be this same feeling that brings babies bawling into the world.

There's a lovely paradox involved in all of this. We each know that the journey is much more enjoyable than the destination, but for every destination we reach, there is a new journey to begin. Ah, but these beginnings still hold the bittersweetness of the weeping guitar, the heart pain of knowing an ending as your feet find a new path.

I had hoped to provide myself and others with some insights and answers by "framing" these particular incidents in their stories. Each one taught me something of myself that I had never realized before; I wish for each of them to hold a small wonder everyone who reads this. I suppose that
I will be successful to some degree, but, for the most part, I am reminded of these lines from one of my songs:

Every singer in this world has to cry.
If tears upset you, please pass us all by,
But I'll be sitting here long after you've gone
Watching the night fade darkly into the dawn
of our mourning.

You can sing as long as you can and never be heard; you must be heard to be understood. I wonder how long anyone can sing without knowing if they are just peopling the darkness with imagination or if they are really, truly touching someone?

My words are here for the reading. I hope that here you will find the shadow that capers in the corner of your vision, the song that you woke trying to remember in the dawning darkness, and the color that eluded addition to the canvas waiting in the closet.

I tried to touch you.
Did you feel it?
ENDNOTES


4. Ibid., p. 253.

5. Ibid., p. 282.

6. Ibid., p. 133.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 120.


10. Ibid., p. 401.

11. Ibid., p. 407.

12. Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY