THE SELF AND THE STATE: DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT

CHAPTER IV

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_The Great American Novel_ is a text where the convergence of aesthetics and history takes place. Wordsmith, the "four score and seven" year old narrator, is engaged with the problem of locating his self, the text, and the experiential reality within the corpus of a re-created "history as heinous as any ordered by a tyrant dictator abroad" (GAN 12, 26). In his own words it is a text about what America did to himself and the baseball fraternity called the Patriot League. The baseball expeditions of the League form the referent of the narrative discourse. Baseball apparently assumes a tropological form with "referential productivity" (De Man 69).

Within the text the verifiable incidents get discursively diffused into fiction and autobiography. Self-portraiture, referential medium, and technical demands weigh down upon Smitty who seems to be "burning with a truth that everyone else denies" (GAN 32). The narrative appears to be structured in the epic tradition. The "Prologue" parodies and discusses the tradition of writing a grand narrative on America with either allusions to or participant conversations of Chaucer, Hemingway, Hawthorne, Twain and Melville. Smitty, tries to counter the "craziness of reality" with the "craziness of fantasy" cast from a tropological memory (Watson 108). He finds himself
faced with a heterogeneity of conflicting discourses on the great American narrative. He desires to make it possible to effect a "rupture" with the dominant discourse and a "rapprochement" with the one that is yet to come into reality (Silverman 31).

The reality of Hester Prynne's stigma symbolized by the letter 'A' is parodied as 'R' which stands for Ruppert Mundys, a prominent team that plays for the League. Hucklebury Finn's echo could be perceived through the picaresque mode of narration and the aberrant actions and speeches of the players. A tropological parallel seems to exist between Smitty's discursive voyage and that of Ahab's fictional tryst with Moby Dick.

The 'Prologue' as a topic comment unit of the text presents the narrator - self's attempt to map a synecdochic self of American polity. The haunting image that occupies the imaginative centre of the discursive venture is Smitty's dying body that is housed in the "'State Home for the Aged, the Infirm, the Despondent, the Neglected, the Decrepit, the Incontinent, the Senile, and the Just About Scared to Death [...]" (GAN 31). It is this trope that seems to give coherence and meaning to the scattered and trivial concerns of the text. It illuminates the anxieties and contradictions of a perplexing socio-cultural problem in modern America: the problem of how America should imagine itself as a nation and how it should be imaged as a social entity. Smitty examines whether any adequate image of America is available.
The image of society organizes the subjectivity of individuals and makes possible the reproduction of society, or, with the advent of new images, the construction of a different society. Smitty's text appears to embody a mythical imagination. He locates the narrative within the "demythologizing decade" of the 1960's (Watson 113). A long drawn conflict ensues out of the text's "journalistic myth making" (Watson 114). It is the conflict between a national myth and an insidious reality. The text also concerns itself with the task of undoing what a generation of sports writers had jointly conspired and executed for the complete obliteration of the construct of a great American myth.

The narrator-subject attempts to find appropriate tropes of nationhood by which he could salvage a mythical consciousness, or, with the advent of new images, construct a different society. The text tries to live up to this ideological challenge that is a far-reaching issue in the America of the sixties. Terence N. Bowers remarks that "the emergence of new images promoted alternate ways of envisioning the nation as a social construct, and facilitated the advancement of traditionally undervalued social groups as well as the potential demotion of formerly powerful groups" (557). Smitty's project is aimed at demoting the corrupt and the malicious elements of a degenerate society.
By a tropological historiography, he envisions American society as a horizontally organized one whose builders of order and morality are subjects engaged in mundane activities tropally represented by those within the Patriot league. The fabula of a rag-tag collection of teams seems to serve as a backdrop to re-integrate the mythical imagination of a body-politic which had been "wilfully erased from the national memory" (GAN 26).

By comic artistry, sports becomes politics and politics becomes sports. Donald G. Watson observes about the non-structuredness of the text as "the freewheeling nature of associative logic and imaginative inventiveness" (108). This becomes a discursive device to salvage the sensibility of a nation that has been trivialised by a self-seeking grossness of capitalist economy. America was fast becoming a commercial empire, an advanced capitalist society founded on "the rhetoric of delusion" and "dishonest manipulation of language" (Jones and Nance 148). The new social types and formations generate an anxiety that underscores the need for an image of nationhood. This is to enable one to gain a control over the developments taking place. Bowers maintains that "establishing a dominant image of the nation would enable one to evaluate change properly so that it could either be impeded or accelerated according to one's model of nationhood" (578).

Smitty makes use of the logic of farce and remains responsive, as Roth states, to the "unsocialized" elements. (RMAO 76). A tropological plane is
created on which religion, baseball, patriotism and governmentality become interchangeable. They appear to subvert the serious values of literary culture and those of the narrator's self. The narrator subject subtly directs his "blasphemous assault" on the "Cold War years" that had "to bear the full brunt of the mass media and advertising" (RMAO 88). Smitty's text attempts to evolve a counter-text and counter-mythology through a discursive conflict with the daemonic reality of "disorder, upheaval, assassination, and war". The fictional discourse is characterized by a bizarre historiography that encapsulates "a continuum between the credible incredible and the incredible credible" (RMAO 91). The writer-subject descends into the unreality of speeches, scandals, idiocies and pieties that permeate the Patriot League. It was once a rallying point of common loyalties and enthusiasms. Along with its fascinating lores, legends, strategies and heroics, baseball had fostered a patriotism that was more humane than the sloganized one of partisan politics. The game gets transmuted into a figurative plane where many binaries are staged and comically interrogated. The text generates meanings through the media of grotesquery, distortion and incongruity. The "slang and brag" of America get foregrounded for undermining the malicious reality of contemporaneity (Pinsker, *Comedy* 85).

The dominant image of American nationhood to which Smitty subscribes is not that of the land but the body. The body trope might have appealed to the narrator because it, as Bowers states, expressed the notion
that "society was not a level, horizontally organized entity, not an open space to which all had access, but a stratified, hierarchically ordered entity that was yet unified" (578). The ancient image of society, like Smitty's own body seems to have lost vitality as a master trope. Smitty's narrative intervenes in the ideologically charged issue of imaging the nation by making use of the body metaphor as a way of assessing the severe social problems afflicting late twentieth century America. The very notion of a body politic-the industrial, paternalistic way of life it underwrites-is called into question. Smitty tries to understand and cope with the dissolution of his own body and the dissolution of the social body that had so long sustained him and to which he had given so much. He seems to get exalted to the stature of an "all-American boy or girl" and "he has become the Ahab of American sports writing" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 11,131).

Within the matrix of the narrative the world of sport gets equated to that of writing. The talk between Smitty and Hemingway on a fishing boat calls the latter's "all American skill and sexual prowess into question". Hem becomes the narrator's father-mentor for he too fishes for the great American novel that requires "the greatest courage, technical skill, and manliness to write" (GAN 124). In the experimental venture to fabricate a weaponry of a defensive discourse the individual self gets subtly coalesced with the social group. The history of the text is the history of a characteristic American group. The state of an individual subject-in crisis/process forms the main
concern of the discourse. It is governed by an insider/outside dyadic phenomen. The narrator-self's task is not to bear "witness to the true shape of his culture's values, fears, and dreams, but as that of confronting the political decisions that define its shapes and possibilities in the first place" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 123). The "logorrheic octogeneraian sports writer" gets reduced to an alien in his own land where he contends with the corrupting power of rhetoric and the loss of natural innocence (Edwards 437).

The second topic-comment structure under which the relevant semes of the text are going to be analysed is the pattern of ungoverned appetites and the construct of a civil society. Smitty frames the way the reader is to picture America as a nation. He also seeks to control how one should think of his self. His body gets narrated not as a signifier of shame, but as a site of social conflict in which he becomes a casualty:

And just who is Word Smith? Fair enough. Short-winded, short-tempered, short-sighted as he may be, stiff-jointed, soft-bellied, weak bladdered, and so on down to his slippers, anemic, arthritic, diabetic, dyspeptic, sclerotic, in dire need of a laxative, as he will admit to the first doctor or nurse who passes his pillow, and in perpetual pain (that's the last you'll hear about that), he's not cracked quite yet [. . .]. (GAN 13)
He is a martyr-subject and hero in a larger process of societal breakdown wherein he contemplates himself as an "archaic" in his own century and a "humorous relic" in his own land and "a doornail while still drawing breath" (*GAN* 17).

The narrative frames into focus a world in which the basic organic structures appear to verge on a great collapse. The fundamental categories of the organic seem to lose their firmness. Body and orality become two tropal devices by which the narrator explores how society nourishes and orders itself. Since the tropes partake of both nature and culture, they constitute the crucial point where the objectified participants first construct categories such as wholesome/unwholesome, decorous/indecorous, and normal/abnormal, and then begin to fashion themselves as social beings.

The breakdown of categories—both organic and social—are tropologically encoded on the player's bodies where the lower stratum continually invades the upper. All physical aberrations that Smitty chronicles are apparently bodily transgressions that reflect social transgressions. The Mundy team had a motley group of pitchers, "every last one of them flabby in the middle, arthritic in the shoulder, bald on the top" (*GAN* 143). The first unit entitled, "Home Sweet Home" records the decline of the Ruppert Mundys through a series of physical abnormalities. Gil Gamesh, out of revengefulness towards the umpire throws a ferocious fast pitch that hits Masterson, on the
Adam's apple and destroys his voice forever. Gil Gamesh is banished from baseball. The fourteen year old Damur weighing just ninety two pounds was once knocked "so high and so far that the center-fielder, Roland Agni, came charging in to make a sensational diving two-handed catch of the boy" (GAN 116). The umpire who initially declares him out, later reverses the decision as he realizes that it is the ball that has to be caught but not the player. Again, Big John's legacy is described as notorious. His father Spit Baal delivered the ball so "juicy that by the end of an inning the catcher had to shake himself off like a dog come in from romping in the rain" (GAN 120). The "stringy stuff" that the pitcher used was usually saliva, phlegm, mucus or ear-wax (121). Spit's career comes to an abrupt close by an outrageous violation of the law of baseball decency. When he finds his pitches being hit hard and the crowd booing he resorts to the mischief of urinating on the ball. The next pitch of the "pissball" makes "hairpin turns and somersaults" and "it shifted gears four times, halving then doubling its velocity each fifteen feet it traveled" (GAN 123).

Perceptibly enough, in addition to the body, a critical area of conflict is the mouth. Bowers believes that it has an "inherently ambivalent place and function in the body"(583). As a part from the head, the mouth is an essential organ of the intellect. An oblique tropological correspondence seems to have been built between the corporeal constitution of player-participants and the communal constitution. Mouth becomes an unstable and contested zone
where the upper and lower regions of the body are in conflict. The bodily abnormalities seem to produce a ripple effect in the social body. The mouth, as an orifice, exposes the body to the outside. It also represents one of the several points of entry to social units. Hothead or Hot Ptah is the most despised of the Mundy lot. With just one "leg made out of wood" he moves about with a crabby disposition (GAN 127). A perfect match to him is Bud Parusha with only one stump of an arm. Sometimes when he catches the fly-ball it gets stuck in his jaws. Then two fielders would have to perform the task of extracting it resulting in "an inside-the-mouth grand-slam home run" (GAN 135).

The significance of the mouth lies in its contradictory use as a means of either sociability or aggression. The stratum of the body (and the body politic) that controls the mouth determines whether it serves as an instrument of civility or violence. Significantly, incidents of oral aggression disrupt and undermine the behavioural discipline of the League.

Incessant haggling by the players forms a prominent tropal action in the narrative. The oral excesses get manifested in various ways like spitting, swearing and crudeness of speech. The player-participants in the narrative indulge in swaggering and ostentatious comportments that are often hyperbolic. The nineteen year old Greenback pitcher Gil Gamesh rubs the ball in his "enormous paws" and announces loudly to the batter: "'You
couldn't lick a stamp. You couldn't beat a drum. Get your belly button in there, bud, you are what I call duck soup' " (GAN 68). He is up in arms most of the time against the umpire, Mike, and his "booming voice had earned him the monicker ' the Mouth' " (GAN 71). In almost all the matches wordy duels assume the pattern of another game between Mike and Gil Gamesh:

'So's to make sure', said Gil, his voice rising to a piercing pitch, 'so's to make sure the old geezer standin' behind you hadn't fell asleep at the switch! JUST TO KEEP THE OLD SON OF A BITCH HONEST!'

'one and two', Mike roared. 'play!'

'JUST SO AS TO MAKE CLEAR ALL THE REST WAS EARNED!'

'Play!'

'BECAUSE I DON'T WANT NOTHIN' FOR NOTHIN' FROMYOUSE! I DON'T NEED IT! I'M GIL GAMESH! I' M AN IMMORTAL, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT!'

'PLAY BAWWWWWWWWWW!' [. . .]

no, he was a human being, made of piss and vinegar. . . petty, grudging, vengeful, gloating, selfish, narrow, and mean. (GAN 80)

The oral duel reaches its climax when Mike turns his back on the final pitch of the most magnificently pitched game ever recorded. Infuriated, Gil
throws a rising fastball that hits Mike "the Mouth" in the mouth and reduces him, instantly, to a mute. Gil Gamesh is thereby banished forever from organized baseball.

In the unit entitled, "Every Inch a Man", the narrative begins with Frank Mazuma, the Kakoola team owner signing the midget, Bob Yamm as a pinch hitter who "presented the pitcher with a strike zone not much larger than a matchbox" (GAN 210). The irony and humour is stretched to such an extent that the issues raised involve human rights and equality. Yamm raises the serious question at the press conference as to how "the powers that be have threatened to pass a law at the next annual winter meeting" banning anyone under "forty eight inches" from playing in the League (GAN 211). The questions further raised at the radio interview with Mrs. Bob Yamm regard midgets' housing, food, entertainment, morality and family life. The drama of midgets reaches a climactic pitch when another midget, O.K. Ockatur is introduced as a pitcher into the team resulting in a war between men with professional jealousy: "The sight of Yamm wearing a smaller number than his own made him wild with anger [. . .] why, if Yamm was number $\frac{1}{4}$ then he should be $\frac{1}{8}$, if not $\frac{1}{16}$! " (GAN 219). The newspaper reports come out with torrents of wordy stories and ask with suspicion: "Yes, a country at war hungers for distractions of a strange sort, but I ask you, my fellow Americans: how much of this strangeness are we built for? " (GAN 229).
Donald G. Watson perceives in all this an America, with its image as a "Land of Opportunity", bringing out the best in "the fourteen-year-old ninety-two pound second baseman, the one-legged catcher, the fifty-two-year-old third baseman, the one-armed outfielder" and the forty-inch tall Bob Yamm (114). Not only does Yamm become a success, the entire nation and all American midgets take him to their hearts. But his opponent Ockatur, angry over the fate of being confined to a dwarfish body, blinds his rival with a high inside fastball. Watson further states that "Yamm represents the benign national myth" and Ockatur "the suppressed reality which will always resist idealised mythology" (Watson 115).

An overall analysis of these semes and tropes reveal that passion dominates over reason. The accumulation of such instances of aggressive, unregulated orality constitutes an index of the deterioration of civil society itself. The League is represented as a society composed not of reasoning players taking part in mutually beneficial intercourse, but of players with ungoverned appetites engaged in hostile forms of interaction.

The intellectual and civilizing organs of the body politic are being progressively run over and rendered inoperative by the lower elements. Social intercourse becomes less polite and downright savage. The body politic unwittingly but systematically devours itself. The break-down of the elemental categories of nature finds its parallel in collapsing social categories.
The taxonomic collapse causes even a complete effacement of fundamental differences. "A society", states Bowers, "that is unable to sustain difference is one that will collapse in upon, prey upon, and ultimately feed upon itself" (586). The picture that Smitty delineates at both micro and macro levels—-at both the level of the body natural and the body politic- is that of a devouring, self-consuming organism that literally eats itself alive.

The Mundys who were once honoured at every Patriot League city are now ushered on board a vehicle borrowed from the sanitation department. The welcome music played for them at every stadium on their entry was "Home on the Range", by Gene Autry, the favourite of President Roosevelt. The tragicomicality about the Ruppert Mundys is that its present is recorded in stark contradiction to its rich past. The once noble ball-club, with superstars like Luke Gofannon, Base Ball and Smoky Woden, is now "degenerated into the sad sacks of organized baseball" (Pinsker, *Comedy* 93). Patriotism gets uneasily combined with big profits when the owners lease the Mundy Park for fast cash:

'They have been chosen because glorious Mundy is dead and his heirs are scoundrels! Mammon, Mister Fairsmith, that is who is behind the move! The love of money! The worship of money! And what is more disgusting, they cloak their greed in the stars and stripes! They make a financial killing and call it a patriotic act!
And where is God in all this, Mister Fairsmith? Where is He when we need Him! (106-107)

The players find themselves paraded through streets in garbage trucks. They become a ragged lot with a one-legged catcher, one-armed Pitcher and a group of such other players who Smitty painfully describes as "the has-beens, might-have been, should-have-beens, would-have-beens, never-weres and never-will-be" (GAN 143). The stable categories seem to dissolve within the text. The collapse of basic categories and the inability to maintain distinctions are fraught with social implications. If distinctions dissolve on the plane of nature, they will break down on the plane of society, especially if one subscribes to an organic model of social order. To the Mundy manager, Ulysses S. Fairsmith, a ball park is "that place wherein Americans may gather to worship the beauty of God's earth, the skill and strength of His children, and the holiness of His commandment to order and obedience" and they are "the twin rocks upon which all sport is founded" (GAN 101).

The totality of disorderly physical characteristics seemingly represent a body politic that has itself lost all shape, form and order. The Patriot League itself is metaphorised as a huge body going through a series of disruptive and intestinal conflicts. It becomes an "open space of choice and liberty" where unreason gets pitched against reason. Smitty and the participant-narrators, Fairsmith and General Oakhart establish their ideals on the basis of the trope
of "a fundamental choice as a condition of the exercise of reason" (Miller 112). The two participant-narrators try to locate unreason in a socio-historical context. Unreason gets situated in a milieu where the player's relation with his feelings, with time, with others are altered. Abnormality becomes possible because of everything which, in man's life and development, is a break with the immediate. Unreason seems to reside not in the player himself but in his milieu. Miller further maintains that, "The human milieu was the condition of possibility of all madness" (119). The text seems to create fragmented spaces and structures of moral discontinuity. The reader is confronted by "a variety of separate and homogeneous domains" (122). Fairsmith and Oakhart seem to represent the subject's gaze directed toward unreason as an object to be known.

At the centre of Smitty's complaint about the collapse and self-consumption of the body politic lies a profound disquiet with the development of a possessive individualism. The narrative addresses itself to the fundamental changes that involve both how the subject is defined and how a subject's relation to society is construed. These could be analysed by suturing the various tropes that focus upon the gross materialistic trends of capitalism and barbarism in the text. The units, "In the Wilderness" and "The Temptation of Roland Agni" (in two segments), seem to establish a homology of tropes that signify the disintegration of the League and its enshrined values
by the base acquisitive urges of team owners. The first unit opens with Gene Autry classic song:

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,

Where the deer and the antelope play,

Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,

And the skies are not cloudy all day. (GAN 150-151).

As a Roosevelt favourite, the song is played to welcome the Mundys to each of the six Patriot League cities. The song is selected by Gen. Oakhart's secretary to "strengthen the idea that the fate of the Mundys and of the republic were inextricably bound together" (GAN 150). When the city garbage truck carrying the Mundys goes around, Hothead is outraged: "'Why, it looks to me like they are carting us off to the city dump! It looks to me as if they are about to flush us down the bowl! [...] It looks to me like a violation of the worst sort there is of our inalienable human rights such as are guaranteed in Declaration of Independence to all men including Ruppert Mundys!'" (GAN 151).

The Mundys' many and varied experiences in the unit seem to have a semic pattern that cumulatively builds up the image of a body politic which is fragmented, and atomized. Gen-Oakhart finds himself at an interstice between residual and emergent notions of selfhood and society. He struggles to understand and re-member a body politic that seems splintered
into countless antagonistic fragments: "[. . .] they were shortly to begin to partake of the suffering that was the daily bread not just of the wretched of the earth, but of the wretched of the wretched" (GAN 155).

The Mundys play out their season during America's war against the menace of Hitler's fascism. They are "homeless and unloved, denied even the possibility of returning home," and they represent "the reverse side of the heroic mythologising of the national character" (Watson 113). The sjuzet of this unit demythologises the sanctity of an established ideology and also exposes the poverty of American culture perpetrated by expedient journalists and capitalists who care little for baseball's integrity. Against this backdrop of an emotional vacuum the reader can place the actions of the "Moms" who adopt the Mundys after their loss to the Kakoola Reapers. The Mundy Moms adopt the players and turn them into little dependent kids—bathing them, spoon-feeding them, and putting them in to bed. They are the "three elderly ladies, wrinkled little walnuts in identical hats, shoes, and spectacles" (GAN 165). The Mundys are ushered as guests to receive their warm hospitality. The "self appointed 'Moms' " accost them expressing concern for their well-being: "You poor boys! How you must miss your sisters and your wives! Who sews your buttons? Who darns your socks? Who turns your collars and sees after your heels and your soles?" (GAN 166). The players set out across Kakoola and reach the "'Cradle of Civilization' " where they are "undressed and bathed, toweled down, powdered, diapered and encased" and kissed good
night (GAN_168, 171). They trade in hospitality services. The cheapest one they have is a "'Rock-a Bye-Baby' for ninety-eight cents" (GAN 172). The "Moms" themselves are a part of the national culture that contributes to the patriotic spirit at a crucial juncture in history. The "Mom" asks Nickname: "Where's my loyalty to the wonderful people who come here to spit pea soup in my face? And what about the boys going off to war-how can I be so unpatriotic?" They claim themselves to serve by "cleaning the mess out of the diapers" of anyone who has "fifteen bucks" and is looking for "a good time" (GAN 174). Maintenance of physical well-being seems to be the object of this kind of maternal care that, gets advertised and sold in a war-torn capitalist economy. The text exploits the comic possibilities inherent in the human body. Physical discomfort and scatology are humorously centred in the narrative. The bodily functions and animal qualities in humans get figuratively transmuted into the comic order of the grotesque and macabre. The "Mum" soothes Nickname with the sensuous smear of her body: "She placed her buttocks against the bars of the crib. 'Feel how nice and firm that is. And look at my face-not a wrinkle anywhere. Not a gray hair on my head. And that isn't from the beauty parlor either. That's natural. I just do not age [ . . . ] 'The Eternal mom' " (GAN 173-174). On the tropological level, the language in such narrative segments are redundant with what Bernard F. Rodgers would describe as "homely images, animal metaphors, vernacular speech and descriptive exaggeration" (17).
Frank Mazuma, the motivated owner of the Reapers declares May 5, 1943, as 'Ladies Day' to enliven the "skimpy crowd" (158). The play is interrupted by a "dolled up lady" who leaps to the ground and starts her pranks with the ball players. The people in the crowd "converge upon the blond bombshell, piercing wolf whistles mixed with obscene threats" (GAN 158). Bathos comes when the cops charge after her yelling, "She ain't no lady!" Side by side with the realistic depiction of common place scenes the sjuzet gets coloured by details from the world of fantasy. The fantastic world of hilarity remains as an overall pattern of individual units and segments. The text progresses through the binary worlds of reality and fantasy. Mundane circumstances and heroic ideals are sutured together to form structures of incongruity. Smitty portrays the grotesqueries and myths of a society that has been carried away by a new set of outrageous ideals. Frank Mazuma seems to have the subjectivity of a capricious employer who delights in the gimmicks and hypes of exhibitionism. He plans to introduce commercially oriented changes in organised baseball: "[. . .] selling off all the white boys and bringing niggers in to replace them!" (GAN 160). His ambition is to become the "Abe Lincoln of big league ball (GAN 161). One of such ambitious projects he undertakes is a series with the inmates of the mental asylum in the countryside of Ohio:

[. . .] as the General simply would not hear of abandoning a practice that brought public attention to the humane and
compassionate side of a league that many still associated with violence and scandal, the tradition was maintained year after year, much to the delight of the insane, and the disgust of the ballplayers themselves. (GAN 187)

The game becomes a site of eccentric actions which get exhibited for fun and entertainment. The lunatic catcher squats behind the plate and offers signals to the pitcher to pitch the ball the way he fancies. When on the "sixteenth signal" the pitcher neglects him he calls the "four players up on the mound" and "in his mortification" continues "to flash from between his legs". The pitcher calls Doctor Traum to come to his rescue as he feels that he has been misunderstood and the signal flashed is for him "to meet him later in the shower" for a homosexual escapade (GAN 194). This act seems to be a reflection of polymorphic sexuality or perversity that gets manifested for entertainment and delight of the crowds. Baseball with the Asylum players seems to reveal the oblique tactics by which a capitalist society impinges upon "forms of pleasures, of relationships, co-existences, attachments, loves and intensities" (Foucault, Politics 116).

All actions in the Asylum form a catalyser to indirectly focalize the relations of power that make even perverse comicality productive and profit-oriented. With little indulgence in psychologizing, much of the narrative
employs the tropes of masculine pastimes, physical discomfort and popular myths. Rodgers's critical statement relevantly amplifies this idea:

Midgets, dwarfs, dimwits, cripples, one-armed and one-legged characters swarm through the pages of *The Great American Novel*, and typically tasteless – and hilarious – fun is made of their physical maladies. At the same time, prostitution, vaginal odors, sexual perversity, urination, flatulence, and various forms of physical pain are freely and comically treated in ways designed to offend the squeamish. (16)

Incongruity arises not by a celebration of physical prowess but by a hyperbolic treatment of "superhuman ineptitude" (16). Episodes and anecdotes are fostered in the picaresque narratives where the collective indulgence of the Ruppert Mundys becomes the principle of integration. The thumbnail portraits of players with sharp comic details and direct quotations, are quite becoming of Smitty's narrative with the tempo of a mock oral tale:

But now in the top of the second, though he continued to gobble up everything hit to the left of the diamond, as soon as he got his hands on the ball he proceeded to stuff it into his back pocket [. . .] the rest of the Lunatic infield would begin screaming at him to take the ball out of his pocket and make the throw to the first. 'What?' he responded, with an innocent smile. 'The ball!' they cried. 'Yes,
what about it? 'Throw it!' 'But I don't have it?' 'You do!' They would scream converging upon him from all points of the infield, 'You do too!' (GAN 191)

As the Lunatic shortstop pockets the ball the Mundys capitalize on his kleptomania by scoring more runs. Dr. Traum intervenes by talking to him "steadily for fifteen minutes, their faces only inches apart" and then the ball is recovered and thrown back (GAN 192). Such anticlimactic anecdotes colour the deformed coherence of the narrative. They, to a considerable extent, set the ground rules for Smitty's exercise of story telling by which he gets entangled with the powers of his social world.

America begins to look disturbingly similar to some of the barbarous oppressive nations. The narrative also problematizes the distinction between the civilized and the barbarous. The firmness of this distinction too does not seem to hold. This too collapses and the society appears to be headed toward civil regression, tyranny and barbarism. Such kind of a degenerate action could be discerned in Mister Fairsmith's expedition to the state of barbarous practices in Africa. He succeeds in teaching the niceties of the national pastime but is disappointed over the savages who commit blasphemy upon all the sacredly held customs of the game: "In Africa, I would have martyred myself rather than permit those savages to sully the national game. Why, why is this happening!" (GAN 335).
The reality that Mister Fairsmith encounters in Africa twenty years earlier has, in his view, a close bearing with what happens to the Mundys in 1943. It was the horrific culmination of his world trip undertaken, with the object of proselytizing for the national pastime in different countries. He was accompanied by Billy, his nephew, a young theology scholar. With the equipment donated by the school kids of Ruppert, Fairsmith trains the village tribals of Africa in "the fundamentals of hitting, bunting, catching, pitching, fielding, baserunning, sliding, and umpiring" (GAN 320). Trouble erupts over the denial of the right to "slide into first after having been awarded a base on balls", a movement that is against the game's conventional rules (GAN 325). The tribal leader refuses to be enslaved by the white man's "arbitrary structures designed to rob them of their inalienable cultural rights" (GAN 324). When Fairsmith is adamant about the rules both of them are condemned as enemies and "bound by their wrists and ankles to stakes driven into the coaching boxes, Mister Fairsmith at third, young Billy Fairsmith at first" (GAN 326). Then a series of odd baseball rituals are staged before them in successive phases. With the ritualistic chant "'Oomoo! Oomoo! Oomoo!'" the balls are boiled and thrown for the tribal children to eat (GAN 328). After they devour the balls, the winner is hailed "Typee! Typee! Typee!". Then the "hitting-contest" begins with the head of a killed "enemy, or traitor" that "appeared to them to be as easy as pie" (GAN 329). Next in the series is the ceremony of deflowering the virgins with baseball bats. Every initiate takes
her turn in the batter's box, and the "bat was used but once and then discarded". Then to follow is the hearty feast where the villagers devour all the boiled thirty-six gloves and the "chest-protectors were boiled for dessert" (GAN 331). Late in the night the "crones of the village, bone-thin women" ape and re-enact the ceremony of the virgins. When all is over Mister Fairsmith gives out a faint cry, " 'The horror! The horror!' " (GAN 332). In the morning, the boy whom Fairsmith had Christened Wee Willie declares, " 'Mistah Baseball-he dead' " (GAN 333). Later the two Americans are discovered down a stream at Stanleyville, in a canoe bearing the tribe's symbol of death. They are rescued and taken to a hospital by the friendly natives.

In this kind of world, the subject is the proprietor of his own subjectivity or capacity, owing nothing to society or social convention. A subject is thus an autonomous independent self, free from others and free to enter into relations of his or her choice. The development of possessive individualism leads to social dismemberment. Such a society "encourages rapacious behaviour," as each individual subject "seeks to maximize his or her own advantage over others" even at the expense of general good (Bowers 588). A society comprised of possessive subjects is governed by competitive and invasive relations which put everyone on his own. Each subject becomes a pillager of one's fellow subjects and a tyrant too. Everyone continually competes for power against others. This is what is perceptible in the
relationship between Mister Fairsmith and Walter Johnson the tribal leader, who is named after an old time American baseball player:

'Pride he calls it? The men with spears? The women screaming like banshees? And from the looks of it, preparations underway for an outright act of cannibalism? That isn't pride in my look, and you may tell him as much!'

'But, Uncle, he says that though they will follow to the letter the rules of the white man's game, they refuse to be enslaved by arbitrary strictures designed to rob them of their inalienable cultural rights'. (GAN 324)

All social intercourse become a form of combat that debilitates the entire community and deprives it of the quality of human understanding. One to one communion is no more a facilitating factor that holds the social edifice in tact. Fairsmith and Johnson's actions are "a tiny manifestation of a larger pattern of cruel, predatory economic behaviour" that rips the social body apart (Bowers 589). The wretchedness of the whole scenario could possibly be perceived as a synecdochic trope of America's stagnant national prosperity and declining state of imperialistic hegemony.

Every relationship seems to get turned into a commercial relationship devoid of social content and subject to endless negotiation and dispute. The narrative unit, "The temptation of Roland Agni" stands out to exemplify this
proposition. The name echoes, as Sanford Pinsker would say, those of "Childe" and "Agonistes". Agni's body tapers "like the V for victory from his broad shoulders" and his physical prowess attracts Angela Trust, "the owner of the Tri-city team and an ex-nymphomaniac" (Comedy 97). She has had affairs with five superstars of baseball: Luke Gofannon, Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Jolly Cholly and Gil Gamesh. She considers her affairs with these men as the accomplishments she had made in her career as the wife of Spenser a "patron and patriarch" of sports and arts in America (GAN 281). In the course of her romantic career that is etched out alongside the history of Mundy team, she had been using her physical charms to keep the superstars enamoured of her: "Her face, her breasts, her lips, her thighs, for all that she had given them everything money could buy[. . .]" (GAN 275). Now when Roland Agni approaches her she is too old to woo him. But he wants her to take him into her team so he makes a bargain with his body: "My forearms and my wrists are like steel, Mrs. Trust. Want to feel them and see for yourself?" (GAN 270). She advises him to play for the Mundys if he loved his country. She lets out the secret about the "Communists in Russia" who are out to destroy the major leagues: "'Baseball! And that is how they propose to destroy America [. . .] that is their evil and ingenious plan to destroy our national game!'" (GAN 287).

Being turned down by Angela Trust, he approaches the Jewish owners of the Greenback team. Abraham Ellis phones up the Mundy front-office and
enquires about the expected price of the centre fielder. The Mundy receptionist quotes "'A cool qwata of a million'" dollars (GAN 310). Agni rebels against this bargain. He is hard put to realize the commercial value of players and the denial of one's personal right of choice and movement: "'I'm the greatest rookie of all time! [...] and a Jew and a nigger bargainin' for my hide!'" (GAN 309). Ellis consoles him that some day a better situation would come when Agni's body and his own brains could be harnessed together to make unprecedented strides and "'there'd be nothing like it in the history of the game'" (GAN 311). The right over one life too is appropriated by the media when the media, for sensation, reports about his suicide: "AGNI LEAPS FROM SCOREBOARD" (GAN 310).

Abraham Ellis the owner of the green backs and his son Isaac advance ideas of their own to buy Agni for their team and their ideas about ball-play are quite innovative. Isaac's theories on the method of playing the game are unconventional. With the same out of the way methods, he decides to help in the purchase of Agni. He claims to have secret patent right over a newly processed "Breakfast of Champions" or "Jewish Wheaties" which he himself had scientifically prepared in the secret laboratory under the Greenback scoreboard. Isaac claims that it could work wonders on the Mundys or any other team. He convinces Agni to spike his teammates breakfast cereal with them every morning. Then he plans to bet on the Mundys to win and thus raise the twenty, five lakh dollars needed to buy Agni. The strategy succeeds.
Rejuvenated, the Mundys go on a steady winning spree. Disaster strikes, however, on the last day of the season, when the Mundys play against the Tri-city Tycoons. The once jeered team is welcomed greatly into the stadium. Winning becomes more of an intoxicating religion for the teammates:
"Winning is the tops. Winning is the name of the game. Winning is what it's all about. Winning is the be-all and the end-all [. . .] " (GAN 314).

Disaster strikes fatally in front of General Oakhart, Fairsmit, Mountain Landis and Eleanor Roosevelt. As Agni loses his nerve he miserably fails on the ground. With great speculation Isaac had greedily betted every thing he had been able to earn so far. With all the winning chances on his side he had planned to buy Agni and his team's franchise too. But with every cent gone he has to go back to splitting atoms in his laboratory. Agni, out of consternation and disappointment finally abuses Isaac: "You're a dirty greedy money- mad mocky! You're a Shylock! You're a sheeny! You killed Christ! I'd rather be a nigger than be one of you! " (GAN 344).

In the unit of Agni's temptation, a persistent focalization takes place through confinement, stasis, and misdirection seems to set in. It is nefarious self-interest that governs the whole site of relationships and interactions. Every subject has some separate scheme of private interest to advance at the expense of general well-being. It is a site of permissive freedom to sell and to
act as possessive beings. When all are free no one is free. The problems encountered by Mister Fairsmith, Angela Trust, and Ellis appear to reflect a civil degradation that afflicts the body politic of a country.

Reconstructing the body politic becomes the fourth topic-comment structure under which the relevant tropes of the text are going to be analysed again. One can detect a homology between Smitty's attempts to reshape the body of his writing on the Patriot League and his effort to put order into the body politic of the baseball establishment. The War Department depopulates Cooperstown and attracts hordes of aberrant elements. The last unit, "The Return of Gil Gamesh; Or, Mission from Moscow," includes a series of "death rattles (assassinations, suicides, airplane crashes) and subsequent investigations by a witch-hunting Senate Committee into the notorious "Mundy Thirteen". Word Smith is held in contempt [...] and sentenced to a year in penitentiary" (Pinsker, *Comedy* 101).

Smitty narrates a Mundy establishment that is bloated into a huge misshapen mass creating physical, moral and socio-political disorder. The most potent trope of this disorder is the narrative text on the fictive reality itself which Smitty ambitiously wants to call *The Great American Novel*. The "Epilogue" of the text, as Pinsker would affirm, is "a study in illusion-reality, part of his ongoing effort to separate genuine vision from mere paranoia, truth from the official lie our society tells" (*Comedy* 101). The epilogue comprises
a series of rejection slips that meta-narratively reveal the matter that the text, as a body, could not integrate itself into an organic and acceptable structure and be consummated through its own publication.

The last unit becomes a site for complete confusion of socio-politico categories and violation of moral boundaries. Gil Gamesh, after his re-entry as the Mundy Manager, tries out the methods of the communist regimentation in Russia from where he has a doctoral degree in indoctrination and espionage. Ironically enough, the "International Lenin School for Subversion, Hatred, Infiltration, and Terror in Moscow" is known by the popular acronym "SHIT." He is back home with a contradictory ideology and conviction: "All my life I found my strength in rancorous resentment, but only after my banishment from baseball did I plunge headlong into a barbarous world of violence and vengeance, and dedicate myself wholly to destroying what had destroyed me" (GAN 354). America is described to be a sagging body "on its last legs" where the parodied communist dictum, "From each according to his stupidity, to each according to his greed" rules the roost (GAN 355,359). Gamesh's construct of American competition and baseball greatly resembles his fanatical version of communism. His rhetoric gets attuned by a bizarre combination of "American competition" and "Communist propaganda" (Jones and Nance 150). His inspiring speech to the Mundys advocates an uncompromising ideology grounded in human hatred and it runs like a rhetoric of indoctrination: "You are scum because you do not hate your
oppressors you are slaves and fools and jellyfish because you do not loathe your enemies" (*GAN* 371). Roland Agni dons the Mundy uniform once again bearing the letter 'R' which instead of "'Ridiculous' and 'Refugee'" now stands for "'Ruthless and Revenge'" (*GAN* 381).

The memorandum prepared by Gil Gamesh, the "Chief Investigator, Patriot League Internal Security Affairs Division" indicts almost all the star players as either communist agents or fellow travellers: O.K. Ockatur, Hothead Ptah, Frenchy Astarte, Big John Baal, Chico Mecoatl, Deacon Demeter, Jolly Cholly Tuminikar, Nickname Damur and the others.

What transpires at the conversation between Gamesh, and Agni is that the ballgame is reduced to "'Latin', threatenin', and cursin' it's wantin' to kill the other guy, wantin' him dead [. . .]" (*GAN* 383). But to Agni, "'The Revolution has begun! Henceforth, the Mundys are the master race!'" (*GAN* 385). The long conversation between these two players turns out to be an exercise in mutual incrimination. During a game in Kakoola, Agni discovers Gamesh's plot to destroy the League and threatens to expose him. In return, Gamesh too raises a threat of blackmail involving the Jewish wheaties:

'You wouldn't want the world to know about those W-h-e-a-t-i-e-S, would you? [. . .] 'America?' said Gamesh, smiling. 'Roland, what's America to you? Or me, or those tens of thousands up in the stands? [. . .] America is the opiate of the people, Goldilocks – I
wouldn't worry my pretty little reflexes about it, if I was a star like you'. (GAN 392)

When charges are hurled upon each other two rifle shots ring out from the scoreboard. Agni falls dead and Gamesh is badly wounded. Mouth Masterson, the vengeful umpire is the assassin. But he immediately becomes the target of a volley of bullets from the Kakoola mounted police. Hilarity is taken to the extreme point when only Mike's ear is grazed by the two hundred and fifty six bullets. He actually falls dead of the heart attack caused by "the excitement of the assassination" attempt (GAN 393). Anticlimax and incongruity reign supreme at this juncture where the whole of Patriot league and its history are about to be obliterated from the social psyche. Roth himself claims no satiric value for the narrative as its intrinsic value is not social or cultural reform, but "to establish a kind of passageway from the imaginary that comes to seem real to the real that comes to seem imaginary, a continuum between the credible incredible and the incredible credible" (RMAO 91).

The narrative deceptively stands at a middle point between the credible and the incredible. Bernard F. Rodgers tries to explain this by perceiving a sub text of historicity within itself:

The use of specific dates and recognizable historic personages lulls us into accepting the reality of Oakhart and the Patriot League
The aura of historical accuracy is maintained by mentioning Coolidge, Harding, Teapot Dome, and Commissioner Landis as factors in Oakhart's decision to accept the job as a stepping-stone to the presidency of the United States. (21)

Gamesh returns to Moscow and is seen on May Day posing next to Stalin in 1949 or Khrushchev in 1953. He is executed for being a double agent in March, 1954. General Oakhart takes up the cleansing operation to deliver the League from the clutches of Communist infiltrators and the Russian espionage racket:

As General Oakhart had promised, within the week thirty-six more Communists and Communist sympathizers were suspended from the Patriot league and their names released to the press: nine Reapers, eight Greenbacks, seven Keepers, six Butchers, four Blues, and two Rustlers [. . .]. Frank Mazuma and Abraham Ellis, as well as the Soviet 'courier', Ellis's wife Sarah. (GAN 398)

The general who runs for president on the Patriot Party mysteriously disappears during a flight on board a private aircraft in 1956. It is suspected to be a case of "Communist sabotage" (GAN 406). After the expulsion of the regular players chaos reigns in the League. High school boys are enlisted and as a result by the end, "there wasn't a team in the league, not even the
untainted Tycoons, who could draw more than three hundred people into the park to watch them play baseball" (GAN 399).

But the integration of such an anti-social thematic into the "conventional plot of juvenile sports fiction" is not complete without a suitable consummation of the narrative venture undertaken (Rodgers 21). Smitty's text has to be published if his truths are to prevail and be recognized as a part of non-canonical history. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill looks upon the discourse as Smitty's mission "to give the world a history that evil forces have suppressed-that of a forgotten major baseball organization, the Patriotic League [. . . ]" (222). To recapture the suppressed truth, Smitty deviates from temporal sequence and sutures the disparate semes of the fabula that suit his fictional chronicle(102,558),(924,921). The Judge Landis Commission that is entrusted with the task of cleansing the League and restoring its past glory only succeeds in sabotaging the whole establishment. The reformation of the body politic entails more than getting rid of a few bad apples and more than reinforcing relations of dominance, obedience and paternalist ways of life. So Smitty seems to be greatly concerned about alleviating Cooperstown of its dropsical condition. He, through his discursivity, attempts to find new structures that would be capable of dealing, on a macro scale, with the swelling hordes of masterless, rootless men. The need for such structures is paramount. As such Smitty finds it very hard "to participate in this lunatic comedy in which American baseball players who could not locate Russia on a map of the world
[... ]denounce themselves and their team-mates as Communist spies out of fear and intimidation [... ] out of incorrigible human perversity and curdled genes" (GAN 402). His defiance before the House Un-American Activities Committee earns himself a year's imprisonment at Lewisburg. There is hardly anyone to realize as to how he dramatizes contemporary reality. The narrative also brings into focus the relationship between experiential reality and art. Instead of reading as to how the phenomenon of his narrative functions, the readers tend to look upon him as a "paranoid fantasist" (Rodgers 19). Smitty is not a paranoiac but a narrator subject who attempts to re-member the body politic and thereby invent new institutional structures through his discourse. The Patriot league was once a web of obligations uniting the higher and the lower strata. But the live-in, duty-bound committed team-work has given way to a mobile, wage-earning, and increasingly urban workforce. The onset of commercialism and the greed for fast wealth and success become the major cause for shift in the pattern of operations. If the lower orders are responsible for the breakdown of the social order and traditional ways of life, the upper stratum is complicitous. Donald G. Watson observes that the text has a "literary past" that transmutes its discursive presence "as a stabilising element in the world of benign but bland ideology and rampant commercialisation and trivialisation of American mythology" (122).

Tropologically, if the body politic is being torn asunder by the self-directed conduct of its lower members, part of the reason is that there is no
head to direct them. Smitty obliquely emphasizes the head’s disconnection from the body and the need for just reform but a radical reconstruction of the body politic. The implication of the head’s complicity in the body’s disorders cannot be underestimated. The indictment of the managerial class gets manifested through the disconnection between the club managers and the players. In the end, instead of co-operation and face to face creative engagement between the upper and the lower participants, the body politic is held together by coercion, enforced sequestration and surveillance. The reconstructed anatomy of the League makes a grotesque mockery of the body trope, and therein seems to lie the pathos and ideological significance of Smitty's narrative venture: "Truly sir, I have never seen anything in sixty years of astonishment to compare with these shameful shenanigans [. . .]. Frankly, I still don't believe them. But for sheer unabashed, unabated, unabridged, unaccountable, unadorned, unalloyed, unamusing, unanticipated, unassailable—" (GAN 402).

But Smitty's narrative venture does not reach its consummation. The "Epilogue" shows that the text will never be published and thereby be recognized by the society. It is a new conspiracy of "a new persecuting group" comprised of twenty seven publishers who fob him off on flimsy grounds (Blair and Hill 222). David Monaghan is of the view that Smitty is the only subject in the novel "capable of understanding the truth about American life. No one else realizes that baseball operates according to the
profit motive, that the Mundys were exiled for economic rather than patriotic reasons, and that the Red Scare is a fake". The critic further adds that the text broadly works out that the theme of "innocence corrupted by materialism" at both the extremes of "local and archetypal levels". The end of the "vividly colored but one-dimensional" sjuzet is open and inconsummate (74).

Smitty writes to Chairman Mao Tse-tung of China to translate and publish *The Great American Novel* in his country. He allusively identifies his plight with that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in Russia who, like himself, "refuses to accept lies for truth and myth for reality" (*GAN* 410). Drawing "courage", "strength" and "wisdom" from his Nobel prize lecture, Smitty tries to survive in America: "'In battle with the lie', said Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, 'art has always been victorious, always wins out, visibly, incontrovertibly for all! The lie can stand against much in the world— but not against art' " (*GAN* 412).

The empty values of the Vietnam era become the focalised theme in *Our Gang*. The narrative is framed in the form of a grotesque dramatic discourse which becomes the site for a polyphony of specifically identified voices. The text is structured as a long drawn joke-work in which everyone plays "a preordained role" (*Baumgarten and Gottfried* 103). The President of the United States, Tricky E. Dixon orally indulges in a long commentary on the socio-politico context of his nation. His seemingly rational discourse
begins as "willful self deception" and gets concluded as "deliberate lying" (104). The proposition of deceptive language is the thematic upon which the narrative discourse is built. The two epigraphs bring out the problematic of the deceptiveness of language. The first is a statement on "Lying" and "false Representation" taken from "A Voyage to the Houhnyhms," the fourth book of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (*OG* 6). The second regards politics and the degeneration of language and it is a quote from George Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language". The text is perceptibly bracketed between these two epigraphs and a quote from the "Book of Revelation" that the devil "SHOULD DECEIVE THE NATION NO MORE [. . .]" (*OG* 142).

The text could well be considered as a satirical polemic on what Murray Baumgarten and Barbara Gottfried would consider as "deception and political lying" and "the disruption of American English by political corruption" (104). It is structured more like a playscript or movie scenario, redundant with dialogues and two exclusive units cast as dramatic monologues. Roth validates the narrative style by trying to place it as a joke-work in the tradition of American political satire. The text could so be read as an offshoot of the tradition well established in America by an array of comic writers like James Russell Lowell, David Ross Locke, and H.L. Mencken. The hyperbolic humour seems to be a fair extension of the broad comedy of Olsen&Johnson, Laurel & Hardy, and Abbot & Costello. Commenting on the ferocious comicality of the text, Jay L. Halio maintains that the fictional
strategy is to "dislocate" the readers and "get them to view familiar subjects in a different way" (104). The narrative rises to the level of an exercise in writerliness. This is mainly because warfare is the theme focalized in the narrative. Warfare, as a theme, could impose constraints upon structure for action, from a leader's point of view and indirection from that of a narrator's.

What becomes problematic to the subject in the narrative, according to the Jerome Klinkowitz, is the act of structuring and articulating the void itself that Vietnam had become for the nation of America (135). The writers, by late 1966, find Vietnam experience as "one of uncertainty in the face of disrupted forms and yet unanswered questions: why was this war neither fightable nor supportable in conventional terms?" (Klinkowitz 137). On looking around, the writers could find in "October 1966 that 150,000 American military personnel were stationed in Vietnam, where President Johnson paid a secret visit to urge them on". The theme of war gets transformed into a chimera like phenomenon. The writers experience an indirection and so they start employing different literary styles and devices to "structure the void." Forms employed turn structurally disruptive with little certainty of order, coherence and authority. The tradition of linear time, physical space and God like authorial presence is completely obliterated. Communicative potential of language itself is questioned. A vacuous space arises between the world and the words used to comprehend it. Kilnkowitz sums up the enigmatic phenomenon with a pertinent question: "Could it have
no centre of authority at all, meaning that everything would become not truth but just endless discussions of what truth might be – and never pretending for a minute to find it?" ('Klinkowitz, Structuring 137). It is at such a point that the thematic of Vietnam coincides with the experiential reality in America. The text and context are constrained to take into consideration three elements. First, the events taking place abroad; second the odd occurrence at home; and the third element is the principles of fictional composition. The text and context of *Our Gang* might generate more meaning if it is read with an understanding of these topical socio-cultural realities. The text gets to be established as a re-defined space where the relations between the literary, the bodily, and the political lack order and comprehensibility. The readerly authority over the matter that concerns a nation's political history appears to be subverted. This could be one reason why the text is bracketed within the three epigraphs on the theme of the abuse of words. The relation between fiction and history comes to form one of the main topics of concern on recognising that fiction is no more less real or serious than history. But it becomes all the more complex when one attempts to define the precise relation of fiction to the world of reality. The genre of historical novel, though traditionally conceived of as imaginative literature, offers explication of the mode in which reality gets transformed into fiction. The events and figures it uses are recognisably historical: “While the genre’s avowed fictionality and the notion of textuality implied by ‘recognition’ [ . . . ] might appear to place
this mode of writing in direct opposition to empirical history, its real life provenance would seem to link it directly with some version of historical discourse" (Raveendran 26). Surrealistic fantasies and topical fabula have been collated with inventive powers. *The Great American Novel* and *Our Gang* appear to embody a "fascination with conspiracy that was rampant in American culture during the early seventies" which is described as a demythologizing decade (Eiland 261). A strange voice of farcical unrealism seems to usurp all action in both the narratives. The over-ruling paradox is that these texts have to be, by historical inevitability, placed within the political context of specific reading groups. The reader is constrained to draw sense out of a reordered sequence of specific scenes or situations. Indignation and outrage over moral justification of the Vietnam War get sublimated into what Pinsker qualifies as "bromides of political rhetoric (*The Comedy* 73).

Both the texts are apparently pinned to an explosive political climate of the 1970’s. In "Writing and the Powers That Be," Roth harps upon the sense of man's alienation and the rise of the impetus towards irrational rhetoric: "One even began to use the word ‘America’ as though it was the name, not of the place where one had been raised and to which one had a strong spiritual attachment, but of a foreign invader that had conquered the country and with whom one refused, to the best of one's strength and ability, to collaborate" (*RMAO* 12).
Tricky Dixon, the actor-subject becomes the focal point around which all catalysers of the grotesque are attached. Roth draws a parallel between Tricky Dixon and Richard Nixon. The latter who is "known as a crook" in the "kitchen" is not simply a person taken as a model of deceit from the world of empirical reality (RMAO 11). He becomes more of a referent of "what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things" (88). The discourse generates humour out of a strange "disjunction between the American myth of presidential integrity and the political reality" (Jones and Nance 134).

The subtitle, "Starring Tricky and His Friends," is suggestive of the ambience of show business and tele-posturing. Tricky is trapped in a series of comic postures into which he has to fit himself. His is the discomfort of having to put up with "credible performances before indifferent audiences" (Milbauer and Watson 110). He appears to occupy a space of fragmented reality and unstable values. Richard Nixon's 1971 speech on anti-abortion expresses his "PERSONAL BELIEF IN THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE" (OG 10). It becomes a text that triggers off a series interpretations and counter interpretations. What gets thrown into relief is the discord between the good, the felicitous, the perfect and the bizarre realities of American vulgarity. President Nixon's inconsistent and flexible standpoint regarding China and human rights could be predicated to this parodic situation. In 1971, he had made much about his trip to China in glorious words. Roth
points out the callous expediency of his politics through a pungently worded rhetorical question: "And if it's suddenly okay with the United States for eight hundred million people in China not to be able 'to determine their own future in free elections,' why isn't it okay for a mere thirteen million more in Vietnam?" (RMAO 52). Dixon tries hard to justify before Mr. CATCH-ME-IN-A-CONTRADICTION as to how scientific a project is the one that is envisaged to extend voting rights to the human fetuses who have no faculties of speech, sight, hearing or thought:

It would be a tragic irony indeed, and as telling a sign as I can imagine of national confusion and even hypocrisy, if we were willing to send our boys to fight and die in far-off lands so that defenseless peoples might have the right to choose the kinds of government they want in free elections, and then we were to turn around here at home and continue to deny that very same right to an entire segment of our population, just because they happen to live on the placenta or in the uterus, instead of New York City. (OG 22-23)

The ideational self-contradiction is evident. The My Lai massacre and other killings in Vietnam get justified on a false pretext of establishing "free elections" but the right to life of fetuses protected out of a grave concern for human rights. His election rhetoric is obsessed with a hyperbolic concern for
bringing justice and equality to those "without representation or voice," and they are the "infinitesimal creatures up there on the placenta" (OG 18). In Tricky's perception there are millions of embryos going through different stages of evolution and they accomplish physical growth "without waving signs for the camera and disrupting traffic and throwing paint and using foul language and dressing in outlandish clothes" (OG 18). The President champions the cause of the unborn just as Martin Luther King and "Robert F. Charisma" champion the cause of the disadvantaged masses of the country. The latter is a parodied subject who is juxtaposed with a personality from real life freedom struggle. The text is infested with such semes of contradistinction and grotesquity. The language too is well synthesized with cadences, clichés and repetitions that are essential for building up the thematic tropes of deception. Tricky builds for himself a defensive discourse characterised by "outrageous twists in logic" and "pietistic language." In such a linguistically framed matrix could the reader place the interaction between Tricky and the "Troubled Citizen". The unnamed person is perturbed about Lieutenant Calley's role in My Lai massacre and the paradoxical anti-abortion statements that President Tricky makes. He strongly suspects that one of the twenty-two Vietnamese civilians killed is a pregnant woman. In response to his odd questions regarding his suspicions the President indulges in a long-drawn "sanctimonious double-talk that typifies much of his discourse
throughout the interview and the novel (Halio 105). The conversation leads into arduous twists of logic, charged with verbal pieties:

And may I make one thing more perfectly clear, while we're on the subject of Vietnam? I am not going to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. If President Thieu has sufficient evidence and wishes to try those twenty-two My Lai villagers posthumously, according to some Vietnamese law having to do with ancestor worship, that is his business. But I assure you, I in no way intend to interfere with the workings of the Vietnamese system to justice. (OG 11-12)

The interface between Tricky and the Citizen moves from seme to seme in such way that Tricky could make them all conform to his "conscience" and "refusal to do the popular thing" (OG 11). The two popular things the people at large expect him to do are to make a declaration in favour of abortion, and then to convict the twenty two unarmed civilians as partakers in the conspiracy to murder Lieutenant Calley. He attempts to hammer out an argument that his conscience is clear as he has not done these two popular things which "cannot square" with his "personal belief in the sanctity of human life, including the life of the yet unborn" (OG 16). The Citizen's mind is troubled that, probably, one of the women killed by Calley was pregnant, and in that case abortion would have been performed. Tricky promptly points
out that while "there were babies in that ditch at My Lai," there were no pregnant women (OG 12). Even if there had been one "there could have been no possible means of verbal communication" as Calley was an American. (OG 13). He could have had no means of knowing that a particular woman was not just stout but actually carrying a child. As such, Tricky, the lawyer, avers that Calley cannot be charged with facilitating abortion on demand. The implied irony is that the President condemns abortion but condones large-scale murder of innocent Vietnamese peasants. The syntactic convolutedness of Tricky’s rhetoric points to the absurdities rampant in American politics. George Orwell’s statement about language and reality seems to be well in place in this context: "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one’s real and one’s declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. [. . .]. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer" (97).

The appropriate words that come out of Tricky lack involvement in or commitment to a humanitarian mission. He seems to speak out of a "reduced state of consciousness" that is "favourable to political conformity" (Orwell 96). Tricky’s vision of eloquence seems to rely upon a model of speech incarnate. He appears to assume that the Citizen would be convinced by the physicality of his performance and would thereby believe in his logic. The confused Citizen, as a listener to Tricky’s discourse, is thrown between the
seductiveness of listening and the actual seduction of political discourse. Nothing helps him to interpret reality and get out of his puzzled thoughts. He finds that his judgement is sunk into imbecility and confusion. Tricky 's reactions seem to get piled one upon the other as an allegory of political discourse. Roth compares the ideological shifts of a whimsical ruler to those found in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The official spokesmen interrupt news broadcast at every session to inform "the people that their enemies are now their friends and their friends their enemies" (*RMAO* 51).

Tricky is overwhelmed by the sheer physicality of his participation in the polemic as he hopes the listeners would be by his own. His press conference is based on his "San Dementia statement of April 3" (*OG* 17). The representatives of the media who appear as listeners are "Mr. Asslick," "Mr. Daring," "Mr. Shrewd," "Mr. Charmin," "Mr. Catch -Me-in-a Contradiction," and "Mr. Fascinated." There seems to be no determinate value of signification for his words. They are without substantial meaning and are capable, like an algebraic symbol, of receiving any meaning whose only function is to close the gap between the signifier and the signified. Jerome Klinkowitz, in his essay, "Constraint: Vietnam," draws upon Roland Barthes, to point out that the rhetoric of "American 1960's" is still an enigma because "our traditional ways of understanding have become inadequate". The reader's presumption that "reality and rationality are interchangeable terms" has to be shed in toto to come to terms with Tricky's world of non-verifiable
logic (Klinkowitz 139). His official vocabulary on Vietnam affairs is axiomatic. This is to say that it has little value as communication, but only as intimidation:

If this Vietnamese woman presented herself to Lieutenant Calley for abortion [...] let's assume, for the sake of argument, she was one of those girls who goes out and has a good time and then won't own up to the consequences; unfortunately, we have them here just as they have them over there – the misfits, the bums, the tramps, the few who give the many a bad name[...]. (OG 14)

The language constitutes only a speech/writing that is meant to thrash out a coincidence between set standards and facts. It attributes a noble morality to a malicious reality. The discourse is framed at a time when the social fabric is splintered and thousands of soldiers and civilians perish in Vietnam. In 1966, when America was fighting in Vietnam, Barthes and Saussure, in Europe, were developing new "practices of linguistics" to study "how signs function in society" (Klinkowitz, Structuring 138). They emphasize the double referentiality of linguistic signs: firstly, cultural signs refer the reader to something else, and secondly, they refer to themselves. Klinkowitz points out that Barthes and Derrida "had seen their respective native lands at war in Algeria" (138). Barthes' essay, "African Grammar" tries to grapple with the official vocabulary on warfare which is quite similar
to that of America on Vietnam. Barthes goes on to explicate how the language of France regarding its war Algeria functions as a code (Klinkowitz 138). His message is that it is impossible to comprehend an experience "until the discourse that experience invalidates is cleared out of the way and replaced by a style of communication, pertinent to the matter at hand" (Klinkowitz 140). In the texts of Vietnam War, the reader finds himself faced by a challenge to capture the appropriate words and forms that convey the sense either directly or obliquely.

Tricky's discourse is further accentuated by "slips in grammar and logic" (Jones and Nance 136). The mock presidential news conference ends with a typical Lutheran speech on his personal dream: "My only hope is that whatever I am able to accomplish in their behalf while I hold this office will some day contribute to a world in which everybody, regardless of race, creed or color, will be unborn. I guess if I have a dream, that is it" (OG 25).

"Tricky Addresses the Nation (The Famous Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark Speech)" is a narrative unit that could make more coherence if read as an extension of the first two units: "Tricky Comforts a Troubled Citizen" and "Tricky Holds a Press Conference." Parodying of language assumes the form of "Nixon's public speaking style" with the aid of a map and pointer (Halio 108). It is an elaborately rehearsed rhetorical justification that Dixon attempts to present before the public on the despatch of "Aircraft
carriers, troop ships and destroyers" to the "Baltic and the North Seas" that geographically surround the territories of Denmark (OG 66). The principal enemy of America is said to be the "Pro-Pornography government in Copenhagen" (OG 67). The riddle as to how the government of Denmark poses an immediate threat to America is solved by a meandering discursive journey down the corridors of history. The explication is made dense by piling of diplomatic jargons and qualifiers that perceptibly echo President Nixon's "Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia policies" (Halio 108). Trivialisation of grave historical incidents is done to emphasize the expedient ways in which history is distorted by a self-motivated political leader. The syntax of the justificatory statement is crammed with phrases and modifiers: "belligerent expansionist policies," "territorial designs," "privileged sanctuaries on our eastern seaboard" and "open contempt for our territorial integrity" (OG 67).

Perhaps the historical allusions are specifically made to put up models, normative justifications and sanctions before the American public who form the part and parcel of an institutionalised society. Through his address, Tricky reminds that in "the eleventh century," invasions were made "upon the North American continent" by the Viking forces of Eric the Red and Leif Ericson in "direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine (OG 67). They had tried to establish their dominion in places of national heritage like "Boston, the birthplace of Paul Revere [...] and the site of the famous Boston Tea Party" (OG 67). Tricky seems to pose himself as the protector of a country whose
territorial integrity is very much in jeopardy. His words seem to build up an ambience of threat and mystery in the listeners so much so that they could very easily be made to acquiesce in the execution of his plans. In his perception, the invasion of Denmark is more of a liberation struggle to recapture one of the renowned cultural landmarks "that has been sacred for centuries to English speaking peoples around the world, and particularly so to Americans" (OG 68). Jones and Nance look upon the speech as an exemplary "parody of the American government's way of describing its involvement in Vietnam" or even any other foreign country for that matter (139).

With his typically circuitous logic he affirms that American marines have liberated Hamlet's castle at Elsinore "without firing a single shot" (OG 69). He appeals to the sense of national pride of the people when he breaks the news that his men have recaptured the castle immortalized by William Shakespeare and it is "occupied tonight by American soldiers, speaking the tongue of the immortal bard" (OG 68).

Tricky's attack on the "Pro-Pornography government" in Copenhagen stands more as a self-apparent satirical comment on America's offensive against the pro-communist government in Vietnam. Despite his reluctance to interfere in the internal matters of a foreign country, he puts up the charge that the "Pro-pornography government" has so indoctrinated the Danes that the "Danish Anti-Pornography Resistance" received no votes at all in the so-
called democratic election. Consequent upon this, America, he says, is forced
to carry its "military might" to establish a government "of, by and for, not
only the Danish people, but the American people and all good people
everywhere" (OG 71). All this endless and stupefying redundancy of
platitudes definitely points towards the meaninglessness of contemporary
political speech. The presidential address clearly reveals to what low levels
debasement of language could set into the polity which by itself is structured
like a text for an expert to read and interpret.

The text could well be considered as a reflection of the polity of a
period which is almost all talk and very little action. From a linguistic
perspective it is understandable that individual consciousness and social
structure are an outcome of discursive practices prevalent in a certain period
of time. Brown, in his essay, "Social Reality as Narrative Text," states that
"Language as both social institution and political practice is the active
synergy between consciousness and things" (118). Human reality is
experienced only with the mediation of symbols. The realities to which
symbols refer are also symbolic. They are generated by human actors and
realized within some shared frame of vision. Rhetoric is no longer simply a
means of persuasion but the medium in which self grows. As such, reality is
considered as basically symbolic, action is viewed as embodied language, and
language therefore becomes the fundamental unit of empirical knowledge.
One can come to know and realize reality only through an engagement in
rhetorical activity. With such a logic of the physicality of rhetoric has the reader got to comprehend the rationality of Dixon's address. Through innumerable qualifications, additions, and assertions he tries to institutionalise his expedient views on the invasion of a foreign country. This process is managed by alluding to all the traditionally reified icons of the country:

[. . .] should the state of Denmark, now or in the future, attempt to occupy Mark Twain's Missouri, or the wonderful old South of *Gone with the Wind*, in the way that they have so ruthlessly occupied 'Hamlet's Castle' all these centuries, I would no more hesitate to send in the Marines to free Hannibal and Atlanta and Richmond and Jackson and St. Louis, than I did tonight to free Elsinore. *(OG 70)*

The next allegation brought against Denmark is that the Danes harbour Charles Curtis Flood alias Curt Flood, the ex-baseball player of St. Louis Cardinals of the National League. The existing charge in the name of the ballplayer is that he "is out to undermine the youth" of the country by "destroying baseball" *(OG 75)*. He, according to Dixon, has done injury to the nation's pride by a clever legal action against the sport "made famous by Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Rogers Hornsby, Honus Wagner, Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson and Ted Williams" *(OG 74)*. To argue out the case against National League, Curtis Flood had enlisted two
lawyers from the Supreme Court, Mr. Abe Fortas and Mr. Arthur Goldberg. Besides all this, in the long description of his crimes, appears his role in inciting "the Boy Scouts of America [...] numbering nearly ten thousand" to riot in Washington D.C. (OG 79).

The digressive matters presented in the speech look very much like a parodied version of President Nixon's "Checkers Speech" (Halio 108). Dixon presents a narrative on his early struggles as a budding lawyer in Prissier, California and then moves on to discuss the sluggish state of American justice. He justifies his scheme of "Justice in the Streets Program" as a means to alleviate courtroom crowding (OG 77). The narrative becomes more of an exercise in language than a novel per se. The parodic texture of the rhetoric, whether read comically, seriously, or on some ironic level in between, submerges the banal, but significant elements like story and plot. The whole speech palpably inspires a kind of distrust in reality which also seems to be the basic premise of Our Gang. The text's appeal seems to lie more in the humour made out of the state of affairs of the occasion. Rhetoric gets fine-tuned by the machinery of official lying and platitudinising. Roth himself looks upon the text as "an exaggerated impersonation, a parody, of Nixon's style of discourse and thought" (RMAO 45). The President's style stands out by its strange "discrepancy between official pieties and the unpleasant truth" (RMAO 53). This is borne out by the way in which the death toll in the anti-Boy Scout operation is quantified and advertised. Out of the ten thousand
strong group of Boy Scouts in the two-day protest the police had shot dead only a meagre number of three protesters: "That breaks down to one and one-half scouts per diem, while nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight and a half Scouts continued to live full and active lives the first day, and nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-seven the second" (OG 80).

Tricky's expedient rationality accords him the status of the text's most mature speaker. But it is simultaneously undercut by an irony that even after his deliberate and methodical attempt to make sense he could construct only deceptive truths from the reader/listener's point of view. Crucially enough it is not his actions but his narration that does the damage by its stylistic approximation to virtual truth. He finds himself at pains to affirm before the public that he is not susceptible to sensation but only braced up to tell the truth: "My fellow Americans, I am confident that you recognize as well as I do, that any man who says he wants to make things perfectly clear as often as I do, both awake and in his sleep, obviously does not have anything to hide" (OG 72).

It could well be such an irresistible motive to dramatically encode his accomplishments that prompts him, in the course of his speech, to indulge in two elaborate narrations: one on the weapons of torture and the other on the dramatic capture of Curt Flood through "Operation Courage" on the "Danish island of Zealand" (OG 91). Through a kind of readerly absorption he
reproduces a simulation of experiential reality. His narration appears to mimic the effect storytelling has on himself. He tries to play the rational reader by focussing on the virtuality the stories convey. Albeit the unstated motives, there seems to be an experiential identification with the narrated incidents:

And unless we cut these sources of contagion from our society as swiftly and as thoroughly as we would excise a cancer from a living body [...]. And so long as I am President, I am not going to stand idly by while the children of this country come down with cancer, leukemia, or, incidentally, in that connection, muscular dystrophy. (OG 89)

Tricky's consciousness seems to be obsessed with the carnal body. This is discernible in the topic-comment structure which brings together his attempts to justify his ventures in Vietnam and Denmark. He is captivated by the carnal body, much as he hopes the readers/listeners would be by his discursivity. In the earlier segment of the text, the foetal trope becomes the referent for body which Tricky conflates with the notion of violence. In his irrational fancy, it serves more as a metonymic trope that condenses together ideas of violence and basic human rights.

In the later segment of the text, the spectre of Denmark, like Vietnam in the earlier unit, haunts him as a disordered/disordering body. Curt Flood,
as a tropal image, appears to embody an un-American American's threat to the body politic: "Even now, with the American Army massed on their borders, the American Navy blockading their coast and the American Marines firmly in control of 'Hamlet's Castle' [...]" (OG 90).

To comprehend the influence of the Vietnam War on American culture and its texts, it would be worthwhile to examine the structural challenges posed before the episteme of war. Klinkowitz identifies three factors that have been structurally challenged: "the military strategists' planning and their tacticians' conduct, the fiction writers' remarkably similar struggles with form, and the cultural theorists explanations for what was happening [...]") (140).

Tricky, as a narrator of "Operation Courage" in Denmark is faced with a similar challenge. He struggles hard to capture the war's experience which has to reach its climax of action. The best way he finds is to condense it into the action of just one day as if in a child's tale of adventure:

[... ] only two hours before coming on television to address you, I gave the order, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces meeting his responsibilities, for a fleet of helicopters to make a surprise landing [... ] only twenty nautical miles from the capital of Copenhagen [...]. Would he resort to poison gas? Would he dare to employ tactical nuclear weapons? There was no way in
which our aerial photography could penetrate this man's skull, to see just how far he would go in violating the written and unwritten rules of warfare. (OG 91)

In this passage, all three factors seem to converge directly or indirectly: military strategy, fictional form, and even deconstructionist thought. He wishes his "brave Green Berets and Rangers" to be precise in their dodging movements (OG 91). But the grammar of this new war will not allow it. The syntactic tenor itself is intransitive, not transitive, with no real structure as apart from an endless series of improbable possibilities. Tricky punctuates the trackless grammar with a series of "woulds". How to organize the war defies all previous military, political and even fictional schema. The politics and military tactics of Vietnam War become a test of imagination. As such Tricky can find no substantial vocabulary for the war beyond some hackneyed images. His vision cannot supercede the video adventures or he seems to jerk through signs drawn from gangster or cowboy movies to find the right manner of description:

First off, the dangerous flight from Elsinore to the landing site was made in twenty-two minutes and fourteen seconds [. . .] the hazardous search of the farmhouse, the outbuildings and the tilled acreage was accomplished in thirty-four minutes and eighteen seconds, in other words, with two full seconds to spare [. . .].
Moreover, our forces returned to safety without sustaining a single casualty. As at Elsinore, the enemy was so completely taken by surprise that they did not fire a single shot. (OG 92)

The experience of the war makes little sense. The narration seems to have no sense of purpose or achievement. It cannot free itself from the clichés of popular war stories and movies. Tricky wends his way from pretexts (his study of the map of Denmark and *Hamlet*) to subtexts, that is the actual literary structures of the war: "My fellow Americans [. . .] 'Something', he said, 'is rotten in the state of Denmark' [. . .] we shall [. . .] with God's help, purge Denmark of corruption, now and for all time" (OG 94). Incongruities become the common characteristic of the semes of the narration of war. It could be suggestive that Vietnam and the war are a reality entirely different from what America had previously known. This seems to be "a non-linear war, with no objective to seize, no identifiable good to achieve, and no overall end-date in sight" (Klinkowitz 148).

The three units of the text entitled, "Tricky Has Another Crisis, or, The Skull Session," "The Assassination of Tricky," and "On the Comeback Trail; or, Tricky in Hell" are conflated together as a topic-comment structure that concerns the issue of Tricky's ungoverned appetites. The whole text of *Our Gang* apparently presents a series of loosely linked comic strips rather than a plot with evolutionary development. As a parodic-satire the rhetoric attempts
to deconstruct "the absurdist string tied to Nixon's actual words" (Pinsker, *The Comedy* 74).

In "The Skull Session," Tricky is faced with the contingent situation of having to overcome the Boy Scout protest against his idea of favouring sexual intercourse by protecting the rights of the unborn foetuses. Tricky dresses himself up in football uniform and holds the "Skull Session" in his blast-proof underground bunker. The uniform appears to restore the sense of his own power. He discusses his crisis with his aides who too are dressed up in football uniforms: "Indeed, even in the midst of the most incredible international blunders and domestic catastrophes, he has till now, with the aid of his football uniform, and a good war movie, been able to live up to his own description of the true leader in Six Hundred Crises as 'cool, confident and decisive' " (*OG* 26). Baumgarten and Gottfried discern this as the President's "macho of the childish values" or "the adolescent qualities legitimated by the American culture of sports" (107).

Tricky's discussion with his "Political," "Spiritual," "Highbrow," and "Legal" Coaches brings about several expedients. Everyone's paramount objective is to exonerate the President from the charge that he had given "POWER TO THE PENIS?" (*OG* 31). He and his staff contemplate a massive public relations exercise by announcing on national television that neither himself nor anyone in his family has ever been "infected by desire or
lust, or for that matter, an appetite for anything at all, outside of political power" (OG 30).

Besides this, he wants to escape from his own carnal self to impress upon the people that he is devoid of all sexual urges. His discomfort is that he has a body that perspires and tarnishes his image. So he decides to remove "the sweat glands "from his upper lip and dissociate himself from "anything remotely resembling a human body" (OG 30). The mob of Boy Scouts has to be silenced alongside the task of restoring the dignity of the Presidential office. To perform these two tasks he discusses the efficacy of himself coming out with an open confession to homosexuality. But the Spiritual Coach advises him against such a confession as even homosexuals engage in intercourse. What becomes evident here through the "textual action" is an attempt towards normalisation of political conduct against a revolutionary "transformation of the grammars" of the polity undertaken by the Boy Scouts (Brown 128). The practices within a polity is regulated and executed through its "reigning grammar" (Brown 128). So also, the public action within a political unit is facilitated by the grammars laid down through constitutions, common laws, or traditions, which are manifest bodies of political thought and conduct. "The Skull Session" brings into relief, though in parodied form, the American polity as a text. It has to be understood as a process of communication in which ideas are mooted in terms of the reciprocal reactions they engender on the part of the political addressee. Political strategies are
transformed into events to which meanings could be attributed. These meanings give rise to the artificiality of experience and also integrate them into the textual grammar of polity. It is a grammar that generates its own rules and meanings. Again, it is this textual grammar that appears to unite the so called Coaches (voices) in a system of political communication and also constitutes them as a polity.

The confluence of serio-comic views expressed at the session constitute a witty negotiation of internalized but unassailable contradictions in the social order. Jones and Nance observe that the "The Skull Session" becomes a hyperbolic "parody of the way in which policy decisions are made and the political opportunism and irrationality that motivate them (138). The Military Coach is prevented by Tricky from opting for the solution of shooting orders. So the advisors make a list of five renegades and zero in on making Curt Flood, an ex-black baseball player, their scapegoat:

Tricky: [ . . . ] Since I am a decisive man, as you can see from my book *Six Hundred Crises*, I am now going to decide how many of these five enemies of America each of you will be allowed to choose to charge with the crime[. . . ]the Professor will read his list, and each person present will select as many as he wants, up to three... No, two... No, three... Uh-oh, my lip's sweating-uh-oh, I think I'm having another crisis! Two! Two! Say two! [ . . . ].
Highbrow Coach: To the list then, gentlemen. 1: Hanoi. 2: The Berrigans. 3: The Black Panthers. 4: Jane Fonda. 5: Curt Flood.

All: Curt Flood? (OG 46–47)

The joke opens up a multiplicity of subject positions to the reader/listener. There seems to be a conflation of the code of action with the code of inaction, and that of the spy novel with the domestic drama. The scene also brings the world of high politics to the level of the common world of family life. In 1968, the real Curt Flood had challenged the decision of his ball club St. Louis Cardinals to trade him off to Philadelphia Phillies. It is this reality that is collated into Dixon's discourse with a different twist. Out of a strange sense of expediency, he fixes the responsibility of the Boy Scout uprising on Curt Flood and declares him the arch enemy of "the most American of American sports" (OG 50). In the long examination of the credentials of each of the five culprits they unanimously find Flood to be the most appropriate choice as his public image in the country is at its all time low.

Highbrow Coach: I cast my vote for Curt Flood and Curt Flood alone. Not only is his a fresh name to a country that is growing pretty weary of the Berrigans and Panthers-and, with all due respect, is sick to death of Jacqueline Charisma—but on top of that he is, as I said earlier, someone we can slander and vilify without any danger of turning him into a hero or martyr. (OG 61)
In real history, President Nixon had widened the jurisdiction of the FBI and the CIA in connection with the apprehension of the suspected enemies of the White House. Taking cue form this, humour is aroused by the bizarre topicality of allusions to ball players, actresses, and President Kennedy's wife as if in an allegoric adventure story. As the session concludes, Tricky becomes conscious of his true bodily self which he desires to hide from public gaze: "No, I will remain in uniform, helmet and all, and with the aid of the ballots you have cast here in this free election[...]."

(OG 63).

The unit entitled "The Assassination of Tricky" metaphorically reveals how the tangle of signifiers which Tricky has woven out so industriously to undermine, becomes a net in which he himself gets incarcerated. Newsman, political observers and lawyers who wrote on President Nixon's Watergate scandal had profusely commented on "the sinister distortion of language" by the administrators during the war years (Lee 54). Lyndon B. Johnson appears to have "sanitized" the language of war and this, opines Hermione Lee, was carried on by Nixon too. The device of "doublespeak" was applied to the war in Vietnam and the oppressive measures resorted to against the revolutionaries at home. In the early 1970's the spy networks were "dressed up in terms such as 'electronic surveillance', 'mail coverage' and 'development of campus sources'" (Lee 54). Language was rarefied to such an extent that a lie could not be distinguished when one found it: "'True' words became unusable once Nixon had described the withdrawal of the American presence..."
in South Vietnam as 'peace with honour' " (Lee 54). When interviewed, his arguments were characterized by "banal, lengthy evasions" and "random inconsistencies" (Lee 55). Tricky, after being assassinated, gets dispersed into a mazy syntax of alliteration, repetition and overcrowded sentences. This happens in the last two units of the text, "The Assassination of Tricky" and "On the Comeback Trail, or Tricky in Hell". In these segments, which are together examined as one single unit where ungoverned appetites form the main thematic, Tricky gets metamorphosed first into an embryo and then into an incarnate form of the evil Other.

The range of bodily excesses that seem to plague and pleasure him throughout the narrative comes to its consummation in the last part. The trope of the Vietnamese foetus appears to be the originary source of pollution and depravity that spreads across the narrative. Tricky's obsession with carnality begins with the discussion on the My Lai massacre with the "Troubled Citizen". It is no accident that the metamorphosis occurs on the site of the narrative. Indeed, all he has is his skill of rhetoric and physical metamorphosis: ". . . I will hammer out, in the lonely vigil of the night, the conspiracy that seems to me most beneficial to my career" (OG 63). What he produces with these skills provides sufficient distractions from his troubles. It converts his lack of a secure position into a prolonged engagement with foetal bodies.
It is precisely Dixon's attraction to the physical aspects of oral discourse – his attachment to his expressions – rather than the truth of the text that enables meanings to be transmitted. The "President's Bilge Secretary" announces: "It was his belief that if he could stop sweating so much along his upper lip when he addressed the nation, the great majority of the American people would come to believe he was an honest man, speaking the truth, and may be even like him a little better" (OG 103). Identities in the novel are contiguous with surface physical appearance. Baumgarten and Gottfried look upon the text as a "dramatic enactment of the political uses and abuses of language" and as one that "unmasks the process by which these Americans seek scapegoats for their failures, and condemns the corrupt and corrupting tactics of those holding even the country's most sacrosanct offices" (111).

What seems to be operational in the discourse is the classic strategy of satire, where subjects convict themselves with their own words. This strategy comes to its efficacious stage when, after the "assassination", he is represented by a polyphony of voices that appears to figure him out in an ironic tropes. The language used is that of tele-reportage where the reporter guides the narrative by bringing in voices and sketchy texts on the leader's personality from various quarters of the country: "A second White House announcement has now called attention to the President's schedule for the day, pointing out that no mention is made there of dying" (OG 95). Such reports
are alternately juxtaposed with direct declarations. The Vice President, "What's-his-name" goes into a paroxysm of alliterative speech when asked as to why Tricky was secretly admitted to Walter Reed Hospital: "This lachrymose lie is a lamentable lollapalooza launched by the lunatic left" (OG 96).

As reports flow in about the mounting speculation regarding the President's death following a surgery for the removal of sweat glands from his hip many press interviews are also conducted with responsible persons. The "Chairman of the National Committee" is questioned as to how the "President's death would give a great boost to his waning popularity" (OG 97).

Reports and sidelights on the President flow in with the characteristic "unnaturalness, or falseness" (OG 105). The reports are orally filed in by "Morton Momentous" in Chicago, "Peter Pious" in Los Angeles, and "Ike Ironic" in New York city (OG 109-111). Anticlimax comes when the hospital authorities make the crucial declaration: "The President of the United States was assassinated sometime in the early hours of the morning. The cause of the death was drowning. He was found at seven A.M., unclothed and bent into the fetal position, inside a large transparent baggie filled with a clear fluid presumed to be water, and tied shut at the top". (OG 107).
The body, as a trope, provides a point of metonymic contact, a point of origin to which the disordering ripples of perversity that spread through the text are insistently traced. Dixon's problems can be summed up as the misfortune of having a body and no quality. Rhetoric also becomes the body's alibi in the text. The unreasonable presence of the carnal could be accounted for by its role as a catalytic trope that makes Tricky's presence more concrete within the site of the narrative discourse. It adds an extra psychological dimension to the text.

The body seems to have an inescapable connection to the **sjuzet** of the text. Tricky's discourses are sensational oral performances. They are more like stand-ins for the speaker's body. If he mismanages his body, it is the discourse that makes him do it. Rather than functioning as emblems of depersonalized virtue, as repositories of self-evident and politically productive truths, the rhetoric becomes sites of private and deeply troubled identifications. The text's logic appears to become more palpable when rhetorical speeches are treated as privately fetishized objects rather than discursive pieces for rational discussion. The subject seems to be attached to shapes and surfaces of the narrative – to the material embodiment of their storyness. This allows it to function like a body, as a vehicle for cathexis and absorption. The redundancy of nonsensical alliterative codes appears to be hermeneutically significant in this context:
'So the blah blah blah blah of state has been passed [. . .]. Heavy are our blah blah blah blah [. . .] our civilization with it. We can ill afford that [. . .]. Blah blah 1776 blah blah?[. . .]1812 blah blah blah? [. . .] 1904-1907? [. . .]. Blah blah blah one hundred years ago[. . .].Blah blah blah blah blah nation's capital". (OG 125)

Tricky’s rhetoric is physically contagious in the narrative setting. Subjects rub against one another discursively and transferences seem to take place. Such transferences that operate through rhetoric threaten the prospects for the actors’ return to rational existence. Tricky’s cathartic metamorphosis into devilish being could probably be read in psychoanalytic terms: "And one thing I have noted as I have traveled from one end of Hell to the other is the wonderful belief our people have in Wickedness [. . .]. And I humbly submit to you, the denizens of the greatest infernal region in all creation, that if elected, I would be that kind of Devil" (OG 132).

Images run one upon the other and sensations succeed in so rapid a sequence. The text seems to have been built insensibly, almost as though the narrative itself were a sleepwalking. James F. English, in his analysis of the political language of literature, considers such texts as a "farcical generic slippage" between a spy thriller and a fantasy story (622). The text tosses up a world in which "something so fundamental has been disturbed that all the crucial institutions of society – schools, homes, churches, courts, senate
houses—go mad" (Keman 453). The reader is disallowed from adopting even the pretense of the rational as there is so much of emphasis on sensationalism. Perhaps, the text shows vigorous resistance to closure in the absorbing effects of its structure, its narrative, and its rhetoric. So Tricky who appears to be fictively dead resurfaces alive in hell:

I am no longer a man burdened by all the limitations and weaknesses of that condition, such as conscience, caution and consideration for one's reputation. And I am no longer the President of the United States, with all the barriers and obstructions that stand between the holder of that powerful office and his own capacity for evil. I am at long last a citizen of Hell, and let me tell you, that is a great challenge and a great opportunity. (OG 137)

The discourse produces something that is wholly out of line with the ideal of reason. Perhaps, it serves to produce a body politic where desires exceed the possibility of control. As Tricky cannot contain his desires within his self, he goes on to haunt an irrational self by which he could have flourishes of narrative rhetoric. The spectre of his carnal body cannot be explained away rationally. It can only be rationally warned against. Peter Prince's comment on The Great American Novel is relevant here too: "The whole mode of the book is designed to illustrate the fashionable opinion that
the condition of contemporary America is so grotesque that the only way of interpreting or enduring it is by means of farce and fantasy and manic-depressive fun" (439-440).

The excess of his physical self and its pleasures haunt Tricky. He farcically pursues the cause of human body (foetus) but he falls a victim to the condition of bodily excess. His story becomes the story of his own imperilled body and its accompanying perils. *Our Gang*, on the whole, is itself a captivity narrative, though of a farcical sort: ". . . you are going to see a New Dixon, a Dixon such as I could only dream of being while still an American human being, a Dixon who humbly submits that he has what it takes in experience and energy to be the kind of Devil all you lost souls deserve" (*OG* 137).
NOTES

1Fetishism means an abnormal attachment of erotic feeling to an object or part of the body. The term is most applicable when a subject becomes focussed on some object (or part of the body) to the exclusion of every thing else. In the text, Tricky appears to be fetishistically attached to his own language and/or sometimes to certain parts of his own body. Frank N. Magill et al., eds. *International Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2 vols. (London: Fitzroy, 1996) 1547-1548.

2Cathexis is a term recurrently found in Freud. Its connotation and significance vary greatly as according to the demands of the context in which it is used. The term appears first in 1895, in the *Studies on Hysteria*. The term is relevant here as one that connotes a psychical energy that gets attached to an object (the object of narration itself in *Our Gang*). Tricky, as a subject, evokes an important but unpleasant event in his own political career with indifference and then tries to associate it with a kind of harmless narration. This is a kind of displacement or false association. See Laplanche and Pontalis 62-65.