The Art and Integrity of Alan Sillitoe's "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner"

Ronald D. Vaverka
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The purpose of this essay is to analyze the structure and subject of Alan Sillitoe's "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". In order to discuss this story meaningfully, a certain amount of attention must be devoted to the relevance of artistic creativity to social reality. It should become evident that the artistic achievement of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" as well as its concomitant revelation of reality rest on the quality of Sillitoe's socio-aesthetic perspective, which is conveyed within his creative method of realism. To be more specific, the language of the story necessarily reveals certain values; it imparts a particular perspective that is transmitted through Sillitoe's creative method, that is, the manner in which he creates his characters and their points of view, plot and setting, in relation to external reality, to produce the desired total meaning of the literary work of art.

For Alan Sillitoe, being an artist means being seriously involved with prevailing social relations in English society. The literary work at hand will be seen in terms of its total aesthetic structure in relation to a given socio-historical context. Sillitoe's story will be viewed as a social product imaginatively created by the author on the basis of his interaction with the world outside himself. Furthermore, the parts making up the whole of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" must function coherently to produce a unified structure. The coherency, in turn, depends on the method of Sillitoe's interpretation of social reality. In other words, is the coherency achieved artificially, that is, formally in isolation from reality, or realistically? A distinction must be made between a literary work that distorts reality for the sake of bare technical perfection or one that aesthetically delineates the actualities of reality, as will be shown in the case of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". However, in order to adequately grasp the essential socio-aesthetic context of Sillitoe's novella, relevant comments are needed concerning significant aspects of Sillitoe's social background and literary method.

Alan Sillitoe was born on March 4, 1928 at 38 Manton Crescent, Lenton Abbey Estate in Nottingham, and most of his childhood was
spent in the working-class area of Beaconsfield Terrace, Old Radford. Actually, a significant share of his life has been lived in Nottingham. As Sillitoe puts it, "I lived my first 20 years in the city and those are the formative years." His father, Christopher Sillitoe, was a tannery laborer, and his mother, Sylvina, was the daughter of a blacksmith. The social conditions within which the young Sillitoe and his two brothers and two sisters were brought up were characterized especially by the harsh realities of the depression of the thirties. At this time, many workers were forced to live on the dole. Sillitoe's father was unemployed for no less than six years. Vividly recalling his home life as a child, in an interview, Sillitoe says, "My strongest memory is anxiety about money, of the misery it caused, of my father's depression and the quarrels between him and my mother. There was never much food, but on Sunday there was somehow always meat—a 6d. roast, any leathery left-over the butcher had, but it made a meal. We got enough to eat, milk at school, and bread and cocoa given out to kids at what was called the Dinner Centre. I had no shame about this—just the way you lived, although I was vaguely aware that we were the poorest in the street." The enforced poverty was most severe for the parents; at least the children, during the schoolday at noon, were able to eat a hot meal. Yet, the experience of poverty has been ingrained in Sillitoe's mind. His views on poverty have been nowhere better registered than in his article entitled "Poor People". In discussing the various material and spiritual aspects and effects of poverty, Sillitoe notes that a major feature of poverty is the political division of society into "them" and "us":

The poor know of only two classes in society. Their sociology is much simplified. There are them and us. Them are those who tell you what to do, who drive a car, use a different accent, are buying a house in another district, deal in cheques and not money, pay your wages, collect rent and telly dues, stop for you now and again at pedestrian crossings, can't look you in the eye, read the news on wireless or television, hand you the dole or national assistance money; the shopkeeper, copper, schoolteacher, doctor, health visitor, the man wearing the white dog-collar. Them are those who robbed you of your innocence, live on your backs, buy the house from over your head, eat you up, or tread you down. Above all, the poor who are not crushed in spirit hate the climbers, the crawlers, the happy savers, the parsimonious and respectable—like poison.

It will be seen that it is the core of this view of the fundamen-
tal opposition between "them" and "us" that is delineated by Sillitoe in "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner".

Moreover, in his presentation of this opposition, Sillitoe has adopted a method of realism. The aim of his method is the aesthetic delineation of real social relations in contrast to the appearance of these relations. For example, a realistic characterization of persons portrays them as thinking and feeling beings, who exist dynamically within a specific socio-historical process. It is through his realism that society is seen in essentially personal terms, and people, on the basis of their social relationships, are necessarily depicted in moral-political terms, as expressed in the "them" versus "us" conflict in "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". Furthermore, the major aspect of this conflict is the problem of integrity which is centered on the issue of honesty. The question of integrity is not only of serious concern for the protagonist of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner", but also for the author of this novella. On this point, the connection between the man and the artist is made profoundly clear: "This story of a working-class youth," says Sillitoe, "is at the same time the statement of my artistic integrity. I shall never write anything to uphold this Establishment and this society. And I'm ready to stick to my principles even to a self-damaging extent. One has to be very careful about moral decisions in this society." And in an earlier essay, Sillitoe speaks in a similar vein: "Working men and women who read do not have the privilege of seeing themselves honestly and realistically portrayed in novels." "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" will show, if anything, that Sillitoe, because of his realistic perspective, has fulfilled the authentic need for creating well-defined characters, as exemplified in his protagonist. Indeed, it is by means of his selection and handling of his subject matter that Sillitoe can produce artistically convincing works of art. For him, the creative process entails an acute and artistic interpretation of contemporary English reality. This is indicated in his comment that "Imagination isn't so much a brain constantly creating fantasy and outlandish situations as the feat of transposing what is observed to an artistic and absorbing shape on paper." In the light of this view, if it can be demonstrated that "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" realistically
cognizes and delineates life within a coherently integrated structure, then it ought to be considered a successful work of art.

Analysis of
"The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner"

"The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" is the title story of Alan Sillitoe's second published prose work, a collection of short stories. The story brought Sillitoe another literary award in 1959, the annual Hawthornden Prize, for the best prose work of imagination. It describes the conflict between a young Borstal inmate and the governor which reaches its climax in the long-distance cross-country race. Most critics agree that it is a fine work of literary creation. There are, of course, differing views as to what makes this story an artistic achievement. Certain critics, for example, do not place this achievement in the area of Sillitoe's use of technical devices and language. Smith's speech is discredited by V. S. Pritchett, who asserts that "The difficulty faced by the talking writer is that there is a fundamental lack or dignity, a hopeless guesswork in human speech." 7

The majority of critics, however, praise the overall style and language of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". Malcolm Bradbury, for instance, acclaims this fictional work because it is "an extremely finished piece of work, a major study in rebellion." 8 And Bernard Lockwood not only considers it an "un-common artistic success without the slightest tampering with the story's organic unity or relying in any way upon artificial devices", but he also emphasizes that in this story "Sillitoe pictures a . . . society by relying solely upon the absolutely credible language and ideas of a Borstal inmate. This is one of his major accomplishments in the story." 9 The fact that the diction is not merely a decorative, formal device, but an artistic means of communication is pointed out in N. Denny's brief remark on the idiom of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner", stating that it displays a "controlled colloquial diction". 10 Sillitoe, indeed, has not created a mechanical reproduction of a particular language of social reality. The artistic control of the diction is illustrated in the realistically consistent relationship be-
between Smith's language and his personality, for example, in the scene where Smith is confronted by the detective:

I'd seen him before: Borstal Bernard in nicky-hat, Remand Home Ronald in rowing-boat boots, Probation Pete in a pitprop mackintosh, three-months clink in collar and tie ... a 'tec who'd never had as much in his pockets as that drainpipe had up its jackes. He was like Hitler in the face, right down to the paintbrush tash, except that being six-foot tall made him seem worse. But I straightened my shoulders to look into his illiterate blue eyes—like I always do with any copper.11

The defiant quality of Smith's personality is revealed in his flippant attitude that is conveyed in his choice of words such as "Remand Home Ronald in rowing-boat boots" and "Hitler in the face, right down to the paintbrush tash" the use of which appropriately reflects Smith's particular social situation. Furthermore, Smith's diction is given the flavor of authenticity through his personal use of such peculiar terms as "In-law blokes" and "Out-law blokes" to describe the fundamental relationship of "them" versus "us". Such descriptive expressions as "pop-eyed potbellied", "flash-bulb face", "Borstal Bernard", "Lord Earwig", "chinless wonder", and innumerable slang terms such as "slumgullion", "mug's game", "clink", "pinch", "lolly", "twig", "maulers", "patchy", "on tick", "flaptabs", "croaked" help to distinguish the thoughts and feelings of Smith as an individualized character within a specific social milieu. As David Craig observes, "If you try to take a language or speech from life and use it raw with the minimum of artistic transformation you end up with strings of lame clichés ... Even a fully literary style would be more effective than that.12 Sillitoe's command of a language that artistically penetrates social reality by effectively delineating character, incident and milieu prevents it from becoming a string of "lame clichés", as demonstrated in the following analysis of the subject and structure of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner".

The title of the story is the result of a visit Sillitoe made to England in 1957: "While on a visit to England in the spring of 1957 I stayed in a country cottage, and one afternoon, idly looking out of the window, I saw a man in white shorts and vest running by outside. He vanished around the bend of a tall hedge and headed towards a wood at the lane-end. I took out a blank sheet of foolscap and wrote on it a single sentence: The loneliness of the long-distance runner."13 The appropriateness of the title is confirmed
by the subject of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner", both in terms of the idea and metaphor of the story. Smith rebels against a repressive and alienating social order. His situation and his reactions to it make up the backbone of the narrative structure of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner".

Sillitoe develops a coherent structure through his manner of creating and concentrating on a particular type of character within a specific social setting. By using the first person narrator point of view, Sillitoe allows Smith, the seventeen-year-old protagonist, to tell his version of the story. Smith narrates his tale, in retrospect, by writing it down, as the asides to this effect emphatically remind the reader. In general, not only does his viewpoint function in organically binding the three parts of the story into a whole, but the perspective of the "I" specifically creates a certain intimacy and immediacy between Smith and the reader. This sense of personal contact is heightened by exposing the reader to Smith's private thoughts, feelings and experiences, the results of which ought to lead to a sympathetic understanding or an identification with Smith's views and predicament. This predicament is skillfully presented by the story commencing in medias res, a device that dramatizes the acuteness of Smith's situation as well as harmonizing directly with the first person central perspective. The unity of the narrative structure is augmented by the necessary flashback in part two, which introduces the reader to the essential past aspects of Smith's present predicament and consequent behavior in part three. Hence, the balanced ordering of the parts is due to the controlling device of the first person central point of view that has established the framework in which the principal conflict is logically and convincingly unfolded.

The opening of the story discloses the general problem, the inevitable opposition between "them" and "us", as seen from Smith's angle: "I'm telling you straight: they're cunning, and I'm cunning. If only 'them' and 'us' had the same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't see eye to eye with us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it stands and how it will always stand" ("Loneliness", 7-8). In this story, though, the particular conflict is between Smith and the governor of the Borstal, a reform school operating in the interests of "them". As N. Denny notes,
Smith's "heroic nature expresses itself in his collision with 'society', a conflict which provides the basic tension of the tale. It is a genuine collision this, the magnitude and reality of the opposition properly conceded, not the cocked-snook brag-gadocio of our heroic 'anti-heroes' for a buffoonish papier-maché Establishment." Furthermore, it will be seen that the fundamental conflict between the governor and Smith centers on the issue of honesty. In fact, it is Smith's conception of honesty that serves as the ideological core of his rebellion, which at the same time reveals the major quality of his personality. His character, though, seems to be somewhat problematic.

Although Smith, for example, certainly commits criminal acts, it would be an exaggeration to assert that this young worker is "the classic delinquent or problem child of the new age, the expendable jetsam of industrial 'affluence'." Smith cannot possibly be so abstractly classified, exemplifying the "new age". Nor is there sufficient evidence to make the opposite but equally narrow and vague claim that "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" is "the story about a young criminal". Such a limited view either avoids or fails to comprehend the import of Smith's criminal behavior. His criminal activities should be seen as a symptom of a larger social problem existing in a given political context without, however, minimizing or naively justifying his criminal inclinations. Allen R. Penner's view comes closer to the mark: "Smith is unemployed, therefore, because he does not want employment. He commits the crime--stealing a bakery cashbox--not out of necessity, but out of choice." This is an important distinction, especially regarding motive. It can then be adequately maintained that Smith's criminal behavior, at least partially, is an expression of defiance, a form of rejection.

What is of primary importance is that Smith genuinely protests against a repressive social system whether through stealing or not. Indeed, his rebellious attitude is made quite explicit throughout the story of his life. And it is the consistency of this attitude, both in conviction and deed, that gives coherency to the narrative pattern. In part one, for example, it is significant that Smith evinces his basic awareness of the social nature of his development, as demonstrated in the utterance, "being born and brought up as I was" ("Loneliness", 15). This awareness is again more fully
reiterated in the next paragraph, concerning his stay in Borstal: "Borstal does something to me. No, it doesn't get my back up, because it's always been up, right from when I was born. What it does do is show me what they've been trying to frighten me with. They've got other things as well, like prison and, in the end, the rope" ("Loneliness", 16). Hence, Smith's experience in Borstal has resulted in an intensified understanding and substantiation of the essential struggle between himself and "them". The knowledge of this reality is vividly and energetically expounded by Smith:

You see, by sending me to Borstal they've shown me the knife, and from now on I know something I didn't know before: that it's war between me and them. I always knew this, naturally, because I was in Remand Homes as well and the boys there told me a lot about their brothers in Borstal, but it was only touch and go then, like kittens, like boxing-gloves, like dobbie. But now that they've shown me the knife, whether I ever pinch another thing in my life again or not, I know who my enemies are and what war is. ("Loneliness", 16).

This passage not only emphasizes Smith's conviction of who his enemies are, but it also denotes specifically that it is his war against "them". Sillitoe concentrates, in this story, on delineating the life and character of a particular person from the ranks of the working class. This means that "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" is not about the class-struggle per se, nor is Smith a class symbol, as some critics apparently believe.

Lockwood, for instance, claims that "The rebellion is effectively dramatized through the conflict between the governor, and all the middle-class values he stands for, and Smith, and all the working-class values he stands for" (Lockwood, 246). However, neither the governor nor Smith "stands for" the respective class values in an "all-out declaration of class war" (Lockwood, 250). The governor, of course, functions as an agent of "them", in his capacity as governor of the Borstal; yet, he is not symbolical of the universal interests of the "In-laws" in a class struggle. This also, in the reverse, applies to Smith. Although Lockwood mentions in passing that "Instead of ingratiating himself with the governor, Smith chose to run honestly his own race, to go his own way; hence the title, 'The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner'" (Lockwood, 257), he in fact incorrectly emphasizes the class character of Smith's rebellion, which he stresses throughout his analysis. His position is made quite clear when he asserts that "Even more than in his first novel Sillitoe uses the protagonist alone as the
embodiment of all the working-class attitudes in the story" (Lockwood, 244). Firstly, the facts and the purpose of the story do not bear out this contention. Not all members of "us" or the "Out-laws" think alike or behave in the same way, as illustrated by Smith's pertinent remark: "even in a street like ours there are people who love to do a good turn for the coppers, though I never know why they do" ("Loneliness", 29). And the more relevant fact remains that prior to Smith's explanation of why he refused to win the race, his fellow inmates cheered him on to win. It is because of the complexity of such differences that Smith cannot personify "all the working-class attitudes" in or out of the story. Secondly, Lockwood gets himself in a difficult situation, in that he earlier declares that Sillitoe's protagonists are "all confused anarchists" (Lockwood, 216). Not only is this inaccurate as to Sillitoe's protagonists per se, with the possible exception of the Arthur Seaton of Part One of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, but in the case of Smith, let alone Sillitoe's other protagonists, it would mean that if he embodies all the working-class norms and values in the story, then all members of the working class must be "confused anarchists". Enough of such generalizations. Finally, Sillitoe is not primarily concerned with depicting the class struggle in his fiction. As he notes in an interview, "my stories are not class conflicts";¹⁸ that is, he apparently wants to avoid an abstract categorization of individuals into formal structural divisions: "If you compartmentalise anything, it tends to be called a class, in other words a division. It's a semantic argument. Let's face it, there are social structures—the sociologists aren't entirely wrong—but as a writer, one can't afford to deal in a compartmented series of people or events. One just has individuals, and forgets the hampering constrictions of the sociologists' idea of class."¹⁹

Sillitoe, indeed, has created an individualized character in the person of Smith; yet, he is an individual within a society that is divided into the opposing forces of "them" and "us", the "In-laws" versus the "Out-laws". Smith, then, is a particular type on the side of "us". He is a rebel fighting his personal war: "I knew I already was in a war of my own, that I was born into one, that I grew up hearing the sound of 'old soldiers' who'd been over the top at Dartmoor, half killed at Lincoln, trapped in no-man's-
land at Borstal, that sounded louder than any Jerry bombs. Government wars aren't my wars; they've got nowt to do with me, because my own war's all that I'll ever be bothered about" ("Loneliness", 17). Indeed, as the title of the story suggests, Smith is a loner; he is determined, and committed to fighting his own battle, in the name only of "us". This is manifested in the subject and action of the story. While running his race, Smith declares the real sense of his existence: "I knew what the loneliness of the long-distance runner running across country felt like, realizing that as far as I was concerned this feeling was the only honesty and realness there was in the world" ("Loneliness", 43). The metaphoric implications of running nicely describe Smith's psychological and social situation. What, in fact, is real in his life is his solitary struggle for what he believes to be honesty in a morally corrupt and repressive society. Smith's dehumanizing social conditions force him to rebel, while at the same time creating his alienating situation.

The essence of Smith's predicament is dramatically unfolded in his confrontation with the governor of the Borstal in the England of the 1950's. The speech given by the governor upon Smith's arrival reveals the governor's apologetic function, a declaration worth quoting in full, since it plainly exposes the significance of the governor's behavior and the purpose of the Borstal:

'We want to trust you while you are in this establishment,' he said, smoothing out his newspaper with lily-white workless hands, while I read the big words upside down: Daily Telegraph. 'If you play ball with us, we'll play ball with you.' (Honest to God, you'd have thought it was going to be one long tennis match.) 'We want hard honest work and we want good athletics,' he said as well. 'And if you give us both these things you can be sure we'll do right by you and send you back into the world an honest man.' ("Loneliness", 9-10)

The fine use of descriptive detail reveals a number of personal and political features about the governor that help to define his character. A certain consistency of impression is immediately evoked in the manner of description such as the formal euphemistic expression "'this establishment'", the gesture of "smoothing out" his newspaper, his "lily-white workless hands", and the conservative Daily Telegraph. This picture seems to depict a kind of self-conscious, conservative person. His ideas, especially, expose a basically conservative view towards his world. Smith is not given
any real alternatives. He is under the repressive control of the governor, who is responsible for the rules. He makes his position of power known by emphasizing that Smith must first "play ball" with "them", do "hard honest work" as well as play "good athletics" before they are willing to play ball with him, and turn him out into the "world an honest man." In other words, the governor wants to train Smith to adapt himself to a society which he already rejects. The governor's terms, of course, are thoroughly unacceptable to Smith. The clash of interests, it will be seen, centers on the ideological-political problem of honesty.

The incompatibility of their positions is undeviatingly illustrated by Smith: "another thing people like the governor will never understand is that I am honest, that I've never been anything else but honest, and that I'll always be honest. Sounds funny. But it's true because I know what honest means according to me and he only knows what it means according to him" ("Loneliness", 15). Smith's frankness demonstrates the utter impossibility of any sort of compromise, as suggested by the governor in his speech. To give in to the governor would be tantamount to selling his soul. It is of the utmost importance to keep in mind that Smith constantly struggles to maintain his sense of integrity. This, of course, is why he refuses to be treated like an animal, a racehorse: "I'm a human being and I've got thoughts and secrets and bloody life inside me that he doesn't know is there, and he'll never know what's there because he's stupid" ("Loneliness", 13). This difference in attitude towards Smith as a runner does not mean, however, that the governor's purpose is to use Smith for selfish motives. As Smith insists, he and the governor have their own separate and divergent ideas about honesty. For the governor, "'hard honest work'" and "'good athletics'" are genuine means for making Smith an "'honest man.'" Hence, the issue is more complicated than what meets the eye. For instance, according to Penner, "Smith does not pretend that stealing is not theft, but the governor pretends that his actions are motivated by a desire to improve his prisoners". Penner then quotes from the governor's speech cited above, concluding that "the governor will teach him the art of appearing to be honest" (Penner, 48).20 Surely, there is nothing in the governor's talk to support this contention. The governor is not a cynic, merely pretending to want to improve Smith's behavior by
teaching him the hypocritical "art of appearing to be honest". From his own point of view, the governor really believes that his policy is honest. There is not the slightest hint of pretence or irony in his manner of speaking, the tone of which, if anything, is frank and plain-spoken. It is this fact that contributes to the making of a difficult and unavoidable situation between the governor and Smith. It seems, however, that Penner has not fully grasped the complication of the predicament.

Penner's reasoning is disclosed in his analysis of the protagonist's point of view. When Smith says that the governor is "stupid, and I'm not, because I can see further into the likes of him than he can see into the likes of me" ("Loneliness", 13), Penner alleges that "despite Smith's claim that he can 'see further into' the governor than the governor can see into him, Smith sees with a jaundiced eye" (Penner, 51). Penner maintains elsewhere that Sillitoe's "analysis is not objective: Smith does not conceive that he is in any way in error; he tells his story, not the governor's" (Penner, 48). This is exactly the point; Sillitoe's purpose is to present a story seen from the standpoint of a rebel, one who experiences the effects of a repressive order. What Penner appears to be doing is to try to neutralize or placate the essentially irreconcilable, as manifested in his assertion: "What Smith does not recognize is that the race which needs to be won by both sides is one of comprehension" (Penner, 51). In fact, as will be seen, Smith's refusal to win the governor's race and win his own shows the complete incongruity of their respective social positions. The question remains, however, why Penner does not justify his allegedly objective protestation that "Smith sees with a jaundiced eye." It seems, too, that Penner does not comprehend the intrinsic political dimension of the conflict. He as well as Lockwood do not fathom the political depth and magnitude of Smith's social situation and insights, which are the result of his upbringing and experience, including his incarceration in "Remand Homes" and Borstal.

The material conditions and opportunity for running at Borstal provide Smith with the possibility to develop his thinking: as he says, "this long-distance running lark is the best of all, because it makes me think so good that I learn things even better than when I'm on my bed at night" ("Loneliness", 10-11). Smith utilizes his routine movements of running for the purpose of reflection. One of
the more significant outcomes of this thought-process can be noted in Smith's penetrating judgment of the governor: "I'm alive and he's dead. . . . At the moment it's dead blokes like him as have the whip-hand over blokes like me . . . Maybe as soon as you get the whip-hand over somebody you do go dead. By God, to say that last sentence has needed a few hundred miles of long-distance running" ("Loneliness", 14). The profoundness of this political-psychological insight makes intelligible Smith's conduct towards the governor. Smith realizes that he is being used by the governor; yet, the problem is that the governor does not realize that his kind of activity and honesty of necessity function as a means of exploiting Smith. The basis of the governor's honesty is an illusion, an erroneous conception of social reality, since it is limited to the view of the world according to the "In-laws". Smith's honesty, in contrast, is based on an extended view of reality; since he is the one being repressed, he sees the world from the perspective of both the "In-laws" and "Out-laws". This point is keenly expressed by Smith, who says of the governor and his like, "No, I'll show him what honesty means if it's the last thing I do, though I'm sure he'll never understand because if he and all them like him did it'd mean they'd be on my side which is impossible" ("Loneliness", 51). That is to say, if the "In-laws" could comprehend their social function as oppressors, then they would join ranks with Smith and his like, thereby undermining the basis of their existence. But Penner's analysis of this difficult social conflict is seen in intellectual and moral terms only: "what the 'Smiths' of the world must recognize is that conceptions of human dignity are not the prerogative of any one social class" (Penner, 53).

What must be recognized is the material, political nature of the conflict. Certain ideas of honesty and morality are enforced by real social institutions. It is the governor's conception of honesty that prevails, a political reality of which Smith is perfectly aware: "I think my honesty is the only sort in the world, and he thinks his is the only sort in the world as well. That's why this dirty great walled-up and fenced-up manor house in the middle of nowhere has been used to coop-up blokes like me" ("Loneliness", 15). Hence, the concrete social institution in the form of the Borstal functions as a real political force to uphold the concept of honesty according to the "In-laws". Although Denny
rightly sees the Borstal as a form of social control in general: "For Borstal merely reflects in extreme form the regimen fondly devised by British society for the achievement of its official ideal, the 'gentleman', or, in more prosaic terms where the general populace is concerned, the 'good citizen', who can be relied upon to do nothing to upset the status quo". Smith, like Penner, specifically reduces the problem of integrity to one of morality only, which is indicated in his observation that the individual struggles against a "sterile moral code that an authoritarian middle-class British society officially decrees all men shall uphold and live by". Denny seems to neglect the importance of the fact that an officially decreed "sterile moral code" exists on the basis of real economic and political power. Smith's battle should be seen in this light, if it is to be properly understood. Lockwood, too, either disregards or does not realize the essential political aspect of Smith's situation: "One of the merits of Sillitoe's first two works is just that: that he has succeeded in portraying a morally corrupt society in imaginative, fictional terms, and not in dreary sociological or statistical manner" (Lockwood, 253). Sillitoe, in fact, creatively reveals the underlying mechanisms of moral corruption in terms of political repression and rebellion in both Saturday Night and Sunday Morning and "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". The existence of moral corruption, then, is integrated within the socio-political structure of Arthur's and Smith's society.

It is evident that the political nature of Smith's rebellion is of paramount interest. This quality of his opposition is also ignored by James Gindin—however, for concerns that do not even consider the problem of morality. In his analysis of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner", Gindin insists on reducing man's social existence by interpreting it as a jungle-like one: "The governor is refusing to admit the constant antagonism between the two warring sides in the jungle." Not only is Gindin's observation of the governor misleading, on the grounds of the already indicated deceptive view of social reality that the governor holds, but he also distorts this essential socio-political struggle by turning it into a mystical, biological one: "Energetic, forceful, and irrational, Sillitoe's characters are surrounded by other energetic and forceful creatures. They can only pit their skill and power against
the skill and power of others... the long-distance runner pits his 'cunning' in a direct struggle against the 'cunning' of his governors and society." 25 The struggle, on the contrary, is the result of diametrically opposed ideological-political positions, which are not dependent on the animalistic, brute survival of the fittest and the strongest, on the basis of struggling "energetic and forceful creatures" living in the jungle that is "dark and rich and alive." 26

The battle, then, is between conscious, social individuals, between Smith and the governor, who eagerly wants Smith to win the "Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup for Long Distance Cross Country Running (All England)" ("Loneliness", 39). Smith knows, of course, that he can tangibly demonstrate his opposition towards the governor and his like by losing the race. The race, in other words, provides the key means for Smith to prove unequivocally his conviction of what it means to be honest. As Denny notes, "this honesty finds its beautiful and heroic expression—its perfect expression in this case—in the boy's refusal to win the cross-country race." 27 Smith's courage is put to the test on the day of the big race. And, quite naturally, part of his inspiration comes from the memory of the "Out-law death" of his father, who refused to end up in a hospital like a "bleeding guinea-pig" ("Loneliness", 50). Smith, too, will stick it out in spite of the negative consequences, since losing the race will establish the fundamental difference between his and the governor's respective positions, as illustrated in a passage worth quoting at length:

For when the governor told me to be honest it was meant to be in his way not mine, and if I kept on being honest in the way he wanted and won my race for him he'd see I got the cushiest six months still left to run; but in my own way, well, it's not allowed, and if I find a way of doing it such as I've got now then I'll get what—for in every mean trick he can set his mind to. And if you look at it in my way, who can blame him? For this is war—and ain't I said so?—and when I hit him in the only place he knows he'll be sure to get his own back on me for not collaring that cup when his heart's been set for ages on seeing himself standing up at the end of the afternoon to clap me on the back as I take the cup from Lord Earwig or some such chinless wonder with a name like that. And so I'll hit him where it hurts a lot, and he'll do all he can to get his own back, tit for tat, though I'll enjoy it most because I'm hitting first, and because I planned it longer. ("Loneliness", 45-6)

This passage reveals explicitly the core of the conflict, which also reflects Smith's determination to face boldly the effects of his
action. His behavior, though, displays no false sense of modesty, nor does it exhibit an exaggerated sense of pride, as contended by Gindin, who unabashedly sides with the governor and what he can serve. Gindin says of Smith's loss of his race: "Although losing means six more months of carting dustbins and scrubbing floors instead of kindness from the governor, honor, and easy jobs, the runner feels too proud, too much a part of his own defiance, not to lose his race." Gindin's interpretation is superficial, confining itself to a one-sided view of the conflict. Such an approach is also exemplified by G. S. Fraser, who says, "The hero of the title short story is a Borstal boy, a magnificent runner; the Governor of the Borstal wants him to win a race, and he wants to win it himself, but for the sake of pure defiance he forces himself not to." Fraser's view is a misconception that is a result of a shallow reading of the story. His summary of the outer manifestations of the conflict mistakenly leads him to the conclusion that Smith refuses to win his race simply for the sake of "pure defiance". A closer reading should, at least, show that Smith's rebellion is anything but "pure defiance".

The analysis of the conflict thus far ought to have shown the inherent political-moral nature of Smith's social predicament, as illustrated in his unconventional views and reactions towards a dehumanizing socio-economic order. Whether in or out of Borstal, Smith will oppose the Establishment. His radical sense of integrity serves as the principal means for opposing the rule of the "In-laws". It is this crucial fact that must be kept in mind. John Dennis Hurrell, however, misunderstands the causes of Smith's rebellion in his observation regarding Smith's hostility: "Constantly at war with society . . . he maintains his hostility despite all efforts to rehabilitate him." Hurrell begs the question with the term "rehabilitate". Smith, of course, is continuously at war with "them" not "despite", but because of "all efforts to rehabilitate him". He resists any efforts by those who attempt to mold him into the beliefs and values held by "them". His unwillingness to surrender to the "In-laws" is an expression of the quality of his moral strength; it is a measure of his spiritual fiber. As already indicated, however, certain critics do not share this view. David Elloway, in particular, remarks, "With twisted integrity he sacrifices the prospect of comfort and success for a
principle," Smith does not experience his negation of a degrading and alienating environment as sacrificial, nor is his attitude towards a competitive social structure a manifestation of "twisted integrity". Hurrell similarly thinks that "moral decay . . . has eaten into the soul of young Smith", and he also asserts that "we are led into seeing that all of Smith's beliefs have been false". Hurrell arrives at this conclusion on the assumption that "Since the story is in a book, the implication is that Smith has been 'shopped' by his pal". Not only is there no reason to believe that Smith has been deceived by his pal, but even if he had, this does not logically mean that his "beliefs have been false". Hurrell's reasoning on this matter falters, as a result of his failure to substantiate his opinion that "The ending of the story could be criticized as contrived and O'Henryish." Lockwood, however, points out, "Smith has obviously been captured again by the police for a 'crime' against middle-class society, and thus his friend, in compliance with his wishes, secured the publication of the story" (Lockwood, 256). Hence, Sillitoe's creation of a solid narrative structure is made distinct through the consistent development of the various aspects of the conflict between Smith and the "In-laws". Indeed, the correspondence between the method of characterization and the unfolding of incident makes for a realistically cohesive structure that serves as the basis for the emergence of a convincing theme.

The central idea in "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" is the interactive connection between the forces of repression and rebellion. There is, of course, disagreement concerning the question of theme. According to Penner, for instance, "The theme of the tale is the ancient Aeschylean one—an indomitable will pitted against an overwhelming force; but Sillitoe has rendered it in an antisocial, nihilistic context" (Penner, 49). Firstly, it is erroneous to suggest that Smith's defiance is based merely on "an indomitable will", thus neglecting the significance of the real causes of his rebellion by reducing it to a personal problem of voluntarism. Secondly, as indicated earlier, Smith's thoughts, feelings and actions do not take place in a social vacuum, since they are the result of his social existence; hence, they are not "antisocial" in general, but anti-"them" in particular, which further means that they are not simply "nihilistic". An equally de-
ceptive generalization is made by Francis Wyndham in his discussion about Smith's predicament: "The bravado of the final paragraphs, in which he gives fine expression to his rejection of society, have pathetic undertones; in these can be detected the futility of an antisocial life as he will in fact have to live."\(^\text{35}\) Again, Smith does not reject just any "society", nor is there sufficient evidence to warrant the comment that the final paragraphs contain "pathetic undertones". Evidence seems to support the exact opposite. For example, a note of strength and determination, not "futility", is revealed in the tone of Smith's statement regarding the effects of his six months of hard labor: "The work didn't break me; if anything it made me stronger in many ways, and the governor knew, when I left, that his spite had got him nowhere" ("Loneliness", 53). Moreover, the conclusion shows that Smith will persist in his criminal activities and he will continue to defy "them". Yet, it would be an exaggeration, if one viewed Smith's "big jobs", in the way Saul Maloff does, as "his form of revolutionary protest, of beating the system."\(^\text{36}\) In fact, Smith is not, as Penner thinks, a "revolutionary young man" (Penner, 53). His protest against the system is, in practice, sooner defiant than revolutionary.

Smith is both rebel and victim. Although, as he says, "I know every minute of my life that a big boot is always likely to smash any nice picnic I might be barmy and dishonest enough to make for myself", he candidly declares, "I'm not hard-hearted (in fact I've helped a few blokes in my time with the odd quid, lie, fag, or shelter from the rain when they've been on the run) but I'm bugged if I'm going to risk being put in the cells just for trying to give the governor a bit of advice he don't deserve. If my heart's soft I know the sort of people I'm going to save it for" ("Loneliness", 18). This attitude is strikingly illustrated in Smith's different treatment of the detective, whom he keeps out in the rain, in spite of certain qualms, and Mike, his partner in the bakery theft. With Mike, he believes in all share and share alike, since they "believed in equal work and equal pay, just like the comrades my dad was in" ("Loneliness", 29). And finally, Smith's concern with other members of the "Out-laws" is demonstrated in his pleasure with the effect of his loss of the race: "the boys caught on to me losing the race on purpose and never had enough good words to say about me, or curses to throw out (to themselves) at the gov-
Yet, in spite of his clear position on the side of "us", Smith's rebellion is too solitary and immature to be genuinely effective. His thoughts and actions must develop even further, beyond the self, if he is to help bring about a qualitative change, leading to a positive improvement of his social circumstances. He is still being victimized by the prevailing social system. This is reflected in the main effects the dominating ideology of every man for himself has on him. He is constantly being influenced by and subjected to the social philosophy of the Establishment. The indications of this influence are revealed in Smith's utterances concerning his philosophy of life. While running his race, Smith reflects: "You should think about nobody and go your own way, not on a course marked out for you" ("Loneliness", 44), and, at a later point during the race, he says metaphorically and decisively, "I'm a long-distance runner, crossing country all on my own no matter how bad it feels" ("Loneliness", 52). The emphasis on the individuality of his struggle plainly shows that, on the one hand, he is a product of the dominating ideology of individualism, while, on the other hand, in order to maintain even a trace of personal worth within a dehumanizing social context, Smith must try to develop a sense of integrity on at least an individual, nonconformist level. The effort to do so, of course, contributes to his state of alienation, both as rebel and victim. But the necessary complexity of this problem is ignored by Hurrell, as noted in his comment on the causes of Smith's loneliness: "he is lonely . . . because he lives his life according to a 'code' that denies him any joy in life, a 'code' that consists, in fact, of the denial of the ordinary human pleasures." Hurrell, however, does not define these "ordinary human pleasures", but it is certain that if they are to mean Smith's acceptance of the governor's code, then he surely will reject them. How much "joy in life" can Smith expect or realize in an alienating and repressive society? Nevertheless, in contrasting himself with the governor, Smith does suggest that "Admitted, we're both cunning, but I'm more cunning and I'll win in the end even if I die in gaol at eighty-two, because I'll have more fun and fire out of my life than he'll ever get out of his" ("Loneliness", 13). It seems, then, that Smith's "code" also means, at least, that part of the "fun and fire" in his life will include his persistent strug-
gle for an honest existence within an unjust social system.

"The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" demonstrates Sillitoe's ability to create a realistic, unified work of art that delineates essential features of contemporary social reality, as shaped and illustrated through the contradictory positions of the governor and Smith on the question of honesty. This contradiction is vividly and dramatically portrayed in the key event of the story, that is, the race, which is also the climax of the conflict. It must naturally be emphasized, too, that the climax does not lead to a reconciliation between the governor and Smith, nor is the conflict resolved, as Lockwood asserts. He thinks that Sillitoe "brings the story to a resolution in the most dramatic and inevitable way possible" (Lockwood, 255). "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" ends openly. Lockwood's approach is to abstract this literary work from its concrete, socio-political context, of which it is a dialectical reflection. Hence, the conflict is not resolved; the art product reflects the dynamic contradictions within contemporary English social reality. This explains the political nature of Sillitoe's imaginative re-creation of social reality. The achievement of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" is to be found in its convincing and revealing apprehension of a basic social conflict in aesthetically satisfying images. The artistic merits of this story have been well summarized by Pamela Hansford Johnson, who says that it has literary tact and a sense of design. And he is able to bring all this to the study of a section of society which has to be known at first-hand to be understood. All the imaginative sympathy in the world can't fake this kind of thing. It must have been lived in, seen, touched, smelled: and we are lucky to have a writer who has come out of it knowing the truth, and having the skill to turn that truth into art.
permanent reporter, "Says Alan Sillitoe: Nottingham Has Not
Changed Since Film", Nottingham Evening News, April 6, 1961, p. 5.

2Kenneth Allsop, "I Starved . . . for Saturday Night and Sunday
Morning", Daily Mail, February 16, 1961, p. 10. In an autobio-
graphical essay, Sillitoe bitterly observes, "From the beginning
we children witnessed the dumb god-damn suffering of our parents,
who were not able to do anything about what was happening to them
—the eternal fate of such people everywhere. Bitterness was the
only comfort available but because my father couldn't read or
write, it lacked the subtle edge that might have led him to find
some way out." "The Long Piece" in Mountains and Caverns: Se-


4Igor Hajek, "Morning Coffee with Sillitoe", The Nation, Jan-

5"Both Sides of the Street" in The Writer's Dilemma (London:

6Alan Sillitoe, "Proletarian Novelists", Books and Bookmen, 4

7"Saints and Rogues", The Listener, December 6, 1962, p. 959.

8"Beneath the Veneer, Pure Animal Life", The New York Times Book
Review, April 10, 1960, p. 5. Although Roy Perrott in The Guard-
ian does not see "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" as a
major study of dissent, he declares that "It is a slight but most
artistic study of the spirit of the outsider, the dissenters, the
man apart," "Life through the eyes of the odd man out", September
25, 1959, p. 7. John Rosselli states that Sillitoe's story is
"the best and most nearly flawless thing he has done". "A Cry
Francis Wyndham also recognizes Sillitoe's achievement: "tech-
nique throughout his work is triumphantly unobtrusive." A review
of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner", The London Maga-
azine, 7 (March, 1960), p. 66.

9"Four Contemporary British Working-Class Novelists: A Thematic
and Critical Approach to the Fiction of Raymond Williams, John
Braine, David Storey and Alan Sillitoe". Unpublished doctoral
dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966, pp. 244, 255. Here-
after cited with the surname Lockwood and the page number in par-
entheses.

10"The Achievement of the Long-Distance Runner", Theoria, No.
24, 1965, p. 10. John Coleman states that the language of "The


14 Denny, "The Achievement of the Long-Distance Runner", p. 3.

15 Denny, p. 3.


19 Hall, p. 8.

20 A few other critics also erroneously contend that the governor and his like only want to put up a show of honesty. Hurrell, for example, asserts that "Smith's kind of honesty consists of being truthful about one's hatred of the other side. He really believes that the 'In-laws' hate the 'Out-laws', like himself, and that if they had any real honesty they would annihilate them, rather than
pretend to reform them". "Alan Sillitoe and the Serious Novel", p. 12. A difference of understanding or beliefs of what "any real honesty" means need not necessarily indicate a pretense to be honest by any one side. Lockwood, too, suggests that the governor is uncandid: "Honesty, in the governor's terms, finally resolves itself into playing the middle-class game, accepting the middle-class values". P. 255. And Denny claims that the governor is displaying his "dishonesty and bogus mateyness" in his speech to Smith. "The Achievement of the Long-Distance Runner", p. 7.

21 Although Penner accounts for Smith's recognition that "honesty is not an absolute term" (p. 48), he nevertheless arbitrarily believes that Smith should be shown to be aware of his "error".

22 Denny, "The Achievement of the Long-Distance Runner", p. 7.

23 Denny, p. 3.


25 Gindin, pp. 24-5.

26 Gindin, p. 33. In spite of Penner's oversimplified view of the issue concerning Smith, he does more or less seem to grasp that "What he means by 'cunning', as we learn, is not simply a talent for animal survival in terms of a jungle existence, for both the stakes and the means of survival are more subtle than that. What is at issue is not food, but human will." P. 49. Bradbury, on the other hand, apparently agrees more with Gindin, when he misleadingly says of Smith that "He is pure, amoral, animal vigor". "Beneath the Veneer, Pure Animal Life", p. 5.

27 Denny, "The Achievement of the Long-Distance Runner", p. 4.

28 Gindin, p. 21.


30 Hurrell, "Alan Sillitoe and the Serious Novel", p. 11.


33 Hurrell, p. 13.


37 Hurrell, p. 12.

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Denna uppsats analyserar strukturen och temat i Alan Sillitoe's "Långdistanslöparens ensamhet". Därvid behandlas även det avgörande sambandet mellan den sociala verkligheten och konstnärligt skapande, som det avtecknar sig i Sillitoe's socio-estetiska perspektiv. Det konstnärliga utförandet och framställningen av verkligheten i "Långdistanslöparens ensamhet" är avhängiga av Sillitoe's konstnärliga metod, vilken kan betecknas som realistisk. Sillitoe har i denna novell lyckats sammansätta form och innehåll till en dynamisk helhet, där en trovärdig personlig spridning och ett träffsäkert språk resulterar i en skickligt uppbyggd berättelse om integriteten hos en arbetarpojke, i konflikt med det rådande samhällets normsystem.

This essay analyses the structure and subject of Alan Sillitoe's "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner". In the process of this analysis, attention is devoted to the crucial connection between social reality and artistic creativity as reflected in Sillitoe's socio-aesthetic perspective. The artistic achievement of "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner" as well as its revelation of reality rest on the quality of Sillitoe's creative method of realism. One of his more outstanding achievements is his deftness in creating credible characters whose attitudes and beliefs develop on the basis of their social circumstances and individual personalities.

A Select Bibliography as well as a Summary in Swedish are to be found at the end of the essay.

Ad

Vaverka, Ronald D.

Gez Sillitoe, Alan
[ İz Sillitoe, Alan]

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