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PREFACE

With the appearance of *MidAmerica I* early in 1974, the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, in existence for three years, began its major attempt to establish an annual publication. The *Newsletter*, published three times a year, had gained a reputation as a useful, successful publication, and the first volume of the projected *MidAmerica* series was to supplement that accomplishment and build upon it.

The modest measure of success attained by *MidAmerica I* is perhaps best attested to by the appearance of this second volume, *MidAmerica II*, as well as the recent publication of the first of a third series, *Midwestern Miscellany*. Together, the three series will provide the means by which the literary dimensions of the Midwest may be more completely defined and established by the Society's members, a process that demands a great deal of dedication and promises even more satisfaction and fulfillment.

This volume, like its predecessor, carries us further toward the ultimate definition of a literature expressive of a people, a time, and a region. At the same time it promises further exploration of the many dimensions of the literature to which it is dedicated, an exploration that will continue in future volumes, the next of which is already becoming a reality.

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THE UNCRITICAL CRITICS: AMERICAN REALISTS AND THE LINCOLN MYTH

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Abraham Lincoln was sixteenth President of the United States, constitutionally designated Commander-in-Chief of the nation's armed forces during the supression of the only major armed rebellion against the power of the federal government, and the first presidential victim of politically-inspired murder. The effects of his actions as President have had far reaching effects in the evolving political, social, economic, and cultural life of the nation.

Even this mere recital of Lincoln's accomplishments and influences is perhaps the most impressive in the nation's history, and generations of historians have devoted themselves to exploring, defining, and interpreting them in terms of factual basis, significance, and meaning. Included in the list of volumes based on that historical research and interpretation are many of the finest works by American and foreign scholars. There is also a great deal of rubbish.

But the magnitude of the published historical research is only part of the image of Lincoln that remains at the heart of the American experience. Lincoln has become not only a major historical figure but a national folk hero, not only, as Emerson saw him, the Representative Man of the nineteenth century, but also the central mythological character in the evolving myth of America. This aspect of Lincoln's image has not been neglected by modern scholars; Lloyd Lewis explored the growth of the Lincoln myth in its many ramifications in *Myths after Lincoln* in 1929; twenty-nine years later, Richard N. Current, in *The Lincoln Nobody Knows,* in exploring the dimensions of uncertainty that still abound in knowledge of the historical Lincoln,

pointed out that a number of the deliberate and accidental attempts to remove that uncertainty were themselves major contributors to the dimensions of the myth. Other attempts to penetrate the myth included George S. Bryan's *The Great American Myth* (1940), Roy P. Basler's *The Lincoln Legend* (1935), and David Donald's *Lincoln Reconsidered* (1956). My own *Abraham Lincoln* (1970) attempts to penetrate the myth and explore his development as writer and thinker.

None of these attempts has been entirely successful in exploring the Lincoln myth, largely because, although recognition of the dimensions and nature of the myth has been important in each study, in each, that recognition is part of a larger purpose, usually the attempt to unravel the confused morass of fact, conjecture, falsity, and distortion that provides the public image of Lincoln today. In the process scholars, often with the best of intentions, perpetuate some if not much of that morass even as they seek the truth that lies behind it.

But Lincoln, man and myth, has not been the exclusive property of the historians by any means; the enigmatic nature of the man, the facts of his life and death, and the growth of the myth have made him a subject particularly attractive to literary men, creative writers who most frequently seek to reorder facts and experiences in order to define new truths in new contexts and forms. Lincoln's funeral procession, itself a factor in creating a substantial part of the myth, had not yet reached Springfield when the deluge of literature of which Lincoln was the subject began; it has not ceased but instead has continued even as new media and forms have emerged. Lincoln has appealed as greatly to stage, radio, TV, and film writers as to poets, balladiers, novelists, and versifiers of the past.

Most of these writers, however, whether nineteenth century poets or twentieth century script writers, have largely been interested in Lincoln as the romantic sees him, as Emerson, Whitman, and others of his contemporaries saw him, and the Lincoln who emerges from their works has the dimensions if not the substance of myth. But Lincoln as a subject has not only attracted the interest of romantics; he has especially attracted the attention of a group of writers, significantly or coincidentally Midwesterners, who called themselves realists.

As with all other attempts to categorize literary works, the term realist, even—or perhaps especially—when a writer uses it to describe his own work, is at best a loose generalization capable of many often competing specific definitions. Nevertheless, American realists, following William Dean Howells, saw realism as the rejection of the sentimental, of the portrayal of life as the writer would prefer that it be, and a "fidelity to experience and probability of motive." The realist, in other words, had as his literary ethic the delineation of objective truth insofar as it could be determined by the human senses and mind. Finally, Howells and his followers believed that realism must be critical; that is, that in laying bare the objective truth about man in society, the realist provides the information that men must have if they are intelligently to direct the evolutionary development of social institutions. In essence, the realist was neither a determinist nor a pessimist, neither a moralist nor a sentimentalist. He was an observer, a recorder, a delineator of truth.

Howells, who had been instrumental in defining the ethic of critical realism for himself and for the following generation of realists, was also the first of his generation to attempt to delineate the reality of Abraham Lincoln for his time. But at the time that Howells wrote, he was not a realist, nor was Lincoln a President; rather, each aspired to what he was to become. In the summer of 1860, Howells, then a twenty-three year old editorial writer on the *Ohio State Journal* of Columbus, published his second book, *The Lives and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin*, the Republican candidates for President and Vice President of the United States.

Although there is little evidence to support Howells' statement to Mark Twain in 1876 that he had written the life of Lincoln that made him President, Howells contracted with Follett, Foster, and Company, publishers in Columbus, to write the life, and he, in turn, employed a young law student, James Quay Howard, to go to Springfield to carry on research for the volume. Thus Howells, an aspiring poet and man of letters, apparently saw the task as being of no more and perhaps less significance than the editorials that he wrote on so many topics for the *Ohio State Journal*. Years afterward he wrote:

This part of the project was distasteful to me. I would

> not go, and I missed the greatest chance of my life, of its kind, though I am not sure that I was wholly wrong, for I might not have been equal to the chance; I might not have seemed, to the man I would not go to see, the person to report him to the world in a campaign life. What we did was to commission a young law student I knew, to go to Springfield and get the material for me. When he brought it back, I felt the charm of the material, the wild charm and poetry of its reality was not unknown to me; I was at home with it, for I had known the belated backwoods of a certain region of Ohio; I had almost lived the pioneer; and I wrote the little book with none of the reluctance I felt from studying its sources.

The resulting final version—after several varied starts by the publisher to take maximum advantage of the market—consisted of 94 pages of text written by Howells, followed by reprinted speeches of Lincoln and a biographical sketch of Hannibal Hamlin. Although the publishers announced that Lincoln had authorized the biography, both he and his supporters took pains to make clear that he had not, that, in fact, he had not authorized any biography, and he himself suggested to his Ohio supporters that they "look it over, and exclude what [they] may think would embarrass the party. . . ."

Nevertheless, in spite of Lincoln's disavowals, his relationship to the Howells' volume was quite close: it is the only biography that he read himself in the effort to correct the factual mistakes that became part of the text. In a unique copy owned by Samuel C. Parks and since reproduced in several editions, Lincoln noted the errors of fact he found, making notations or corrections, many of them minor, in the text or margin. In at least one case, Lincoln's correction was accepted in a later edition. There are also errors that Lincoln apparently overlooked.

The specific nature of Howells' errors and Lincoln's corrections is less important than the fact that they were made and that Lincoln found it necessary to correct some of them. Whether they originated in Howard's research, in earlier accounts that he examined, in personal interviews, or even later in Howells' writing, is unimportant. In being made, in being widely disseminated, and in standing essentially uncorrected, these and

other similar errors contributed not only to a mistaken understanding of the candidate and his party, as Lincoln knew they would, but they also contributed to some of the vagueness, ambiguity, and controversy that continues to surround his career. At the same time, magnified and propagated, many of them have made substantial contributions to the growth and perpetuation of the Lincoln myth.

Of particular importance is the relationship of Howells' biography to the growth of that myth. In tone, in substance, and in interpretation, Howells, his training as an editorial writer and his dedication to a clear, esthetic prose style manifesting themselves, emphasized the elements of which campaign biographies and campaign images are made. Of Lincoln as a young man he wrote:

> At New Salem, he now found the leisure and the opportunity to initiate a system of self-education. At last, he had struggled to a point, where he could not only take breath, but could stoop and drink from those springs of knowledge, which a hopeless poverty, incessant toil, and his roving, uncertain life had, till then, forbidden to his lips.
>
> There never seems to have been any doubt of his ability among Lincoln's acquaintances, anymore than there was a doubt of his honesty, his generosity, and gentle-heartedness. . . .

Later, Lincoln became a prominent young Whig politician:

> The talented young Whig has founded his reputation upon qualities that make every man proud to say he is the friend of Lincoln.
>
> No admirer, who speaks in his praise, must pause to conceal a stain upon his good name. No true man falters in his affection at the remembrance of any mean action or littleness in the life of Lincoln.
>
> The purity of his reputation, the greatness and dignity of his ambition, ennoble every incident of his career, and give significance to all the events of his past.
>
> It is true that simply to have mauled rails, and commanded a flatboat, is not to have performed splendid actions. But the fact that Lincoln has done these things, and has risen above them by his own force, confers a dignity

> upon them; and the rustic boy, who is to be President in 1900, may well be consoled and encouraged in his labors when he recalls these incidents in the history of one whose future once wore no brighter aspect than his own wears now.
>
> The emigrant . . . will take heart and hope. . . .
>
> The young student . . . shall not be without encouragement. . . .

These passages and those which follow that see Lincoln's rise to prominence in politics and the moral crusade against slavery are less clearly defined than they are magnifiers of his character, as the art of the campaign biography demands, and Lincoln emerges as an almost entirely non-controversal and eminently acceptable leader. Such is the substance of which campaign biographies are made, as Howells knew well. It is also the substance of myth, as the myth uncritically grows to provide a body of belief by which men live and often die.

The position of William Dean Howells, the young man who aspired to a literary career and who wrote that campaign biograpy is understandable: his role was to interpret and create a man who was capable of great leadership; he did not, except by indirection, determine to create a myth. But twenty years later, however, Howells was editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, a novelist, and a prominent critic. In each capacity, he had begun to move toward his philosophy of critical realism, a search for truth and beauty through literature as the laboratory in which man's behavior is examined.

During that twenty years a great deal had happened in America: Lincoln had been assassinated, the slaves had been freed, an industrial-technological society had emerged, and science and philosophy had combined to destroy romanticism and sentimentality. The mythmakers had already done much of their work, fusing all of these elements with the philosophy of Horatio Alger, Jr., and with the versions of Lincoln's life by Howells, by Lincoln's former law partner, William D. Herndon, and others, to produce the image of a man whose life at once epitomized, explained, and transcended America. The story of Lincoln, greatly magnified, simplified, and idealized, became the basis for Emerson's statement on April 19, 1865, that he was "an entirely public

man; father of his country, the pulse of twenty millions throbbing in his heart, the thoughts of their minds articulated by his tongue." In 1880 it indicated that Howells had accepted the myth he had helped to create as he turned to his own words of twenty years before and wrote:

> No admirer who speaks in his praise must pause to conceal a stain upon his good name. No true man falters in his affection at the remembrance of any mean action or littleness in the life of Lincoln. The purity of his reputation ennobles every incident of his career and gives significance to all events of his past.

For Howells, reality and myth had become one, the latter obscuring the facts upon which it had been based, and he was never to question the truth of the myth.

Associated with its formation from the beginning, indeed contributing uncritically to its formation, Howells was also a product of the times that had created it. His acceptance was perhaps inevitable. But more difficult to explain is the fact that his acceptance of the myth marked the path that those critical realists who followed his path to truth were also to follow. The paths of myth and reality, as later experience should have pointed out to them, not only did not meet; neither were they parallel.

The most significant of these realistic followers of Howells were Brand Whitlock, born in 1869, and Sherwood Anderson, born in 1876. Like Howells, both were Ohioans, and both witnessed the transformation of that state from an agricultural to an industrial empire. At the same time they witnessed the abuses of that new society, the transformation of the party of Lincoln and emancipation into the party of the new industrial slavery, and the use of the Lincoln myth to justify, explain, and propagate the new morality. Each of them devoted literary talents and energy to attacking the new industrialism as it degraded men, and at the same time each found himself fascinated by Lincoln, just as was the same generation of Midwestern poets. Significantly, too, each of them accepted the myth as uncritically as he criticized the new American reality. But neither saw the contribution that the Lincoln myth, distorted beyond justification, had made to that reality. In failing to see that relationship, each of them was to contribute

to the perpetuation and the expansion of the myth that had replaced the reality.

Brand Whitlock, in many ways the most complex of his generation of novelists as well as the most dedicated of realists, had, by the time that he wrote his brief *Abraham Lincoln* in time for the Lincoln centennial of 1909, written four novels; a first-rate study of rural grassroot politics in *The Thirteenth District* (1902); a comedy of manners in *Her Infinite Variety* (1909); a realistic study of a small town in transition in *The Happy Average* (1904); and a biting, deterministic study of justice and legality in *The Turn of the Balance* (1907). Dedicated to carrying on in the literary tradition of his literary mentors, Howells and Henry James, he was nevertheless a lawyer, a champion of the underdog, and a political activist, and, while he wrote his *Abraham Lincoln*, he was serving the second of his four terms as reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio. Like his predecessor, Samuel L. "Golden Rule" Jones, he was under almost constant attack, especially from the churches and newspapers, for his innovations in legal procedures, his support of the poor and helpless, and his constant opposition to the city's exploiters.

Whitlock felt singularly well suited to write his biography of Lincoln. He was a lawyer, a politician, a Midwesterner, and a democrat. As a young man he had been active in rural Illinois politics as he served John Peter Altgeld; he had walked the streets of Illinois towns, had lived in Springfield, had talked with old men who had known Lincoln in their youth. His father and grandfathers had been Republicans and Abolitionists; one had been captain of an Ohio volunteer infantry company during the war. His own political experience, he felt, had been, on a smaller scale, much like Lincoln's in its successes and failures, its moments of difficulty and soul searching.

It seemed to him that he unlocked the key to Lincoln's nature as he wrote. Not only had he found himself turning to the Lincolnian ideal at times of stress and abuse, but he had found much self-justification in doing so. Now, he wrote, the relationship between them was even closer than he thought: "I'm particularly interested in the fact that when he ran for President the first time, twenty out of the twenty-three preachers in Springfield were against him. . . . Of course all the 'aristocrats', all the swells, all

the respectables in Springfield were against him at first; that is always the way with the progressive leaders. . . ."

In writing the short but not slight biography, Whitlock emphasized Lincoln as he saw him: a progressive in the tradition that emerged in American politics in the effort to control industrialism. At the same time Whitlock attempted to define him as a man. In both cases Whitlock attempted to lay bare the reality that lay beyond the myth that surrounded Lincoln; in both aspects he added to the myth's dimensions.

Although Whitlock had read eleven biographies of Lincoln in preparation for his own, he found all of them unsatisfactory because they did not define Lincoln as he saw him to be. Nevertheless he found Herndon's account of Lincoln's youth the most attractive and satisfactory; consequently, unaware of its significance, he accepted the account that had contributed most to our knowledge of Lincoln at the same time that it contributed most of the substance that makes up the myth.

Thus Whitlock accepts Herndon's version of the source of Lincoln's melancholia in the loss of Ann Rutledge and the burden of Mary Todd, but unlike Herndon he does not accept them as the basis for the melancholy and tragedy of Abraham Lincoln. Rather, he introduces a new dimension to the Lincoln myth as he attempts to define Lincoln's search for human justice within the framework of the legal, constitutional system.

Such a search, Whitlock concludes, is inevitably doomed to tragedy, primarily because the man who seeks such a goal must inevitably attempt to find it through a stormy balance between idealism and practicality, or, in Whitlock's context, in a balance between visionary idealism, the stuff of which dreams are made, and logical realism, the substance of objective truth.

Thus, Whitlock's Lincoln is defined in terms of Whitlock's vision and predicament; just as Whitlock's Lincoln attempts to find a solution to the slavery problem in terms of the human ideal translated into a practical course of action, Whitlock himself had been attempting to free the common people of Toledo from social and economic bondage by the same means. Whitlock's Lincoln, like Whitlock, attempted to make law the instrument whereby justice could be achieved rather than a tool for the perpetuation of injustice. Whitlock's interpretation of Lincoln concludes that

at the heart of Lincoln's character is an overwhelming compassion that includes not only the exploited but also the exploiters, who do so not out of malice but because of ignorance or misunderstanding.

The search for compassionate justice, motivated by such idealistic concepts of the nature of man and of justice, follows a difficult path at best. In his immediately preceding novel, *The Turn of the Balance,* Whitlock had come close to concluding that finding it was impossible, and in his biography of Lincoln he insists that dedication to those ideals inevitably results in loneliness, misunderstanding, condemnation, and perhaps worse. Whitlock asserts that the progressive leader must not drive men to his goal—he must lead them; and to do so, he must persuade, compromise, or do whatever is necessary to bring that goal closer to reality. He must recognize, too, that he must pay the price of isolation, perhaps even tragedy, but he can do no more than accept it. He may be destined to failure, and he must accept that possibility. He may even run the risk of unleashing forces that will defy control and bring about even greater human suffering. All this he must accept as he carries on with dignity and determination.

Whitlock concludes his *Abraham Lincoln* on a note that emphasizes the new dimension he has given to the Lincoln myth, as he defines Lincoln's tragedy as that of man's eternal search for the golden fleece, the Holy Grail, or the perfect society. It is not a scholarly biography, nor is Whitlock a historian. His Lincoln is a novelist's Lincoln, a man transmuted from reality to symbol, the symbol of the progressive search for a just and humane society and the perennial human search for perfection. What hope there is, Whitlock implies, lies in such men as Lincoln, men who are intensely human, but with their humanity greatly magnified.

In providing a new dimension to the Lincoln myth, Whitlock opens himself to a variety of criticisms: he is too unscholarly, too narrow, too simplistic, too lacking in perception of complex forces. But in defining Lincoln as he saw him, Whitlock was not concerned with attempting to unravel the complexities of social and biological determinism. He was attempting to define Lincoln as a novelist defines his characters: by using the particulars of human life as a basis for perceiving and contemplating the universals.

In attempting to unravel both myth and facts in order to expose the underlying reality of meaning, Whitlock, through the insight of the progressive politician and the empathic intuition of the novelist, provided an additional measure of understanding and a new dimension of truth.

Unlike Whitlock, Sherwood Anderson never completed the study of Lincoln that he began on several occasions, that he determined to write some day, and that survives in numerous comments, a seventy-page fragment, and a significant influence on a major character in Anderson's best novel. In all of this preoccupation, extending over twenty years of Anderson's writing career, there is no suggestion that Anderson's interest in Lincoln was historical or biographical, but rather, as was the case with Whitlock, personal and symbolic.

When Anderson became interested in Lincoln, first as a matter of conjecture and empathetic interest, he was forty-one years old, an Ohioan living in Chicago, and embarked on an almost promising writing career only several years old. Most of his life had been spent in an increasingly successful, frustrating, and ultimately dehumanizing business career. His father had served in the Civil War, and in the postwar years, while the Republican Party and the growing Lincoln myth were extending their hold over the Midwest, Anderson's father was, like Thomas Lincoln, a wandering craftsman, a failure in a time of rising expectations. Like Nancy Hanks, Anderson's mother was a silent, suffering, hardworking woman who symbolized love, and as the family moved from Ohio town to Ohio town, Sherwood Anderson, like Abraham Lincoln, determined to rise above failures, first by rejecting his father and his father's values as had Lincoln. Only many years later, after finding personal failure in business success, did Anderson come to understand and accept his father, thus perhaps finding a compassion that paralleled Lincoln's.

Like Whitlock, Anderson saw himself as a literary realist, his job to define the American reality, as he, too, saw the grimness of that reality. Thus his first two novels, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916) and *Marching Men* (1917) define the impact of that reality, dominated by industrialism and materialism, upon the human spirit. In them his protagonists attempt to free themselves and find personal fulfillment, only to learn that both are elusive.

He followed these two novels with the abstract verse that made up *Mid-American Chants* (1918) and the stories and sketches of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1918), in both of which he began to seek a new kind of reality in defining the prolonged anguish and momentary joy of which human life in America is compounded. It was at this point, in the spring of 1918, that he discovered Lincoln in a copy of Lord Charnwood's biography, given him by Waldo Frank. The dimensions of Lincoln immediately became apparent, and he wrote to Frank that

> Last evening I read for the first time in the book that you left for me, the Englishman's life of Lincoln. . . . You will understand the drift of my thoughts when I saw the book might in many respects be a study of me. There is in my heart no presumptuousness when I say that. There is brought out very clearly the tendency in the Western American man to go loose and cheap at times, to rise to exhalted occasion, to be alternately sad and . . . merry.

As he continued to read, his sense of personal identification with Lincoln began to give way to a greater sense of identification of Lincoln with those writers who, like himself, attempted the definition of the American experience in their work as he had begun to attempt in his own. A few days after his letter to Frank, he wrote to Van Wyck Brooks, then working on his study of Mark Twain, that "I have myself understood the trenchant sadness of Lincoln, the rather childlike pessimism of Twain, the half-sullen and dogmatic insistence on the part of Dreiser on the fight with Puritanism and Whitman's windy insistence on America."

A few days later, still preoccupied with what he sensed was the key to greater insight into the American experience, he wrote again to Brooks that "I got suddenly an impulse to read everything I could get hold of on Lincoln." At the same time he continued to explore the relationship between Lincoln's meaning and that of Mark Twain and Walt Whitman:

> I am wondering if you might not profitably go to Lincoln for a greater understanding of Twain and Whitman. There is something, a quality there, common to the three men. In Lincoln it is perhaps more out in front of you.
>
> I get a sense of three very honest boys brought suddenly to face the complex and intricate world. There is a stare in their eyes. They are puzzled and confused. You will be inclined to think Whitman the greater man perhaps. He came closer to understanding. He lacked Lincoln's very great honesty of soul. . . .
>
> Lincoln let . . . cheapness creep in less, because he was warm and human. He did not love and hate. In a simple, solid way he stuck to abstract principles. He squares up to those principles. That's what makes him seem so big.

At the same time that Anderson began to ponder the nature and meaning of Lincoln he began also to think of the book that was to follow *Winesburg, Ohio,* a novel that was to tell the story of the industrialization of the Midwest and its cost in human terms. That novel, *Poor White,* was in its first draft by March, 1919.

In portraying his central character, Hugh McVey, the poor white of the title, Anderson drew on his view of Lincoln as a man and as a symbol of the revolutionary changes that characterized the transformation of the Midwest from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Consequently, McVey not only contributes his innate talent for invention to that transformation, in the process unwittingly unleashing the forces that simultaneously free man and enslave him, but at the same time he symbolizes the age itself.

The parallels between Lincoln and McVey are obvious. Each is compounded of idealism and practicality, a deep compassion and a recognition that it must sometimes be disregarded, a tendency to dream and a compulsion to work. Most important for Anderson, however, was the fact that McVey, like Lincoln, determined to free men—Lincoln from chattel slavery and McVey from degrading labor. Each saw as his goal the achievement of a physical freedom that would ultimately lead to spiritual freedom, human dignity, and individual fulfillment.

Finally, each saw physical freedom within reach and spiritual liberation a possible goal rather than a remote ideal. In that moment, on the verge of victory, Anderson sees that the reality is not fulfillment but tragedy as each becomes a victim rather than a leader, a tool of those who distorted the movement toward liberation for their own ends. At this moment, the point in time at which Lincoln was shot, unleashing the chaos of Reconstruc-

tion and the Gilded Age, Anderson has McVey realize what he has done, and he determines to reject it and to fight against the forces that turned an idealistic cause into a materialistic victory. As the novel ends, McVey lives, suggesting that ultimately freedom will be won.

Anderson portrays McVey as a classic figure of American loneliness, isolated, aloof, and yet reaching out for others, a figure that resembles the Lincoln of the many bronzes that sculptors have created, and he has McVey reach out to the craftsmen and farmers turned factory workers much as Lincoln sought to touch for a moment the lives of farmhands become soldiers and wives become widows. Like Lincoln, McVey reaches out to his wife, seeking a relationship that would be meaningful and real, and at first there is much misunderstanding. Again, Anderson departs from the reality, however, as he suggests that ultimately the barriers between men will be breached and McVey will find the mutual understanding that he seeks, particularly as the first, most intimate gap, that between him and his wife, is apparently bridged as the novel ends.

Essentially McVey is Lincoln as he might have been under other circumstances, and he is Anderson also as he attempts the symbolic rejection of industrialism that Anderson himself had accomplished seven years before. But in spite of the identification of the mythical figure, the fictional character, and the author seeking insight, a remarkable fusion of imagination, intuition, empathy, and writing skill, Anderson felt that he had not yet defined Lincoln, but that instead he had merely used him. But it was not until early 1924, alone, waiting for a divorce in Reno, Nevada, that Anderson began tentatively, slowly and uncertainly at first, to write a life of Lincoln. When he began, he attempted to describe his goal to Paul Rosenfeld:

> . . . I want to do a Lincoln. That has been a buried treasure dream, and I begin a little to scrawl on it. Do not say much of it to others. It may not come off.
>
> During my time here I have soaked myself in every scrap of Lincoln I could come by.
>
> The thing projected is not a life, but an attempt to make felt the final opening out of that strange, grotesque, sweet man.

> I think you and I have talked before of the need of great themes. Lincoln is that. Always I have felt him, dreamed him, thought of him.

Anderson, it is evident, had, like Whitlock, joined the mythmakers by attempting a new interpretation of Lincoln the symbol rather than Lincoln the President or the human being. And, like Whitlock, he saw in him his own feelings, sensations, values. To Alfred Stieglitz he wrote:

> . . . Of course, I am not trying to write a biography of him. . . . Now I am frankly going to make my own story. . . .
>
> He gets close to me, always has, but I want him on my own terms, as I understand such a man, having come from the same kind of background.
>
> I've a notion it will be a book, in the end.

But although Anderson worked on his Lincoln throughout the spring and summer of 1924, it did not become a book. Rather, it remained unpublished until Paul Rosenfeld included it in the *Sherwood Anderson Reader,* which he edited and published in 1947.

A seventy-page item, Rosenfeld titled it "Father Abraham: A Lincoln Fragment," and as it appears, unrevised and unfinished, it makes clear what Anderson meant when he said that he did not intend to write a conventional life. It is, instead, an attempt at re-creating Lincoln as a human being through subjective, intuitive perception. In execution it employs the same techniques he employed in his imaginative autobiography, *A Story-Teller's Story* (1924), and in his fictional account of his childhood, *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926). The result is a merging of subject and author that defies separation as it seeks a truth symbolically if not literally exact.

Thus it is also difficult to determine whether Anderson is writing fact, fiction, or autobiography as he describes an incident presumably in Lincoln's childhood. But objective truth is not Anderson's goal as he writes:

> Since he had been a child, he had always liked being where older women were at work. He liked sitting unnoticed in a room with them. They were sewing or cooking. His stepmother, Sally Lincoln, was cutting bread.

> Another woman standing at the door of the Lincoln house, a neighbor woman.
>
> Quiet voices, a sense of well-being in a boy's heart.

Later Anderson defines Lincoln in terms of the mysticism that grows out of nature and romanticism to transcend conventional beliefs and anthropomophic gods:

> Abe neither believed nor disbelieved. He had been brought up as a boy in the heavily forested regions of Kentucky and southern Indiana. All forest people are mystics.
>
> Abe's mysticism could not, however, find expression in words. It had something to do with the sun going down at night over the flat stretches of prairie lands. It had something to do with being alone in the forest on still summer afternoons.

Finally Anderson fused man and boy, mystic and realist, into the figure of Lincoln with which he identified himself. This was Lincoln as priest-poet who epitomized and expressed what other men could not:

> Father Abraham in all likelihood always was a poet. . . . He could penetrate deeply the feelings of others. From the very first he expressed something inexpressible in the lives of the men around him. He was strong as they were strong. Their weakness was his weakness. He was always a defeated man in quest of the impossible. He was the man who could not make his inner life quite find satisfaction in the scene of his outer one. It was only in the form of a symbol that he, like all artists could fit in. Finally he did fit that inner life into the outer one. . . .

With these final paragraphs defining Lincoln and defining himself as he understood himself, Anderson abandoned his projected interpretation, perhaps because it had accomplished its purpose in explaining himself to himself in symbolic terms at a crucial time in his life. In the fragment Anderson was careless with the facts of Lincoln's life, and he accepted uncritically the assertions of Herndon, particularly in defining the source of Lincoln's melancholy. But such lapses were not important to Anderson if, indeed, he was aware of them. He was not interested in facts, as

he remarked later in another context, but with meanings, and not with definitions but with feelings. For Anderson the elusive meaning and feeling of Lincoln's life were those of his own and of all America's, and these were the things that he attempted to define in all his works as he sought a reality beyond objectivity, a truth beyond measurement.

Anderson's realism, like that of Whitlock and Howells, was a realism of appearance and of substance, and that substance, filtered through his consciousness, his imagination, and his faith, produced a Lincoln like theirs, beyond objective reality and approaching universality. Just as Richard N. Current commented that the Lincoln myth reveals much of the inward and outward trials of America, each of these three writers, each avowedly a realist, reveals much the same about himself and his country. The image of Lincoln portrayed by each reveals his perception of an increasingly complex, rapidly changing American ideal. Faithful to their own experience and to the probability of human motivation as they experienced it, they sought the reality of Lincoln. In each case the result was a mirror held not to Lincoln's life, but to their own lives and that of the nation. The self-made frontier natural aristocrat portrayed by Howells, the crusading progressive humanist defined by Whitlock, and the tortured romantic seeker after a meaning and fulfillment poetic rather than material drawn by Anderson are all elements of the Lincoln who occupies a central place in the ultimate unwritten definition of America. Such a definition, made up of many particulars, is not the stuff of critical realism, that literary technique devoted to things rather than symbols; as each of them knew, that definition can only be expressed in terms of myth, of the essence rather than the appearance of a life, a time, a people, a place. This is what these realists have made of Lincoln, and in so doing they teach us much about an American reality as vast, as complex, as provocative as the man in whom they insist it is epitomized. The result is reality, it is myth, it is the truth as these self-styled realists insisted that we must know it.

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THE RETURN OF ST. LOUIS' PRODIGAL DAUGHTER: KATE CHOPIN AFTER SEVENTY YEARS

JOYCE RUDDEL LADENSON

What I have said and what I will say
is female, not feminine.
Yes, I said yes,
not analytical, not romantic,
but the book of practical facts.

(Alicia Ostriker, "Once More Out of Darkness")

In 1899, Kate Chopin, a prominent writer of short fiction from St. Louis, suffered a terrible blow to her career. Her novel, *The Awakening,* of which she was so proud, was banned from public sale as well as from circulation in public libraries, and the author excluded from the St. Louis Literary Club. This must have come as an awful shock, especially since the successful appearance of her two collections of short stories, *Bayou Folk* and *A Night in Acadie,* had received accolades from a whole bevy of critics only a few years earlier. The widow of a wealthy Creole cotton trader and commission merchant, and the daughter of a leading St. Louis businessman, Ms. Chopin, at forty-eight, was suddenly ostracized from the ranks of the respectable.[1] Why such a fuss over a rather short novel?

Answers to that question have been attempted by many contemporary critics, nearly all male, and have reached the conclusion, mostly valid, that, to the mind of the Victorian critic, the novel extended beyond the pale of feminine respectability; that in its frank treatment of the sexual life and yearnings of a married woman, it crossed the double standard, violated Victorian prudery and seemed to advocate drastic and unhealthy

("poisonous" was the word used by one critic) solutions to a woman's problems in marriage.[2] Yet, recent answers and explanations have not gone far enough. The banning of *The Awakening* is an obvious example of sexist condemnation of Ms. Chopin's works; her contemporary male critics were not astute enough to see seeds of female consciousness and rebellion planted throughout her canon. *The Awakening* is only a little more transparent than the rest.

A contemporary spokeswoman for feminist consciousness, Shulamith Firestone, has commented that "sex class is so deep as to be invisible."[3] This penetrating observation begins to explain the contradictory and painful dilemma in which so many of Ms. Chopin's heroines are caught. Although it is important to distinguish Ms. Chopin's female characters along class, cultural, and racial lines in order to understand their social and psychological behavior, and, indeed, Ms. Chopin's own attitude toward them, a healthy majority of her female characters nevertheless conflict with men or male authority, a sexual class phenomenon which cuts across economic, cultural, and racial lines.

The more independent women, for instance, are defined primarily by their near total rejection of men, marriage, and respectability. Perhaps the boldest of Ms. Chopin's stories, and certainly one of the most explicit nineteenth century American narrative accounts of female resistance and emancipation, "The Maid of Saint Philippe" has received little and largely inappropriate critical commentary. The setting of the story is pre-revolutionary Louisiana, a time when French settlers were battling with the British for control. Appropriately, the revolutionary conflict which provides the milieu for Marianne and her father's survival struggle against the British colonists, also provides the more important, subsuming theme of conflict between Marianne and her two male antagonists, her father, Picote, and her respectable French suitor, Captain Alexis Vaudry.

The first few pages of the story establish the loyalty of Marianne and her father to their independent community of Saint Philippe as well as their hatred of the British. One dialectal struggle is clear. But another conflict is more subtly dramatized. What is especially interesting in these pages is the way in which Marianne is described physically: She was "tall, supple and

strong. Dressed in her worn buckskin trappings she looked like a handsome boy rather than like the French girl of seventeen that she was. As she stepped from the woods the glimmer of the setting sun dazzled her." And a little farther down the page: "Marianne carried a gun across her shoulder as easily as a soldier might. Her stride was as untrammelled as that of the stag who treads his native hillside unmolested." The details reveal an Americanized Saint Joan, complete with her masculine, simple military attire, and sanctifying halo of sun, dedicated to her resistance mission against the British. There the similarity ends. While Joan fought for Church and country, Marianne fought primarily for her own freedom from patriarchal authority through her identification with untamed nature, an objective correlative for the urge toward freedom and wildness of many Chopin heroines. Coordinately, she resists the proposal of a comfortable, even luxurious marriage, and the encroachments of colonial authority.

Once Marianne's father dies, she is free of her obligation to serve him as a surrogate wife and caretaker. Her subsequent decision to remain true to her worker's origins, designated by the "white cap of the French workingwoman,"[5] and to reject Captain Vaudry's temptations of "silks," "velvet carpets," and "rounds of pleasure," as well as his persistent confessions of love, points up her consummate rebellion.[6] For Marianne, love, romance, and pleasure are mere entrapments of the spirit, ruses to enslave her body and soul. At once the soldier and pioneer, true to her egalitarian and anti-colonist origins, Marianne is Ms. Chopin's most revolutionary heroine. Her rejection of patriarchy is final and complete, just as her rejection of the good bourgeois life, with its attendant political loyalty to the French crown, also signifies her political resistance to any kind of oppressive authority.

Other representative independent or rebellious Chopin heroines reflect a more middle class preocccupation with marriage, love, romance, and motherhood. "Athénaïse," for instance, concerns a young, middle class Creole woman whose arranged marriage triggers her early escape to a hideout in New Orleans. Athénaïse, like Marianne, is filled with single-mindedness and rebellious flight, but is also more tied to her middle class privileges than the maid of Saint Philippe. In her urban retreat,

Athénaïse forms one of Ms. Chopin's significant kinds of relationships—the semi-platonic friendship between a man and woman outside of marriage—which generally allows women more latitude and power than a romantic or marital one since there are fewer legal or psychic obligations.

Indeed, Athénaïse's friends and helpers are clearly not sexually bonded to her. Her brother is responsible for hiding her in the boarding house; Monsieur Gouvernail, her bachelor confidante at the house, protects her secrets and sorrows, and harbors feelings for her perhaps more cultivated and complex than her husband's; and finally the quadroon, Sylive, who owns the house where she stays, protects her anonymity and need for privacy. The meat of the story concerns Athénaïse's rebellion against parental and marital rule and the relationships she develops outside her marriage; yet, the conclusion of the story appears to contradict the theme of escape. Realizing that she is pregnant, she returns to her husband, Cazeau, jubilant with her new knowledge and seemingly in love with him for the first time. But the conclusion may very well be ironic, since one is left more with the major impression created by the story's dominant rebellious tone. One wonders if Ms. Chopin was cautious about revealing her full hand.

Louise Mallard, the middle-aged wife of the successful Brently Mallard in "The Story of an Hour" imparts the truth of Athénaïse's rebellion from a more mature vantage. Indeed, Louise could be Athénaïse fifteen to twenty years later as she experiences a wild, exuberant joy after learning of her husband's alleged death in a railroad disaster. The irony and terrible surprise which accompanies this joy is prepared by Ms. Chopin with wonderful skill. It is Louise's sister who gently breaks the news to her, careful because of the heart condition (skillful pun) from which Louise suffers. The news momentarily liberates her, and, metaphorically, her heart and spirit are freed:

> She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come, that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

> There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature.[7]

Only after the error in the report is suddenly revealed to her by her husband's unannounced and sudden reappearance, does her heart attack commence, and she dies, as the doctor's ironic observation had it, "of a joy that kills."[8]

The perils, ambiguities, and mixed emotions caused by female assertiveness dominate the tone of Ms. Chopin's plots more than the mood of jubilant freedom just discussed. "Wiser Than a God," for instance, is about a very talented young female concert pianist who chooses a career over marriage, despite the love she feels for her suitor. The Chopin surprise ending, simply recording Fraulein Paula Von Stoltz's escape and rest in Leipsic, attended by another, more persistent suitor whose "dogged patience . . . so often wins in the end," suggests that Paula's quest for self-fulfillment is more a youthful whim than a mature or dedicated decision.[9] However, the love which Paula and George share is too consuming and confining an emotion to give oneself over to, and like Marianne, Paula chooses art for the moment. The Latin epigram with which Ms. Chopin introduces the story—"To love and be wise is scarcely granted even to a God"—also suggests the enormous difficulty a woman faces with her identity once she has fallen in love.[10] It is not clear just how Paula could have exercised wisdom inside a Victorian marriage which probably would have diluted and compromised her dedication to music. I am reminded of Kate Millett who, interpreting Frederick Engels, has noted that the nineteenth century propertied classes, having others to serve them, convert their privileged women into decorative, aesthetic objects with only limited uses.[11] This observation applies to the role Paula might have played inside marriage, given her social class, and helps explain why she impulsively resisted her feelings for George. One would indeed need the wisdom of a God in order to cope with the tragic contradictions facing Paula.

But Paula's trial is only a cameo performance for the larger, more complex struggle of Edna Pontellier in Ms. Chopin's *magnum opus, The Awakening*. The book, however, was not considered such until its American reissue in 1964.[12] As mentioned, the first reviews were blatant, if not vicious sexist attacks which served as critical justification for its censure. On the one hand, the novel was denounced for its supposed amoral treatment of infidelity, and on the other for its egalitarian tendencies which permitted women to harbor thoughts "fit only for the smoking room." Per Seyersted's bibliographical commentary notes that even *The Cambridge History of American Literature* and *The Literary History of the United States* omitted it entirely from their hallowed establishment pages. Recent critics who have attempted to deliver the novel at least from obscurity and have paid Ms. Chopin an important service, nevertheless tend to overemphasize the existentialist, self-determining *angst* in the novel as a kind of universal theme above and beyond sexual and historical consideration.[13] Joan Zlotnick, however, has begun to point in the right direction when she asserts that the nature imagery is a clue to Chopin's implicit approval of Edna's female rebellion.[14]

At twenty-nine, Edna is defined by her domestic and family responsibilities to her two children and her husband's upper middle class friends and acquaintances, a definition which demands the cultivation of large and lavish dinner parties, afternoon teas and visits, and constant social activity. Significantly, Edna is not Creole; in an important way she is the female representative of the emerging Protestant capitalist class, bred in distrust of sex, despite her strong yearnings, and in subservience to the new emerging American businessman. An outsider, she does not feel altogether comfortable in the sensuous, very gregarious Creole social life. Clearly, she does not answer the flirtatious advances of admiring men with the same nonchalance and casually responsive tease with which Creole women do. Her Presbyterian background dictates the same double standard, but does not even allow women the liberty to masquerade flirtatiousness. Creole society does so allow, although its stern Catholic morality holds women to a strict chastity beneath the social mask.

Thus, Edna is not prepared for a chance flirtation on a vacation island while her husband, typically, is away on business. A desire for her young admirer, Robert Lebrum, grows while her closeness to nature becomes more intense; her awakening to her

sensual longings is also an awakening to her need for greater self-determination, although she is not clear what that would encompass. The novel elaborates her sexual and psychological escape from her domestic life toward a temporary involvement with a pleasant *roué*, Alcée Arobin, while she waits for Robert, her heart's desire. The denouement recounts Edna's rejection of Alcée for Robert, who ironically but predictably rejects her in order to protect his own reputation. Edna's final metaphoric acknowledgment that she cannot return to her husband or children because of her new consciousness is expressed tragically through her suicide, since she sees no other way to satisfy her awakened desires within the patriarchal world of double standards and family loyalty.

Edna's dilemma is not that she is an a-historic, eternally tragic victim, but that, as a woman in Victorian America, the only way out of her subtle oppression is a kind of egalitarian license for promiscuity. Meaningful work, for instance, which could have added another dimension to her life, enters only momentarily as a possibility when she considers cultivating her artistic talents. However, skeptical of her abilities and convinced by Madomiselle Reisz, her Bohemian artist friend and confidante, that she must give herself over to art completely in order to be successful, Edna rejects that outlet for her more consuming sensual passion. Yet, her perspective matures just before her suicide as she evaluates her sensuality for what it is, and is fearful of the chaos that would result. Her suicide in the once life-giving now death-dealing sea is the result of only part of her own will; most of that fatal decision was made for her by the agonizing social and psychological pressures arbitrarily imposed on her as a woman. Ms. Chopin's most daring achievement in this novel is its implicit attack on patriarchy and the sexual double standard; her limitation is her inability to suggest a more humanized world larger than that doomed by sexual escape.

Edna's battle with her very real passions, even greater than those of her male counterparts, is a motif repeated in several other Chopin stories. The heroines of "A Shameful Affair" and "The Kiss" both are privileged Creole women who break the double standard and momentarily give in to or least recognize their real feelings toward men outside that legitimate province designated

to them. In "The Storm," a story considered her most daring by recent critics, the heroine, Calixta, gives in to an internal storm—her passion for an old flame—while an actual storm keeps her husband and son temporarily away.[15] The great surprise in the story is Chopin's end. Here, unlike a number of her reverse endings which seem contradictory to the stories' major tone, the finale finds Calixta guiltless and perfectly happy when she welcomes back her husband and son. Alcée, her lover, also returns to his home, exchanges pleasant letters with his wife who is enjoying a vacation of her own away from him, and for a moment pure pleasure triumphs. Metaphor and action both work harmoniously, allowing Ms. Chopin to describe and implicitly condone, in unprecedented graphic detail for the nineteenth century, the passions of a mature woman.

To her credit, Ms. Chopin's range of female characters sometimes reaches perceptively beyond her class and race. In "Elizabeth Stock's One Story," she poignantly rescues the impoverished spinster from her undeserved stereotypical mold, and, like Sarah Orne Jewett whom she admired, creates a complex human being out of an isolated setting. Elizabeth, a local postmistress, dedicates her life to working for men because she does not have the confidence as a woman to become a writer, her lifelong wish. The terrible irony in the story concerns Elizabeth's betrayal by the very man whose economic survival she earlier insured. "Désirée's Baby" also focuses with a harshly critical eye on the subject of white male racist attitudes. Désirée, the self-effacing, adoring wife of the imperious Armand, gives birth to a black child, only to be hypocritically condemned by her husband whose own mother is black, a fact of which Désirée is kept ignorant. Désirée, like Edna, is trapped by an historic injustice, and despondent beyond relief, she commits suicide; Armand's patriarchal racism is thus secured by her sacrifice.

The foregoing stories and novel represent, I think, some of the best of Chopin—the most sensitive, sympathetic and skillfull. And yet, *At Fault*, her "other novel," as Lewis Leary has designated it for its benighted position beside *The Awakening*, treats the female condition almost as though written by a male.[16]

Ms. Chopin's first attempt at long fiction, *At Fault*, with its moments of social reaction and heavy plot contrivance, is still a

more difficult novel to penetrate than critics up to the present have assumed. Thérèse Lafirme, a prosperous Creole widow in her early thirties, is apparently a well adjusted woman, true to her assigned role. Her matriarchal position on the plantation she runs is executed with benevolence and efficiency, though within a strictly hierarchal and racist social and economic order. Blacks know their place and are happy under Thérèse's guidance; they never revolt or complain, except for comic relief, and are generally stereotyped out of existence. Epitomized by its Catholic Creole mistress, Thérèse, this semi-feudal agrarian society conflicts with expanding Northern capitalism in the figure of David Hosmer, a self-serving lumber baron from St. Louis who literally and metaphorically cuts the timber and gleans the harvest of wealth from part of the old plantation. The dialectic is right out of Marx: feudal power conflicts with rising bourgeois power, with the inevitable triumph of the latter. The catch here is that contrary to the standard class conflict which at the highest levels takes place between men, this conflict combines class and sex, the feudal world represented by a woman tied to an older European culture.

The novel is conventional and somewhat predictable. Hosmer, the Northern capitalist, after an excruciating test of moral strength imposed upon him by the scrupulously moral, queen-like Thérèse, wins both the sought-after land for timber exploitation and finally, the hand of the nearly irreproachable, spotlessly virtuous Thérèse. The novel is also heavily suffused with an atmosphere of superficial values of good and evil: Thérèse insists that Hosmer do the right thing by his divorced wife, Fanny, and return to her in an effort to make up for past mistakes; Grégoire, Thérèse's nephew, recklessly shoots Jocint, the half-breed Indian arsonist, and gets his just desserts in the end; after the contrived death of Hosmer's wife, who is a no-good alcoholic anyhow, Thérèse and Hosmer are reconciled to live happily ever after. Love conquers all in a cruel, evil world. Hosmer's self-serving capitalism is "humanized" by the more "civilized" European feudal manners and values of Thérèse. Capitalism wins, but is cleansed and uplifted by feudalism. And crucially, feudalism's garbs are feminine, not female. For Thérèse, the feminine moral conscience, and Hosmer, the natural male predator, summarize another type of Victorian

morality. Illuminating this, Kate Millett has suggested that the Victorian world was dominated by a social ethic that defined the woman's role as moral arbiter and conscience for the male who found goodness "tedious but felt someone ought to do [it] anyway."[17]

And yet, there are a few redeeming features to Thérèse, which lift her from her stereotype. Advising Hosmer to return to Fanny, Thérèse does not merely subscribe to traditional Catholic morality; on a more realistic level, she actively sympathizes with Fanny, on the grounds that Hosmer neglected her and contributed to her "character weakness." Fanny herself, later in the novel, offers her own version of this argument, confiding to Thérèse about Hosmer's failings. She accuses him of never discussing the events in the daily newspaper with her, even when she actively tried to engage his interest, then of arrogantly scattering the papers all over the apartment for her to clean up, and finally of deliberately avoiding her company as much as possible. Female identification with Fanny is as much a cause for Thérèse's refusal of Hosmer's marriage proposal as the Catholic prohibition against divorce.

The only independent woman in the novel is the divorcée, Milicent, Hosmer's younger sister, whom Chopin seems to deride because of her hypocritically emancipated attitude which acknowledges few social bonds and feelings. The character sketch is a little reminiscent of Georgie McEnders, a short story heroine who insists on being a social do-gooder while condemning immorality in the lower classes. Her righteous bubble bursts when she discovers her own inheritance is sullied by an unscrupulous father.[18]

Maudlin piety and plot contrivance aside, *At Fault* raises important questions about responsibility or fault for actions within relationships, although it settles conflict in a traditional, male-oriented way. More to the point, the novel probably shows that Ms. Chopin was just warming up, getting ready for a novel which would explore the female condition in a far less inhibited and honest way. This she did, to her immediate censure and historic delivery.

Despite the stifling patriarchal Victorian world in which Kate Chopin lived and wrote and to which she sometimes acquiesced, her work often raises significant questions about the role of women

as wives, mothers, unmarried women, adolescents, and even revolutionary pioneers. Seventy years after her death, her literary canon is now certain to attract the much deserved attention denied it in the past.

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NOTES

1. See esp. Daniel Rankin, *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1932); and Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969) for details of Ms. Chopin's life. Mr. Seyersted is the more perceptive and reliable biographer, as his work is relatively free of the moralistic, sexist pronouncements characteristic of Mr. Rankin.
2. Per Seyersted, "Kate Chopin (1851-1904)," *American Literary Realism*, III, No. 2 (1970), 153-159.
3. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 1.
4. Kate Chopin, "The Maid of Saint Philippe," in *The Awakening and Other Stories*, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 12. Hereafter cited as Chopin.
5. Chopin, "The Maid of Saint Philippe," p. 16.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
7. Chopin, "The Story of an Hour," pp. 120-121.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
9. Chopin, "Wiser Than a God," p. 11.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
11. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 121.
12. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York: Capricorn, 1964). See Kennth Eble's introduction to the first American reissue.
13. Seyersted, p. 153-159.
14. Joan Zlotnick, "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood and Motherhood," *The Markham Review*, 3 (1968), 1-5.
15. See esp. Robert D. Arner, "Kate Chopin's Realism: 'At The Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm'," *The Markham Review*, II (1970), 1-4.
16. Lewis Leary, *Southern Excursions; Essays on Mark Twain and Others* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: 1971), pp. 176-177.
17. Kate Millett, p. 37.
18. Chopin, "Miss McEnders," pp. 181-189.

ROSS LOCKRIDGE, *RAINTREE COUNTY*, AND THE EPIC OF IRONY

Gerald C. Nemanic

William Carlos Williams may be the only important writer of our time who persisted in believing that an American epic might still be written. His own *Paterson*, an "answer to Greek and Latin with the bare hands," was not to be that work. Williams knew it; indeed, he visualized his efforts as a necessary preliminary, "a gathering up" of raw materials into a foundation on which later poets might build epic structures.

The successful dramatization of American experience would result not from sophisticated commentaries on the nature of the American and his institutions. It would follow from the direct knowledge of objects, a simple apprehension of and generous acceptance of the "beautiful thing." "No ideas but in things" and "beautiful thing" are refrains echoing through *Paterson*. They aid in building a motif central to the meaning of the poem. One reflection of that meaning is the knowledge that any reification of the national experience must begin at the sensuous level, in that world most simple and yet baffling.

Perhaps the implication of Williams' stricture is that the only worthwhile "epic" of American life must of necessity grow from an endearment which might never be associated with "ideas," but only with the destructable world of time and space. If so, how could any one man possibly know enough "things" of this sprawling, chaotic nation to allow for, in his sensibility, the evolution of a metaphorical frame suitable to the demands of an epic vision? Williams thought long on this dilemma and set it before us in his art. He not only believed in the dilemma, he was thoroughly convinced that it could be solved. A quarter century after Book I

of *Paterson* issued its challenge to future poets we have not yet seen the fulfillment, nor perhaps even those first halting steps toward the realization of his prophesy. Our best instruction still lies in pondering the import of "pre-epic" poems like *Paterson* or Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, and, in the genre of prose fiction, reflecting on the lessons taught by valiant failures, one of which, *Raintree County*, is the main subject of this essay.

II

Ross Lockridge's mammoth "epic" novel was published, to much fanfare, in 1948. It was the author's first novel, a work more than eight years in the making. Within months of its first printing the obscure English instructor who wrote it had become a wealthy celebrity. A number of prestigious critics had reviewed *Raintree County* with enthusiasm. Howard Mumford Jones went so far as to declare the appearance of this novel as marking the end of a serious slump in American fiction. The motion picture industry, searching everywhere for new filmscripts which might help mine another bonanza like *Gone With the Wind*, provided the author with increased public exposure and a whopping sum for the rights to film his novel.[1] At that moment it seemed quite possible that another youthful and brilliant novelist was coming out of the Midwest, as Dreiser, Lewis, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald had done before him, to reshape the forms of American fiction.

But there were immediate and disturbing side effects resulting from this public display. Lockridge, a highly sensitive and private man, was finding the role of instant celebrity difficult. Despite strong public and critical acclaim for his work, he raged at the minority of nay-sayers who pointed out the shortcomings of his style and formal conceptions.[2] A young man of thirty-three, after eight years of exhausting work on what he believed to be his *magnum opus*, was being churned through the mill of public opinion in a fashion he could hardly have anticipated. With a part of his movie money he purchased a new home in Bloomington, Indiana, his home town. There he brooded and drove his new Kaiser automobile up and down the driveway. Not three months after the first appearance of *Raintree County*, Ross Lockridge had committed suicide. While many groped for reasons his

mother said simply that "the boy put his heart's blood into the book, he had nothing left."

III

In the more than twenty-five years since Lockridge's death his novel has steadily lost visibility to the point where, by 1974, it had gone out of print entirely. Lockridge's work has not, it seems, interested many literary critics beyond that initial excitement engendered by its publication There are some good reasons for this neglect: like many young writers, Lockridge may have attempted to write too much, too soon. His ambition not being matched by his experience, the style and formal qualities of the novel are flawed. The author's romantic conception of the American epic experience, a part of that "Great American Novel" syndrome associated with the first half of the twentieth century, has by now lost a good deal of literary caste. And the fact remains that Lockridge wrote only one novel, and this has not been sufficient to establish a literary reputation.

Yet to the student of American cultural life this one novel is arresting—a literary curiosity which exasperates us with its turgidity while as often luring us forward with its beauty. One is tempted to regard it as The Final Experiment with the Great American Novel and to discern, inextricably interwoven through its images, visions and sentiments, the stamp both of its successful vitalism and of its inevitable failures.

IV

Williams' opinion of *Raintree County* has not been recorded, but his stricture, "No ideas but in things," penetrates to what is both good and bad in the novel. For an immediate insight into the methods Lockridge will use to dramatize the essential experience of America, we need look no farther than the title page and dedication. There the author introduces us to Raintree County, Indiana, which has "no boundaries in time and space. . . . You will hunt for it on the map, and it won't be there. . . . For Raintree County is not the country of the perishable fact. It is the country of the enduring fiction." At the outset we are told not to expect the dull, stubborn facts of the real world of rural

Indiana but an imaginative vision wherein "ideas" *are* father to the materials they create and not, as Williams would have it, *vice versa.*

In the accompanying dedication we find: "For My Mother/ Elsie Shockley Lockridge/This book of lives, loves, and antiquities." Here is revealed the obverse of Lockridge's attitude toward his materials. A "book of . . . antiquities" seems much different than one which has been ascribed "no boundaries in time and space." And this dichotomy informs the entire novel. Much care is taken to recreate the artifacts, tenor, and style of life in nineteenth century Indiana. These "antiquities" are evoked with deep feeling for that fading fabric of life. They delight, and are their own reason for being. And yet, for Lockridge this is hardly enough. He is bent on discovering the principles of American development, the foundation of American character. Raintree County will also have a metaphorical reality, and the author will lead us through interminable Platonic dialogues and prolix theorizings on the nature of history and art in his determination to fully develop that metaphor.

V

In *Raintree County* Lockridge details the life of his epic hero, John Wickliff Shawnessy, from his youth in antebellum Indiana ("that mirror of the ancient republic now lost in time") through the Civil War and into a later life amid the trappings of a "Gilded Age." Mostly we are in Raintree County, the boundaries of which will delimit the existence of Shawnessy, but significant scenes range from the battle of Chickamauga to Ford's Theatre on the night of Lincoln's assassination. Shawnessy's life span has been determined strategically, for into this representative American hero must be woven strands of American experience both old and new. There is the pre-war dream of an Edenic republic; then the chaos of internecine warfare; and finally the increasingly impersonal life of industrial America. "The greatness of Lincoln," says the seasoned Shawnessy of later years, "was the greatness of America in his time."[3] And with this comment Shawnessy passes judgment on himself and his times, for it was that first half of the nineteenth century which was "capable of creating a great man," a man of mythic proportions. The remainder of

that century molded the complicated and ambiguous American hero, that prototype of the anti-hero which we may all recognize as contemporary.

VI

Through Shawnessy, Lockridge attempts to mirror the essential American experience. As a Midwesterner, the hero exists at the geographical and cultural middle ground of the nation. The Raintree County culture he absorbs is stable and traditional enough to maintain a strong grip on the hero's moral self. Instinctively vital and curious, young Johnny is fully able to mount a critique of the mixture of puritan and bourgeois values which permeates this society, and yet he is not capable, in the last analysis, of washing them from his conscience.

The isolate purity of the County is lovingly examined in all its "antiquity," and yet it is, at the same time, traversed by the Great National Road, that main artery to the West which carries a steady stream of pioneers past the Shawnessy home. In his earliest recollections Johnny is stirred by the promise of freedom and adventure symbolized by the wagonloads of ebullient emigrants. The young hero is torn by conflicting impulses. He yearns to understand a tribal past and to clarify his own position within the framework of his circumscribed culture.

Thus he clings to that place, Raintree County, which promises answers to his insistent questions. Simultaneously, he is excited by the epic sweep of national experience and dreams of contact with the innocence he associates with westering. A crucial dilemma associated with the production of the American epic is reflected in Shawnessy's quandary. Named "John Wickliff" for that old hero of the race who translated sacred documents into the vernacular, Shawnessy becomes the potential American Homer. The undoing of the pure vision of an American republic, through war and greed, will nullify his efforts to compose the American *Odyssey.* Not only will it be impossible for Shawnessy to absorb the discordant and protean elements of post-war American life, but the maiming experience of his own guilt will sap his resolve to continue.

Raintree County is a novel conceived in paradox, for it is an epic structure which reveals that the artistic realization of the

true epic is no longer possible, at least not in America. Shawnessy's epic poem, this epic within the novel, is the work of a lifetime. It is begun in the first enthusiasms of youth and carried on doggedly, sporadically, and, finally, perfunctorily, into the last years of the century. As art, this epic poem is fated to remain inchoate and fragmented, a mere literary curiosity. Shawnessy finds that he can hope to succeed ultimately not through his literary efforts but in "the legend of my life, with which I refute all sophistries. By a myth of homecoming and a myth of resurrection." (988) This legend is the fabric of *Raintree County* and it is Lockridge, viewing from the artists's perspective, and not Shawnessy, his creation, who strives to indite the ironical American epic.

VII

Raintree County meanders through more than one thousand pages of flashbacks, dream narratives and philosophical disquisitions, yet the basic outline of the novel is simple, for it is essentially a *bildungsroman.* Here is played out the story of John Shawnessy's education, symbolized by his search for the mythical Rain Tree, the tree of knowledge. He was born in April, 1839, and the novel's literal action takes place on one day, July 4, 1892. From that point in time Shawnessy reflects, through reminiscence and flashbacks, on his life as an American hero.

The hero's first concrete memories are of 1844—pioneers passing his home on their way to Oregon. At that point Johnny first feels a longing for the western star. But youth in rural Indiana is idyllic. In memory, "the clock in the Court House Tower . . . is always fixed at nine o'clock, and it is summer and the days are long." These endless days are spent musing and wandering by the river. John Shawnessy husks corn in the autumn and secretly adores Nell Gaither. He imagines himself a young Adonis and her an airy river nymph. The senior Shawnessys are kindly folk, yet imbued with the implacable moral values of middle America and Scotch Presbyterianism. The father, T. D. Shawnessy, is a doctor, preacher, and mixer of botanical medicines. His wife Ellen is a hardy woman, but softly lyrical as well, the fine fruit of a pioneer heritage. This portrait of the early life of an American hero is one of warmth and security.

The occasional vicissitudes are not atypical; indeed the conception is remarkably similar to those of the earlier Indiana masters of sentimental fiction—Booth Tarkington, Maurice Thompson, *et al.*[4]

But troubling undercurrents complicate this idealized picture. Johnny is moved by the restlessness of America in the 1840s and 1850s. Lockridge views these pregnant times as an inevitable climax of two hundred years' history. The westering spirit of a nation catches Shawnessy in its wave; he longs for a free and glorious life which the limits of Raintree County cannot supply. His first fascination with literature stems from a vaguely felt need to rise above the limitations of place. Another shadow is cast over the hero's youth by the building fury of fraternal enmity which will culminate in a civil war. Even before the outbreak of fighting he is caught up in the fate of the South. Seduced by Susannah Drake, an exotic Southern visitor to Raintree County, Johnny is determined to fulfill his responsibilities to the "fallen" girl. They marry and travel South in the troubled days before the firing on Fort Sumter. Susannah, at once incredibly sensual and puritanical, is Lockridge's somewhat stereotyped symbol of the South.[5] She is, finally, a schizophrenic driven to madness by a moral and racial ambiguity. Her derangement results in a desperate flight from her husband and an attempted suicide which brings about the death of their young son. Thus for Lockridge the South represents an American tragedy which destroys both its own and the sons of the Republic.

Once Susannah has been safely institutionalized, Johnny is free to fight for the Republic. He is transformed into the typical American foot soldier: after being wounded in action, he spends weeks in a military hospital near Washington where, among his wounded countrymen, he is visited by President Lincoln and Walt Whitman. Back home in Raintree County, Johnny has been erroneously reported killed in action. Heartbroken sweetheart Nell in turn marries Johnny's boyhood rival, Garwood Jones, and then dies in childbirth.

Having had enough of historical melodrama, Lockridge settles his hero into the life of Raintree County. Except for an ill advised foray into politics and a few minor adventures in the iniquitous East, Shawnessy leads a model life in tranquil obscurity,

remarries, rears a family, teaches school, and works fitfully on the epic poem he can never finish. Occasionally former friends return, sons of Raintree County who have moved into the larger world of the post-war Republic. There is the famous journalist, Jerusalem Webster Stiles, who serves as an intellectual mirror image for Shawnessy. Garwood Jones, coward and opportunist, has become a U.S. senator and a candidate for President. Cash Carney was once a local hustler but now, in an age favoring manipulative genius, he has become a financial power and molder of political personalities, a character modeled perhaps on another Midwesterner of obscure roots, Mark Hanna. The "Gilded Age" glitters forth boldly and John Shawnessy, heir of the heroes of old, has in it no place of honor.

VIII

Within the framework of the *bildungsroman* the protagonist becomes life's initiate; he experiences marriage, lost love, death, war, and remorse while his personality slowly ripens. There is a thematic quest—the hero's desire to explore the secrets of the exotic Rain Tree—which is compatible with the growth principle of the novel and helps unify the action.

It would seem that the melodramatic paraphernalia of the plot could be brought forth as evidence of the novel's inherent weakness. And yet Lockridge's melodrama is so self-conscious, so mannered and obviously exaggerated, that we are forced to examine its possible intent. The work, which from one angle seems so romantically earnest, yet from another can be viewed as ironical and satiric. We see that Shawnessy's life story, replete with classic analogues, describes the development of an heroic American prototype. But the novelist often reminds us of another viewpoint: from it we can see that Shawnessy has evolved into a sententious wind bag who rocks sleepily toward death in an obscure corner of the Midwest backwater. He mutters of a "lost republic" and timorously mollifies the harpies of the local PTA in order to keep his job. In the crucial decisions of his life—marrying Susannah instead of Nell, rejecting the impulse to move West—he has chosen wrongly. His moral earnestness becomes a maddening prudery; his heroic attempt to forge the American

epic seems merely the scribbling of an aging schoolmaster who clings pathetically to youthful dreams of glory.

This other, or anti-epic, which coexists with the first is best illuminated in a comparison of the novel's hero and his antagonist, both of whose initials are "J.W.S." John Wickliff Shawnessy is not the exclusive alter ego of Ross Lockridge. As much a part of the author's sensibility is the cynical, bumptious intellectual—Jerusalem Webster Stiles. Shawnessy and Stiles are antagonists, and yet they represent divided segments of that personality which is close to Lockridge's own.

Stiles enters the novel when Shawnessy is an adolescent. The "Perfesser" come from the East to open an "Academy" in Raintree County, the place of his birth, and it is in Pedee Academy that Shawnessy is introduced to the learning of the ages: English poetry, the classics, philosophy, the new science of Darwin, and the new skepticism in religion. Stiles, the jaded aesthete, exercises a powerful hold on Shawnessy's pliant imagination. Representing the "stile-ish" East, Europe, and modern intellectual taste, Stiles is the primary formal educative force in Shawnessy's youth. It is as if Lockridge splits his own identity in two. The author had, like Shawnessy, grown up to an innocent and powerful idealism in the quietude of pastoral Indiana. We can imagine that Lockridge's father, a college professor, was much like T. D. Shawnessy—earnest, conscientious, kind, and morally upright. The Lockridge family, ensconced in a rambling old house amid the towering elms of a college town, probably lived in much the same warm, wholesome atmosphere as did the Shawnessys of Raintree County.

But for young Lockridge there was also the inevitable move to the state university, and then on to Harvard. We can also imagine some of the disillusionment, the hardening, that most young men suffer when removed from the idyllic life of a small Midwestern community. He was thrust into a competitive, lonely world and was suddenly responsible for a wife and children. Shawnessy also ripens through experience, but his pastoral nineteenth century world still provides enough ballast to maintain him upright. Shawnessy does not sink under the weight of modern life, whereas Stiles, and Lockridge, too, are not so fortunate.

Stiles represents not only the intellectual *avant garde* of the

East, but a deeper kind of debilitating knowledge—the finality of death known to young, when psychological defenses have not yet been developed to combat despair. Late in the novel, in a drunken moment, Stiles tells Shawnessy:

> Years ago . . . I was a child in Raintree County. He paused as if the words just said were full of labyrinthine meanings. My father died before I was old enough to remember him. When I was only ten years old, my mother died. In that death, Jerusalem Webster Stiles knew the secret of life—which is death—and never added to his wisdom though he added to his words. And with that act, also, he left Raintree County and went East. . . . He learned early with the bitterness of the homeless child, that the earth cares nothing for our grief, and that even our mother who cared for us in life cares nothing for us in death. (986, 987)

Stiles, who from one angle appears to be merely the hero's foil, is, in another way, the hero's mirror image, and indeed the two characters, both J.W.S., can be seen as a composite figure which may reflect the complex personality of the author. Accepting this, we could explain the perplexing doubleness of the novel—that tendency to both rhapsodize and satirize, to both *believe* in the epic heroism of John Shawnessy's life and to judge so severely its limitations.

IX

This curious duality, or the depth of Lockridge's irony, if indeed it is conscious irony, brings us inevitably to speculation about the role of the artist's personality in his creation, and, in this case, to consideration of his suicide. It is surely possible that Lockridge's suicide had nothing to do with his literary career, or that the concerns of art played only a minor part in a highly complex situation. Yet in retrospect we can see signs of forboding in the novel itself. The double vision spoken of previously was not necessarily an "enriching ambiguity." Perhaps the doubleness of *Raintree County* is not so much the artistic weaving of an ironic vision as it is the sign of a perilous personal dilemma, one which may have eventually led to the tragic denouement of the author's self-destruction.

In Midwestern fiction we have seen the development of a romantic school—the Hoosiers—and a subsequent reaction toward realism. While neither movement was the exclusive property of Midwestern writers, there were, between about 1870 and 1930, a disproportionate number of writers from the region who took on the key roles in the evolution of literary fashions. Complicated spirits like Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson showed elements of both romanticism and realism in their fiction. *Winesburg, Ohio* is a fine example of how an ostensibly objective piece of writing can be enriched through an infusion of pathos and human sympathy.

Lockridge, like Anderson, exhibited a complicated relationship to his Midwestern roots. Both writers wished to write the truth about life in the Midwest they had known, and yet the need to confront the facts came into deep conflict with an emotional need to charge that world with significance, whatever these "facts" might show. It is perhaps ironic that Anderson's simpler vision may have benefited him as an artist. He wrote the Winesburg stories much as Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn,* directly from the heart and with a minimal self-consciousness. The ironies and beauties abiding in those books are inherent in the tangible, dramatic conceptions of their makers.

Lockridge, on the other hand, was an intellectual as well as an artist and his novel is partly conceived in intellectual terms. Although *Raintree County* is brilliant in parts, it fails in its intellectualism—in the abstracted Platonic dialogues which take up too much of its last half. In these debates Shawnessy, the idealist, combats Stiles, the cynic, on subjects ranging from love, marriage and the family to politics, religion, anthropology and myth. We find here a rough analogue to Anderson's conflicting vision of Winesburg. Objectivity clashes with a sense of personal involvement, despair combats hope, elemental hatred strives in no less elemental love. Anderson can present the reader with a moving dramatization of thse conflicts; Lockridge too often can only talk about them.

And so we come to face, finally, a clear illustration of art's value, the force of its humanism. The gift of the artist is to be able to confront us with dilemma in a tangible form and through this presentation to reap, for himself and his reader, a spiritual

harvest. The imperfect, though valiant, attempts of Lockridge to reach that consolation result in the frustrating ambiguity which is *Raintree County,* a novel which reveals our bewilderment as well as our vitality as a culture.

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NOTES

1. *Raintree County* was winner of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Semi-Annual Novel Award for fiction suitable for adaptation to the screen. The award provided a minimum of $125,000, with bonus clauses which could bring the total to $275,000. The studio, of course, gained film rights to the novel.
2. Hamilton Basso, writing in *The New Yorker,* simply dismissed Lockridge as a "second-hand Wolfe." *Newsweek* pegged the book as "sprawling, exasperating, tedious."
3. Lockridge, Ross, Jr. *Raintree County.* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1948, 455. All other references in the novel are indicated parenthetically after the quote.
4. Ross Lockbridge, Sr., was a scholar of Indiana history and lore while teaching in the Speech Department at Indiana University. He wrote *A. Lincoln* (1930) and *Old Fauntleroy Home* (1939), the latter concerning a well known house in New Harmony, Ind. His son was probably quite familiar with the Hoosier writers.
5. We discover, partly through some heavy handed symbolism and foreshadowing, that Susaannah is a mulatto. The scar she bears in a particularly delectable location is the result of a fire which killed her father and his black mistress. Note that the surname "Drake" was also used by Faulkner, several years earlier, to designate the neurotic Southern heroine of *Sanctuary.*

KNIGHTS IN DISGUISE:
LINDSAY AND MAIAKOVSKI AS POETS OF THE PEOPLE

Marc Chénetier

"The shadow hand lifts up a pistol to your head . . ."
Allen Ginsberg ("To Lindsay")[1]

Lindsay never shot himself. Maiakovski did.

Ginsberg's confusion, due, perhaps, to the short interval separating the suicide of the two poets, might have had other causes.

At first sight, no two well-known contemporary poets seem so far apart as Vachel Lindsay and Vladimir Maiakovski. Geographically and historically dissociated by physical distance and political environment, they also were philosophical and ideological strangers. To state things even more bluntly, what thematic material they may have had in common superficially crystallizes the abyss of commitment that gapped between them, deeper and wider than the united stretches of European lands and Atlantic waters and American plains. Listen to Vachel roar out *The Soap Box,* prompted into the act by Upton Sinclair, ("This my song is made for Kerensky") and overhear Vladimir complaining, in an entry of his autobiography for August 1917: "Little by little Russia is getting 'kerenskized'. Respect is lost."

Obviously, there is little common political ground between he who, aged 20 when the October Revolution unfolded, appointed himself its popular propagandist, and the man, aged 38 the same year, whose most vividly striking creative period had for years been fed by memories of rural populist and evangelist meetings. Two nations, two historical contexts, two ideologies,

two eras really. What social commitment Vachel Lindsay always had and kept developing only colored a deeper, inbred yearning for the variety of "gospels," religious and aesthetic, which built up the real tensions in his best poetical works; whereas the very structures of Maiakovski's thought and writing nursed, from the beginning, the basic breaking away from the society of his youth which the 1917 outbreak epitomized on the social level. Remembrances of things past dynamized Lindsay's creative imagination, its roots digging ever deeper into the American subconsciousness; and where the so-called "futurism" of *The Congo, The Santa Fe Trail,* or *The Kalliope* relied strictly upon forms too new for a poetical environment that was still going by the tenets of the Brahmins, Maiakovski's adhesion to the ideas set forth, in Italy and France, by Marinetti, by Khlebnikov in Russia, is really one of principles: "David (Bourliouk) has the anger of the master who has outgrown his contemporaries; as for me, it is the pathos of the socialist who is certain that the collapse of old things is fatal. Russian futurism is born."

Nothing in all this that might cling to any sort of unearthly, desincarnated abstraction. When Lindsay was twelve, the United States was being shaped by modern industrialism and the Gospel of Wealth. He read the Bible, Milton, *Uncle Remus,* and the *History of Egypt.* Maiakovski was twelve in 1905, and what he read then ranged from Engels to Liebknecht, via Kautsky, Lasalle, and Marx. The whole of Russia was then in violent reaction against centuries of Slav mysticism and idealism. What form should Lindsay's reaction to a growingly "materialist" society be but a recoil onto the ample and well-nourished streams of American idealism?

Objections to an ideological parallel are certainly in order. Ethereal verticality permeates Vachel's thought, even his "democratic vistas"; Springfield is "magical" and his polis "under God." Who could deny that Maiakovski would have made him a favorite target? Recognition of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay by "the moderns" was always the result of surface estimation. Seldom could they see through the glittering shell of the Congo jester to the hard core of Lindsay's visions and true obsessions. There was hardly a contemporary courageous enough to trace the path of modernity that runs under Vachel's most outlandish or seemingly

"passé" attempts. One could hail "Booth; Yeats had said so. But loud pieces and clownish "cute" ones were those one came to hear. The rest was unfitting and immediately attributed to his somewhat pathetically puerile obsessions with weird drawings and social misdemeanor. America could use a bard and boast of his being invited to England, the first American poet ever. It just may not have been quite ready to deal with the real "futurism" in him, that which it never saw. Indeed, presented with the accepted official image of Mr. Lindsay, Maiakovski could well have laughed. And yet . . .

Yet parallel readings of the two poets could not but strike the unprejudiced reader and put him or her on a certain number of tracks. Ill-traced and strewn with anecdotal blocks to begin with, they will nevertheless gradually enmesh one with their increasingly dense and strong network, lead him by and by to the open clearing where, all topical contingencies left aside, two poets of the people might have met, had they not found in the very same spot ample reason for their respective deaths.

Coincidental traits in biography draw the threadmark of an obvious kinship; reached for certain only after they have been rid of their purely anecdotal contents, they point to similar reactions to life and single out germane approaches of the double conception of the relationship between language and poetic imagination and between the poet and society.

A sincere belief in his inability to write verse first led Maiakovski to undertake painting. In 1911, he entered the School of Fine Arts; in 1914 he was kicked out of it by the director, Prince Lvov, for whom Maiakovski's only interest lay with "criticism and agitation."

Lindsay's artistic adventure officially ended up on better terms. Robert Henri gave him to understand that he had better write more and paint less, that his attempts at getting on in the world of art would never meet with very great success. We must notice now that neither poet ever gave up his original ambitions, taking them up constantly, on the contrary, to serve their purpose. We shall turn presently to their means and aims. Both were convinced of the adequacy of song rhythms to convey the desired effect. Elsa Triolet tells us that Maiakovski "was jealous of some songs, he was jealous of

"Hard-headed Hannah
the vamp of Savannah . . .

of songs with a rhythm of alcohol and Spring."[3]

Lindsay's "jealousy" bore on different rhythms, more worthy of an Anti-Saloon League propagandist. But a note must also be made of that common obsession.

Both arts gave them tools to work out their didactic lore. The contents, once again, were—outside of the limits drawn below—quite different. What counts, in our eyes, is that both should actually have had a will to spread their thoughts, to teach and propagandize, to assign, therefore, a new purpose to their art, and that they should both have given themselves the necessary means of diffusion, at the stage of their production *and* at that of their delivery. We find in their conception of the part poets play in society an extension of the very principles that originally governed their choice of medium; and finally we are convinced that, conversely to the accepted notion that "the man makes the work," in both these poets' cases, the conception that they developed of their poetical commitment outlined, and embryonically bore, their eventual tragic death.

> "I want to make a socialist art."
> Serioja laughed a good while: "Your eyes are larger 'n your belly."
> "I still believe he underestimated my belly."[4]

> "I am now, in this tract, gently petitioning for prepared audiences. But some day I hope to struggle with the question of the unprepared and I hope many of the hundred singers will attempt the Chautauqua thing by devising some sort of rhymed oration of double structure, an oration, at the same time a lyric poem of the old school. Democracy itself is a paradox and to attempt the problems of its art we must wrestle with perpetual contradictions.[5]

> "In 1820 Gretch did not know the 'tchastouchki'; but had he known them, he would probably have written about them what he wrote of popular poetry—spitefully: 'These lines know neither syllables nor harmonies.' But these lines have been adopted by the street of Petersburg. When the critics have leisure, let them try and analyze on the basis of which criteria this was done."[6]

> "Our democratic dream has been a middle-class aspiration built on the bog of toil-soddened minds. The piles beneath the castle of our near-democratic arts were rotting for lack of folk-imagination."[7]

In 1916, Ezra Pound was denouncing "the constant preaching to the mob" ("It flatters the mob to tell them that their importance is so great that the solace of lonely men, and the lordliest of the arts, was created for their amusement").[8] At the very same time, others decided to take their stand against the abuses of society on the side of the people and, denouncing a world they refused, to propose their vision of another that would have the people as its basis and creator. The appeal to numbers became crucial where numbers were concerned. In this as in many other things, Lindsay did not parallel Maiakovski. Most of his poetry was not political in the strictest sense of the word. Few poems indeed might fall into that category once the Altgeld and Lincoln Poems, "Factory Windows Are Always Broken," "The Soap Box," "Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket," "Sew the Flags Together," "A Curse for Kings," and a few others had been excluded. But the fact is that Lindsay's vision of a better world doesn't operate on that level; and if we agree to find in any drastically different vision of social organization and life a protest against what is and a will to transform, the question of its being "political" or not does grow moot. The pageant of October does find a parallel in Lindsay then; there is no need for explicit reference to political options on Lindsay's part—although they can be found—to assert boldly a belief in an ideal of communal brotherly life that falls squarely within the limits of the socialist ideal. The numerous ideological variations that carried our two poets apart Lindsay once summed up unwittingly in a letter to Harriet Monroe: "I heard a fine Negro sermon yesterday on the cleansing of the Temple. The best thing was like this: "There is a revolution going on in Russia today, and my Lord is riding high.[9]

Holding his obscure political thoughts against Lindsay just because his thought flowed more unincumbered in the grooves

of aesthetic and religious visions would be as ridiculous, in poetical terms, as accusing Maiakovski of betraying the Revolution just because God appears here and there in his poetry or because he sees "Jesus become a komsomol."[10]

Thematic resemblances exist in places, but we might even exclude them to serve the purpose of our work better. The "barns of the skull"[11] may have been filled with different fantasms and dreams, at times with wildly opposed propositions; there remains the tangible and sovereign fact that in matters of sowing and reaping, Vladimir and Vachel were of one single mind.

Ever present in their poems is the notion that poetry has no business being separated from social life, that there is no such well-defined thing as "a poet," that rules and tags are not in order, that poetical expression will and must be grasped by the people and that to achieve communication between the people and the craftsman who makes verse, all artificial barriers should be torn down. No special status for the poet, no sneaking away from accepted speech, no halo of mystery kept alive about poetic creation seen as just another aspect of Veblen's "instinct of workmanship." Emphasis on mass appeal by all means possible, physical contact, public participation tending to drown the individual work into anonymity.

> — "Mr. Lindsay, do you find that the public reacts to good verse?"
> The Answer is:
> — "Yes; so long as they do not know that it is poetry."[12]

Maiakovsky: "How to Make Verse" (1926):

> "I repeat once again, categorically: I give *no* rule that would make a man a poet, that would do that a man would begin to write verse. Rules do not exist. It is precisely the man who creates poetic rules that is called a poet."[13]

Maiakovski's poem "150 000 000," written during a difficult period for Soviet Russia, was published without his name. "I want everyone to polish it and better it." Millions were struggling *and* saying it.[14]

Lindsay wrote at the top of his "War Bulletins": "He who helps pass the fire of the Bulletins from mind to mind, has done the greatest favor possible to the publisher thereof. Writers and

speakers, please steal my ideas"; and opened his *Village Magazine* with:

> "The idea is not copyrighted."[15]

Years later, his wife, Elizabeth Conner Lindsay, testified: "It was this democratic dream, this yearning to merge as a voice with his audience . . . 'to be lost like the salt in the sea', 'to get down into the grass roots' he would say . . ."[16]

The contents of poetical works should be simple and easily accessible for all.

> "Go plant the arts that woo the weariest,
> Bold arts that simple workmen understand."[17]

> "New crafts where roughest men can hit at the thought
> and write life's lyric in a hand set free. . . ."[18]

So that the success of a popular poet is not to be attributed to some sort of "literary genius," but to the struggle and work that have made possible the "comprehension of the masses." Even before such texts as they have produced are presented to the public by attractive means, they must have acquired that peculiar quality that makes the people reach for it and feel it is their own. In this regard the very particular alternative use of first and third persons in Maiakovski's and Lindsays' works give them an unusual sort of "epic lyricism" that finds its only equivalent in such narratives of collective action as make the narrator a constant part of the community of people which is the actual hero of the action. In *Rules of the Road,* Lindsay writes: "The folk peered into my dreams as simply as they would have peered into my basket had I peddled beads, calico or silk."[19] The fact is that this commercial comparison holds in essence one of its necessary corollaries: "My dreams they acquired" or "I supplied what they demanded." As for Maiakovski, he called, in "Order no. 2 to the Army of Art," for communal production of poetical wares:

> "No more imbeciles
> waiting, a gaping crowd,
> for the word to come out of the 'master's' mouth.

Comrades,
give a new art
that pulls
the Republic out of its mire."[20]

Witnessing the sagas of their respective people and taking an active part in their elaboration, these poets constantly interfuse and make partly void the distinction between epos and lyricism, which might have had Whitman as its first destroyer had he done what Lindsay constantly regretted he did not do: played his part as a troubadour. And being troubadours was at the very center of both poets' preoccupations. "Whitman in his wildest dreams was only a pretended troubadour. He sat still in cafes. Never such a troubadour for audiences as Bryan or a thousand Chautauqua men. He was an infinitely more skillful writer than any other American. But I can beat him as *troubadour. . . .*"[21]

Lindsay's tramping and begging days are well-known. The picture has often been a bit forced even, for purposes of dramatization and legend. The fact remains however that Lindsay epitomized in these tramps his protest and his approach of poetic communication. That his tramping gradually turned into travels by more trivial and common means, out of tiredness and sheer material coercion, does not obliterate the fact that going out to meet the people was at the core of his poetical praxis:

> "It was definitely an act of protest against the United States commercial standard, a protest against the type of life set forth for all time in two books by Sinclair Lewis: *Babbitt* and *Main Street.*"[22]

Communication and personal contacts were to him the way to circumvent the commercial circuits that prevented the poetical potential of the people from developing, the way to establish a new—not "constituency," for that went against the grain of his non-elitist convictions—but community of thought and vision. In fact, he quickly turned the few hundred people he met on foot into millions when he started touring the country systematically, willing, he said, "to meet the United States" while "talking United States." There is a notion in Lindsay, as in Maiakovski, that the

creator must take the business of diffusion in hand, that books won't do the work, that reading their texts is only half their possible impact. "Shall the arts which are supposed to represent the powers of choice be arbitrarily forced upon the people by the textbook trust?"[23] Lindsay asked. A common desire to broadcast as amply as possible their poetical lore animated the Russian and the American. By voice, picture, or word, the notion must be spread that the country was one and their messages were of a nature to confirm and reinforce that unity. The non-elitist conception of their work unites them. Poets must immerge themselves in the social ocean and work with and within it, so that poetic images and symbols may become a part of the social fabric, undistinguishable, in the last analysis, from its other components; so that they may eventually produce "a perfect whirlwind of poetry and song that happens to be labelled something else.[24] Under the title of an unpublished poem ("The United States of America Dance"), Lindsay writes: "To be read aloud to utter strangers in the smoking car, everyone joining in the chorus." He tours indefatigably American cities, villages, universities: "People not willing to be taken by storm should stay away."

"I want to be understood in my country," Maiakovski answers, and claims:

> "I said verse for the peasants, in the palace of Livadia. I said verse this last month in the warehouses of Bakou, in the Schmidt factory in Bakou, in the Chaoumian Club, in the workmen's club of Tiflis; I said verse standing up on a metalworker's lathe during lunch-hour, accompanied by the dying noise of machinery."[25]

Both can hardly catch up with the necessities and move about constantly. Lindsay claims he has covered the 48 states several times over and has to quit, exhausted. Maiakovski assigns himself

> "a second job: to continue the interrupted tradition of the troubadours and minstrels. I go from city to city and I say verse. Novotcherkask, Vinitza, Kharkov, Paris, Rostov, Tiflis, Kazan, Sverdlovsk, Toula, Prague, Leningrad, Moscow, Voroneje, Yalta, Eupatoria, Viatka, Oupa, etc. . . ."

And each and every time, at each and every stop, comes the voice, the voice of these two poets, acknowledged by all to have been formidable and commanding, comes the contact with the audiences, or, as C. Zwaska rightly remarked,[26] with what might then be called "optiences," so fascinating were the deliveries for the spectators. But going out to the people proves in the long run to be insufficient. Sacrificing time and energy is not enough. Going moneyless and exhausted does not do the work. Becoming famous does not do the work, and, furthermore, hampers it: "It is no final satisfaction to me to float on top of things. I like to cut convention at right angles and whenever I see myself getting respectable or suspected of being reasonable, I like to dive under the social ocean again and wash it off."[27] Aggressivity and humility act as safeguards against recuperation (see Maiakovski's "To You," Lindsay's "To the US Senate" and "War Bulletins"). Synthetizing social and individual lyricism takes in as many as can be taken in. And still Lindsay is compelled to call for help:

> "From Boston to Los Angeles, we, American versifiers, democratic poets, face the problem of our potential audiences of one million or a hundred million that we have never conquered, but which the Chautauqua orator, like Bryan, in a tent-speech telegraphed to the newspapers may reach any day. From this standpoint, Bryan is the one living American poet till we learn to make a few songs sturdy enough to endure the confusion of the Chautauqua tent and strategic enough to outlast merciless newspaper scrutiny."[28]

Eventually, Lindsay finds more satisfaction in being published in *Farm and Fireside* than in being hailed by Yeats, because *that* means reaching 200,000 farmers. To Sandburg, he writes, about quarrels of style:

> "They are all nonsense to me when you consider that there are 100,000,000 good Americans who do not know there is even an Amy Lowell. Not till we have reached the Harold Bell Wright circulation will there be any excuse for a battle of the giants. As it is, the more we scrap, the more in-growing we get and the more divorced from the normal American currents. If all the critics in the United States shouted at once through one megaphone, our next door neighbor would not hear and Whitman would not be vindicated. We can all afford to unite and charge abreast at the American people. . . . Bryan is really the American poet till we can take the Chautauqua platform and sing to as many."[29]

Conscious of their natural shortcomings, both Vladimir Maiakovski and Vachel Lindsay resort to other means of expanding communication. Born as poets in the universe of pictures, both will naturally turn to drawing, the cinema, and other forms of visual arts. Maiakovski is conscious, in 1922 ("I Love") of having

> "learnt the alphabet
> of shopsigns
> leafing through sheet metal and iron."

Lindsay admits in 1924: "The American eye is completely paralyzed in its will power by too many movies, newspapers, advertisements and billboards."[30] Both, along with the Russian formalists of their time—and Lindsay, in that field, is a pioneer—understand the interest offered by the new-born cinema, are conscious of the semiological essence of motion picture principles and of their popular potential. Maiakovski writes eleven screenplays between 1913 and 1930, becomes an actor, writes his own plays and acts them out, gives more than little time (1919-1922) to the creation of "Rosta Windows" the posters used for political and ideological agitation and propaganda. Lindsay publishes *The Art of the Moving Picture* in 1915, prepares a second book on the movies (*The Greatest Movies Now Running*—never published), launches with renewed enthusiasm into his old idea of the Poem Games, of theatrical and choregraphic essence, develops his own system of American hieroglyphics after years of study in the original Egyptian hieroglyphics. Calligraphy and drawing take them further and further away from what, for lack of a better word, we feel compelled to name "militant poetry." From the imperialism of sound and speech, both turn more and more to pieces that bear the mark of strengthened imagery, unhesitatingly stepping out of the poetic frame when images outgrow the line and page. For Lindsay, eventually,

> "The signs in the street, and the signs in the skies
> Shall make a new Zodiac, guiding the wise. . . ."[31]

But here again, among the variety of activities that Lindsay undertakes, a constant care remains: to associate the public, as closely as possible, to the performance: the poetry recitals will always be "à deux voix," participation in the Poem Games compulsory (there shall be no spectators, merely participants); he will call for oral public comment on the motion picture *while* it is being viewed, in the theatre (this, of course, is the time of the silent movie!); Lindsay's old didactic conception of museum visits follow him into the movie-house.

Still, within a couple of years—Maiakovski in 1930 at the age of 37, Lindsay in 1931 at the age of 52—each poet of the people "stepped on the throat of his own song."

Both had, years before, left the exhilarating stage of their all-out attack on the front of art and gradually dug in for the ensuing years, enervating and evermore debilitating, of entrenched combat. We shall however make bold to say that no outside enemy ever killed the two poets. Of course, one can always fall back on explanations of lassitude and desperation, say that society, global or individualized, forced the gun to one's chest and the poison down the other's throat. To say that the world feels no great tenderness for its poets would indeed amount to no great discovery. But had both died of exhaustion or tuberculosis before their time, the seed of self-destruction had remained planted in the heart of their poetry. The latter is strewn with early allusions to such a potential destiny. Its very structural trends point to death. When, in his correspondence, Lindsay admits to being left "spent" by his recitals, when he mentions the "consumption" that gnaws at him after his public appearances, he is not merely alluding to the physical strain brought about by his performance. ". . . Patch out the great gaps in my mind after the noisy recitals are over and heal my body and soul," he asks E. M. Wills in a letter.[32] A part of himself goes with his poetry, the communal part of his substance that he never can get back. The correspondences he keeps establishing, via his own mind and body, between the exterior world and its people, between reality and his symbolic vision, are pregnant with destructive accumulation. Lyricism is not made gratuitously the bearer of communal aspirations; the

poet does not extend and generalize his yearnings with impunity. Metaphorically bound by his all-encompassing symbolism to an utmost variety of ontological dimensions, the poet is left with a deadly alternative:

First, vindication by a community that commits itself to the realization of the wild design within which he can lean on the network of symbolic, cosmic correspondences which his work established, and go forward towards the ever-escaping delineation of his metaphoric world: *The Golden Book of Springfield* comes too early in Lindsay's life: none of the bases of his golden utopia have seeped through the people down to the solid earth to erect its symbolic foundations into immovable pillars: Springfield in 2018 remains eerie and magical and floats about like some American Bagdad on the 1001st night. This is why its structure is loose and shaky.

> "I sing my country
> as it is
> Three times I sing it
> as it will be. . . ."[33]

For years, Maiakovski works on his *Fifth International.* "It is a Utopia. There shall be shown in it art as of five hundred years from now."[34] He will never finish it, for the tide has turned in the Soviet Union and his principles of art for the community remain still-born in the womb of a society from which his own growing estrangement will be kept from developing by his own bullet. *Disembog the Future* (1925) holds much that explains Vladimir Maiakovski's fears of being left alone in front to grapple with masses of disconnected symbols.

But, should the people not vindicate the vision whose source it untapped in the poet's mind, the latter will be cut off from the only link that could make whole again his imagination, voluntarily exploded into the multiple dimensions of his being around which his symbolic visions have blossomed. The vision of strictly lyrical poets can afford to branch out into different metaphorical networks that will account for their relationship with the universe. Poets of the people partake of an epic dimension whose symbolic correspondence needs must be relayed by the community of men he addresses, for his own personal, lyric assimilation to the vari-

ous tiers of universal symbolism to be rendered possible. The constant search for a collective identity, for which he proposes the necessary mythology and symbols, is the condition sine qua non for his own identity and commitment. Sustained by a communal mythology whereon to fall back and wherein to insert themselves, popular poets can thrive only on the trunk they helped grow. Cut off from the collective symbolism with which he endowed his people or which he helped formulate, the "I" of the poet withers. His lyricism must keep its roots and be fed by the community or die. Lindsay's constant invocation is to "my people." Giving advice to those who would follow in his steps, he writes, in *The Village Magazine:* "Your life is now thoroughly dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal in taste. You are engaged in a joyous Civil War testing whether your work, or any work so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. Just as much civilization hangs upon your success, as hung upon the fighting of the private soldier at Gettysburg." Austin Warren once peered into that deadly gap when he wrote: "He escapes from bourgeois culture and refinement . . . by identification with the people and folk-art; but the escape is demanding and he cannot use folk-art as thematics for a mythic poetry. . . . He had faith in a unity of culture ahead of us."[35] That the vision of this unity should seem to be further and further removed out of his reach; that his symbolic imagination and iconography should appear less and less able to cope with the growing estrangement of the people and the vision he had ready for them, however willing he may be to display "the signs" more openly at the expense of his more subtle ways—*that* may well have been more treacherous and painful than Lysol. Left alone to confront his visions with symbols and metaphors, Lindsay, in 1931, did nothing but officialize the break from the community of men which had already taken place.

Maiakovski is

> "Happy
> to be
> a particle of that force
> which has in common
> even the tears in the eyes.

> A stronger
> purer
> communion cannot be
> in the immense feeling
> named—
> class!"[36]

But as early as 1915, he sees:

> "Above the chasm my soul is taught like a cable
> I swing upon it, juggling with words."[37]

And in 1930,

> "the boat of love
> crashed against daily life."[38]

In a last poem from which he extracted his farewell letter, he spoke of death as the moment when the message and the visions indeed went through:

> "It is the hour
> when one gets up and when one talks
> to the centuries,
> to history
> to the universe."

Many were the critics during Maiakovski's last years who said, as other did of Lindsay, that "he was through," that "his powers had declined," that didacticism shone too clearly through his verse. May we suggest that the logic of their fight led them to the common point where, all symbolic bridges being blown off, they turned to "their people" and, once more called, unmasked. Maiakovski was at work on *At the Top of My Voice* when he died. Lindsay's last work was *The Litany of Washington Street.* Calls and Prayers. Filled with clear signs both, and desperate pointing out.

Sorbonne Nouvelle

NOTES

1. In *Kaddish* (San Francisco: City Light Books. 1961), p. 44.
2. *All* the quotes from Maiakovski have been taken out, for conveniency's sake,

of Elso Triolet's *Maiakovski*, and translated. Reference to the various pages is therefore given as in this work, Editeurs Français Réunis, Paris, 1957.
Myself, p. 91.
3. *Souvenirs*, p. 17.
4. *Myself*, p. 89.
5. *A Letter about my Four Programmes* for Committees in Correspondence. Springfield, Ill. 1916. p. 6.
6. *How to Make Verse*, p. 339.
7. Quoted by Francis Hackett in "The Poet at the Movies," *New Republic*, December 25, 1915, p. 201.
8. In *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, June 1916, pp. 145-6.
9. Letter to Harriet Monroe, April 2, 1917, p. 5. This letter is in the University of Chicago Library.
10. "Christmas Night," 1923, p. 201.
11. *How to Make Verse*, p. 342.
12. "What It Means to be a Poet in America" by Vachel Lindsay. *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 13, 1926.
13. p. 335.
14. *Myself*, p. 98.
15. *The Village Magazine*, p. 2.
16. *Shane Quarterly*, April-July 1944, p. 119.
17. "To Those that Would Mend the City." Miscellaneous Unpublished Poems in the University of Virginia Library, at Charlottesville.
18. "To Those that Would Help the Fallen." *Ibid.*
19. In *American Magazine*, May 1912, p. 56.
20. p. 176.
21. Letter to Elizabeth Mann Wills, September 18, 1923. This letter is in the Princeton Library.
22. *Collected Poems*. "Adventures while singing these songs," p. 19.
23. "What It Means to be a Poet in America." *Ibid.*
24. "What It Means to be a Poet in America." *Ibid.*
25. *Souvenirs*, p. 24.
26. In *Little Review*, April 1916.
27. Letter to Floyd Dell, December 1, 1912. This letter is in the Newberry Library, Chicago.
28. *A Letter about my Four Programmes*. p. 6.
29. Letter to Carl Sandburg. January 13, 1917. Courtesy of the Sandburg family.
30. "The New Poetry," in *Christian Century*, April 10, 1924, p. 461.
31. "A Rhyme about an Electrical Advertising Sign." *Collected Poems*, p. 340.
32. *Ibid.*
33. p. 296.
34. *Myself*, p. 99.
35. "The Case of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay" in *Accent* (Summer 1946).
36. "Vladimir Ilitch Lenine," p. 234.
37. p. 124.
38. *Posthumous Poems*, p. 328.

FLOYD DELL: FREEDOM OR MARRIAGE

GERALD L. MARRINER

Floyd Dell was typical of the young intellectuals of his generation in that he experienced a serious intellectual-emotional conflict in trying to cope with love and sex. Like Hutchins Hapgood, who was nearly twenty years his senior, Dell realized what it meant to be "A Victorian in the Modern World." Born in 1887, he also was a product of his Victorian environment, but rebellion attracted him romantically, and as a youngster he denounced the church, pronounced himself an atheist, and joined the Socialist party. Although a "Romantic Rebel," he recognized within himself an even deeper strain of inherent conventionality. The two tendencies produced a tension, never more apparent than when Dell tried to break through the Victorian sexual boundaries to find a greater happiness with the opposite sex.

A man of many talents—novelist, poet, journalist, playwright—Dell was best known for his views on free love. His attitudes gained him a certain popularity among the avant-garde and very likely a greater notoriety among the larger populace. There were probably as many different definitions of free love as there were those who professed their belief in it. Dell's own ideas had only gradually taken shape. Floyd started his private library with the purchase of Ik Marvel's *Reveries of a Bachelor*, a "subtly immoral book," and one that impressed his young mind. "It was the first book I had ever read which suggested that love does not necessarily and solely exist in order to bring about the wedding of two hearts forever." Instead, love could exist for its own sake, it need not be eternal or lead to marriage, and yet it was "beautiful all the same." For a young idealist who was totally romantic about women, Ik Marvel's revelations merely whetted his appetite. But Dell remained in his world of fantasy

rather than face the disappointment of reality. He turned to other books and confessed later that he "had got [his] ideas of love chiefly from advanced literature."[1]

The ideas he gathered from books were far removed from the realities of love and marriage which he perceived in the Victorian era. Two of Dell's fictional characters stated the conventional view in admitting that "a man wasn't a real man unless he wanted to go into business and make a lot of money," and "a woman wasn't a real woman unless she wanted to get married and have children." "In America, men worked, and made the money by which women were supported in the home."[2] But why? he asked. Must women be trapped in the home while men slaved at their jobs? Why couldn't they work and play together "side by side"? Others argued that "a woman's place is in the home." Dell disagreed.

> This saying applies only to wives. It does not apply to sweethearts. No man ever thought his sweetheart belonged at home. He regards her home with hostility and suspicion, and keeps her away from it as much as possible. It is only when she is a wife that he begins to think he has a right to expect her to be there.

Instead, lovers should "inhabit the world" together, sharing their "habits and tastes," and letting their relationship grow "with the solid democratic equality of partners in the business of life." As to the home, it was admittedly "a little dull," and it created the conditions which could destroy one's love.

> When you have got a woman in a box, and you pay rent on the box, her relationship to you insensibly changes character. It loses the fine excitement of democracy. It ceases to be companionship, for companionship is only possible in a democracy. It is no longer a sharing of life together—it is a breaking of life apart.[3]

Dell had made out a large order, and it couldn't have been filled had not the New Woman emerged at this time. She refused to submit "to being the victim of Life," for her first right was to be herself. The New Woman freed herself from masculine authority and took it for granted that she could work and earn her own living. Only then would she lead a complete life. "If

women were not troublesomely modern," said Dell, "we sought to make them so." Not only were they good companions, but they had a liberating effect on the men themselves. Feminism is going to make it possible for the first time for men to be free," argued Floyd. Men could dare to be brave, risking themselves "fearlessly in the adventure of life," if they did not have to fear the economic consequences this might have on a dependent woman. Feminism would "give them back their souls."[4]

This was how life should be lived, gaily as well as seriously, together, if only for the moment, and "inconsiderate of the dull responsibilities of workaday life." But it was not to be a mere frivolous adventure. "For some reason," said Floyd, "I thought of freedom as a right granted to the loved one in unselfish and understanding love, not as a privilege to be exercised lightly or casually by oneself." Free love did not imply "permission to follow every romantic or sexual impulse. . . ." Finally it stood for a candid relationship between the sexes. Dell wrote in *Love in Greenwich Village:*

> These were our vows—to be courageously candid in our expected and inevitable unfaithfulness. For we knew, intellectually, that the time would come when we would no longer love each other. Instinctively, we could not believe it—to speak of such a thing at a time like this was secretly a hurt to our deepest feelings. But we believed in facing the facts.[5]

Hopefully young lovers would not be trapped by "the matrimonial illusion." "If two people are in love with each other," says one of Dell's heroines, "why should church and state interfere? Having words said over you—what difference can that make? Love is the true sacrament!" Dell agreed with the Anarchists "that love could not be promised, contracted for, and legally or morally enforced. . . ." Rather "mutual love created its own obligations, and . . . the attempt to impose such obligations by legal force or moral terrorization was a tyranny which no one was bound to respect." For those who were "not brave enough to dispense with the—rigamarole," it was best they marry. Certainly there were differences of opinion as to what marriage was. "Some said it was a social arrangement, some an agreement between two individuals, some a mystical sacrament; others considered

it a necessary evil; and still others a damned nuisance." For themselves, the intellectuals viewed marriage as a convention, not "the mutual slavery that crucifies two souls. . . ." For the woman, the wedding need not "turn her into a wife." These couples were not supposed to "subordinate their individual lives to a domestic arrangement." Instead, the wedding was a means to "a companionship in the adventure and beauty of life. . . ."[6]

Dell was, at first, a reluctant lover. He was sensitive and shy and lacked the forwardness of other young fellows. Girls his own age either frightened or hurt him, and few of them knew anything about the things in which he was interested. The standards he demanded in a sweetheart were most exacting. "She must, just to begin with, be a girl to whom I was attracted both physically and intellectually—and this simple condition, not to go on to any others, was hard to fulfill." It was not enough to sleep with her; he wanted to talk with her also. Naturally she was an equal partner in a mutual love. Because she was not married did not make her his mistress. "The conception was hateful and degrading" and aroused "his Socialist ire."[7]

Instead of seeking out girls his own age, Floyd was led to the cultural coterie of Davenport, Iowa. Through his poetry and his frequent visits to the public library, he met Marilla Freeman, the librarian, and she introduced him to the local literary clique. Floyd was younger than the others by years, but they welcomed the self-styled atheist into their midst. Thus began his association with people who were usually about ten years older than himself, and as women tended to be the cultured members of the community, many of his new friends were young women. They naturally enjoyed the flattering attention of the boy poet and joined in the harmless flirtation.

Dell's first serious love affair, however, was with a girl his own age who was already engaged. It was a pagan love—"free, natural, fearless, unashamed, joy-loving." They might have married, but their love was only for the moment. "She did not wish to be the distraught wife of a youthful poet with no prospects, nor did she at all wish me to change from what I agreeably was into the more practical fellow who might manage to support her and the babies she would have in marriage."[8] The affair ended when she decided to marry her fiance. Floyd was hurt and

humiliated by the realization that he could not marry his sweetheart. Their pagan love had been a dream come true for the romantic idealist, but the knowledge that the girl who had initiated him into carnal love had also rejected him as a husband tormented his conventional nature. Whatever the attractions of being a vagabond, Floyd could not escape his more basic desire for marital stability. Free love he might idealize, but the agonies produced by his own divided nature indicated his opposition to marriage was more theoretical than real.

Later Dell reflected on what his love had meant to his sweetheart.

> I was not marriageable, but very companionable; and besides the desire to be married, it would seem that some girls have also the desire for a companionship in which they can be frank about themselves. It is a genuine kind of love, which a girl clearly differentiates from the kind of love which is a basis for marriage.

As it was, his pride was hurt. She could not marry him so she had married her suitor. Dell was surprised to discover that "my hurt and my loneliness only made me the sooner, and this time unbidden, put my arms around another girl and kiss her; and to my astonishment she returned that unpremeditated, impulsive kiss."[9] His heart had healed and he was ready to love again.

The years in Davenport were nearly over. Floyd was feeling restless and his hopes centered on Chicago. He had worked as a newspaper reporter and together with George Cram Cook, the future guiding spirit of the Provincetown Players, the two had made the pretense of running a truck farm while exchanging lines of poetry and working on their novels. Again Floyd fell in love, this time with Mollie, Jig Cook's young anarchist wife. Wishing to avoid a hopeless entanglement, Floyd resolved to leave for Chicago. Later, Cook himself left Mollie and their babies to go to Chicago and marry Susan Glaspell. The incident left a strong impression on Dell. He had thought much about marriage and was never able to "reconcile himself to the abandonment of a marriage with children. . . . In Chicago, Floyd was to receive this "sad little note" from Mollie:

> I find myself growing Puritanical. I have little patience with my former deification of passion. I think the value of

> sexual love is very much over-estimated, and holds too consuming a place in the scheme of things. The old-fashioned God of Repression has a wise purpose behind him[10]

It was a strangely prophetic statement of conclusions Dell himself would arrive at by the late nineteen-twenties.

Chicago was an exciting place in 1908. The city seemed to be exploding with creative activity, and Dell soon found himself the center of the Chicago Renaissance.[11] When he arrived, he was only twenty-one; he had twenty dollars in his pocket, and was seeking a job. The prospects in journalism were hardly promising, but fortune was with him. He became assistant editor to Francis Hackett on the *Friday Literary Review* of the Chicago *Evening Post*. Later when Hackett resigned, Dell became the editor. But even more amazing, especially to Floyd himself, was that within a year of his arrival he had married.

Margery Currey "was a militant suffragette, advocate, at least in speech, of a greater sexual freedom, smoker of cigarettes. . . ." She was twelve years older than Dell, but it mattered little. Floyd explained,

> She was a girl of twenty-one in looks, and I was a man of thirty-one in mental powers, tastes and habits. We found no discrepancy to bother us in our friendship or in our love, and carred no more for that indicated by the calendar than we did for what anybody else might think about us.

In the summer of 1909, they were married. "As a mild gesture of defiance to conventionality," an old Jewish ceremony was performed by their close friend, Rabbi Fineshriber. Floyd felt incredulous. He had never expected to be able to support a wife, and he still couldn't. But Margery had no desire to be supported—she would continue teaching school. To his surprise, with her savings and his newly discovered credit at Marshall Field's, they had an apartment with furniture of their own. "That seemed to me much more remarkable than being an assistant literary editor," confessed the new husband.[12]

Their marriage was based on feminist principles.

> There was no tyrannizing—we were equals, each contributing to the support of the home. Nor was there any subjection to an artificial social standard—we had our own friends, who were not involved in middle-class social life at all. There were not even any bickerings—we had nothing to bicker about. If my wife had, as school-teacher and home-maker too, a double burden, I was assistant cook and bottle-washer, expert in making a salad, lobster Newburg, and other dishes—I was assistant home-maker, and very much on the job.

It was a "satisfactory arrangement" and Dell was glad to be "an ardent Feminist." Margery was a charming hostess and Floyd a brilliant conversationalist. Their dinner parties "were small and gay affairs," attended by their many close friends "within the fields of the seven arts." "We were full of ideals, illusions, and high spirits," Dell recalled. "We were young, and the world was before us." "Talk was almost the chief interest of our lives; and it lasted longer and longer into the nights."[13]

The Dells appeared to be the perfect modern couple. Their marriage was an example of what could be achieved through feminism, while their life styles reflected a comfortable bohemianism. On the wall of their apartment hung a nude pencil sketch of themselves, adding a touch of the risque. And when they moved to separate apartments in Jackson Park, they seemed to accomplish the ultimate in radical life style. "With the back doors adjoining," they had sacrificed neither their freedom nor their marriage. Friends and acquaintances admired and envied them. What more could one ask for?

Appearances, however, are often deceiving. The separate apartments of Floyd and Margery were more a reflection of their failing marriage than a symbol of freedom achieved in their bohemian wedlock. Reality had come crashing in on Dell's world of intellectual theories. He had fallen in love again. Sadly he discovered "that marriage has no supernatural magic to keep people from being interested, emotionally and physically, in others." At first he only kissed another woman, and then there was a more serious love. And now he had to candidly tell his wife. Like his fictional counterpart, Felix Fay, he realized, "It was all very well to talk of telling the truth to one's beloved; but the truth was not such an easy thing to tell! . . ."[14]

Floyd and Margery had always agreed to be completely truth-

ful to each other rather than let their emotions "fester in secret." But this "moment which they had lightly envisioned in theory . . . in reality had an air of terribleness about it." Floyd confessed his unfaithfulness, and Margery, "however hurt, was kind and generous, and willing to end [the] marriage." Dell refused. He had enjoyed his brief affair and felt no shame. "What had happened was right, in its own realm. It just didn't belong to this other world." But even if it wasn't wrong, he "did not wish to be tossed into the maelstrom of such impulses; I did not wish to lose—I wished desperately not to lose—the peace and order and stability which I had so miraculously achieved in my marriage."[15]

"No, I couldn't go through this again," resolved Dell. The hour of freedom " was beautiful," but the coming back created too much trouble. Unfortunately, and against his will, he did fall in love again, giving up his new love to save his marriage, only to fall in love a third time. They were sincere affairs, but they were like a dream intruding upon reality. Floyd was bewildered and accused himself of "not being capable of any deep and lasting love."

> Margery's pride was wounded almost beyond her capacity to bear, and yet she sorrowed about what she felt this rootless emotional life was doing to him. A major portion of the blame she laid on herself, convinced that as a woman she was not adequate for him, whereas in another he might be fulfilled.

Margery moved to a rooming house, but Floyd followed. Finally, as a last attempt to save their marriage, they took the separate apartments in Jackson Park.[16]

The effort was futile. Margery knew that the marriage had come to an end, and slowly and painfully Floyd reached the same conclusion. He feared spending "his whole life in the following of disconnected impulses, a vagabond and a fool." But the marriage was beyond repair. Quietly they told their friends of their situation while " removing their own bonds as noiselessly as possible in order for each to go on his own with best wishes for the other." Their "attempt to be 'civilized' . . . succeeded in being perfectly well-mannered and good-humored." It was not the

"natural" way to separate. There "were no private quarrels, and no reproaches or recriminations." "It was a terrifying threat to the status quo," thought Dell. For one thing Floyd was most grateful. Unlike Jig Cook, he had left no children behind. He may have been "bruised with the pain" of the failure of his marriage, but his conscience was clear of parental responsibility.[17]

The failure of his marriage underscored the unresolved tension within Dell's character. Romantically he idealized free love while accepting the convention of marriage. His marriage to Margery was an attempt to achieve the stability which he had so earnestly sought. He did not, however, abandon his theoretical principles toward free love. But in Dell, the two strains could not coexist. "We talked ourselves into trouble," he admitted when they tried to live according to the principles they espoused. More of a Victorian than he would have cared to admit, Dell felt bound by conventional marital mores during his marriage. His anguish over the breakup of that marriage was hardly that of a vagabond. Rather it suggested that Floyd Dell was trapped within himself—a romantic rebel unable to overcome the more conventional male. Their establishment of an entirely free marriage was an illusion. No matter how significant their departure from the traditional Victorian marriage, their more basic impulses eventually made the marriage "un-free."

In the fall of 1913, Dell left Chicago for New York. Again he had no prospects, but once more he found himself at the center of things. As assistant editor to Max Eastman on *The Masses,* he came in contact with the various elements of the political left and with the many avant-garde crosscurrents in the arts. It was an exhilarating experience, and he enjoyed his new associations among the radicals and bohemians. Besides editing *The Masses,* he wrote plays, poems, short stories, book reviews, and worked on his first novel. The novel progressed slowly, but Floyd reasoned, "There are sometimes more important things in life than finishing a novel, especially when one is under thirty." Dell was under thirty, and those "more important things" were the many young women who attracted him romantically.

Even the failure of his recent marriage did not make him "less ready to expose [himself] again to the dangers and the pain of love."[18] And Greenwich Village was the perfect setting. It

was "a moral-health resort," and the Village morality seemed infinitely better than that of small-town America. Besides, "we had no anxious relatives to come snooping around, asking to see our wedding certificates," said Dell. One of his fictional characters claimed that in the Village you had "a right to do as you damn please." Everyone seemed to know everyone else, and Floyd "was a well-known figure." George Tanselle, Dell's biographer, says that Floyd "represented it [Greewich Village] in all its aspects, serious and carefree, important and trivial. He participated in everything, knew everyone, and defended Village ideals."[19] Free love was a Village ideal, and Dell appeared as one of its most energetic practitioners and defenders.

Time and again, Floyd fell in love and was often living with a woman "who was clearly not his wife." The affairs lasted from a few weeks to three years. For a while he was in love with Edna St. Vincent Millay. Whoever the current girl might be, there were dinners in bohemian restaurants, rides on Fifth Avenue buses or the Staten Island ferry, and always the endless talk. His most serious affair was one "in which I had dared to think of my sweetheart as a girl whom I wanted to be the mother of my children." This confession was a clear indication of the permanence and stability he was trying to recapture through free love. Dell had no desire to keep passing from one sweetheart to another. " 'Keeping sweet and warm one's friendships with women without letting them turn into love' was a plain statement of the effort I was making sincerely then, that I would be sincerely making all the rest of my life. . . ."[20]

As he approached thirty, Dell experienced a new desire—the desire for children of his own. Previously, he explained, "I never expected to have any children, because I was too unsure of being able to support even myself. . . ." As a bohemian lover he knew he was unprepared and unwilling to provide the stability which children required. Babies were a serious responsibility, and one didn't just "drop them whenever they got tiresome," thought Dell, "and you knew that they *would* get tiresome." "But I did want to find 'common things at last'. And I did want to find marriage." Reflecting on his past loves, he added:

> I felt quite sure now that I did not want to be married to a girl artist; I wanted to be married to a girl who would not put her career before children—or even before me, hideously reactionary as that thought would have seemed a few years ago. One artist in the family, I was convinced, was enough.[21]

In *Homecoming*, Floyd reflected on his impasse. "I was thirty years old, and I had not found myself yet either in work or love. Thirty seemed a decisive age. It was, I felt, time to do something about my life."

> I was as little satisfied with such literary accomplishments as one-act plays, poems, short-stories and book-reviews, as I was with little love affairs. I wanted to be set free to love deeply enough to get married and have children; and I wanted to find in myself the powers necessary for completing my novel.

For these reasons, He decided to have himself psychoanalyzed. Dell had been introduced to Freud's ideas in Chicago and had been instrumental in informing others of these latest thoughts in psychology. But he had never had himself analyzed, not until 1917. The results were pleasing. He felt within himself "a new happiness and self-confidence" and "wrote better than [he] ever had before. . . ."[22] Most gratifying was that he soon fell in love in what would finally prove to be a lasting relationship.

In the winter of 1918, Floyd met B. Marie Gage. She was a Socialist, had attended the University of Wisconsin, and had helped organize pacifist groups in the West. When she sold a pacifist book banned by the Espionage Act, she was tried and given a nominal fine. Dell, also, had been indicted by the federal government for his writing in *The Masses*. "As two who had been through war-time trials, we had much in common; I fell in love with B. Marie at once, recognizing her as the most splendid young woman I had ever seen; and we were everywhere together from that moment." Psychoanalysis had given him the conviction, never held before, that he could fall in love for life, and at their third meeting, Floyd asked B. Marie to marry him. "Doubtless I did not seem a very marriageable young man; others had taken pains to tell her how inconstant I was in love, but I had told her the worst about myself, so it perhaps produced the less impression." Ten weeks after they had met, they were married. Both

continued to work as B. Marie "kept her job as an executive for a fund-raising organization and ran the household with a firm hand."[23] Soon they purchased a home at Croton-on-Hudson although they kept their place in the Village.

For the next decade, Dell produced a novel nearly every year. The publication of *Moon-Calf* in 1920 made him a popular success. The critics were kind and his readers were enthusiastic. Many felt they could identify with Felix Fay, the hero. *Moon-Calf* was clearly autobiographical fiction as the story of Felix Fay closely paralleled Dell's early years. Felix reflected the dualism of Floyd's own nature—a romantic fascination with a world of dreams in conflict with a desire to cope adequately with reality. But "It was Felix as a symbol of unfettered freedom that they [the readers] adored," said Dell. Felix refused to forsake his ideals and thus did not marry his sweetheart. By choosing love over marriage, *Moon-Calf* left Felix free of entanglements, and this "fitted in with the younger generation's spirit of revolt. . . ." The publication of *The Briary-Bush* a year later was a disappointment to these same fans. Continuing the story of Felix Fay, they discovered that he was finally willing to sacrifice his freedom for marriage. Dell commented on the reaction of one reader, "It would be all right, I was told in one letter, for Felix to end as a mere married man, provided that the author recognized this is a tragedy; but my failure to so recognize this, ruined the book!"[24] That a satisfactory marriage could only be accomplished at the sacrifice of some freedom remained a dominant theme in Dell's novels.

His readers might not have been as surprised or disappointed if they had read *Moon-Calf* more thoughtfully or if they could have known the author better. For all of his rebelliousness, there is a strong undercurrent of conventionality in Felix Fay, just as there was in Floyd Dell. In spite of his ambivalence, Felix wished to marry his sweetheart as Floyd had wished to marry his first love. Recognizing this ambivalence and the dualism of his nature, one senses that Dell's own character never changed as drastically as his critics charged. Clearly his priorities had changed, as success in marriage came to outrank absolute freedom. And then, maybe Floyd Dell had simply matured.

"I had believed in marriage all along," Dell explained, "and

had hoped always for permanency, like practically everybody else." It was a sincere statement—not a mere rationalization for his apparent change. "In the back of our minds, no matter how cynical our words or how apparently frivolous our actions, there was the ancient mutual if unconfessed desire for a permanently enduring relationship." Floyd may have erred in projecting his own feelings onto other radicals and bohemians, but this was what free love had meant to him. And even if we were not sure "what we believed about love and 'freedom' . . . ," said Dell, "We were incredibly well meaning." But good intentions were not enough, and finally, like the heroine in *Janet March*, Dell confessed, "I wanted to be through experimenting, so that I could start in living." "It isn't enough, is it—just being lovers?" Of course, the love affairs were beautiful. But they had become "a prolonged holiday away from life." "We had had to avoid responsibility so long that we made freedom from responsibility our ideal." By thirty Floyd had dismissed the dream of freedom with only "a faint and shadowy regret."[25]

His seeming reversal led many to view Dell as a renegade. The militant radicals saw his preference for art before revolution as a repudiation of radicalism. The success of his first novel underscored, for them, at least, the accuracy of their charge. By the late twenties and early thirties, his critics and fans both noted their disappointment. Critics claimed that underneath the bohemian and radical trappings, Dell had "the instinct to conform" and had become "a nice good-looking radical who isn't too upsetting."[26] His fans disapproved of his later novels. But most disturbing was that Dell was no longer the rebellious figure the public could romanticize. He had remarried, but even worse, he was now championing the institution of marriage.

This was too much. Dell admitted, "It was not at all unusual for a 'radical' to get married; but it was rather unusual for a 'radical' to approve of marriage theoretically." To compound the problem, this new defender of marriage and babies had been the chief spokesman for free love. "This was almost as if William Z. Foster had come out openly, in favor of private profit," one of Dell's friends explained. "It was practically the sexual counter-revolution." Everyone seemed to criticize him, said Dell, even if they did not know what they themselves believed about mar-

riage. "All they [the Socialists and Communists] knew, or thought they knew, was that 'marriage was a bourgeois institution'." "It would be assumed that my views would necessarily be stupid, reactionary, hypocricical, and sanctimonious," Floyd added. Nevertheless, people paid money to hear Dell debate Freedom vs. Marriage, first with Michael Gold and later with V. F. Calverton.[27]

The heroes of Dell's novels, like their creator, enjoyed their bohemian affairs but ultimately conclude that marriage is more important than total freedom. His heroines, who are usually outwardly radical, have an underlying conservative streak and finally seek marriage and children. Even "Village girls, after having had enough love affairs, wanted to get married," admitted Dell. Whether or not they felt guilty over sexual relations outside of marriage, they found that quotations and arguments from Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis no longer convinced them "that love without marriage was infinitely superior to the other kind. . . ." If Floyd felt that marriage was the way to happiness for many Modern Women, he did not condemn them to the Victorian marriage. They were surrendering to love and not to convention. They need not be discontented wives. Instead, with the understanding of their husbands and with "all the passionate devotion and the critical intelligence which they had intended to consecrate to their careers," they could engage "in humanizing the ancient institution of family life."[28]

These women were not being confined to their homes. Far from it. Dell foresaw that marriage would logically develop out of romantic love if only the woman could continue working outside of the home. This made early marriages economically feasible for young lovers. Both husband and wife could continue working. With a knowledge of birth control, they could postpone children until they were sure their marriage was sound and they were prepared to take on the added responsibility. To Dell, this was an intelligent solution to certain problems created by Victorian marriages. Young lovers did not marry then. Instead, girls married older young men who had already financially established themselves. The young men who had been their lovers had to wait until they were financially secure and ended up marrying the younger sisters of their former lovers. In either case,

romance was frustrated to comply with the social demands of a patriarchal society which was passing away. In the modern machine age, men and women should again marry for love.[29]

Floyd Dell had come a long way since his adolescent flirtations with the women of Davenport, Iowa. Happily married, he retreated with his wife and two sons to their country home on the Hudson. Floyd continued to write while B. Marie guided their adventures in the stock market. But the crash and the Depression reduced their savings, and in 1935, the Dells moved to Washington, D. C., where he disappeared into the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration. After his retirement, he continued to aid scholars with his personal reflections on his earlier years in Chicago and New York. Finally, after five years of illness, he died in 1969 at the age of 82.

One of Dell's heroines, speaking in *Love in Greenwich Village,* summarized the author's experience well.

> "People aren't so civilized as we pretended to be; they're barbarians, really. We want the old things—the best of them; things like homes, and permanence, and babies. At least I'm like that—and I'm glad I've found it out. Do you remember how we used to assure each other that marriage was a relic of barbarism? Well, so are our feelings—relics of barbarism. And it's our feelings that we love with—not our brains!"

Dell was full of intellectual theories, but he, too, discovered within himself "certain bourgeois traits—the desire for . . . a house in the country, and children, and a settled life—for one becomes tired even of freedom!" He accepted marriage, not as a convention, but as a means to achieving happiness. Like Felix Fay, he "had had two quite definite wishes—to achieve continuity and stability in his work, and the same in his love life."[30] These he achieved, but only after the romantic rebel had surrendered his impossible dream. If his critics and followers were disappointed, Floyd Dell was not, for the sacrifice of a little freedom seemed a small price to pay for the happiness he had achieved in marriage.

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NOTES

1. Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1933), pp. 45, 235, 163.
2. Floyd Dell, *An Old Man's Folly* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 146; *Homecoming*, p. 63.
3. Floyd Dell, *Looking at Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924, pp. 20, 18-19, 21-22.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 13; Floyd Dell, *Love in Greenwich Village* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 112; Floyd Dell, *Intellectual Vagabondage: An Apology for the Intelligentsia* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), pp. 127-128; *Looking at Life*, pp. 15-17.
5. *Homecoming*, pp. 64, 171; Floyd Dell, *Janet March* (New York: Alfred A.
6. *Janet March*, p. 142; *Homecoming*, p. 171; Floyd Dell, *Moon-Calf* (New
6. *Janet March*, p. 142; *Homecoming*, p. 171; Floyd Dell, Moon-Calf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), pp. 290, 278—page references are to the paperback edition (New York: Sagamore Press, Inc., 1957); Floyd Dell, *The Briary-Bush* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), pp. 107, 408-409, 124-125, 127, 177.
7. *Homecoming*, pp. 103, 185, 129, 246; Dale Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life in the Midwest, 1900-1930* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966), p. 164.
8. *Homecoming*, p. 166.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159, 168; Floyd Dell, *Souvenir* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929), p. 210.
10. George Thomas Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades: The Life and Work of Floyd Dell" (unpublished Ph.D. disseratation, Northwestern University, 1959), pp. 146-147; *Homecoming*, pp. 203, 201.
11. For Dell's contributions to the Chicago Renaissance, see Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance;* and Bernard Duffey, *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters: A Critical History* (Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1954).
12. Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance*, p. 100; *Homecoming*, pp. 185, 192-193.
13. *Homecoming*, pp. 198, 200, 229-230, 220.
14. *Love in Greenwich Village*, p. 216; see Emily Hahn, *Romantic Rebels: An Informal History of Bohemianism in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), pp. 181-183, for an added account of how sexual experimentation led to the breakup of Dell's marriage; *The Briary-Bush*, p. 291.
15. *The Briary-Bush*, pp. 330, 333; *Homecoming*, pp. 240, 212-214; Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance*, p. 165.
16. *Homecoming*, pp. 215, 240, 238; Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance*, pp. 238-239, 165-166.
17. *Homecoming*, pp. 240-241; *The Briary-Bush*, p. 319; Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance*, p. 239; Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades," pp. 117, 140.
18. Quoted in Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades," pp. 152, 140.
19. *Homecoming*, pp. 272-273; *Love in Greenwich Village*, p. 243; *An Old Man's Folly*, p. 311; *Looking at Life*, p. 66; Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades," p. 139.
20. Elizabeth Anderson and Gerald R. Kelly, *Miss Elizabeth: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 25; Jean Gould, *The Poet and Her Book: A Biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Dodd, Mead &

Company, 1969), pp. 82-95, discusses Dell's relationship with this poetess; *Homecoming*, pp. 286, 262.

21. *Homecoming*, pp. 223, 282-283; *Intellectual Vagabondage*, p. 165; *Souvenir*, p. 86.
22. *Homecoming*, pp. 255, 291, 293-294.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 330, x, 331; Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance*, pp. 313-314.
24. *Homecoming*, pp. ix, 360; Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades," p. 301.
25. *Homecoming*, pp. 351, 242, 290-291; *Intellectual Vagabondage*, pp. 162, 188, 168-172; *Janet March*, p. 456; *The Briary-Bush*, p. 425.
26. Hutchins Hapgood, *New Republic*, LXXVII (November 29, 1933), p. 80; Malcolm Cowley, *New Republic*, LXII (April 30, 1930), p. 304.
27. Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), pp. 244-245; *Homecoming*, pp. 348-351.
28. *Homecoming*, pp. 273, 288-289; *Janet March*, p. 53; *Intellectual Vagabondage*, pp. 138-141.
29. Dell developed these ideas at considerable length in *Love in the Machine Age: A Psychological Study of the Transition from Patriarchal Society* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1930).
30. *Love in Greenwich Village*, pp. 250, 303; *Homecoming*, p. ix.

THE FIRST NICK ROMANO:
THE ORIGINS OF *KNOCK ON ANY DOOR*

ROBERT E. FLEMING

With the publication of *Knock on Any Door* (1947) Willard Motley seemed to burst upon the American literary scene. Within three weeks the story of Nick Romano, an altar boy who becomes a killer because of his environment, had sold 47,000 copies, and it went on to sell 350,000 during its first two years in print. The novel was condensed in *Omnibook*, interpreted in pictures by *Look*, serialized in a King Features comic strip in daily papers, and filmed by Columbia Pictures with Humphrey Bogart in a major role. Nor was the novel merely a best seller. The critics compared Motley favorably with such established literary figures as Theodore Dreiser, James T. Farrell, and Richard Wright.

Motley's success, however, had been a long time in coming. By 1947 he had served an extensive apprenticeship that began when the Chicago *Defender* published his first short story, "Sister and Brother," in 1922, when Willard was only thirteen years old. From December 9, 1922, to January 5, 1924, he wrote a weekly column for the *Defender*'s young readers. Determined to become a professional writer, Motley spent the first half of the 1930's submitting slick formula short stories to magazines such as *Colliers* and *Liberty*, which promptly rejected them. His first real success came when he began to submit articles based on his travels to a variety of magazines ranging from *Highway Traveller* and *Outdoors* to *Commonweal*. In spite of his success as a writer of non-fiction, Motley was still determined to write fiction.

One brief article proved to be the germinal work that would lead to the writing of *Knock on Any Door*, Motley's complex mixture of observation and fiction that was to make his protagonist

Nick Romano one of the best-known fictional characters of the 1940's. This important transitional piece was a short story entitled "The Boy," published in August 1938 by *The Ohio Motorist*, a magazine printed by the Ohio branch of the American Automobile Association.[1]

THE BOY*
by Willard F. Motley
Fool, Adventurer, Scribbler

There was an imploring look in his eyes when he thought that I was going to pass on after smiling at him with friendliness and compassion. But when I stopped alongside the high wire fence he dropped his hoe and ran to the fence looking up at me eagerly. His elfish smile came hesitantly [sic], with all the reserve and shyness of adolescence; then swiftly, dyeing his face into a tanned wreath. And though he smiled his eyes held mine with the pleading graveness of a child.

"Are you the gardener here?" I asked, smiling.

He put his hand against the fence. His eyes fell.

"I'm in here for being bad," he replaied, putting childish emphasis on the "bad."

"What did you do so bad?" I asked, his grave manner both amusing and touching me.

"I stole a bike," he answered, simply, truthfully.

"You haven't had anyone to talk to, have you?" I asked.

"No. Not now. Will—will you talk to me?" His eyes fell shyly.

There was an innocent and clean look about his face; a pathos about his clear, frank, brown eyes; a wholesomeness about his tanned slightly freckled skin; his shy, half-melancholy smile that puckered his lips. His voice had the friendliness of a puppy; a puppy that had been kicked. His blue shirt, open at the neck and exposing his throat, recalled to me the remembrances of a lost boyhood. Curse words

dropped prematurely but easily from his lips in his boyish voice. And there was this streak of badness that ran through him as a minor chord through a haunting and beautiful melody.

Poor kid. I liked him. And my friendship was his as surely as if it had been a tangible and concrete thing he held in his hands.

"Do you gamble?" he asked naively.

"No," I laughed, "I don't."

"Aw gee," he said, "I want to learn how without losing. I always lose."

"How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"Was—was it a nice bicycle?" I asked, bashful myself before this little boy.

"I—Oh gee—I've never had anything. That's why I took it."

"I wouldn't feel badly about it." I told him, "We all do wrong things sometimes."

"Did you ever steal?" he asked in a voice that implied I might break an idol.

I broke the idol: "Well once I got into trouble. I was in jail once. I syphoned some gasoline because I was broke and hungry and cold. I had an old car I was making a trip in and I ran out of gasoline before I could get to a city where some money waited for me. But I'm not sorry that I was in jail. I'm glad. I think it made me better."

I nodded at the handsome building beyond the flower garden where the boy stood. "Do they feed you good?"

"Oh I guess they do. Only it doesn't seem like it. There's nothing to do in there but sit and wait for the next meal. There are only three more kids in there and they won't let us talk loud or play games. And they make me wash walls and they're always after me—'Joe comb your hair' . . . 'Joe wash these pots' . . . 'Joe you've been here long enough to know what you're supposed to do.' I'm going to run away from here. It won't be hard to get away from here." He measured the fence with his eyes.

I smiled at him: "You couldn't run far. You'd go home and they'd find you and bring you back here."

"I'd go to my aunt's house."

I laughed. Then seriously: "How many more days have you got to go?"

"Eighteen."

"You can take it, can't you? Eighteen days. That isn't long. Why not show everybody that you can take it and come out of here a cleaner and finer boy?"

"Aw gee, my birthday is two days before I get out of here."

"You can keep a stiff upper lip and stay here for just eighteen more days, can't you? I think you can."

"Aw I guess so but I want something else besides two potatoes and two slices of bread for lunch. And we never have milk."

"Are you hungry now?"

"Yes. And it's two hours before we eat again."

It was my turn to let my eyes fall as I replied:

"I'm broke. I haven't even got a nickel or I'd go to the store and buy you a candy bar. I'm looking for a job now so that I can get enough money to drive my car back to Chicago."

"It will take an awful lot of money to go to Chicago, won't it?" he asked.

"Yes it will."

"Listen." He looked furtively at the windows of the detention home, then continued, "Have you seen those Corbetta Ice Cream trucks? They carry their money under the front seat. Some kids I hang around with got fifty-five dollars once and twenty-four dollars another time."

"Joe," I said, "I know you told me that because you wanted to help me. But I wouldn't do that. I couldn't do that. You wouldn't either, would you? You don't want to be a crook, do you?"

"Oh gee, I know it. But when they put you in here it doesn't make you any better. It makes you worse."

"When was your mother here to see you?" I inquired, looking at the boy's head bowed in shame.

"Oh, she doesn't come to see me," he said and his mouth trembled.

"Hasn't she been here?" I was genuinely surprised.

"No."

I offered to go to his mother and have her come to see him if he would give me the address. But he was obdurate and to all my persuasions proudly refused, saying: "If she doesn't want to come and see me it's all right. Anyway I bawl when I see her."

"We all cry sometimes." I told the boy, "Sometimes just inwardly. But you shouldn't be ashamed of crying. It makes you feel better, doesn't it?"

"Yeah."

Over an hour I stood talking to him, sharing his imprisonment. And when I left him standing there with his face pressed against the fence, his heavily fringed eyes following me with a yearning wistfulness he said:

"Thanks for your company."

Broke, jobless, eating for nothing at the Society of St. Vincent De Paul, unable to help myself I was at least able to do The Boy some good. I went to several wholesale candy houses where I plainly stated the facts about The Boy and my own impoverished status. At the fourth salesroom the man begrudgingly told me:

"It is against our principles to give donations. It's very poor business. We never, under any circumstances, do this. Here—Don't come back again."

He dropped two candy bars and a few sticks of free sample gum into my hands.

The Boy wasn't in the yard. I rang the bell. An old lady, hard of hearing, came to the door. I flashed my bogus press card that has more than once gained me difficult entrances.

"Come this way, young man," she said crisply, smiling both pleasantly and a trifle irritably.

She led [sic] me down a hallway. "No newspaper stories! No pictures!" she warned.

The Boy came in shyly, looking up at me bashfully. I gave him the candy, started to give the gum.

"What's that?" the matron snapped. "Gum! Oh Joe can't have that!" She held out her aged hand and took it. "I'll give to it him when he leaves—They get it all over everything," she confided.

The Boy and I sat and talked but where we had had our confidences out by the fence he was now reticent and often looked up with ill-ease at the matron who never left the room.

My next visit was to the County and City Building where by dexterous maneuvering I obtained The Boy's home address.

There were but four bleak frame houses where he lived. The street was a dirt path, one block long, fronted by eight strands of railroad tracks. Across the tracks stood a foundry and a paint factory against which the weeds grew waist high. In a bare little front room I talked to The Boy's mother.

Work was hard to find; bumming much easier, so I went to a nationally famous cookie company and was there promised a box of cookies for The Boy if I presented myself the following morning at eight-thirty.

The next morning the kind-eyed manager, who still retained a shred of belief in human nature, handed me a five-pound box of cookies, saying:

"I hope they're for what you say."

The box was heaped with fresh cookies of an assortment so varied that I suspected the manager of packing them himself: Macaroons, Vanilla Wafers, Cholocate Marshmallows, Iced Cookies, Peanut Clusters.

If I sat in an alley, opened the box and ate two cookies it was curiosity—and because I was hungry. But a half-truth may as well be a whole-truth. . . . I ate five.

At any rate the box arrived, shortly afterward, at the detention home where The Boy told me, shyly, that his mother had been to see him.

I produced the box: "Here is something for you." His eyes were big with surprise, his lips trembled: "Gee, what if they had caught you!"

I explained that I hadn't stolen them.

When I went to see him the next day the old matron told me that he was sick; that he had eaten too many cookies.

When Sunday came I sold, at a hock shop, a thin volume of Shakespeare's sonnets that I particularly prized so that I could take The Boy some fruit.

Too soon the allotted time allowed visitors passed. We stood in the detention home reception room. I stood stiffly and blinked my eyes sternly. I knew that I probably wouldn't see The Boy again. He smiled shyly up at me much as he had at our first meeting. His voice had all the friendliness of a puppy. His eyes were clean and clear. His elfish, half-sorrowful smile came hesitantly; and then swiftly . . .

I walked away from the building with my eyes closed, impressing the image of that boyish face upon my memory that it might follow me as far as possible along the path for the rest of my life. The end of a friendship is always heartbreaking.

In spite of his feeling that he would never see Joe again, Motley remained interested in him, visiting his family again in 1938, and bringing readers of *The Ohio Motorist* up to date with a second story, "The Boy Grows Up," published in the May, 1939, issue. There Motley noted the changes that the penal system had caused in Joe's character. He was back in the reform school for stealing a second bicycle and had become an experienced young lawbreaker. While visiting Joe in the school, Motley toured the facilities; he heard the story of a break-out attempt and the harsh punishment that followed it and saw the marks of the lash on the buttocks of one young offender. This experience provided the material for Grant Holloway's institutional visits and for the brutal beating of Nick's young friend Tommy in *Knock on Any Door*. The tone of "The Boy Grows Up" is darker as the raw materials of a tragedy replace the somewhat pathetic notes of "The Boy."

In the two articles, Motley told the story just as it had happened, but something about the little Mexican boy stuck in the author's imagination; ultimately he came to realize that here was the subject for a full length novel, that he would have to take the real boy as he had known him and work out his fate imaginatively. As he told an audience in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1960, "I realized that this story would have to get tougher and tougher and tougher at the beginning and at the end, and as to the middle, I wasn't too certain."[2] One way of working out what else had to happen occurred quite naturally as Motley, living in the slum neighborhood near Chicago's Maxwell Street Market, met another boy who was somewhat further along in his delinquency. As Motley recalled in 1960, "I ran into this kid who at that time was about 17 years old, blond, half Polish, half Italian, who was a jack roller on the street [West Madison], and who talked to me quite freely about his activities on the street, and I combined the two persons up to perhaps their seventeenth or eighteenth year, and then used my imagination from there on. And so out of this grew my first novel."[3]

The growth of the novel and the subsequent struggle to find a publisher for it were to occupy some eight years,[4] during which the young Mexican boy and the Chicago jack roller merged in Motley's mind with a third boy, "Knifey" Zawicki, who was tried and sentenced to death for rape and murder in 1941.[5] But the original germ for the story that was to become *Knock on Any Door*, best-seller and landmark of latter-day naturalism, was the brief, non-fiction account published in an obscure motorists' magazine in 1938.

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NOTES

1. The following text is from *The Ohio Motorist*, August 1938, pp. 14, 30-31. Several minor punctuation and capitalization errors have been silently corrected. An inscription set off at the right of the title on page 14 reads: "Being one of many experiences that included walking across Catalina Island, climbing mountains, trapping mountain goats bare-handed, being a ranch cook and sometimes taking refuge at missions while on a vagabond trip to the Pacific coast in a second-hand car."
2. Willard Motley, "The Education of a Writer," *New Idea*, Winter 1961, p. 13.
3. *Ibid.*
4. For an account of Motley's difficulties with publishers, see Jerome Klinkowitz and Karen Wood, "The Making and Unmaking of *Knock on Any Door*," *Proof*, III (1973), 121-137.
5. Motley's unpublished journals, currently housed in the Parson Library, Northern Illinois University, tell how he attended Zawicki's trial and later conferred with his attorney (entries for September 23 and October 27, 1941).

COMMUNITY AND SELF IN THE MIDWEST TOWN: FLOYD DELL'S *MOON-CALF*

PARK DIXON GOIST

The myth of the town in America is, as Anthony Hilfer asserts in his study of *The Revolt From The Village,*[1] essentially a myth of community. For many Americans "the town" is synonymous with "community." A good deal of American Midwestern literature reflects and supports this equation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a flood of stories, novels, essays, and poems appeared which praised the community values of the town. For Americans at the turn of the century popular Midwestern writers like Booth Tarkington, William Allen White, Vachel Lindsay, and Zona Gale were among those who helped create and/or sustain an image of the town as ideal community. But even among those novels which were part of that "revolt from the village" the image of community in the town is evident. The following essay is an analysis of such a work.

When Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* appeared in 1920 one reviewer took its heroine, Carol Kennicott, to task for submitting to convention and commercialism, "not merely because the town is dull, but because she is weak." This critic maintained that an idealist need not be either a "victim of commercialism or an exile from it." Young idealism might at times be silly but still it is "one of the most beautiful things in the world."[2] The reviewer, Floyd Dell, had himself just written a novel about the idealism of youth. *Moon-Calf,* published just two days after *Main Street,* is frequently included among the novels of revolt characteristic of this period. Its author was a bohemian and radical, connected with both the Chicago Renaissance and the *Masses,* a socialist journal published during the peak years of Greenwich Village

just prior to and during World War I. Like his contemporary, Zona Gale, he was an advocate of women's rights, as well as other social justice causes. For all this, Dell's attitude toward the small town in *Moon-Calf* was far from being one of vitriolic ridicule.

Like Carol Kennicott, Felix Fay, the "moon-calf," is an outsider, a poet and idealist, a seeker after self who also yearns "to belong." Felix experiences three towns, moving with his family from Maple to the somewhat larger Vickley and then by himself to the more bustling Port Royal. [Felix's moves correspond to the progression Dell and his family made from Barry to Quincy, Illinois, in 1899 and then to Davenport, Iowa, in 1903.] Each move comes at a turning point in Felix's life and each represents a new beginning. The story end with Felix on his way to Chicago for yet another chapter in his search for identity. Each move also has its unsettling aspects. In moving to Vickley, Felix reflects on what life had been like in Maple:

> In Maple it had been possible to pretend the family poverty was only a temporary accident. There were memories of prosperity; and rich or poor, the family was part of the town life. Mr. Fay had served on Fourth of July celebration committees, and helped get up the Republican rallies. Jim [Felix's brother] had been drum major of the Junior Republican band. Everybody had been interested in Ed, [another brother] the house painter who wanted to be an artist. Old friends of Mrs. Fay still came from the ends of town to help her make a quilt, as in the old days of 'quilting-bees'. But in Vickley they were lost. Nobody knew them. The boys were so much labour to be used up ruthlessly in shops and factories.[3]

The young moon-calf feels himself uprooted from community.

But Felix does find a kind of community in Vickley, among the workers at a candy factory where he is employed. He falls in love with one of the girls there and becomes fond of the others. On the day he is laid off—due to a slump in business—the feeling of togetherness is particularly strong. After being abruptly fired, the factory hands return to complete their last day's work. "Finished with the cakes they went back to the caramels, and eked them out with songs. The songs expressed what none of them was able to put into words—the sense of community which

comes to unite those who work together. . . ."[4] Felix is a romantic socialist and he may have been reading more into the situation than actually existed, but the important fact is what he understands the significance of this experience to be—a sense of community among a group of workers.

As Carol Kennicott tries to form a 'group' in Gopher Prairie, so in Port Royal, the next town to which he moves, Felix seeks to find his own people. Again he reflects upon the strong sense of community he had felt in the town from which he has just moved. When he discovers that Port Royal has enough atheists to form a society and hold public meetings he is delighted:

> He came (to the atheist meeting) happily, with a grateful sense of having at last refound a part of life he had left behind in Vickley. He realized now what a varied and complex and humanly attached life he had led for the past few months back there. He had been part of the human process—and for the first time, gladly a part of it. The severance of those bonds had left him feeling strangely isolated. He had, without realizing it, lost his old self-sufficiency; he had known, obscurely but satisfyingly, the feeling of communion with the race. And then suddenly, he was detached and flung into an utterly alien world.[5]

The question Felix faces is one common to the deracinated twentieth century American intellectual: can he establish (or *re*-establish) that feeling of being part of the race, that 'complex and humanly attached life'? It is a need expressed by Malcolm Cowley's exile, an urge for "a *sense of belonging* to something, of living in a country whose people spoke his language and shared his interests."[6] In Felix Fay's case, after his first unfavorable impression of Port Royal has softened, he comes to also like this new, somewhat larger town. He admires its tree-shaded streets and parks, its fine buildings and comfortable homes, its "dignity and serenity." He begins to feel that he can be happy in Port Royal.

Felix is introduced to a group of local writers and free spirits by Helen Raymond, his librarian friend. Though socially awkward at first, he eventually finds himself at ease among these people, particularly after gaining wider experience as a newspaper reporter. He has established a firmer sense of self and

reestablished the sense of actively participating in a humanly attached life. This feeling of community and belonging is most sharply felt in Felix's experience as he reflects on his relationship to the local Socialist Party. As he enters Turner Hall to attend his first Socialist meeting in Port Royal:

> Felix stood still, under the spell of a curious illusion. It was as if he knew this place—had always known it—as though he had frequented it in some previous existence, or in dreams. He knew that he belonged there; and breathed in the odour of tobacco smoke and drank up the murmur of voices from within with a kind of nostalgia. After a long exile in an alien environment, he was coming home. Somehow he felt, as he had never felt before in any group, that these were his kind of people, that he understood them, that he was on an equality with them. The letters Comrade Rapp was reading, meaningless in detail, had a sharp significance as tokens of the relationship of this group to other groups of the same kind, proofs of the existence of a vast body of people among whom he felt he belonged.[7]

Like Carol Kennicott in Washington, D. C., Felix found, for a time, his own kind of people. This experience is strikingly similar to Carol's, who finds that her circle of friends in Washington has linked her to "vast affairs, not confined to Main Street."[8] In 'coming home', Felix feels he has simultaneously made contact with all those throughout the world who are also engaged in the Socialist struggle.

Midwest towns have been good to Felix. But he neither embraces nor ascquiences to any town; rather, like George Willard in *Winesburg, Ohio,* he leaves for the city. Towns have provided him a sense of community, a secure basis for his further quest for self. They have not crushed or suppressed him, nor do they define the world for him as they so often do for the residences of such place as Friendship Village, Zona Gale's idealized settlement. Unlike so many other characters in the revolt from the village literature, Felix is neither a victim of the Midwest town nor an angry rebel against it. His move to Chicago is not a desperate flight from small town dullness; it is more a natural step in his pursuit of self. As Felix is leaving Port Royal for Chi-

cago he reflects on what Dell, in the dedication of the novel, refers to as the "grim yet generous hospitality" of the Midwestern town:

> He had been happy in Port Royal: it had given him love, and painful wisdom, and the joy of struggle. He would like to write a poem about it. The town had been built for young men and girls to be happy in, to adventure in, and to think strange and perilous thoughts. . . .
> Yet, it was an amusing thought, that Port Royal had been built for such purposes—for growing up in. Port Royal was not everything, of course. It had sufficed nobly. It had given much. And now— . . . Chicago! Chicago![9]

Like so many other of his generation, the Midwestern town had served Felix Fay as a background, not as a goal but a point of departure.[10] He had arrived at a stage in his life when it was time to leave behind the world of adolescent security, heart-break, and beginnings and to strike out for the challenge, excitement, and unknown of Chicago. The towns had offered community, but the search for self continued, and for intellectuals of this generation the city was the next step on that journey.

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NOTES

1. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).
2. Quoted by John E. Hart, *Floyd Dell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), p. 72.
3. *Moon-Calf* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), pp. 82-83.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
6. Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 214. Italics added.
7. *Moon-Calf*, pp. 183-184.
8. Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 408.
9. *Moon-Calf*, p. 346.
10. "With the closing of the nineteenth century, what had been the 'West' had become, instead of a goal, a point of departure for new places and for achievement of new goals." David D. Anderson, "The Dimensions of the Midwest," *MIDAMERICA I* (1974), p. 12. In my analysis I have substituted "Midwestern town" for what Anderson refers to as "West."

LIZZIE DAHLBERG AND EULA VARNER: TWO MODERN PERSPECTIVES ON THE EARTH MOTHER

Robert L. Kindrick

One of the character types most attractive to modern American writers is the Earth Mother. Connected with ancient fertility goddesses such as Demeter, Aphrodite, the Sumerian Inanna, and the Akkadian Ishtar, the Earth Mother is traditionally associated with seasonal changes and fecundity. In modern American literature, she has often become merged with the "Dark Lady."[1] As a result, the Earth Mother often loses her association with fertility: she is defined instead by her pronounced sexuality, albeit that sexuality may be sterile. Just as ancient fertility goddesses had to be wooed with ceremonies and sacrifices, the modern American Earth Mother is capricious. She too must be appeased with gifts or wooed with humility. Just as the forces of Mother Earth could be destructive if not placated, so the modern Earth Mother may destroy her man, like Rappacini's Daughter or Brett Ashley. Because of the general nature of the renewal myth, the traditional Earth Mother was usually promiscuous in her favors. The modern Earth Mother shares her favors as well, and moves from suitor, most often on the basis of her personal whims or at the caprice of fortune.

The use of this sexual archetype, however, has not resulted in characters that are predictable and mundane. Indeed, one of the most interesting aspects of the Earth Mother in modern American literature is the variety of faces she presents. The differences among characters based on this archetype certainly suggest that "Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known."[2] Two modern American writers whose characters represent the extremes of the

Earth Mother type are Edward Dahlberg and William Faulkner. Characters in their works present, respectively, the Earth Mother as mother, and the Earth Mother as sexual partner. Dahlberg's Earth Mother, Lizzie, is a warm, living presence, fully developed and transcending sterotypes. Faulkner's Eula Varner is a flat character, interesting primarily (and sometimes only) for her dumb, passive sexuality.

Dahlberg's heroine is the subject of two works, *Bottom Dogs* (1929) in which she appears as Lizzie Lewis, the mother of the narrator, and *Because I Was Flesh* (1964), in which she is revealed as Lizzie Dahlberg, the author's own mother. A superficial examination of Dahlberg's character may suggest she is not an Earth Mother at all. She is associated with St. Teresa of Avila and Christ's mother. In her relations with the lady barbers she meets, she is portrayed as long suffering and patient.

Nothwithstanding Lizzie's other qualities, her characterization is certainly based in the Earth Mother archetype. Lizzie is no less sensual a creature than Eula. Although she is not beautiful, Dahlberg tells us that she is one of those persons "who will be admired for their Beauty; whom you must call Adonis and Hyacinthus, though they have a nose a cubit long."[3] Dahlberg is appalled by her sloppiness, but he also remembers "burning brown eyes and hair of the same color." He suggests that there was "much feeling in the appearance of her mouth," and he takes pains to point out that "she did not have thick features." While Lizzie was not a beauty, she was lovely enough to attract a host of suitors.

She had a total of eight lovers. The degrees of intimacy vary. At sixteen, she was wed to a stocky fur operator, her first legal husband. Having produced three sons by her husband but tiring of him as a bed partner, Lizzie abruptly abandoned her family and ran off to Boston to have the child of her next lover. Saul had "the soft crooked locks of Absalom and vain white teeth which he showed her. . . ." He was a dandy and a perfect rakehell who drifted in and out of Lizzie's life for the next ten years after the birth of his son. When he was absent she pined for him. When he was present, he stole from the cash register in her barber shop to cavort with "chippies" and "sporting women."

Her other lovers seem a bland and impotent lot after Saul.

There was first the dignified major, whose proposal she refused. She then fell in with Harry Cohen, a shyster who managed to trick her out of sizable sums of money. Popkin, the next of her paramours, swindled her out of $3000 and left her only memories and a parrot that recited "Aloph, Beth, Gimel, Popkin."

After this assortment of rogues and lotharios, Captain Henry Smith is attractive, despite his rascality. Lacking Saul's good looks, Captain Smith was none too particular about his appearance: "Stout, but not flabby, he sweated copiously . . . his pants stuck to the settee in the shop. . . ." (62). It was he who was responsible for sending her son to the orphanage in Cleveland. The last of Lizzie's suitors was Tobias Emeritch, a profound disappointment. A man in his dotage who chewed his tie, Tobias smelled of "cheap hair tonic" (174).

Lizzie is certainly victimized by her suitors: She was bartered to her husband by her brother like so much horse flesh. Saul and Popkin both took large sums of money from her. Captain Henry Smith cheated her out of several months' rent. But Lizzie's motives in dealing with her suitors were not simply amorous: she too wanted financial security and often used her sexuality to get what she wanted. After her unhappy marriage in which she received financial security without love, she became Saul's mistress and was forced to support her lover and her child. Having been through these two disastrous affairs, Lizzie settled on financial security as the major consideration. She was cunning in her advice to the lady barbers when they planned breach of promise suits, and she was suspicious of her own suitors. Although she was swindled by Popkin and Captain Henry Smith, she did not passively accept their duplicity. She even managed to obtain some recompense from Captain Henry Smith in the form of a clapboard cottage in Northmoor, Missouri. It was, in fact, her caution about financial arrangements that caused her to lose Tobias Emeritch. A skinflint himself, Tobias became unduly suspicious about her persistent demands for legal protection in his estate. Lizzie lost Tobias, only to discover in his obituary six months after their separation that he died leaving an estate of $50,000.00 In her dealings with all of her last four suitors, Lizzie promised or withheld sexual favors to get her own way or to obtain the security she wanted.

There is no doubt that Lizzie's sensuality is perhaps her most pronounced quality. The author affirms that she "was utterly separated from the whole race of mankind save when she was concupiscent" (5). Fred Moramarco has commented that one of the keys to Lizzie's character is that to the author she is "the three Marys of the New Testament."[4] This means of course that she is also Mary Magdalene, and Edward repeatedly emphasises that he was embarrassed by his mother's sexuality. He shuddered at the sight of her undergarments. One morning he awoke to hear his mother's cry of pain as she was copulating with Harry Cohen, and his childhood anguish is reflected in the ruminations on lust that the memory yet provokes:

> We inherit our songs of lust from angels. The heavens are defiled, and God makes nothing that is not corrupt. The Angel 'Azazel taught men the uses of lechery; everything that lives is incontinent. (57)

Lizzie retained her passion in her later years and even confided in Edward that Captain Henry Smith was all played out before she got him. Despite his embarrassment with her lusts and loves, Dahlberg praises Lizzie for her "sexual understanding" (94). Dahlberg attempts to understand the character without censuring her, and perhaps his final judgment on and explanation of her is:

> Lizzie was guided by the laws of her body. . . . (43)

Faulkner's heroine, Eula Varner, possessed these same characteristics. Eula's physical appearance emphasized her beauty and fecundity. Even in her early adolescence, Eula was precociously attractive:

> she was already bigger than most grown women . . . her entire appearance suggested . . . honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine.[5]

She blossomed into full womanhood as a "paen of triumph to the supreme triumphal uterus." Everything about her physical appearance from her hair to the generous display of thigh she exhibited on her way to school suggested her desirability as a sexual partner.

Like Lizzie, Eula was available. Although her suitors are not all described in the same detail as the lady barber's, she had just as many. Her first lover was Hoake McCarron, a man "with assurance in his face which was bold and handsome too" (*The Hamlet,* 137). Somewhat like Saul in *Because I Was Flesh,* he was the suitor to whom Eula apparently gave herself with no hidden motive. He was also the only suitor capable of impregnating her. "In trouble" because of her night with McCarron, Eula was married by the fiat of her father to Flem Snopes. In the catalogue of her suitors, Flem ranks low. "Smaller than common" (*The Hamlet,* 7), Flem was almost an automaton in tennis shoes and a black bow tie. Ironically, although he was the man who had legal possession of the most desirable woman in the county, he was impotent, and her marriage to him may be viewed as a sacrifice.[6] Eula's last long-term lover was Manfred De Spain, with whom she was involved in a complicated arrangement that was used to advance the Snopes family. De Spain is more what we might expect the "sky father" to be:

> De Spain himself was a West Pointer who had gone to Cuba as a second lieutenant . . . he led the yearly cotillion and was first on the list of the ladies' german . . . born a generation too soon, he would have been by acclamation ordained a high priest in that new national religious cult of Cheesecake. . . . (*The Town,* 10, 14)

No matter how short the list of Eula's real lovers may be, there is other evidence of her attractiveness and possible availability. Early in *The Hamlet,* Labove, the schoolmaster, had a passion for her so strong that he attacked her. To his dismay, she was not even afraid and rebuffed him with scorn. Eula was also pursued by a host of nameless beaux who sat in the dark around the family home and called to her. Her brother Jody constantly attempted to protect her but failed and merely seethed "in his raging helplessness." (*The Hamlet,* 102) Finally, Eula made herself available to Gavin Stevens after the disastrous brass incident in *The Town.* She came to his office and suggested that "it would be all right here" (*The Town,* 91). Stevens was too shocked to accept her offer, but there is clearly an implication that this was her way of returning a favor.

A "satirical figure in the power struggle for money and respectability,"[7] Eula like Lizzie used her sexuality for her own purposes, Ratliff, speculating on her relationship with Hoake McCarron, suggested that she was rewarding him after he had fended off three of his rivals who had tried to harass them. Her treatment of de Spain was determined in large part by the curious permission and perhaps even encouragement of her husband. Because of de Spain's affection for Eula he found himself trapped into helping the Snopes family, even going so far as to replace the funds Byron Snopes stole from his bank. Eula was at least vaguely aware of her power. Her suicide was clearly yet another in a series of personal manipulations. Moreover, she attempted to use her sexuality when she approached Gavin Stevens. Although Stevens might have been misinterpreting her visit, he felt that her offer to him was simply an attempt to pay off a favor:

> "And be quick, hurry too maybe since you haven't got much time, since you really ought to be in bed this minute with your husband or is this one of Manfred's nights? . . . maybe it is both of them; maybe they both sent you: both of them that scared, that desperate; their mutual crisis and fear so critical as to justify even this last desperate gambit of your woman's—'their mutual woman's—all?'" (*The Town,* 92).

Final evidence of her belief that sexual favors are rewards for monetary or personal services is found in her suggestion to Gavin Stevens that he marry her daughter Linda to get her out of the control of Flem Snopes.

Eula's sexuality is doubtless her most salient characteristic. Jody believed that she even had a particular scent:

> "She's just like a dog! Soon as she passes anything in long pants she begins to give off something. You can smell it! You can smell it ten feet away!" (*The Hamlet,* 99).

All of the descriptions of her physical appearance are designed to enhance her allure to emphasize her fecundity. Moreover, through his use of literary allusion, Faulkner attempts to draw parallels with past Earth Mothers. Labove envisioned a future husband playing "Crippled Vulcan to the Venus" (*The Hamlet,* 119). Her own Vulcan is, of course, sexually crippled. And,

from the very first description of her, Faulkner says that she suggested "some symbology out of the old Dionysic times" (*The Hamlet,* 95). Eula certainly has Lizzie's "sexual understanding"; in fact, it is one of the major sources of her tragedy.

Given the similarities that exist between Eula and Lizzie it is amazing that two such different characters result. Eula is hardly a fully developed character: as Page has noted, she is a force but almost inhuman:

> She is person, but she is primarily force; her own personality and her body are subservient to the force of life which emanates from her. . . .[8]

A less kind suggestion is that she "is moved by nothing at all except the processes of her own organic chemistry."[9] She is a flat character, symbolic of the forces of nature or the "sacrificed virgin" but having little interest as a character, right up to the time she goes to see Stevens before her suicide. Her function is solely mythic.

Lizzie, on the other hand, is one of the most fully developed characters in modern American fiction. Sir Herbert Read asserts that her portrayal is "a masterpiece, as lovingly detailed as a late Rembrandt."[10] Fred Moramarco believes that "Dahlberg's mother emerges from these pages as a character with mythic dimensions, the embodiment of human suffering and endurance."[11] Even readers who generally dislike Dahlberg for his style or his erudition find themselves attracted to the portrait of his bewildered heroine struggling to make sense out of her life. Even though Lizzie also has mythic qualities, she represents the Earth Mother in her most realistic and sympathetic form.

The differences cannot simply be explained by saying that Dahlberg loves women while Faulkner hated them. When he was asked at the University of Virginia which he preferred to write about, men or women, Faulkner responded that he preferred women "because I think women are marvelous . . . they're wonderful."[12] Moreover, when we compare Eula to Faulkner's other Earth Mothers, such as Lena Grove, or other women characters such as Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury,* her two-dimensional quality is even more apparent. We must conclude that Faulkner

was deliberately creating a symbol whose meaning was more important than characterization.

Key differences between these two figures appear in the techniques of characterization. Faulkner uses every means at his disposal to keep his readers from knowing Eula too intimately. There are no insights into her mind. Eula is always shown from the outside. In the description of her childhood, for instance, there is no attempt to explore the development of her ideas about the world. She was simply an inert bundle of female "laziness" that had to be carried or escorted from place to place because she refused to move.

Even after she was old enough to start attracting men, there is no indication whether she was aware of her power and cultivated it. Jody said that "she would be glad to walk home from school if you put a man every hundred feet," assuming that she would budge from her natural laziness only to attract suitors. But we never know how *she* feels. The whole incident with Labove is related from his point of view. His agony and sexual frustration are described in detail:

> He had long since thought of marring her . . . he just wanted her one time as a man with a gangrened hand or foot thirsts after the axe-stroke which will leave him comparatively whole again. But he would have paid even this price to be free of his obsession. . . . (*The Hamlet,* 119).

The climatic structure of the whole relationship, in fact, is predicated on the suspense involved in Labove's attempt to satisfy his longing. Faulkner remains singularly and deliberately silent on Eula's feelings. There is never any indication that she suspects the schoolmaster's intentions. Even after he had attempted to attack her, her only reaction was "stop pawing me . . . you old headless horseman Icabod Crane" (*The Hamlet,* 122). This is simply the reaction of a child. It emphasizes the childlike, passive quality associated with Eula. The fact that she did not even bother to tell her brother is additional evidence of the symbolic nature of her characterization.

Her relationship with Flem in *The Hamlet* is treated in precisely the same fashion. She is never shown to have any particular feelings about him. Faulkner is again non-commital:

> She knew him well. She knew him so well that she never had to look at him anymore. She had known him ever since her fourteenth summer. . . . By then she had learned to recognize the mute hissing of his tennis shoes on the veranda planks; without rising or even turning her head she would call toward the interior of house: "Papa, here's that man," or, presently, "the man"—"Papa, here's the man again," though sometimes she said Mr. Snopes, saying it exactly as she would have said Mr. Dog.
>
> (*The Hamlet,* 147-148)

Although the marriage may indeed be a kind of sacrifice, we know nothing of the feelings of the victim. Like any dumb creature, she went to her ritual murder without complaint.

In *The Town* Eula is in many ways a more fully realized character than she is in *The Hamlet.* Even so, we still have little or no information on her feelings. Probably the most startling example of Faulkner's tendency to focus on externals is to be found in the incident with Gavin Stevens. Like Labove, Stevens was frantic about the prospect of making love to her. Faulkner's shift to the use of multiple narrators, including of course Stevens, gives us even more insights into the suitor's thoughts than before. Passive and mysterious, Eula was typified by the "tragic mask" she wore through Faulkner's Snopes saga. When she approached Stevens in his office, his frenzy reached a climax and he insulted her. Her bluntness does not reveal her feelings: "I thought it would be all right here. . . . Do it here. In your office." (*The Town,* 91). She does nothing to change her image as a bland, nonactive nature figure, dealing her favors out at the caprice of fortune or on the basis of her personal whim. Only one other line in this scene expresses Eula's feelings: "I thought that was what you wanted" (*The Town,* 92). But it is not enough to explain her character or humanize her.

Eula's mask cracks somewhat in her attempt to get Linda out from under Flem's control. Faulkner attempts to characterize her through motherly concern, but his efforts are unconvincing. Distraught about Flem's refusal to let Linda leave Jefferson to go away to school, Gavin goes to see Eula who collaborates with him in a scheme to save her daughter:

> And now she was watching me, the cigarette motionless, not even seeming to burn. "Marry her."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The marriage is the only fact. The rest of it is still the poet's romantic dream. Marry her. She'll have you. Right now, in the middle of all this, she won't know how to say no. Marry her." (*The Town*, 226-227).

If this is a crack in the mask, it is a slight one. The reader is still outside Eula. Despite Faulkner's opinion that "she suddenly realized that this child was growing up and had to be protected . . . she knew that this child must be defended and protected,"[13] there is no real evidence of grave concern on her part. There is no hint of the distress that was to lead to her last grand gesture, the suicide that saved Linda.

Dahlberg has humanized his Earth Mother by almost reversing Faulkner's techniques of characterization. For one thing, he explains what Lizzie is thinking at almost every important juncture in her life. After she has left her first husband, Jacob, Dahlberg tells us that "She disliked his nose and thought he grubbed up his soup with it because he kept it so close to his plate. Her days were larded with tedium, and her body was like the salemander, which cannot live unless it burns" (7). This kind of comment would doubtless be equally appropriate about Eula's life with the impotent Flem Snopes, but Faulkner simply refuses to take us this far into Eula's mind.

Later, after she had been deserted by Saul, Lizzie is depicted in the throes of even greater anguish. Concerned that she would never find a man who would truly love her, she prayed: "She offered her petition to the Lord. . . . She was as impotent as the water hen that stands by the marsh. . . . She cried out 'O Lord God, I quake before everybody, I am such a nervous woman'. . . ." Her loneliness precipitated a fear that was hardly bearable: "She was afraid of the unmercied space around her, and even her bed was a pit. . . . Sometimes she awakened and found that she had wet the bedclothes, and she sobbed because she had a weak bladder. . . ." (18).

Every relationship that she had with a man is described from her point of view instead of her suitor's. She rejected the Major

because she could not endure her own happiness. After her experience with Popkin, she was "embittered and ill" and resolved "to relinquish all thoughts of felicity" (61). Even with jolly Captain Henry Smith, Lizzie was testy on occasion: "when she was indignant and moody, she composed a brief, rancorous declamation that she intended to recite to him." (62). We are even given Lizzie's reaction to crusty old Tobias Emeritch. When she first saw him. "Lizzie's ecstasy vanished. She was so overcome by the man's appearance that she fell into a painful reverie. Was this a nation of squat, pasty men with kitchen-garden noses?" (174).

Not only do we know how Lizzie felt about her lovers, we know how she felt about her job, her lady barbers, her son, and even her impending death. Lizzie enjoyed her profession. She thought that barbering was a "high-class" job:

> Lizzie liked being with the public and listening to the easy drawl about the swapping of a mare or shipments of stallions, geldings and cows to Topeka, Sedalia or St. Joseph. (9)

She worried about the rumors that her location was bad. "When Lizzie heard this kind of loose talk she quaked. . . ." (21).

A good deal of Lizzie's time was spent with the lady barbers, and Dahlberg gives us her opinions on them all: "of all the lady barbers Lizzie liked Emma the best; she had no respect for the giddy heads who wore their skirts stuck up behind them as hens their feathers, but she envied Emma" (32). Dahlberg continues to explain Lizzie's thoughts as she helped her lady barbers in breach of promise suits. She saw to it that they profited from her experience. We are even allowed into Lizzie's mind while she was helping one of the girls to abort.

She was concerned about her son's education. She took him to a parochial school "to learn German because she wanted him to be cultured" (15). Even her lack of comprehension of his repulsion with his physical surrounding is recounted in detail. In her son's early youth, all Lizzie could understand about him is that he "vomited and that he would grow up and be ugly" (41). She had, however, some tender feelings when she was forced to leave the boy. Because he annoyed Captain Henry Smith, the

boy was sent off to an orphanage in Cleveland. Lizzie accompanied him to the railroad station: "She was nearly ill because she feared that the boy would not have a seat in the railway coach. . . . What else could she do with boy?" (63).

As his heroine grows older, Dahlberg continues to reveal her thoughts, including reflections on aging and above all her fear of death. But she got some relief, we are told, by going "back to her memories." She looked at picture postcards and remembered the happy days of her youth. She could only respond to death with fear or prayer for a long life: "If the Lord God would only take into consideration all her misfortunes and give her credit for them, perhaps she could live until she was ninty-one or ninety-three, maybe even ninety-seven. . . ." (225). Much of the last seventy-five pages of *Because I Was Flesh* is an explanation of Lizzie's fears of old age and her loneliness after her son's marriage. The remarkable portrait of Lizzie Dahlberg is possible only because Dahlberg is not hesitant about telling us his heroine's thoughts. Her vitality is intensified with each insight into her feelings on her lovers, her son, and a variety of other subjects.

Internal characterization is not the only difference between the treatments Dahlberg and Faulkner accord their Earth Mothers. External characterization is the main technique that Faulkner employs to keep Eula mysterious, to emphasize her archetypal qualities even at the expense of realism. He goes even further, however, to hypertrophy her mythical attributes. Almost all of the major relationships Eula has in *The Hamlet* and *The Town* are with men. Most of the direct characterization in both novels is to be found in the way she affects her suitors. First there was Labove, who sniveled and crawled before her sexuality. Her next major relationship was with Flem, in which she was portrayed as a goddess sacrificed to a beast. Her relationship with de Spain was obviously predicated on sexual and social goals. Finally, in *The Town,* her major relationships are with de Spain and Gavin Stevens.

Almost the only relationship with another woman that Eula has in either book is that with her mother, and it is vaguely described at best. Like Eula herself, Mrs. Varner seemer unconcerned about sexual proprieties. When Jody, the voice of Victorian conscience, suggested that Eula needed protection, Mrs. Varner's reaction was surprisingly bland.

> Fiddlesticks. . . . Besides don't worry me with it. It was you insisted she had to go to school. It wasn't me. I raised eight other daughters, I thought they turned out pretty well. (*The Hamlet,* 99-100).

Aloof and mysterious, she has almost no contact with the other women of Jefferson to whom she is alternately a scandal or an object of scorn. Faulkner exploits Eula's relationships with the other members of her family for the sole purpose of emphasizing her sexuality. Jody was of course patently afraid his sister would disgrace the Varner family name, as she did: far and away his most pronounced feeling about Eula was fear, fear that her fecundity and attraction would cause a scandal. To Old Will she was apparently a burden. Even in her early youth, she shared his main characteristic, being "incorrigibly lazy" (*The Hamlet,* 95). He too faced the difficulty of physically moving her around as a baby until she was too heavy to lift. When she became pregnant, he had no compunctions about trading her to a mercenary, impotent drudge to relieve the pressure on his family. Eula's relationship with her father was based on mutual exploitation.

Dahlberg, on the other hand, shows his Earth Mother in a variety of relationships. He emphasizes her affairs, but the men Lizzie dealt with were substantially different from those in *The Hamlet* or *The Town.* Eula was certainly confronted with some undesirable characters: Flem is little short of fiendish in Faulkner's view, and even a character such as V. K. Ratliff has enough of the con man in him to merit some circumspection. Lizzie's men, however, were all sharpies, so her use of her sexuality seemed more justified than Eula's.

Lizzie's brother sold her to Jacob, the fur dealer. Saul stole money from Lizzie's barbering to spend on chippies and whores. Popkin swindled her out of a substantial investment. Captain Henry Smith attempted to get several years' board and room with no recompense. Even old Tobias Emeritch seemed unwilling to make financial arrangements that would provide Lizzie with the security a wife deserves. Contrasting these men with Faulkner's

de Spain and Gavin Stevens only emphasizes their shrewdness and pettiness. Lizzie was dealing with a group of small-time operators interested only in what they could get for as little as possible in return. Even in the numerous male relationships Lizzie had, she was more successful in adapting to her world than Eula. And, in some ways, her world possessed more numerous if not more severe perils than Eula's. To keep from being victimized, Lizzie constantly had to use her wits.

These are not, however, the only situations in which we see her. She is concerned about her girls in the barbershop, and Dahlberg establishes sympathy for his character by showing her bedeviled by the same cares any businessman might have. She is shown reacting to her customers. With some she was extremely friendly:

> A cattle dealer always relished any game of chance, and playing a game of dice with a woman was, next to horse swapping, the best of sports.
>
> "You start, Miss Lizzie, I'll shake you for a dime Havana. . . ."
>
> "Now, don't be a piker, Mr. Bob. Look at that fortune you're carrying in your hip pocket. How about shaking for a quarter?" (22)

On occasion, however, she was opportunistic, a trait seen in Dahlberg's explicit comments about how she handled drunks: "By the time an old sot had sobered up in the chair he would have had the whole bill of fare: a shave, a light trim, raw-egg shampoo, massage, every hair tonic in the shop and a manicure" (26).

Dahlberg also helps his readers to sympathize with Lizzie by contrasting her with her girls. While Lizzie was occasionally dishonest, the girls were constantly so. At the very worst, Lizzie would fleece a drunk or steal back from her lady barbers only what she believed to be hers. The girls themselves, on the other hand, were constantly stealing from one another. The barbershop operated on a voucher system, and each girl kept her day's vouchers in her apron. If a girl had left the shop and hung her apron on the rack without removing her vouchers, "Soon as she was seen passing the plate-glass window and waving to the others sprawled in their chairs, the lady barbers ran to get their hands

into the pocket of the apron" (29). Moreover, the reader's appraisal of Lizzie's own lusts is in good part determined against the unabated passion of the Magdalenes of the barbershop. The girls were always involved in some affair of the heart; in fact, Lizzie "attributed most of the ills of the lady barbers to excessive indulgence in the ecstasies of Venus" (28). Although Lizzie had her affairs, she was not so foolish as Emma Moneysmith who was "positive she was in a family way" because of her affair with a stockman. Lizzie, of course, lost Saul, the narrator's father, but Emma lost her stockman as well. In fact, it seems that one of the girls was habitually in "man trouble" and her lover had taken flight. Unable to face the social consequences of their actions, the lady barbers chose abortion: Lizzie chose to give her son life. Dahlberg suggests that Lizzie chose the nobler course when she decided to have her illegitimate child and try to provide for him as a "respectable widow." He attempts to entice the readers' sympathies for his Earth Mother by portraying her in the company of tarts, suggesting that her lady barbers were always worse than she. Their affairs were more tawdry, their men were less desirable, and they were less courageous.

Most importantly for Dahlberg, Lizzie had proper motherly concerns. In the early days of her business, when she was much concerned about getting established, Lizzie is shown taking her child with her wherever she went. Although she spent little time in recreation (other than her paramours), when she took time for an afternoon or evening outing, we see "the boy at her side was silent, rejoicing in the Pleiades. . . . He carried his mother's straw basket filled with homemade jellies. . . ." (24-25). When she had to send her son to an orphanage to please Captain Henry Smith, she showed genuine anguish. Later in her son's life, when he started to wonder who his father was, Lizzie had to face the excruciating trial of dealing with his questions.

> I pulled the tintype out of the rack and leaning against the cemetery of postcards, I roared, "It is Saul! Who else could my father be? I know it is Saul. . . ."
>
> She sat immovable. No grave was more silent than she, and no matter what words and sounds I made, she did not move. (170)

It is she too who provided her son with the security he needed to marry and continue his writing career. In disposing of her properties, she liquidated many of the hopes of her lifetime to provide her son with a start. In one of the most touching scenes in the book, Dahlberg describes the confrontation between his mother and himself when Lizzie rejoices in the offer of help she can make:

> Then she drew from the depths of her breast a sheaf of hundred-dollar bills and she placed them in my hands. . . . Standing on the one rug bitten by a generation of want, I still clung to all her drudgery in the Star Lady Barbershop. Then she took more money from her bosom . . . the winged lucre flew to the floor. (230)

Edward Dahlberg shows his archetypal figure in interaction with more types of characters than does Faulkner. While Faulkner attempts to emphasize Eula's mythic qualities by keeping her in the company of men, most of whom wish to bed her, Dahlberg shows his figure contrasted against a cast that is striking in its variety. Lizzie must deal with swindlers, promiscuous lady barbers, sometimes corrupt business associates and a sickly child. While Faulkner keeps Eula remote and aloof, Dahlberg shows us Lizzie in her true and natural habitat.

Finally, even the indirect characterization about Eula is from the masculine point of view. We learn about her from a third-person narrator, a love-sick schoolteacher, and a fuming brother who is shocked by his sister's conduct. In *The Town* Faulkner has changed his technique. Instead of using the omniscient (or nearly omniscient) third-person narrator, he uses the multiple-narrator technique that he employed in *The Sound and the Fury*. V. K. Ratliff, Chick Mallison, and Gavin Stevens piece together the events of the Snopes invasion of Jefferson; of course, Eula is a major subject of their narration. But again she is shown only from men's points of view. Gavin is certainly in love with her and feels that she has been sacrificed first in her marriage to Snopes and then by Snopes to de Spain. V. K. Ratliff fears the Snopeses but shares Gavin's feelings about Eula. Chick Mallison feels unable to comprehend all of the power that Eula possesses but his admiration for his uncle would extend to Eula no matter how

dangerous she might be. The three of them are votives at Persephone's altar.

The final result of all of these techniques is to keep Eula aloof and mysterious, not only from the other characters in the novels she inhabits but from the reader as well. The mystery is part of the process of devotion that the theme and structure of the novels demand. Like Gavin, Chick, and V. K., we too are expected to kneel at the shrine.

Although Dahlberg attempts third-person narration through a substantial portion of *Because I Was Flesh*, he does reveal his own point of view as the child of his heroine. This indirect characterization from a male source is more sympathetic than what Faulkner gives us. We know a great deal about Lizzie from her child, but very little about Eula from Linda. The child's viewpoint on Lizzie, even when he recalls very bitter memories, is more intimate and understanding than that of any outsider. He knows when she felt elated in her work and when she had fallen into an "infamous desolation" because she had been cheated or disappointed.

Important as it is, however, the child's perspective on Lizzie is not the only one we get. Just as with Eula, we get the point of view of her suitors. In his dealings with Lizzie, Saul "could not imagine that he had any imperfections." He eventually tired of her pedestrian life, and, when the money was about to run out, he ran off to Salt Lake City. At the end of Captain Smith's affair with Lizzie, he too tried to cheat her. "He never said thanks because he was embarrassed" (107), but he started an elaborate scheme to disengage himself from his mistress. First telling her he had a bad cough he moved to another room; then he attempted to leave altogether. When she placed a lien on his property, he tried to charm her out of legal action, but she refused to be moved. We even get a perspective on her from her old lover Popkin. In a bitter quarrel, Popkin noted Lizzie's old-fashioned ways: "What a relic the poor thing is. . . . Where did the old girl get that costume? Does she still think it's 1895?" (211).

We even know something about Lizzie from the point of view of her lady barbers. They were not kind to her despite the protection and medical assistance she offered them. ". . . they called

her a Sheeney when they had a poor day and she a good one" (19). They constantly stole from her, apparently with no twinge of conscience. Nevertheless, they assisted her in some of her most serious ventures. When Saul returned and started taking advantage of Lizzie, "The lady barbers decided to help Lizzie get rid of Saul" (54). Once he was out of the way, however, they returned to their old ways. In their feelings toward Lizzie, we are told, "the girls had the compassion that goes with boiling venery. . . . They had just enough scruples to blush if there were an occasion for it" (45). Although they felt she might cheat them and at times they seemed to hate her, the lady barbers would rally to Lizzie's assistance if she were in real need.

The differences between Lizzie and Eula are immense. Faulkner has deliberately expunged his character's thoughts and kept her in an unreal environment surrounded by predatory males, all to underscore her mythic qualities. She is one extreme of the Earth Mother in modern literature; almost pure myth. Eula serves well her purpose as a symbol of feminine sexuality sacrificed to modern avarice, but she is a completely flat character. She is often compared and contrasted with Houton's cow in "The Long Hot Summer" section, and, indeed, she is little more differentiated. Like the cow she serves as an object of sexual desires and she is traded and bartered at the whim of men over whom she has no control. Like the cow too, she is passive, dumb. She is indeed "a mindless . . . force."[14]

Lizzie Dahlberg, on the other hand, is a fully developed character. While sharing the same basic characteristics that Eula possesses, Lizzie represents the opposite extreme in the use of this archetype. Dahlberg has humanized a character who might otherwise be even more unsympathetic than Eula. Confronted with the tale of a woman who even gave up her son to move from lover to lover, Dahlberg has taken the character and shown that despite her apparent brutality and lack of sensitivity she is human and kind. Like Dahlberg, the reader of *Because I Was Flesh* is forced to overlook Lizzie's faults and to praise her sexual understanding.

Faulkner attempted to generate the mythic out of the backwoods gentry. Dahlberg showed that a lady barber from Kansas City was a woman of genuine feeling. Both succeeded, but the

characters they created are quite different. Faulkner created his myth, but Dahlberg's character is the more genuine and sympathetic.

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NOTES

1. On the Earth Mother in general see Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), pp. 3-38; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1933), pp. 90-95; Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 159-164; and E. O. James, *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), pp. 34-40. Specifically on the merging of the Earth Mother with the "Dark Lady" and on her appearance in modern American literature, see Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), pp. 48-53, 291-336.
2. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Meridian Press, 1956), p. 116.
3. Edward Dahlberg, *Because I Was Flesh* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 3. *Bottom Dogs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930). All subsequent citations will be from these editions.
4. Fred Moramarco, *Edward Dahlberg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), p. 107.
5. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 95. *The Town* (New York: Random House, 1957). All subsequent citations will be from these editions.
6. T. Y. Greet, "The Theme and Structure of Faulkner's *The Hamlet*," *in Willaim Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 339.
7. Joseph Gold, *William Faulkner* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma, 1966), p. 164.
8. Sally R. Page, *Faulkner's Women* (Deland: Everett, Edwards, 1972), p. 161. For an appraisal of how Eula measures up to standards of Southern womanhood see Elizabeth M. Kerr, "William Faulkner and the Southern Concept of Woman," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XV (Winter, 1961-62), pp. 1-5, 12-14.
9. Hyatt H. Waggoner, *William Faulkner* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 184.
10. Read's comment on the proofs of *Because I Was Flesh*.
11. Moramarco, p. 107.
12. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, *Faulkner in the University* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 45-46.
13. Gwynn and Blotner, p. 116.
14. Samuel A. Yorks, "Faulkner's Woman: The Peril of Mankind," *Arizona Quarterly*, XVII (Summer, 1961), p. 119.

COMPULSIVE AND MONUMENTAL:
A REVIEW ESSAY

THOMAS J. SCHLERETH

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER: HISTORIAN, SCHOLAR, TEACHER, by Ray Allen Billington (New York: Oxford University Press; 1973)

Historians have long written historical biographies but there are very few biographies of historians. They have been even more reticent to write of their own history in the form of autobiography, although the recent but different attempts of Bruce Catton (*Waiting for the Morning Train, Memories of a Michigan Boyhood*) and Martin Dubermann (Introduction and Preface to *Black Mountain, An Exploration in Community*) may signal a new self-consciousness in the profession. Despite the fact that some of the most creative minds have always been attracted to the historian's craft there has been relatively little interest to relate their intellectual and personal odysseys either in the first person or the third. Rather, historian's lives have usually been collectively catalogued in manuals of historiography wherein individual scholars are filed by "school," class, tradition, or methodoligical bias. Periodic *Feshschrift* are often little more than premature obituaries; rarely are private or even professional secrets made public.

Ray Allen Billington's huge (600 pages) biography of his own intellectual hero, Frederick Jackson Turner, should help change all this. As his subtitle indicates, he is interested in Turner's multi-faceted career as Historian, Scholar, and Teacher. Billington is almost equally fascinated with his subject as doting grandfather, chronic procrastinator, writer of romantic doggerel, trout-

fishing enthusiast, nativist patriot, and lover of the American wilderness.

To readers of this journal, the Turner biography has several uses. Turner was born, raised, and remained a Midwesterner. "I love the Middle West," he told Carl Becker, and often times while at Harvard he wondered—as many Midwesterners were wont to do once they went East—why he had ever left his native Wisconsin. "I am," he confessed on another occasion, "still a Western man in all but my residence." Billington, born in Bay City, Michigan and long time professor of history at Northwestern, writes with sympathy and insight of what it meant for Turner to grow up Midwestern: as a young boy in Portage, Wisconsin, in the 1870's; as a young collegian at the state University in Madison in the late 1880's; and then, after taking a graduate degree at Johns Hopkins, as a beginning instructor in history at Wisconsin in the 1890's.

Billington skillfully traces the impact of Turner's lifelong regional identification on his scholarly pursuits and his interpretations of American history. Several of Turner's famous contemporaries, in fact, all of the giants of the so-called "progressive school" were also Midwesterners: Carl Becker (Black Hawk County, Iowa); Charles Beard (Knightstown, Indiana); and Vernon L. Parrington (Aurora, Illinois). Like Turner, each of them felt that New Englanders had written American history with the same myopia that caused John Adams to claim Boston as "the Hub of the Universe." Billington does not make much of the possible interaction of Turner with these other Midwestern historians (except Becker, who was a Turner protege), but he does hint that Turner did benefit from the emerging rebellion of Midwestern writers against eastern domination in belle-lettres. He cites Hamlin Garland's aspirations to have his peers cease worshipping the "crumbling idols" of the past (and the East) and to begin exploring the rich resources of the Mississippi Valley. In much the same way as Richard Hofstadter has already argued in *The Progressive Historians,* Billington also sees Turner as a key spokesman for his region and a historian dedicated to proving that the Midwest played an essential role in the emergence of modern America. Billington and Hofstadter merely suggest the similarity of these parallel rebellions in the literary and historical

ranks; they draw few inferences as to their possible interconnection. It would be most intriguing to know if the Midwestern historians and the Midwestern writers consciously influenced each other in any concrete ways in their common distrust of New England as the acclaimed cultural fountainhead of the country.

While Billington does not explore this possible interaction, he does expand the significance of those two Turnerian hypotheses we all know but few have ever taken the time to read: the frontier and the sectional theses. Both ideas grew out of Turner's research into the very areas Garland had directed his fellow writers—the Turner frontier thesis grew out of his early analysis of a small segment of the eastern upper Mississippi Valley; the sectional concept came from his sense of Midwestern politics of the 1890's (Populist discontent, free silver agitation, agrarian unrest) and from his reading in the research that colleagues in physiography, demography, and statistics had done on the region. Both theories were first expounded, appropriately enough, in Chicago: the frontier thesis Turner argued for the first time at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and twenty-one years later he presented "The Significance of Sectionalism in American History" in the very same building, the city's Art Institute.

Turner's sectional hypothesis is less known than the frontier theory but Billington's exacting analysis of it suggests that it may eventually prove an equally important interpretive framework; it certainly deserves careful review and re-examination by any scholar interested in regional studies. Turner defined a section as an area that resisted national uniformity, whether by formal protest or unity of opinion or combining votes in Congress; a section was also marked by "manifestations of economic and social separateness involved in the existence in a given region of a set of fundamental assumptions, a mental and emotional attitude which segregates a section from other sections or the nation as a whole." Turner tended to rely on physiographic, economic, or political evidence to delineate the sections of America and to explain their conflict and cooperation. Hence he examined data such as topography, soil structure, economic activities, climate, and Congressional voting patterns. Nonetheless, he was also aware that cultural factors played an important role in a region's identity. For this reason he realized he would also need to investigate such matters as religious denominational preponderance, ethnic distribution, percentages of illiteracy, prevalence of newspapers and libraries, and the number of high school and college graduates in proportion to the population. Unfortunately, Turner never successfully integrated the political, economic, environmental, social and cultural dimensions of any one section into a persuasive explanatory principle that authenticated what was really distinctive about New England, the Middle States, the Old Northwest, the South, the Middle West, the West, or the Far West.

While Turner's interdisciplinary approach to American sectionalism never succeeded to his critics or to his own satisfaction, the corpus of his writing on the problem is still full of suggestive insights and research clues for investigations in regional studies. His work on sectionalism led to the first, and only, major monograph *(The Rise of the West, 1819-1829)* that he ever published in his lifetime. After 1910, Turner hoped to document how the people of each region in the United States had developed distinctive traits, interests and cultural styles and to explore this idea in several historical periods. As with so many of his other historical projects, Turner never finished "THE BOOK" as he came to call his long anticipated, long labored, and long frustrated magnum opus on American sectionalism. He spent the last twenty years of his life—at Wisconsin, Harvard, and finally at the Huntington Library—collecting data for it, revising and re-writing it, procrastinating about it, worrying over its methodological assumptions, only to die in 1932 before completing it. Two younger colleagues, Avery Craven and Merrill Crissey, after three more years of editing and stylistic revision, finally published 930 pages and 30 maps of the manuscript under the title *The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and the Sections.* It, like his earlier explorations in regional history ("The Development of the Middle West"; "The Significance of the Middle West, 1830-1850"; and "Middle Western Pioneer Democracy") described a time before the close of the frontier, before expanded transportation and communication facilities, and before industrialization and urbanization would begin to nationalize the sections and dilute their regional peculiarities.

Throughout his life Turner remained deeply committed to

higher education, and a third leitmotif of Billington's biography is Turner as an academician at Wisconsin and Harvard. Although "The Harvard Years" (1910-1924) are given their just due, it is in tracing Turner's career at Wisconsin (Billington's own graduate alma mater) that he delights—and excells. Billington interweaves with Turner's personal story the larger themes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments of American higher education: the rise of graduate training, the increased importance of the social and behavioral sciences, the University extension movement, and the significance of athletics in collegiate life. For Midwestern universities such as Turner's Wisconsin or rivals like Michigan and Chicago, it was an especially heady time: unprecedented student enrollments, competition with eastern schools and each other for prestigious faculty, expansion of physical plants and facilities, power struggles and governance disputes with trustees and regents, and, with the advent of Progressivism, political activism in academia. Wisconsin and Turner were in the middle of it all and many a fellow academic empathizes with him as he reads of Turner's fortunes as faculty committee member, department chairman, faculty recruiter, and even king-maker in helping Charles R. Van Hise secure the Wisconsin presidency. Hours, days, years of his time, as with each of us, went into the details of university responsibilities, especially the endless committees, faculty and departmental meetings that demand so much time and produce so few results.

One little known episode to which Billington devotes almost an entire chapter is Turner's zealous crusade against the increased professionalization of college football. Turner was disturbed by both the brutality of the game (21 dead and over 200 injured in the 1904 season) as well as its anti-intellectual effect on the college campus. During his attempt to reform the Western Inter-Collegiate Athletic Association or the "Big Nine" he aroused the anger of university presidents, offended a sizeable portion of his faculty colleagues, and excited the student body to such a fever that they burnt him in effigy on Bascom Hill. In such personal, often humorous detail, the Billington biography abounds.

Unfortunately an apologetic, at times almost defensive, tone also pervades the book as Billington occasionally over-compensates in his effort to re-establish Turner in the American historical profession. There is little reason for this special pleading since the facts speak for themselves. Turner, despite his amazingly poor publishing record, did profoundly influence American historiography and American history. (There are few other examples in American letters of a man who actually wrote so little and yet about whom so much has been written!) Moreover, Turner taught an entire younger generation of historians to think in imaginative, conceptual terms and to use multi-disciplinary methods. These men, in turn, trained still other proselytizers. Such was especially the case in the Midwest. Albert Bushnell Hart traveling in the area in 1912 found so many Turnerians in the colleges and universities that he accused Turner of saturating the region with his disciples: "Wherever I go," he wrote, "they seem to spring out of the ground." Billington catalogs how this band of zealots also infiltrated the high school history departments of the Midwest, thereby infecting their charges with Turner's views even before they attended the expanding state universities.

Thus it hardly seems necessary that Billington conclude such a long and well-documented book with several final chapters reiterating the significance of Turner. Somehow these last pages come off as unneeded apologia, a repetitive summary that wearies the reader. Perhaps this is excusable since Billington's study, from the very beginning, was probably always destined to be more than simply a comprehensive intellectual biography of an outstanding American hisotrian. Billington acknowledges as much in his preface when he warns that he "*wanted* to tell *all* about Frederick Jackson Turner" (his italics). With that kind of compulsion it is hard to say the last word and Billington's massive achievement is that kind of monument. It is also a fellow academic's portrait of a college professor's daily life, a disciple's assessment of the master's achievement, and, in many places, a personal, charming, thoroughly human tribute to one historian's alter-ego across time.

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