MIDAMERICA VIII

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for the Study of Midwestern Literature

Edited by
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WRIGHT MORRIS

PREFACE

The appearance of *MidAmerica VIII* marks the first year of the Society's second decade. During the first, the Society established itself as a vital force in understanding and defining the literature and culture of the region and the nation through its publications, its programs, and the scholarly and creative energy of its members, and the first year of the second decade insures that its role will continue, as the contents of this volume make clear.

Included are three essays in honor of Wright Morris, to whom this volume is dedicated, two of which were presented at a special Society program in honor of Morris at San Francisco in December, 1979, and the text of the symposium "Midwestern Writers and the Nobel Prize," presented at Houston in December, 1980. Similar symposia will be featured at future programs in various cities, and the annual symposium "The Cultural Heritage of the Midwest" and "The Midwest Poetry Festival," at which Midwestern poets read from their works, will be held in May, 1982 at East Lansing. The future of the Society seems as promising as the past has been productive.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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SINCLAIR LEWIS AND THE NOBEL PRIZE

DAVID D. ANDERSON

I The Award

In 1867 an anonymous visitor to Chicago and what had been the Old Northwest a generation earlier essayed an enthusiastic projection of the future of the region and its accomplishment:

> In good time the western bottom lands will spontaneously grow poets. The American mind will be brought to maturity along the chain of Great Lakes, the banks of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and their tributaries. . . . There, on the rolling plains, will be formed a republic of letters, which, not governed like that on our seaboard by the great literary powers of Europe, shall be free indeed. . . . The winds sweep unhindered from the lakes to the Gulf and from the Alleghenies to the Rocky Mountains; and so do the thoughts of the Lord of the prairie. . . . Some day he will make his own books as well as his own laws . . . all the arts of the world will come and make obeisance to him. He will be the American man and beside him there will be none else.

Sixty-three years later, in the late summer of 1930 it appeared that obeisance would finally be made by those who determined the recipient of the world's most prestigious if controversial literary prize. It was common knowledge in Stockholm that an American would be the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, the first American to be so honored in the twenty-nine-year history of the prize. William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Mark Twain had been overlooked by the committee in their later years, but in 1930 the consensus of the committee was that American literature had come of age. Shortly before the awards

were made the Stockholm *Dagens Nyheter* published three articles on the new American literature, a general article and two specific articles on Sinclair Lewis of Sauk Center, Minnesota, and Theodore Dreiser of Terre Haute, Indiana, believed to be the two Americans seriously considered for the award.

In the Nobel Committee Lewis was formally nominated by Professor Henrik Schuk, University of Uppsala professor of the history of art and literature—no record has been kept of Dreiser's nominator—and the special three-person literature committee of the Academy voted two to one for Lewis, Anders Osterling for Dreiser and Per Hallstrom and Erik Axel Karlfeldt for Lewis. Osterling himself later commented that Lewis's "gay virtuosity and flashing satire" prevailed over the more substantial but "ponderous and solemn" Dreiser.

On November 5, when the award was announced, the reactions were predictable. Lewis, who had previously—and rather snidely—refused election to both the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the Author's Club in 1922 and turned down the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith* in 1926, commented initially that he would use the prize money "to support a well-known young American author and his family, and to enable him to continue writing." Dreiser brooded silently, and his friends sent him dozens of adverse criticisms of Lewis; Sherwood Anderson said that Lewis had received the prize "because his sharp criticism of American life catered to the dislike, distrust, and envy which most Europeans feel toward the United States;" Benjamin DeCasseres, in *Bookman*, wrote that in giving Lewis the award, "Europe gave America the worst back-handed crack in the jaw she ever got, for *Babbitt* is America." But the Manchester *Guardian* praised Lewis and the choice; Bernard Shaw commented that Lewis's criticisms were not true only of Americans, but that Americans are convinced they are unique. American newspapers in general, in spite of reservations about Lewis's subject matter, were delighted, agreeing with Harry Hansen in the New York *World* that "It is a recognition that evolving America is a suitable theme for the novelist, and that Sinclair Lewis is representative." But others compiled lists of American authors more representative or more deserving, and the award to Lewis remains controversial. Recently, his award has been called both a disgrace and a significant recognition of the maturity of American literature.

But the Swedish Academy was both more succinct and more effusive. The official citation stated simply that "The 1930 Nobel prize in literature is awarded to Sinclair Lewis for his powerful and vivid art of description and his ability to use wit and humor in the creation of original characters." Unprecedentedly, however, on December 10, 1930, Erik Axel Karlfeldt, permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, addressed that group at length. His topic was "Why Sinclair Lewis Got the Nobel Prize."

Professor Karlfeldt's address might have been written by that anonymous visitor to the Midwest sixty-three years earlier. First he discussed Lewis's origins in "Sauk Centre, a place of about two or three thousand inhabitants in the great wheat and barley land of Minnesota." He continued,

> It is the great prairie, an undulating land with lakes and oak groves, that has produced that little city and many others exactly like it. The pioneers have had need of places to sell their grain, stores for their supplies, banks for their mortgage loans, physicians for their bodies and clergymen for their souls. There is cooperation between the country and the city and at the same time conflict. Does the city exist for the sake of the country or the country for the city?
>
> The prairie makes its power felt. . . . But yet the city, of course, feels its superiority . . . lives in its self-confidence and its belief in true democracy, . . . its faith in a sound business morality, and the blessings of being motorized; for there are many Fords on Main Street. . . .

He turned then to Lewis's works, those of the 1920s, from *Main Street* to *Dodsworth*. Of the former, he said, "As a description of life in a small town, *Main Street* is certainly one of the best ever written;" of *Babbitt*, "There are bounders and Philistines in all countries, and one can only wish that they were all half as amusing as Babbitt;" of *Arrowsmith*, "The book contains a rich gallery of different medical types. . . . He has built a monument to the profession of his own father;" of *Elmer Gantry*, "It ought to be unnecessary to point out that hypocrisy thrives a little everywhere and that any one who attacts it at such a close range places himself before a hydra with many heads;" of *Dodsworth*,

"America is the land of youth and daring experiments. And when he [Dodsworth] returns there, we understand that the heart of Sinclair Lewis follows him there." He concluded,

> Yes, Sinclair Lewis is an American. He writes the new language—American—as one of the representatives of 120,000,000 souls. He asks us to consider that this nation is not yet finished or melted down; that it is still in the turbulent years of adolescence.
>
> The new great American literature has started with national self-criticism. It is a sign of health. Sinclair Lewis has the blessed gift of wielding his land-clearing implement, not only with a firm hand, but with a smile on his lips and youth in his heart. He has the manners of a pioneer. He is a new builder.

Lewis's address at the ceremony in the Stockholm Stock Exchange two days later was equally unprecedented in the hallowed halls of the Swedish Academy. Although genuinely moved by the award—yet two years later when refused admission to Club 21 in New York he was heard to exclaim, "What's the use of winning the Nobel Prize if it doesn't get you into speakeasies?"—much of the substance of his speech, a consideration of what he described as "certain trends, certain dangers, and certain high and exciting promises in present-day American literature," had been discussed before, in interviews, reviews, and articles, especially in "Self-Conscious America," which appeared in *The American Mercury* for October, 1925. In the address he prefaced his remarks by pointing out that "it will be necessary for me to be a little impolite regarding certain institutions and persons of my own greatly beloved land."

After dwelling at some length on adverse reactions to his award—citing in particular the comment of Henry Van Dyke—anonymous in the speech—that Lewis's award was an insult to America, he speculated on the reactions had others been chosen: Dreiser would have produced the complaint that his "men and women are often sinful and tragic and despairing instead of being forever sunny;" O'Neill, that he sees life "as a terrifying, magnificent, and quite horrible thing;" Cabell, that he is "fantastically malicious;" Cather, that she has written "a story without any moral;" Mencken, that he is "the worst of all scoffers;" Sherwood

Anderson, that he "viciously errs in considering sex as important a force in life as fishing;" Hergesheimer, that he is "unAmerican;" Sinclair, that he is a "Socialist;" Hemingway, that he "uses language which should be unknown to gentlemen."

Lewis's tributes to his fellow writers were more gracious than one might expect, but then he turned his attention to those institutions, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the universities, to which American writers might reasonably look for support. Of the former he said that it "cuts itself off from much of what is living and vigorous and original in American letters," that it has "no relationship whatever to our life and aspirations. It does not represent literary America of today—it represents only Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; it is so perfect an example of the divorce in America of intellectual life from all authentic standards of importance and reality."

"Our universities and colleges," he said, "exhibit the same unfortunate divorce; our American professors like their literature clear and cold and dead; in the new and vital and experimental land of America, one would expect the teachers of literature to be less monastic, more human, than in the traditional shadows of old Europe—they are not."

After passing jabs at "an astonishing circus" called the "New Humanism," at "one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men . . . [with] the code of a pious old maid" named William Dean Howells, and at the taming of Mark Twain and Hamlin Garland by Howells, he turned to the future: "We are coming out . . . of the stuffiness of safe, sane, and incredibly dull provincialism. There are young Americans today who are doing such passionate and authentic work that it makes me sick to see I am a little too old to be one of them." There are "Ernest Hemingway, a bitter youth . . . Thomas Wolfe, a child . . .of thirty . . . Thornton Wilder . . . John Dos Passos . . . Stephen Benet . . . Michael Gold . . . William Faulkner . . . who, however insane they may be, have refused to be genteel and traditional and dull."

Lewis's conclusion was dedicated to those young writers:

> I salute them, with a joy in being not yet too far removed from their determination to give to the America that has mountains and endless prairies, enormous cities

and lost far cabins, billions of money and tons of faith, to an America that is as strange as Russia and complex as China, a literature worthy of her vastness.

II The Legacy

When Sinclair Lewis stood before the Swedish Academy and distinguished guests on December 12, 1930, as the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, he was, although he was unaware of it, at the end of the second phase of his career and at the beginning of the third, the period that was to continue to his death, to the detriment of his literary reputation. The first phase, from *Our Mr. Wrenn* of 1914 through *Free Air* (1919), was essentially that of Lewis's apprenticeship, the period during which he discovered a major theme that was to dominate his best work under the guise of satire, that is, that dull people are, in spite of—or perhaps because of—their dullness and the shallowness of the world in which they live, essentially likeable, even good.

During the second phase, extending from *Main Street* in 1920 to *Dodsworth* in 1929, with the single lapse of *Mantrap* (1926), Lewis created his best work as he earned the reputation that brought him wealth, notoriety, and the Nobel Prize. It was also the period that brought a series of best-sellers unprecedented among writers who purported to be serious: *Main Street* sold 200,000 copies shortly after publication; *Babbitt* sold out, and subsequent printings paralleled the sales of *Main Street*; *Elmer Gantry's* initial printing, 140,000, the largest in history, quickly sold out; *Dodsworth*, published in 1929, sold 80,00 in spite of the stock-market crash. These early successes were to continue: *Ann Vickers* (1933), his first novel after receiving the Nobel Prize, sold 130,000 copies; *It Can't Happen Here*, published in 1935, sold 300,000; *Cass Timberlane* (1945) sold over a million, and *Kingsblood Royal* (1947) a million and a half. A number of his novels have never been out of print, none was ever a popular failure, and no estimate has ever been made of continuing paperback sales. Foreign sales and translations beginning with *Main Street* were equally impressive: By 1930, various of his books had been translated into Russian, German, Swedish, Polish, Hungarian, Danish, Norwegian, Czech, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew, and at the time he received the Nobel Prize he was America's best-known writer at home and abroad, and he had added "Main Street" and "Babbitt" to America's vocabulary. That fame continued to the end. His death, in 1951, shortly before his sixty-fifth birthday, was, unlike those of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, and many others of his generation, noted on the front pages of papers around the world.

Whether it was because of his success, as Lewis always believed—just after the publication of *Main Street* he wrote that "Every once in a while some friend indignantly tells me, that some bunch of the young jeunes—say those at the Cafe Rotonde in the rive gauche— assert that if the damned book has sold so well, I must be rotten"—or because of fundamental flaws in his work, Lewis has never been a favorite of his fellow writers. Early supporters—H. L. Mencken, T. K. Whipple, and V. F. Parrington—deserted him early, and as Mark Shorer, Lewis's biographer, has pointed out, his works have almost never been the subject of serious criticism. Conversely, from the publication of *Our Mr. Wrenn* in 1914 to the posthumous *World So Wide* in 1951, he was a favorite of the book reviewers in the popular journals.

Throughout his career and even yet Lewis remains the great paradoxical figure in our literary history. As early as 1922, in an essay in the *New Republic*, Sherwood Anderson wrote that "The texture of the prose written by Mr. Lewis gives me but faint joy and I cannot escape the conviction that for some reason Lewis has himself found but little joy, either in life among us or in his own effort to channel his reactions to our life into prose . . . one has the feeling that Lewis never laughs at all, that he is in an odd way too serious about something to laugh." More succinctly, on page 813 of his definitive 814-page biography of Lewis, Mark Shorer comments that "He was one of the worst writers in modern American literature. . . ." Yet, in spite of his flaws as a writer, in spite of our condescension toward his work, in spite of our refusal to give his works serious critical appraisal, we not only do not ignore him, but we cannot. As Shorer goes on to point out, we cannot imagine modern American literature without him.

We cannot, I think, for reasons that are psychological, sociological, and historical rather than literary—qualities that, I sus-

pect, are the source of his continued popularity as well as the reasons why he was selected to be the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for literature. Unable to define the tragic dimensions of human life, incapable of expressing joy or revealing, even in moments, the subjective life, the inner life, of his people in spite of his sometimes grudging affection for them, he did, nevertheless, provide fleeting, distorted, but frightening moments of insight into ourselves, into the reality of our lives, and into the myths by which we live.

Lewis was a product of the Midwest as it reached maturity, as it became Middle America, the mainstream that has given focus to American life in this century, and it is this Middle America that is not only the substance of the works—*Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry, Dodsworth*—that we remember when we speak of Lewis, but it is also the substance of those glimpses of ourselves that fascinate and frighten us. In this sense, Lewis was, perhaps, the democratic literatus out of the West for whom Walt Whitman called, but he was not the voice for which Whitman listened.

Nevertheless, Whitman and certainly Mark Twain would recognize Lewis's people—or more properly his character-types—as they appear in the best of his works, those of the 1920's (before he absorbed Dorothy Thompson's passion for justice, to the detriment of his work in the 1930's and '40's). His people are of the American past, the mythic, folkloric past of the Old West and the nineteenth century; they are the confidence man—Elmer Gantry; the hero—Arrowsmith; the uncertain seeker after an ambiguous fulfillment—Babbitt; the braggart—Lowell Schmaltz, the man who knew Coolidge; the helpless romantic—Dodsworth; the reformer—Carol Kennicott—all of them caught up in an age that distorted their weaknesses and perverted their strengths, the age of Gopher Prairie and Zenith, of prosperity, prohibition, and the culmination of the American myth of success, the age Lewis describes in the opening of *Main Street*:

> The days of pioneering, of lassies in sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest.

In the nineteenth century each of Lewis's people would have been larger than life; in the twentieth, the age of the bewildered empire, Gopher Prairie, Zenith, and values defined and perpetuated by place and by things have become Lewis's gargantuan reality. Alfred Kazin describes the result in terms of a resulting nightmare:

> There is indeed more significant terror of a kind in Lewis's novels than in a writer like Faulkner or the hard-boiled novelists, for it is the terror immanent in the commonplace, the terror that arises out of the repressions, the meanness, the hard jokes of the world Lewis had soaked into his pores.

The terror that Kazin defines, the nightmare that permeates Lewis's best work, is the result of the fact that none of Lewis's people, including Arrowsmith, is large enough to manipulate the new America as the con men, the braggarts, the heroes, the romantics of the nineteenth century had been able to manipulate the old. It is not the nightmare of Faulkner's Popeye, of grotesque horror, but the nightmare of the ordinary, of a world larger and more materially successful than life, more spiritually bankrupt than we can imagine.

Contrary to too many popular—and critical—conclusions, Lewis's people, limited in perception as they often are, are never the enemy; Lewis was eminently capable of creating a fool or a knave but never a villain. Beneath the veneer of satire, of exaggeration, of sophistication, of vulgarity, Lewis's people, limited in the breadth and depth of their lives, are innocently corrupt, insignificantly rebellious, ultimately defeated, each of them low-keyed but real. Out of all of them, from Carol Kennicott to Sam Dodsworth, only Martin Arrowsmith and Lowell Schmaltz survive emotionally and psychologically, Arrowsmith because he rejects all but the god that he serves, Schmaltz because he is a fool. Not incidentally, however, Arrowsmith endures as an authentic American hero at the cost of his humanity; he must, unlike Carol Kennicott, George Babbitt, Elmer Gantry, and Sam Dodsworth, make his own separate, lonely peace. For the others—Carol, who asserts that she may not have fought the good fight but she has kept the faith, for Babbitt, who insists that the bright new world is his son's, for Gantry, whose new-found faith is

marred by a glimpse of charming ankles and lively eyes, for Dodsworth, whose happiness is so complete that he did not yearn for Fran for two whole days, there is only a moment of self-realization, a shadow-like acceptance of personal defeat.

For each of Lewis's protagonists except the new American hero, survival is possible, re-admission to the institutions that govern the new America and reward its members is readily available, but only at the price of two of the three premises that marked the beginning of the search for American fulfillment. Life, a materially successful life, is theirs at the cost of their liberty and the sacrifice of whatever potential happiness they no longer pursue.

For Lewis's women—and no adequate study of Lewis's women has yet been undertaken—whether protagonist or secondary character, whether Carol Kennicott, Leora Arrowsmith, or Cleo Gantry, the price is identical in kind but greater in degree: if his men are captured by a social system and value structure that they can neither understand nor overcome, his women are enslaved by the conventional role of women as well as the structure of the society in which they live. His women, protagonists or secondary characters, career women or housewives, seekers after direct or vicarious fulfillment, are limited not only by the flaws of insight and judgement imposed on them by their environment, but they are limited by the peculiarly female roles imposed on them by biology as well. Just as Carol Kennicott returns pregnant to home and hearth, defeated and unfulfilled, Leora Arrowsmith goes quietly and loyally to her grave, and Cleo Gantry and Lulu Bains surrender to the godhead manifested in the Rev. Elmer Gantry. Even the later Ann Vickers, who had confidently declared her independence of convention, finds her properly subservient role as woman: Barney, her lover, speaks:

> "And while I was in the pen, I read your paper on the relationship of crime and tuberculosis, in the *Journal of Economics*. I'd question your figures. Shall I check up on them?"
>
> "Oh, would you? That would be terribly kind. Oh, Barney!"

With no sense of the ironic implications of her comment, she rejoices in the promise of the future as naively as had Babbitt in his promise to his son a generation earlier. She says:

> "You, you and Mat, have brought me out of the prison of Russell Spaulding, the prison of ambition, the prison of desire for praise, the prison of myself. We're out of prison!"

And Barney, who had only moments before been pacing in a two-feet by nine-feet prison-cell pattern agrees: "Why! We are!" he tells her in confidence.

In a sense, perhaps, all of Lewis's people, male or female, protagonists or secondary characters, deserve the ignominy of their surrender, conscious or not, to the forces of convention, but not because they are mean-spirited or small-spirited, although many of them are. Lewis's people are intensely if two-dimensionally human, likeable in their humanity, even in a sense admirable in their weaknesses. Lewis's people live their lives as tragicomic players reading lines they don't understand in a play that baffles them before a set that overwhelms them. But they go on, in determined dignity, to the end that life has written for them. They are members of what Lewis has described as the "cranky, hysterical, brave, mass-timorous, hard-minded, imaginative Chosen Race, the Americans," those, he adds, whose history for nearly a century can best be read in the long sequence of catalogues issued by Sears, Roebuck and Company.

Lewis recognized early what his critics have yet to perceive but his readers note intuitively: that his works are neither poetry nor drama; they are history, sociology, psychology. They are not the reality of Howells's real grasshopper but the reality of the monograph, the field study, or the case history. The substance of his work, then, is not the "fearless exposure of humbuggery," as one of his early critics commented, nor is it the result of his "Satirist's hard eye and the romancer's soft heart," as a more recent critic insists; it is the nightmare of mass society, of material values, of carefully-assigned roles to players who know their lines but not their parts, and the terror is not that of standardization; it is that of inevitable depersonalization and dehumanization. Lewis's people seek God in their dreams, their work, themselves, but they find instead that they are trapped not only by time, place, and circumstances, but by their very humanity.

Lewis's people accept the reality imposed on them and survive, but Lewis—and here he is at his best—perceives the nightmare, the terror of survival after surrender. Each of his authentic American types—and I think that perhaps this is the reason why Lewis's people are types rather than fully developed individuals—is both product and victim of his or her environment, beset and imprisoned by hypocrisy, narrowness, greed, and prejudice not only from without but from within, and the new beginnings, the happy endings, the escapes that appear to become possible for his people are, Lewis makes clear, compounded of cosmic irony, acceptance, and self-delusion.

Lewis prided himself on the faithfulness with which he reproduced and exaggerated the America he knew, that of the forty years of his active writing career, and because he gave free rein to his gift of mimicry, it has become a critical cliche to insist that he is out of date, that the America of the teens, twenties, thirties, and forties has long vanished, that today, as Geoffrey Moore comments, the bankers and lawyers of Gopher Prairie have been to Yale, the storekeepers to the state university, and, of course, three generations of Midwestern males—and some females—have experienced government-sponsored junkets to virtually every part of the world.

The implication of these observations is clear: that today Lewis merits little more than a footnote in literary history. But the bankers and lawyers have read Lewis at Yale and the shopkeepers at State as part of their new sophistication and learning, and *Main Street* and *Babbitt* were published by the thousands in Armed Forces Editions during World War II and read by many on those government-sponsored tours of Europe, Africa, the South Pacific, and the Far East. And in spite of the apparent or alleged transformation of American society, these new generations of readers continue to recognize, if not themselves, certainly their contemporaries, their families, perhaps even their professors. They recognize, too, that Lewis's world, beneath its veneer of contemporaneity, is their world, that Babbitt's "carrying on" is today's "lifestyle," that the Good Citizen's League and the Booster's Club are only a generation removed from the Old Newsboys, the Downtown Coaches Club, and the Chamber of Commerce, that the Elks, Rotary, and the Lions clubs are with us yet,

perhaps more democratic but no more imaginative than in 1924. And Lewis was spared the Reverend Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, and the spectre of an actor in the White House, an actor whose favorite predecessor is Calvin Coolidge. To point to Lewis's shortcomings as a writer is to ignore the accuracy with which he defined our lives and our world as we enter the last decades of the twentieth century.

Lewis was not a great writer, nor perhaps was he good enough to win the Nobel Prize in literature—although the political and social dimensions of that award often outweigh literary considerations. But the best of his works, those that have added words to our language, those that give us greater insight into the moral shortcomings of our times and ourselves, those that define the victimization of the individual in a world of mass vulgarity, deserve better of us than we have been willing to give.

Michigan State University

ERNEST HEMINGWAY: A READER'S PERSPECTIVE

ROGER J. BRESNAHAN

Carlos Baker tells us that Hemingway conceived a "sour-grapes theory that 'no son of a bitch that ever won the Nobel Prize ever wrote anything worth reading afterwards'."[1] Rumored to be next in line for the prize from 1950 until he received it in 1954, he had developed a thick skin about the award, but clearly he wanted it. It was hard for him to see Faulkner, whose work he considered useless, get the Prize in 1949 and harder to be generous in his congratulations. The rumors were strongest in '53, but the Swedish Academy shied away from Hemingway in favor of Churchill because they feared the ideals of Alfred Nobel would be ill-served by a writer whose work had shown "brutal, cynical, and callous" tendencies. When he was awarded the Prize the following year he was recovering from two plane crashes and couldn't attend the ceremony. Besides, for years he had threatened that if he should ever be chosen he might just refuse it and in any case would not attend a ceremony. Hemingway hated ceremonies anyway, and he hated talking about his writing.

So Ernest Hemingway sent a 337-word message to be read by the American ambassador to Sweden. In it he expressed gratitude for his selection and a sense of humility. He spoke briefly of the loneliness of the writer's work and of the need, with each new book, to make "a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment," declaring that in this need to do something new or perfect, something which has never before succeeded, the "writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him," doubtless reminding his auditors of the old fisherman in his latest book. He closed by saying he had already "spoken too long for a writer" and admonished the audience to *read* what a writer has to say.[2]

As for a formal defense of his literary method, there is no more than a hint in the Nobel Prize speech, but it is a telling hint: "Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate: but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten."[3] In these few words he offered the key to his practice as a writer—the participation of the reader in the creation of meaning. To see how this operates in his work we shall have to travel quite far from the seminal text contained in the prize speech and content ourselves with only the most sketchy analysis. But, as we shall see, Hemingway's understanding of his craft was flawless—even if his practice was not always so—and its outlines are only now being acknowledged in formal critical theory.

In his interview with George Plimpton, somewhat exasperated by the superficiality of the interviewer's questions, Hemingway came as close as he ever did to a literary theory. Disappointingly but typically, Plimpton failed to follow up. "If it is any use to know it," Hemingway told him, "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eights of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. . . . I have tried to eliminate everything unnecessary to convey experience to the reader so that after he or she has read something it will become a part of his or her experience and seem actually to have happened."[4] Perhaps exasperated by Plimpton's failure to ask intelligent questions concerning this process, Hemingway abandons discussion of "how it is done" and gives an example from his writing of *The Old Man and the Sea*: "I've seen the marlin mate and I know about that. So I leave that out. I've seen a school (or pod) of more than fifty sperm whales in that same stretch of water and once harpooned one nearly sixty feet in length and lost him. So I left that out. All the stories I know from the fishing village I leave out. But the knowledge is what makes the underwater part of the iceberg."[5] Earlier in the interview Plimpton had commented on the dissimilarity between Hemingway and Bosch's nightmarish paintings which Hemingway professed to admire. His reply is instructive: "I have the nightmares and I know about the ones other people have. But you do

not have to write them down. Anything you can omit that you know you still have in the writing and its quality will show."[6]

This so-called iceberg theory is consonant with Hemingway's practice as a writer and his statement composed for the Nobel Prize ceremony. As a writer, he had to stake out new territory. In his reading, he discovered that what was self-evident need not be displayed. To Hemingway, the significance of the iceberg image was that information pruned from the text was still represented in the text by knowledge. Because *The Old Man and the Sea* is a tale told out of the tradition of the fishing village tale, the other tales need not be retold or even alluded to. This is not the same thing as omissions caused by mere ignorance which would result in "a hole in the story."[7]

The best expounder of the iceberg theory, Romeo Giger, has observed "a decided propensity in Hemingway's work towards a technique similar to what in painting is called *sfumato,* the deliberately blurred image or veiled form that cuts down the information on the canvas and thereby stimulates the mechanism of projection."[8] Thus, the act of reading consists of the same kinds of projections characterized by contemplation of a painting whose images are deliberately blurred. Giger shows at length how Hemingway manipulates these projections of the reader "until they explode upon our consciousness as flashes of insight into our state of being."[9] Giger cautions, however, that the reader is not completely free to make projections. Through what Giger calls "steering mechanisms" Hemingway limits the interpretations which might be made.

The legitimacy of the activity which Hemingway has taken as his achievement—that of making the reader a co-creator of the text—may be seen in the critical speculations of the Konstanz school represented in English by translations of the writings of Wolfgang Iser. Indeed, Hemingway's remarks to Plimpton provide a favorable recommendation for the *Konstanz Rezeptionsästhetik*: "Read anything I write for the pleasure of reading it. Whatever else you find will be the measure of what you brought to the reading."[10]

Iser's aesthetic derives from the Hegelian notion of alienation, the theory of indeterminacy of literary interpretation propounded by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden, and R. D. Laing's

psychoanalytic theory of communication.[11] Frank Lentricchia's recent book, *After the New Criticism,* characterizes Iser's view of reading as "not to know the text . . . but to experience ourselves as active, creative, and free agents; and the author, by leaving gaps, encourages us to have this experience."[12] Iser himself, in *The Implied Reader,* summarizes his view thus: "As we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and reorganize the various data offered us by the text. These are the given factors, the fixed points on which we base our 'interpretation,' trying to fit them together in the way we think the author meant them to be fitted."[13]

Iser's view of the reading process has placed greatest emphasis on the activity of the reader—not as a slave to the text, a kind of passive automaton that receives and stores information, but rather as a reflecting being who reacts to each piece of information, comparing it with patterns previously found in the text and with the world outside the text. Iser has explained that "the phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text."[14] In this activity he posits two poles which he calls the "artistic" and the "esthetic." The artistic pole consists of the text as it comes from the author. This is the given of the literary work and, as we shall see, it impels the reader in certain directions to prevent misreading or gross misinterpretation. Iser's esthetic pole refers to the realization of the text accomplished by the reader, an insight which has previously been taken for granted and thus unduly minimized. The achievement of Iser and the Konstanz school has been to focus on the reader's activity as an avenue to the experience of literature and, in focusing on it, to systematize the reader's activity so that we will have a greater knowledge of the workings of the author's text and the breadth and limits of possible interpretations. The literary work can no longer be considered identical to the author's text, nor can it be simply the realization accomplished by the reader. To do that would introduce a *je-ne-sais-quoi* interpretation where the reader might be permitted to make anything of the author's text, regardless of the author's intentions. The literary work must be

seen to lie between the author's text and the reader's text. Reading then, is an interactive process which is on-going and which exists, as Iser puts it, as a "convergence (which) can never be precisely pinpointed. . . ."[15]

Thus, the most exciting thing about reading is reading itself. And re-reading a text is more exciting because as readers we create a text which is based not only on the projections and reflections we make while re-reading but equally on our previous knowledge of the author's text and on our recollections of reader's texts we have previously constructed. When we read "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" for the second, third, or fiftieth time, we know the events of the narrative and anticipate their unfolding. We know that Francis will show himself a coward on safari, will thus become more subjected to his beautiful and bitchy wife, and will eventually free himself of her emotional hold by an act of bravery in the face of great danger. We know that Margaret Macomber will exercise her rule over Francis by deriding him for his public cowardice, will punish him further by sleeping with the hunting guide, will be impelled to save Francis from a charging, wounded animal and in so doing will blow his head off, and will finally submit herself emotionally to the guide. We know that Robert Wilson will vacillate among pity, hatred, and reluctant admiration for Francis, will consider Margaret an emotional terrorist for her control over Francis but will sleep with her just the same, will lose control of the hunt first to Margaret and then to a newly courageous Francis, and will regain control by asserting dominance over the confused Margaret who does not want to admit to herself that she intentionally shot Francis rather than the charging buffalo. This, in large outline, is a synopsis of the author's text. What makes it more enjoyable with each reading is the opportunity to create a new reader's text and from that perspective to grapple with the author's intentions and so converge on the literary work, the literary experience. Iser finds in the act of reading "an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection, which a second reading may turn into a kind of advanced retrospection."[16]

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" begins *in medias res*, the time-honored technique for activating the reader's imagination: "It was now lunch time and they were all sitting

under the double green fly of the dining tent pretending that nothing had happened."[17] Beginning *in medias res* creates a gap for the reader to fill even if only through the five journalistic questions. A more momentous gap is presented by the words *pretending that nothing had happened.* Unless the author is playing an awful trick on us—and as readers who have read a good deal of Hemingway we may decide that is unlikely—something *has* happened. This gap, then, is provided in the author's text to allow us to project a reader's text of what might have happened. As we proceed further in the reading we compare each new piece of information with those that have gone before and with similar patterns of information in systems outside the text. We evaluate and re-evaluate the possible patterns each new piece of information may fit. In this 32-page story it will only take us two pages to discover that what has happened is an unnamed act of cowardice by Francis dealing with a lion. As readers, we will continue to project the exact nature of that act of cowardice for the next 14 pages while our anticipations are reinforced or denied by each new piece of information. Even in subsequent readings we will compare each piece of information we receive with information we know will appear subsequently. Having completed the flashback which shows when and how Francis bolted from the charging, wounded lion, we turn back to the threesome under the dining fly and make and adjust projections as to how Francis and Margaret will play out their confrontation over his cowardice and how the three of them will play out the rest of the safari.

What enables us to make and continually adjust our projections are the cues given by the author's text. It is the gaps in the author's text which impel the reader to project a text which inevitably diverges from the author's and which must therefore be continuously realigned with the author's unfolding text. Anais Nin sheds some light on the restraint which must necessarily be exercised by the author in leaving gaps for the reader to fill when she describes her own technique for leaving out the obvious as that of Brancusi who expressed "the flight of a bird . . . by eliminating the wings."[18]

Immediately after we witness Francis, Margaret, and Wilson "pretending that nothing had happened" we discover than Francis had been carried to his tent in triumph by "the cook, the per-

sonal boys, the skinners, and the porters" but that "the gun-bearers had taken no part in the demonstration." Thus, the author both gives and withholds information. This is the first we discover that hunting is involved. At the same time we discover that it is Francis who is somehow at fault for whatever has happened and that he is disdained by the native hunters.

"You've got your lion and a damned fine one too," the guide says to Francis while Margaret looks quickly at the speaker. Then, after a narrator's paragraph on Margaret's beauty, social position, and lack of ethics, Francis echoes Wilson, "He is a good lion, isn't he?" while Margaret looks at both men "as though she had never seen them before." This exchange sacrifices nothing of life-likeness yet leaves many gaps for the reader to fill by projecting intervening and subsequent scenarios.

"Well, here's to the lion," Wilson says as he takes his gimlet. "Here's to the lion," Francis says taking his and adding "I can't ever thank you for what you did." "Let's not talk about the lion," Margaret says. Well, what about the lion? Why does Robert Wilson consider it "a damned fine one"? And what does Francis understand by that? And why doesn't Margaret want to hear about it? More gaps for us to fill in while we attend more closely to the author's text so that our own interpretation does not become purely personal.

Another page later Francis insists "I won't forget what you did for me though," thus reminding the reader to project scenarios which might fill in that gap. The point must be made here that the reader is not left in "suspended animation" as traditional literary theorists might have it. The primary data for phenomenological theories of literature is our own experiences as competent readers. Faced with gaps like these, I have never been held in anything like suspended animation, eagerly waiting for the gaps to be filled in by the author but refraining from doing that myself. The same is true of any competent reader. Furthermore, even if readers could read in suspended animation, the reader of Hemingway would be left hanging at the end of the story. For Hemingway does not merely postpone revelation; he fails to reveal significant parts of every narrative so that the reader must either fill in the gaps or abandon the story as an ill-made work.

As gaps are filled in, the reader continually revises expectations about the narrative and the characters. When Francis awakens from sleep the night following his cowardice "he realized that his wife was not in the other cot in the tent. He lay awake with that knowledge for two hours." The reader, too, has two hours with that knowledge. The reader's expectations concerning Margaret Macomber may be revised as other pieces of information are recalled which have foreshadowed her infidelity: her earlier remarks on Wilson's red face, her apparent admiration of him as a killer, her anticipation of the thrill of the lion hunt, her readiness to do whatever Wilson should ask when she balks at the same request from her husband, her apparent resentment of Francis' cowardice, and her kissing Wilson on the mouth. Indeed, as readers we are apt to too readily revise our expectations of Margaret Macomber during her two hours out of the tent. The author provides more cues to revise again when she returns to the tent. Francis upbraids her, "You said if we made this trip that there would be none of that. You promised." So, this is not the first time. And there was a promise. Margaret retorts: "Yes, darling. That's the way I meant it to be. But the trip was spoiled yesterday." There's a certain logic to that retort which justifies her action. Here again, the reader's expectations concerning Margaret might be revised. In any case, the reader must evaluate her contention that the promise no longer had validity because Francis had failed to act the role of the lion hunter.

And then there's Robert Wilson. If Margaret slipped out of *her* tent to join him, how could he be at fault? A reader holding that expectation would be confirmed by Wilson's breakfast thoughts next morning. "So she woke him when she came in, Wilson thought. . . . Well, why doesn't he keep his wife where she belongs? What does he think I am, a bloody plaster saint? Let him keep her where she belongs. It's his own fault." Poor Wilson, the reader might think. He seems hardly more than an innocent victim. And how noble that he feels guilty he's slept with another man's wife, even though he half-despises Francis! But two pages later the reader may want to revise expectations of Robert Wilson and of Margaret when it is revealed that Wilson carries a double cot "to accommodate any windfalls he might receive" among the people for whom he hunted "where the

women did not feel they were getting their money's worth unless they had shared that cot with the white hunter." Though Wilson feels remorse that he's slept with Francis' wife, he sleeps with all the wives on safari, even those whose husbands he admires. And while no one can be expected to be a "bloody plaster saint," the packing and unpacking of that double-sized cot could constitute a suggestive invitation.

In addition to gaps to fill in and expectations to revise, the reader's text is composed of shifting perspectives. In a paper delivered at the International Colloquium on Interpretation of Narrative at Toronto in 1976, Iser advanced the thesis that the author's narrative strategies are cues which allow the reader to rearrange information, and that these narrative strategies control the reader by prestructuring the interpretation the reader will produce. Among the strategies discussed by Iser in his paper, one which especially applies to Hemingway's practice is the system of perspectives operating within a narrative. Iser delineated four such perspectives: that of the narrator, that of the plot, those of each character, "and that marked out for the reader."[19] To say that there is often a specific perspective for the reader is not to deny that in the reading process each perspective is assumed and discarded as the author's text may direct. These multiple perspectives are subsumed under the strategy of theme-and-horizon. "Because textual perspectives are continually interweaving and interacting, it is not possible for the reader to embrace all perspectives at once, so that the view he is involved with at any one moment constitutes for him the 'theme.' This, however, always stands before the 'horizon' of the other perspective segments in which it had previously been situated."[20] Thus, in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" we assume and discard each perspective serially. As we assume a new perspective we do not entirely discard previous ones. Instead, we hold the other perspectives in abeyance so that as we view the narrative from our currently held perspective—what Iser calls the theme—we examine its validity against the horizon, that is against other perspectives both within and outside the narrative.

In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" Hemingway provides few authorial intrusions and little in the way of narrative. Since the story is carried mainly by dialogue and interior

monologue, the reader takes on the perspectives, one by one, of the characters. This strategy complements the activities of filling gaps and altering expectations. Thus, as the story opens, the reader is engaged in filling the most obvious gap by projecting what has happened, by forming and altering expectations for each character and for prior and subsequent events, and by taking on and putting off the perspective of each character while holding the other perspectives, including the reader's self-perspective as a reader of Hemingway, on the horizon and evaluating each assumed perspective against those others which form the horizon. In the first few paragraphs of the story this exchange among perspectives forming theme and horizon occurs quite rapidly.

While describing the reader's process of projecting possible patterns to fill in gaps and in posing and altering expectations, we have already (at least implicitly) examined the perspectives of Francis and Margaret Macomber and Robert Wilson. It would be well to be reminded, however, that each of these perspectives changes over time in the story; and so when a perspective is resumed, it is as if a new theme has been introduced. Besides those of these three main characters there are other perspectives which the author's text cues us to assume. The perspectives of the servants, though only briefly held by the reader, must affect the interpretation. The gun-bearers' failure to participate in the fanfare of bringing the lion and Francis into camp indicates a disdain which fairly negates the perspective of the other servants who may only celebrate Francis' lion for the gratuity he might give. When Francis is forced to go after the wounded lion, he and the reader put on the perspective telegraphed by the gun-bearers and thus discover there is really something to fear.

From the time he first appears on the bank of the stream until his head is blown off by Robert Wilson, the lion is a character in the story and the reader assumes that perspective as well. The lion first sees the silhouette of the car and is mystified. Seeing "a man figure detach itself from the silhoutte," the lion "swung away toward the cover of the trees as he heard a cracking crash and felt the slam of a .30-06 220-grain solid bullet that hit his flank and ripped in sudden hot scalding nausea through his stomach." Later, hiding in the tall grass, the lion plots how he will "make them bring the crashing thing close enough so that

he could make a rush and get the man that held it." At this point the author's text cues the reader to drop the lion's perspective, storing it on the horizon, and assume another: "Macomber had not thought how the lion felt as he got out of the car. He only knew his hands were shaking and as he walked away from the car it was almost impossible for him to make his legs move." Later on, as Macomber and his companions wade into the tall grass for the kill, the reader will be cued to assume and put off the perspectives of the lion, Francis, Wilson, and Kongoni the bearer.

Earlier, during the recital of Francis' nightmare before the hunt, one of Hemingway's few authorial instructions marks out a perspective proper to the reader: "he did not know the Somali proverb that says a brave man is always frightened three times by a lion: when he first sees his track, when he first hears his roar and when he first confronts him." Similarly, a reader's perspective is offered momentarily while the lion's perspective is being held by the reader. Surely the information that the bullet was a .30-06 220-grain solid could not have been significant to the lion. As an authorial instruction to the reader it is awkwardly done. One might wish Hemingway had better observed the iceberg principle here by refraining from an idle display of his knowledge of ammunition.

For Iser, the multiple perspectives which contribute to theme and horizon form "a structure that constitutes the basic rule for the combination of textual strategies. . . ."[21] The effects of the theme-horizon complex of strategies are manifold in Iser's view. First, it organizes the text-reader relationship. The pattern which the reader formulates as the reader's text is conditioned by "the continual switching of perspectives during the time-flow of reading."[22] Iser further elucidates this control of the text-reader relationship by explaining that through practice with theme and horizon the reader will gradually assume the author's view of the world.[23] Secondly, the theme-horizon complex of strategies enables the reader to perceive the significance of individual segments of the text, especially as they interact with other segments. For Iser, "the structure of theme and horizon allows all positions to be observed, expanded, and changed. Our attitude toward each theme is influenced by the horizon of past themes, and as each

theme itself becomes part of the horizon during the time-flow of our reading so it exerts an influence on subsequent themes."[24] Thus, the changing perspective of Robert Wilson becomes a new theme each time we assume it, and as we assume his perspective we evaluate it in terms of the horizon, that is in terms of previous moments in the time flow of the reading when we have assumed his perspective, our anticipation of subsequent assumptions of his perspective, the previous and anticipated assumptions of the perspectives of the other characters, our previous readings and interpretations of this story, our expectations for this genre gained from our whole experience with literature, and the horizon of our actual life situation. The literary text, in other words the literary experience which resides beween the author's text and the reader's text, is embedded in two different systems which exist apart from the reader or the author, the system of its own historical situation and the previous literary experience of the reader. As readers we must take into account during the reading both those expectations generated by literature and those generated by an awareness of our own historical situation as well as that of the author and the author's text. It is complex to recite all of the activities which are subsumed by the process of reading intelligently because the human intelligence is itself so complex and creative.

The reading process is accomplished in the same way by all readers, but it is accomplished to different degrees by different readers and by the same reader at different times. In contemporary theory the ideal reader is the "competent" reader. I had intended to explore competence in terms of readers of Hemingway, but at this moment I can only hint at the directions such a discussion might take. Certainly it is clear from the care with which he worked and the few hints he has given in the Nobel Prize message, the Plimpton interview, *A Moveable Feast*, "Death in the Afternoon," and some of the prefaces that Hemingway wrote to a reader who would read a work more than once and would read it carefully. He wrote to a reader who didn't need a tour guide. He recalled that Joyce explained his own work only to jerks. "Other writers that he respected were supposed to be able to know what he was doing by reading it."[25]

Romeo Giger, in his elucidation of the iceberg principle, writes of "Hemingway's conviction that the reader, provided he has had the experience himself, will know through feeling . . . (that) the felt experience was the common ground on which a mutual understanding between author and reader is feasible."[26] The competent reader would be a person whose life experiences—either actually lived or vicariously so—would enable the author to trigger a response. The competent reader would also need what Hemingway thought of as "the most essential gift" for a writer—"a built-in, shockproof shit detector."[27] And finally, Hemingway's competent reader would be a person with a highly developed moral sense for, as he told George Plimpton, "A writer without a sense of justice and of injustice would be better off editing the yearbook of a school for exceptional children than writing novels."[28]

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NOTES

1. Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 526 (hereinafter, EH).
2. EH, p. 529.
3. EH, pp. 528-529.
4. Carlos Baker, ed., *Hemingway and His Critics* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), p. 34 (hereinafter, *Critics*).
5. *Critics*, pp. 34-35.
6. *Critics*, p. 28.
7. *Critizs*, pp. 28 and 34.
8. Romeo Giger, *The Creative Void: Hemingway's Iceberg Theory* (Bern: Francke Verlag Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten, 1977), p. 14.
9. Giger, p. 19.
10. *Critics*, p. 29.
11. Cyrus Hamlin, "Strategies of Reversal in Literary Narrative," *Interpretation of Narrative*, ed. Mario J. Valdés and Owen J. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), pp. 63-64.
12. Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 149.
13. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974), p. 288.
14. *Implied Reader*, p. 274.
15. *Implied Reader*, p. 275.
16. *Implied Reader*, p. 282.
17. The text for "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is taken from *The Hemingway Reader* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 541-572.

18. Anais Nin, *The Novel of the Future* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 24.
19. Wolfgang Iser, "Narrative Strategies as a Means of Communication," *Interpretation of Narrative*, p. 111.
20. "Narrative Strategies," pp. 111-112.
21. "Narrative Strategies," p. 112.
22. "Narrative Strategies," p. 112.
23. "Narrative Strategies," p. 112.
24. "Narrative Strategies," p. 113.
25. *Critics*, p. 26.
26. Giger, p. 22.
27. *Critics*, p. 37.
28. *Critics*, p. 37.

THE "FIGURINE" IN THE CHINA CABINET: SAUL BELLOW AND THE NOBEL PRIZE

MARILYN JUDITH ATLAS

In 1976, Saul Bellow, then sixty-one years old, became the sixth American to win the Nobel Prize for literature. When the judges gave their reasons for awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Bellow, they noted that his early books had helped to emancipate the American novel from what had become the "hard-boiled" writing formula of the 1930s, and that his novels had pointed a new direction in the post-war years for "that familiar, dangling, universal man, the anti-hero." The judges were impressed with these anti-heroes because they had the courage to keep on trying to find a foothold even in an obviously tottering world. While the judges praised Bellow for his subtle analysis of contemporary culture and his gift of introspection, what impressed them most was his ability to depict the ordinary inner agonies and joys of modern life: they correctly perceived that Bellow's strength was characterization.

Bellow's response to receiving the award showed that he also realized that characterization was what made his novels so powerful. For him, the ability to create character was intimately connected with an interest in and sensitivity to the inner tensions of ordinary people. He was afraid of the award and what it might do to his ability to make contact with people and therefore to his ability to create viable art. When he received the Nobel Prize, only part of him responded with extravagant joy: while his colleague, Milton Friedman, that year's winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, brought his wife, Bellow celebrated by bringing fifteen members of his family to Stockholm. At the Nobel banquet, he verbalized his joy, but he also verbalized some ambivalence:

> There are not many things on which the world agrees, but everyone I think acknowledges the importance of a Nobel Prize. I myself take most seriously the Nobel Committee's recognition of the highest excellence in several fields, and I accept the honor of this award with profound gratitude.
>
> . . . .
>
> When the committee's choice was announced and the press rushed at me—a terrifying phenomenon—and asked how I felt about winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, I said that the child in me—for despite appearances there is a child within—was delighted, the adult skeptical. Tonight is the child's night entirely. . . .[1]

Part of his pleasure at receiving this award came from tension release: he would no longer have to wait to be so honored. He had been nominated for the award the year before but had not received it. Now the anxiety of waiting for it would permanently dissolve. Richard Stern, in a *New York Times* essay on Bellow and the Nobel Prize, found an excellent metaphor through which to show Bellow's ambivalent response to receiving the award:

> From a delicate, brass-figure, many drawered mahogany desk, he fetches a white pamphlet: Steinbeck's Nobel Prize lecture, 1962, inscribed to "Saul Bellow. You're next." He was right. Poor fellow. It was a burden on him. He took it seriously, felt he didn't live up to it. Well, it must mean something. At least I don't have to worry anymore about recognition. Not a total loss. Spurlos, versenkt. (Sunk, without a trace.)[2]

Other recognitions had partially prepared him for the award. Graduating from Northwestern with honors in Anthropology and Sociology was the first of many honors. At thirty-one he received the National Book Award for *The Adventures of Augie March*, an honor he was to receive again for *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. Among the other awards Bellow could claim before the Nobel were the Distinguished Service to Literature Award, the Friends of Literature Award, the B'nai B'rith Jewish Heritage Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. But the Nobel Prize was somehow more frightening, more absolute. Too many of the other Ameri-

cans who received it in literature, did so at the end of their writing careers.

His defensive response to the award is well illustrated in the many interviews he gave after receiving it. In an interview with W. J. Weatherby his defensiveness is covert: "I have an American weakness to believe that I have a lot of time before me now that I have reached my full maturity as a writer. . . . I'm a bit embarrassed by the Nobel Prize because I haven't got my teeth into things yet."[3] But Bellow was clearly more than embarrassed over winning the award: he was afraid that the award might force him into false positions and perspectives. In an interview with Joseph Epstein of the *New York Times* his fear took on more overt form: when Epstein inquired how he would feel if he did not win the award especially since he had come so close to winning the year before, Bellow's response illustrated that he saw the award as double edged:

> One of the things one fails to realize till one has won it is that the Nobel Prize for Literature has many extra-literary aspects. Winning it makes you an eminent person; it gives you certain kinds of power. I have never had much taste for the power that goes with eminence.[4]

His discomfort over being a Nobel Prize recipient was revealed again in this same interview when he mentioned that eminence and talent did not necessarily correlate and that the award itself, while not particularly negative, proved nothing:

> Journalists are fond of pointing out to me all the great writers who did not win a Nobel; Tolstoy, Proust, James, Joyce. They ask how it feels to be among the company of such distinguished literary figures as Sully-Prudhomme, Carl Spitteler, Wladyslaw S. Reymont, and Halldor K. Laxness. It causes me to scramble to remember that some pretty fair figures did win the Nobel Prize, among them Yeats, Mann, Eliot, Camus.[5]

Bellow obviously did not appreciate being teased about some of the less talented winners of the Nobel Prize. He was seriously concerned about how the way he was viewed would affect his self-image. In this same interview he asserted a little too vigorously that he would not begin thinking of himself as Saul Bellow

who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976. He admitted that he feared losing his feeling for the common life. Viewing himself as a Nobel Prize winner could only be destructive: "To think of oneself as a Nobel Prize winner is finally to think of oneself as an enameled figurine in a China cabinet, and I don't intend to find myself in a China cabinet." Bellow did not care to become a cultural functionary for such an individual could not study the alienating awareness and consciousness of the urban inhabitant, nor could he have exuberant ideas flashing irony, hilarious comedy, or burning compassion. He did not enjoy being treated like a "corpse in a coffin," and he asserted that just because he was accepting some of this type of treatment at the moment that he planned to limit his public life and glory and to return to himself, not as the eminent Saul Bellow but as Saul Bellow the writer. He indicated in this interview with Epstein that part of him wished that he, like Samuel Beckett, had the ability to turn his back on the publicity connected with the prize, but even though he might lack the coldness, or strength of character, or whatever it took, to refuse the publicity, he stressed that he had no intention of being overcome by it.[6]

Bellow's interview with Epstein revealed his fear of being a Nobel Prize recipient, but it also indicated that he has a clear sense that his strength as a novelist came from his honest interest in finding the essential in the chaos of twentieth century life, and his honest interest in individuality. As a functionary, Bellow would be a type and too removed from reality to perceive the essence of real people or to depict viable characters.

If one looks at Bellow's roots, one better understands his interest and sensitivity toward individuality and his fear of being stereotyped. His parents were Russian Jews, fleeing antisemitism, a form of stereotyping. First they immigrated to Canada where Saul was born and then, when he was nine, they moved to Chicago. Even in his youth he saw his destiny as special and he wanted to get in touch with his essential roots. He was interested in the Midwestern naturalists and realists, not in the Talmud, for writers like Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, and Sherwood Anderson saw even poor, displaced people as living, vital beings. Bellow was fascinated with people and characters who were trying to survive as individuals. Perhaps he wanted to understand them

in order to better understand himself. In his essay, "Starting Out in Chicago," Bellow explained that he saw the study of individuality as his calling:

> It appeared to me that this one thing [that the life lived in great manufacturing, shipping, and banking centers, with their slaughter stink, their great slums, prisons, hospitals, and schools, was also a human life], so intensely known that not only nerves, senses, minds, but also my very bones wanted to put it into words, might contain elements that not even Dreiser, whom I admired most, had yet reached. I felt that I was born to be a performing and interpretive creature, that I was meant to take part in a peculiar, exalted game.[7]

Bellow's novels depict his interests in writers, people, and characters who are concerned with their moral as well as physical survival. He is driven, like other novelists who focus on character, back to the real lives of people. Through characterization, he explores individuals and he leads them to discover what he himself has discovered, which in the words of Charlie Citrine, the protagonist of *Humboldt's Gift*, is: "You don't make yourself interesting through madness, eccentricity, or anything of the sort but because you have the power to cancel the world's distractions, activity, noise and become fit to hear the essence of things."

It is Bellow's need to be an individual, to continue exploring character in art, and through this exploration to help discover and share the essence of life, which serves as the central focus of Saul Bellow's Nobel lecture. This lecture reflects his concern over the plight of the individual attempting to make order out of the chaotic twentieth century, and his own desire to be vital, both as an artist and a person. Bellow's lecture is not one of a victor, but one of an individual intimately concerned with his own search for balance and understanding and the essential need for respecting, examining, and sharing perception through individual lives.

Bellow began his Nobel lecture aptly. He spoke about his own individuality, his own contrary nature, and his own unwillingness, or inability, to simply mesh into his surroundings:

> I was a very contrary undergraduate more than forty years ago. It was my habit to register for a course and then to do most of my reading in another field of study, so that when I should have been grinding away at "Money and Banking," I was reading the novels of Joseph Conrad.[8]

He presented his points concretely, explaining his attraction to writers like Joseph Conrad:

> Perhaps Conrad appealed to me because he was like an American—he was an uprooted Pole sailing exotic seas, speaking French and writing English with extraordinary power and beauty. Nothing could be more natural to me, the child of immigrants who grew up in one of Chicago's immigrant neighborhoods than—of course!—a Slav who was a British sea captain and knew his way around Marseilles and wrote an Oriental sort of English.

Bellow identified with Joseph Conrad, the displaced person, as well as Joseph Conrad the artist. Like Conrad, he attempted to render the highest justice to the visible universe, trying to find in it, both in matter and the nonmaterial facts of life, what is fundamental, enduring, essential. Artists are not scientists who can know the world by systematic examination; artists have to know themselves. Bellow paraphrased Conrad:

> To begin with, the artist had only himself; he descended within himself and in the lonely regions to which he descended he found "the terms of his appeal." He appealed, said Conrad, "to that part of our being which is a gift, not an acquisition, to the capacity for delight and wonder . . . our sense of pity and pain, to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts . . . which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."[9]

Bellow believed that Conrad spoke directly to him, reinforcing his own ideas about the individual which were that the individual appeared weak and felt nothing but his own weakness, but if he accepted his weakness and separateness and descended into himself, intensifying his loneliness, he discovered his solidarity with other isolated individuals. Bellow devoted most of

his lecture to arguing against those writers like M. Alain Robbe-Grillet who find that the Conradian type of novel is "finished." For Robbe-Grillet, the novel of character belongs to the past and even if this state of affairs is not an improvement, it is the truth. Bellow argued against this perception, refusing to renounce the possibility of individuality. Although Bellow admitted knowing what it feels like to be tired of characters who have become false and boring, he believes it is still possible to create interesting ones. The remainder of his Nobel lecture continued to be a defense of character. He argued that if the reader still finds pleasure in the master novelists of the nineteenth century who relied so heavily on character, then character cannot be as mummified as Robbe-Grillet suggests.

Bellow's faith in character parallels his faith in people. He does not see individuality as totally dependent on historical and cultural conditions, nor does he accept that human beings are at a dead end. Even if the best one can do is, as Bellow's character, Mr. Arthur Sammler suggests, "to have some order within oneself,"[9] even that gives hope. Without denying private disorder or public bewilderment, Bellow argued that terrible predictions need not destroy us. As long as people think, feel, and discriminate there is hope for human beings. He appealed to his fellow artists to keep this in mind and to help preserve interest in individuality: "It may be more difficult to reach the whirling mind of a modern reader but it is possible to cut through the noise and reach the quiet zone."[10]

Through characterization, Bellow argued, the novelist can reconnect art and life. If the novelist does this, the novel will move from the margins of human enterprise back to a more central location where it belongs. He acknowledges that the central energies of people are taken up by crises yet he believes in the power of individuals and suggests that artists can and must represent people more adequately. As artists and individuals Bellow pleads for people to refuse to be shrunk or to shrink themselves. He suggested that while owning our disasters that we continue to love life and ourselves. We must go beyond our stock of ideas, myths, and strategies and find new ways to challenge depressing theories. Through the novel, through the exploration of character we can form a shelter for the human spirit.

We are more than the pessimists suppose and we must go beyond that which represents us poorly. Again Bellow used Robbe-Grillet's pessimism in order to assert the opposite:

> What Robbe-Grillet says about character can be said also about these ideas, maintaining all the usual things about mass society, dehumanization and the rest. How weary we are of them. How poorly they represent us. The pictures they offer no more resemble us than we resemble the reconstructed reptiles in a museum of paleontology. We are much more limber, versatile, better articulated, there is much more to us; we all feel it.[11]

Bellow recommended that we lighten ourselves, throw off the encumbrance of pretension and falseness and act on our own—that is exactly what his most successful protagonists try to do whether in Africa, Chicago, or New York. We, like Eugene Henderson, Moses Herzog, and Charlie Citrine, must fight for the germ of our individuality under the wreckage of false and complicated systems.

He ended his Nobel lecture, basically a "call to action" essay, affirming his belief in the novel as a spiritual shelter, in characterization, and in the wisdom of Conrad.

> A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existences, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences signify something, tend to something, fulfill something; it promises us meaning, harmony, and even justice. What Conrad said was true: art attempts to find in the universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what is fundamental, enduring, essential.[12]

It is as if Bellow, in writing his Nobel lecture, took a look at his own novels and tried to define what was good in them. What he must have decided was that the honest searching of his protagonists, their diverse existences, and their fight to get through their own complications and reach what was essential in themselves, was the best part of his writing. Bellow knew he could create character. Often authors who speak of their own work

are wrong about what gives their works power, but Bellow knows that the characters of his novels give them their passion and their integrity.

The most memorable of these are thinkers interested in self-redemption. In his first novel, *Dangling Man*, 1944, Bellow created a remarkable hero who has the strength to accurately perceive his experience even though his life is dismal. The novel is in the form of a diary and through it, Joseph, the protagonist, an isolated man, communicates his disappointments with family and friends. He has recently been drafted into the army and the diary reflects his sickness of heart. He is insulted by relatives and friends who disapprove of his politics and life style. Joseph keeps writing, refusing to close his eyes to the world or to their response toward him. He is Bellow's first intellectual protagonist trying to come to terms with reality.

The Victim, 1947, Bellow's second novel, also examines the life of a central protagonist. In this novel, rather than only examine the isolated individual, Bellow also examines people's relationships and obligations to one another. The novel's central character, Asa Levanthal, a man who has barely survived the depression and acutely remembers the humiliation of joblessness, has found himself alone in New York. It is summer; his wife is out of town as is his brother whose youngest child suddenly becomes seriously ill. Amidst these changes and confusions, Levanthal is directly confronted by a man named Kirby Allbee who claims that Levanthal is the cause of Allbee's ruined life. Years ago Allbee had given Levanthal, then out of a job, a letter of introduction to his employer. When Levanthal presented himself and the letter, the employer was rude and Levanthal responded in kind. The enraged employer fired Allbee.

Levanthal is forced to come to terms with his responsibility to his brother's family as well as to Allbee. As Allbee trails him, making demands, their relationship develops. Through their relationship Bellow asks questions about the nature of brotherhood.

With *The Adventures of Augie March*, 1953, Bellow explores the uses of humor in developing character. This is Bellow's most ambitious book. Delmore Schwartz praised the brilliance of Bellow's characterization. Augie March is a unique American hero:

> *The Adventures of Augie March* is a new kind of book first of all because Augie March possesses a new attitude toward experience in America: instead of the blindness of affirmation and the poverty of rejection, Augie March rises from the streets of the modern city to encounter the reality of experience with an attitude of satirical acceptance, ironic affirmation, the comic transcendence of affirmation and rejection.[13]

Like Joseph and Levanthal, Augie is trying to maintain his own integrity as best he can. If he is more light-hearted than Bellow's earlier protagonists and more adventuresome, he is still the intellect attempting to come to terms with the world. If he is more mobile, he is no less spiritual than his predecessors.

In *Seize the Day*, 1956, Bellow again explores a single character, Tommy Wilhelm (né Adler). The canvas is smaller, the action of the novel spans a single day, but the protagonist, like Bellow's earlier ones, is trying to come to terms with his life. Wilhelm, suffocating in his isolation, tries to talk with his successful father, Dr. Adler, who is too threatened by his son's failure and neediness to be of use. In desperation, Wilhelm turns to Dr. Tamkin, a charlatan who talks philosophy with him, but who robs him of his last few dollars. After losing the money and realizing that Dr. Tamkin betrayed him, Wilhelm breaks down. Only then is there the possibility of rebirth: Wilhelm enters a church, puts down his head and begins to cry. There is a funeral being held at the church and the other guests assume that this man must be bereaved over their friend's death. They try to comfort him. The situation, while obviously ironic, is also warmly humane. The comfort Wilhelm receives is real and because of it he is able to experience the value of just being alive.

If optimism helped win Saul Bellow the Nobel Prize, it was not his optimism concerning heterosexual relationships; nor was it his ability to create fully developed female characters: In *Dangling Man*, Joseph's marriage is neither important nor necessary. The affair he has is meaningless. No woman in the novel is developed. In *The Victim* Levanthal's wife is out-of-town and remains undeveloped. Elena, Levanthal's sister-in-law, remains shadowy and her superstitious mother serves as little more than

a symbol of impending doom. Robert Baker finds his treatment and depiction of women his greatest fault:

> The most apparent of Bellow's faults is his incapacity to deal convincingly with women. The female figures in his novels repeatedly fall into one of two categories: they are either nags or nymphomaniacs. . . . No Bellow novel has a heroine and in none of them does the protagonist's fate directly hinge upon his relationship with a woman. . . . Surely, with the slow erasure of the distinction between the sexes that has been occurring in the past half-century, women are not incomprehensible and one could serve as *the*, or at least *a*, central figure in a Bellow novel.[14]

Baker's comments were written in a review of *Seize the Day*, a novel which contained as its most developed female character, Wilhelm's nagging wife. The review was published in 1957. Since then Bellow has created four novels: *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and *Humboldt's Gift*. Although these novels are brilliant explorations of male characters, none of them contains the kind of female character that Baker is requesting.

Henderson the Rain King, 1959, is his next and perhaps best novel. Eugene Henderson, a man in his second unsatisfactory marriage, is a Jewish WASP, a self-defined outcast, and a millionaire. He is an absurd seeker of high qualities which he cannot name. He goes to Africa and there, slowly, his abstract cries of "I want," change to more concrete and healthy questions concerning action. Henderson, exuberant, delightfully self-mocking, finds healthier outlets for his vitality in Africa where he finally makes contact with nature and forms some intimate relationships.

Like *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, 1964, also centers around a male protagonist. The novel takes place during a two week period in the early summer of Moses Herzog's forty-seventh year. Herzog is distraught over his relationship with Madeline, his wife, who has recently left with their daughter, June, and is having an affair with Valentine Gersbach, his ex-best friend. He deals with his distraught state by writing angry letters to those who have frustrated him, but he does not send them. These letters, however, serve as an excellent vehicle through which Bellow can explain Herzog's past relationships and reactions.

Beverly Gross, in reviewing the book, stresses the importance of character: "What matters is the character of Herzog himself, and he matters enough to make the experience of reading the novel something like reading Joyce or Henry James—the experience itself becomes a lesson in experience."[15] Madeline Herzog is as close as any of Bellow's female characters to being central, but she remains underdeveloped and incomprehensible, a castrating intellectual whose relationship to her daughter seems genuine but remains unexplored. The reader never understands the cause of Madeline's dispassionate hatred for Herzog. The other major woman in the novel, Ramona, Herzog's lover, is no more developed. When she is not acting like a pornographic fantasy, she seems capable and genuinely affectionate, but we never understand her behavior toward either herself or Herzog.

In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, 1970, Bellow examined a different type of male protagonist, one who is European and elderly, but as Ben Siegel suggests in his essay, "Saul Bellow & Mr. Sammler: Absurd Seekers of High Qualities," Bellow's views have not altered: "His primary concern, as always, is at the loss of moral and intellectual authority in America by the rational, the disciplined, the humane."[16] Mr. Sammler, a Polish Jew by birth, lost an eye during the war, survived a mass burial in which his wife died, lived his happiest years in London where he was intimate with the Bloomsbury literary set and with H. G. Wells on whom he is planning to write a book. Sammler is attempting to cope with the values of post-World War II America and of his young relatives.

No woman plays a major role in the novel. Angela, his dying friend's daughter, is oversexed; his own daughter, Shula-Slawa, although forty, is treated as an overly-sensitive, well-meaning problem child. Her double name symbolizes her lack of a stable identity. And the young woman with whom Mr. Sammler celibately lives, Margotte, also a relative, is strong, nurturing, a marriagable widow who never transcends the boring.

Bellow's last novel, *Humboldt's Gift*, published in 1975, the year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize and which probably helped him win it, centers around another male protagonist, Charlie Citrine, a successful writer who must come to terms with

the materialism of his own generation and the brilliant energetic, metaphysical, and paranoid world of his mentor, the dead poet, Von Humboldt Fleisher.

Charlie Citrine, sixty years old, is caught in a difficult divorce and is quickly losing his money. He is too confused to concentrate on his writing. Images of death surround him. Even his beautiful young lover, Renata, throws him over for a death image: she marries a funeral director. Citrine, like Bellow's other male protagonists, is fighting for a viable relationship to the world; Renata, like Bellow's other female characters, needs further development.

If Bellow, in writing his Nobel lecture, took a look at his own novels and tried to define what was good in them, and if he indeed decided that the honest search of his protagonists, their complicated needs, and their fight to reach whatever was essential in themselves, was the best part of his writing, he was judging his work accurately. Bellow's male protagonists and their attempt to get through the world without losing their souls is what is best in his novels. His male protagonists give his novels emotional power; their personalities control even the form of each book: *The Adventure of Augie March*, like Augie, is expansive; *Dangling Man*, like Joseph, is tight, careful, a diary; *Herzog*, like Herzog, is tortured, filled with letters that will never be sent. But although character is his strength and character controls both the themes and form of his novels, he has not yet been able to create a viable female character.

Female characters play an important role in his novels but they always appear in shadow, and one finds the inadequacy of their development jarring. If Bellow insists on dealing with female characters he must learn to make them more than types or they will continue to represent the greatest weakness in his art.

Bellow, in receiving the Nobel Prize, verbalized some fear of becoming a functionary, a type, of losing his ability to make contact with the common life. If we look closely at his fear of losing contact with the common life, if we look at Bellow's language, what he specifically fears is becoming a "figurine in a China cabinet."[17] It is important to notice that he sees powerlessness as a female form—certainly this might help explain his unwillingness to closely examine the common life of women: he does not

want to identify with that which he fears and he cannot create viable characters without identifying with them. Bellow must overcome this fear if he is to do what he states in his Nobel lecture should be the aim of every artist: to discover the essential and once again connect art with life. But as he himself said: "One can't tell writers what to do. The imagination must find its own path. But one can fervently wish that they—that we—would come back from the periphery. We do not, we writers, represent mankind adequately."[18] Bellow does represent mankind adequately, and although he must find his own path, let us hope that he will learn to represent womankind with equal imagination and sensitivity.

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NOTES

1. Saul Bellow, "Stockholm Banquet Speech," *New York Times*, December 11, 1976, 3:2.
2. Richard Stern, "Saul Bellow's Life and Writings," *New York Times*, November 21, 1976, VI, p. 42.
3. W. J. Weatherby, "Interview with Saul Bellow," *The Guardian*, November 10, 1976, as quoted by Malcolm Bradbury, "Saul Bellow and the Nobel Prize," *Journal of American Studies*, II, 1 (1977), p. 7.
4. Joseph Epstein, "Interview with Saul Bellow," *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, VII, p. 3.
5. Epstein, p. 3.
6. Epstein, p. 3.
7. Saul Bellow, "Starting Out in Chicago," *The American Scholar*, XLIV (1974-75), p. 73.
8. Saul Bellow, "The Nobel Lecture," *The American Scholar*, XLVI (1977), p. 316.
9. Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 228.
10. Saul Bellow, "The Nobel Lecture," p. 324.
11. Saul Bellow, p. 324.
12. Saul Bellow, p. 325.
13. Delmore Schwartz, "A Review of *The Adventure of Augie March*," *Partisan Review*, XXI (1954), pp. 113-114.
14. Robert Baker, "A Review of *Seize the Day*," *Chicago Review*, II, 1 (1957), p. 109.
15. Beverly Cross, "A Review of *Herzog*," *Chicago Review*, XVII, 2 (1964), p. 221.
16. Ben Siegel, "Saul Bellow and Mr. Sammler: Absurd Seekers of High Qualities," in *Saul Bellow* edited by Earl Rovit (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975), p. 125.
17. Joseph Epstein, p. 3.
18. Saul Bellow, "The Nobel Lecture," p. 324.

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY IN *THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS*

JOHN E. HALLWAS

Fifteen years ago Harold P. Simonson produced the most extensive discussion yet to appear of Francis Grierson's long-neglected literary work, *The Valley of Shadows* (1909). In that study, he asserts that the various sections of the book are more unified than readers have suspected. However, Simonson's argument is unconvincing, for his central insight—that "Sangamon County represents for Grierson the mythical Garden of Eden"—relates only to the first twelve chapters, which are set in that county.[1] Indeed, his sensitive interpretation of the book is almost entirely focused on those chapters, and so he actually detracts from the notion that *The Valley of Shadows* has any significant unity beyond chapters I-XII. This is as it should be, for that lengthy section of the book is superb while the other parts are comparatively undistinguished. In fact, a careful examination of the book's structure leads toward two conclusions: that the entire book has no meaningful unity, but that the first twelve chapters are as highly unified as any work of fiction—novel or novelette—needs to be. This circumstance suggests something about the composition history of the book and indicates the direction that future criticism ought to take.

The surface structure of *The Valley of Shadows* is not difficult to discern. Chapters I-XII are set in Sangamon County, Illinois and portray the pioneer culture in which the author's family had settled after emigrating from England. The year is 1858, when Grierson was ten years old. In the next two chapters, an unnamed stranger tells a story that occurred more than three decades earlier in the Sangamon River country: the love triangle involving Vicky Roberts, Hank Cutler, and Jack Stone. Nothing about the

story relates to preceding or following chapters in the book. Although the author claimed that *The Valley of Shadows* was based on his recollections, and no scholar has disputed this assertion, the Roberts-Cutler-Stone narrative was, in fact, derived from John L. McConnel's little-known cultural study, *Western Characters* (1853), where it is entitled "The First Grave."[2] Chapter XV describes Alton, Illinois, where Grierson's family moved in 1858. It is the first chapter of the book which reads like autobiographical nonfiction. Grierson uses the first-person pronoun constantly in Chapter XV as he records the sights and sounds of the Alton area. Chapter XVI is an account of the final Lincoln-Douglas debate, which he witnessed at Alton on October 15, 1858. However, the chapter reads much more like an analysis based upon study of the two men than a recollection. Chapters XVII-XXI are obviously autobiographical, offering the author's memories of St. Louis society, the city fair of 1860, The Planter's House hotel, the last torch-light procession before the 1860 election, and a military clash at Camp Jackson in May of 1861. (His family had moved to St. Louis in 1859.) Because Grierson was a page to General Fremont in the summer of 1861, chapters XXII-XXIV are devoted to an account of Fremont's western expedition of 1848, which the author claims was at least partially based on oral information supplied by friends of the General. Chapter XXV gives an account of General B. H. Grierson's raid through the South in 1863. This part was evidently included simply because the famous Civil War general was the author's cousin. Finally, Chapter XXVI presents Grierson's memories of the busy St. Louis riverfront in 1862 and 1863, as preparations were being made for Grant's surprise attack on Vicksburg. It also includes a brief account of the battle, which the author did not witness.

As this summary indicates, at least seven very different subjects are covered in *The Valley of Shadows*, and some of those are not autobiographical. Hence, the book is a collection of materials rather than a unified whole. Moreover, evidence of fictionalizing is apparent in several sections, especially where Grierson presents dialogue that he could not have heard or remembered. Therefore, the various parts of *The Valley of Shadows* must be evaluated separately, as one would approach a collection of essays and short fiction.

Most sections of the book have little literary value. The summary of General Grierson's raid is of historical interest only, while the reminiscences of Alton and St. Louis, although frequently vivid, are neither powerful nor probing. The tale of the Roberts-Cutler-Stone love triangle and the somewhat fictionalized historical narrative concerning Fremont's expedition have slight characterizations and no thematic complexity. Only the long first section of the book, concerning the pioneers of Sangamon County in 1858, has unusual literary significance.

The unity of the opening section is achieved in several ways. First of all, the characters and setting are consistent throughout. Elihu Gest, Zack Caverly, Kezia Jordan, and the others interact in various locations within Sangamon County. Secondly, the twelve chapters contain a loose but engaging plot that involves conflict over abolition and the helping of runaway slaves. Furthermore, as Simonson has indicated, Grierson depicts cultural change in America by presenting Sangamon County in terms of three symbolic concepts: Edenic Garden (the vanishing old order), valley of shadows (the transitional era), and new Canaan (the coming new order). Hence, as he says, "*The Valley of Shadows* is an allegory of a paradise lost and a vision of a paradise regained."[3] However, once again he errs by referring to the book as a whole. Grierson's symbolic structure is evident only in chapters I-XII, in spite of later references to Lincoln at Alton as "the prophetic man of the present and the political saviour of the future" (Chapter XVI) and to events on the St. Louis riverfront as "ushering in a new era and a new world" (Chapter XXVI).[4] The reader does not experience Lincoln as either a prophet or a political saviour in the Alton debate chapter, and he does not feel that activity on the St. Louis riverfront in the final chapter has any connection with a coming era.

Aside from the symbolic meaning in chapters I-XII, there is also a unifying theme in that section: the mixture of religion and politics in the culture of the region. This is introduced very early in the story, when Zack Caverly (nicknamed Socrates) comments that in politics and religion people fall into three groups. " 'Pears like thar's allers three kyinds o'everything—thar war the Whigs, the Demicrats, en the Know-nothin's, en thar air three kyinds o' folks all over this here kintry—the Methodists, the Hardshells, en them thet's . . . dead shet again religion" (p. 35). And this comes in the middle of a conversation which mixes talk about the abolitionists with mention of the influence of the Methodist and Baptist churches in the area. More importantly, in the sermon which is central to the first chapter, the preacher uses the Old Testament story of the freeing of the Israelites from Egypt to advocate the freeing of the slaves, and he asserts that Lincoln will be the deliverer (p. 41). Thus, Grierson makes the point that the people in Sangamon County in the 1850's had an understanding of America's political situation that was greatly influenced by religion.

Of course, this view of Lincoln as an American Moses was not part of Sangamon County culture before the Civil War. Rather, it is a well-known aspect of the Lincoln legend that developed after the assassination in 1865. Grierson simply interpreted central Illinois culture of 1858 in terms of his later perspective. There could be no clearer evidence that the story contained in chapters I-XII is fictionalized, no matter how much it may owe to the author's recollections.

In the same way, much of Chapter VI is devoted to a discussion of religion and politics. The Load-Bearer (Elihu Gest), for example, comments on one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates by saying,

> "Thar's a new dispensation a-comin' . . . but it warn't made plain what it ud be till I heerd Abe Lincoln en Steve Douglas discussin' some p'ints o' law fer the fust time.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I 'low Steve Douglas hed the law on his side . . . but Lawyer Lincoln hedn't been speakin' more'n ten minutes afore I see he war a-bein' called on, en 'peared like I could hear the words, 'jedgment, jedgment!' a-soundin' in the air. . . ." (pp. 74-75)

When slavery advocate Lem Stephens complains, " 'ye war only listenin' to an Abolitionist a-stumpin' this hull tarnation kedentry,' " Socrates (Zack Caverly) says, " 'I reckon religion en politics air 'bout the same,' " and the Load-Bearer agrees: " 'Sin in politics . . . air ekil te sin in religion—thar ain't no dividin' line' " (p. 77).

Likewise, Chapter XII is of central importance to the religion and politics theme. As Uriah Busby says about the camp meeting which fills the entire chapter, " 'the people hev an idee that this here meetin' ain't so much fer religion ez it air fer politics' " (p. 127), for " 'they all want to see which a-way the black cat's a-goin' to jump' " (pp. 126-27). That is to say, they are gathering at the camp meeting to find out how the question of slavery is going to be decided. The answer comes when a son of the Wagners (a pro-slavery couple) drowns in a creek and lightning causes a tree to fall on Alek Jordan (the son of abolitionists). Those two deaths foreshadow the coming of the Civil War. Indeed, the Load-Bearer closes the chapter by saying, " 'Let 'em mourn, let 'em mourn; jedgment ain't far off!' " (p. 137)—which describes the assembled people as both "mourning for religion" in the face of approaching Judgment Day, and mourning over the dead young men in preparation for the Civil War, when a judgment on the political question will finally be made.

It should be noted that the very pattern of Grierson's emphasis on the religion and politics theme—in chapters I, VI, and XII (the beginning, middle, and end)—indicates its structural importance. Furthermore, while Chapter I centers around a sermon with political implications, Chapter VI deals with a political speech that has religious meaning—at least for the Load-Bearer. And in Chapter XII, the only address given is both speech and sermon, as a black man tries to put the realms of religion and politics into proper perspective for his Negro listeners by asking them, " 'which am it better to do—cross ober Jordan inter Canaan, er cross de State line inter Canada?' " and also, " 'which is better fer de coloured folks—to be boun' in dis wurrul and free in de nex', er to be free in dis wurrul an' boun' after you am dead?' " (p. 128).

There is, then, considerable unity in the first section of *The Valley of Shadows*, and this is perhaps not surprising when one considers that it is the most highly fictionalized portion of the book. Even if the plot is based on Grierson's childhood experiences at age ten, chapters I-XII are full of invented dialogue and exhibit considerable symbolic and thematic development. It is also possible that some of the characterizations may be derived from historical materials as well as from the author's recollections.

In particular, the Morgan County, Illinois, history by Charles M. Eames, *Historic Morgan and Classic Jacksonville* (1885), describes Underground Railroad conductor Isaac Snedeker at some length, indicating that he was "a total stranger to fear."[5] A photograph of Snedeker—displaying his large mane of hair and beard—is also included in the volume. When Grierson introduces Isaac Snedeker in *The Valley of Shadows*, the latter is called a man "who had never known fear" and is described in terms that relate to the photograph: "His hair stood out thick and bushy, and his bearded face, with the upper lip clean-shaven, gave to his whole countenance a massive, formidable look. . . ." (p. 102). Hence, the Morgan County history could have influenced this characterization. It is also worth noting that Eames describes Elihu Wolcott as "the head" of the Underground Railroad in the Lower Illinois River Valley area, and his photograph is included in the historical volume too.[6] Wolcott was probably the basis for Elihu Gest, the Load-Bearer, who not only has the same unusual first name but is the leading figure in Underground Railroad activity in Grierson's narrative. In any case, the first section of *The Valley of Shadows* is not only better than all other parts of the book; it is different from them. It is neither recollection nor historical interpretation, but a carefully constructed and surprisingly complex achievement in fiction.

Moreover, there is some evidence that Grierson may have written chapters I-XII at an earlier period than the rest of the book, for the Proem relates only to those chapters. It refers directly to the "late fifties" in Illinois, when there was a feeling that "something biblical applied to the circumstances of the hour," and "the whole country round about Springfield was being illuminated by the genius of one man, Abraham Lincoln, whose influence penetrated all hearts, creeds, parties, and institutions" (pp. 29-30). It also refers to the hard-working settlers, the influence of the prairies, and the marvels that were interpreted as "signs of divine preparation and warning" (p. 29)—all of which relate closely to the first twelve chapters but not to the rest of the book. In other words, it is likely that Grierson wrote chapters I-XII as a short novel—blending his recollections with historical information about the Lincoln era in Illinois and inventing some scenes, characters, and dialogue. After he created a Proem

for the novel, he decided to make that work part of a larger, more directly autobiographical volume. This would explain the vast difference between the first section and the rest of the book.

Why would Grierson make such a change in plans? He may have placed the short novel in a nonfiction, autobiographical context in order to lend the authority of personal experience to his unusual interpretation of Sangamon County culture in 1858. In other words, having produced a work that was based to some extent on recollections but was fictionalized, he may have wanted to de-emphasize the imaginative quality of his achievement in order to promote his view of cultural change in America. It is interesting that, in the opening sentence of his Preface, which is dated 1909, Grierson emphasizes that the work is not a novel: "This book is not a novel, but the recollections of scenes and episodes of my early life in Illinois and Missouri. . . ." (p. 27). As mentioned above, the discovery of the source for chapters XIII-XIV, concerning the Roberts-Cutler-Stone love triangle, demonstrates that the book was not simply composed of recollections and orally transmitted narratives. If *The Valley of Shadows* had been just a collection of autobiographical episodes, this statement by Grierson would have been unnecessary. As it is, no reader would ever mistake the book for a novel—*except for the first section*, which Grierson hoped would blend in with, and give meaning to, the recollections and historical narratives that followed. If he had not added the Roberts-Cutler-Stone episode directly after chapters I-XII, and had not presented it as if told to the Sangamon County pioneers (and himself) in 1858, the change in technique—from fiction to nonfiction—would have been even more apparent than it is.

In any case, regardless of what the author intended, a short novel is exactly what chapters I-XII are because of the single plot, distinctive characterizations, thematic complexity, symbolic depth, and imaginative dialogue. In the future, scholars should approach that section of *The Valley of Shadows* as a separate work—for which the present title and Proem of the book were probably originally intended. It is a fine fictional achievement, published along with other narratives and recollections that are unimportant by comparison.

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NOTES

1. *Francis Grierson* (New York: Twayne, 1966), p. 112. Simonson asserts that *The Valley of Shadows* is unified because Grierson "skillfully relates himself to each episode" (p. 110), but the author's connection with such episodes as the Roberts-Cutler-Stone love triangle, General Grierson's raid, and General Fremont's expedition is slight and contributes nothing to those narratives. Simonson goes on to assert that "The larger unity is in Grierson's artistic use of Sangamon County which resembles, at least in function, William Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha County" (pp. 110-11), but again, this statement is inaccurate since much of the book does not have any relationship to Sangamon County.
2. See "The First Grave," in *Western Characters*, or *Types of Border Life in the Western States* (New York: Redfield, 1853), pp. 178-218. John L. McConnel, of Jacksonville, Illinois, was primarily an author of novels and short stories, many of which were set in the pre-Civil War West.
3. Simonson, *Francis Grierson*, p. 119.
4. *The Valley of Shadows*, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1970), pp. 168 and 217. All subsequent quotations will be from this edition of *The Valley of Shadows*, and page numbers will be given in parentheses.
5. *Historic Morgan and Classic Jacksonville* (Jacksonville, Illinois: Daily Journal Steamprinting Office, 1885), p. 143. The photograph of Snedeker appears on the preceding page.
6. Ibid., p. 142. The photograph of Wolcott appears on the following page.

BRAND WHITLOCK'S LITERARY REPUTATION IN BELGIUM, 1917-1934[1]

PAUL W. MILLER

By the time of his death in 1934, Brand Whitlock's literary reputation in Belgium was eclipsed by his reputation as a diplomat, as a noble and courageous human being, and as a friend of Belgium. Be it long to their credit, the Belgian people did not in his lifetime forget Whitlock the *ministre protecteur* whom they had virtually canonized during the war for helping initiate and for expediting the American relief program and for standing whenever possible between the awesome power of the German Army of Occupation and its potential victims. By May, 1934, however, the high tributes paid earlier in Belgium to Whitlock the distinguished man of letters, had been discounted or all but forgotten.

It must be conceded, however, that Whitlock's literary reputation in Belgium, beginning with his appointment as American Minister in 1913, was ancillary in and probably derivative from his reputation as a diplomat. Moreover, his reputation as a writer in Belgium was rather narrowly based on a first-hand knowledge of only four of his works translated into French and published in France or Belgium between 1917 and 1932. The chief of these works, unquestionably, was *Belgium: A Personal Narrative* published in France in 1922 as *La Belgique sous l'Occupation Allemande*.[2] In the United States, on the other hand, Whitlock's reputation as a writer had always been somewhat independent of his professional and political activities, and had been much more broadly based on a knowledge of his eighteen books published over a long period, between 1902 and 1933.

Although Whitlock's literary reputation in the United States would seem to have been much more solidly established and

secure than in Belgium, at least from the time of his election to the prestigious National Academy of Arts and Letters in 1916, such was not in fact the case, since the revolution in literary taste that became marked in the twenties was glorifying a bold, new generation of post-war writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Fitzgerald and Hemingway at the expense of "archaic" Howellsian realists like Whitlock. Thus, though perhaps for rather different reasons, the decline of Whitlock's literary reputation in the United States parallels its decline in Belgium. Typifying this decline, Whitlock's lengthy obituary in the New York *Times* described him as "primarily a writer," but mentioned—in passing—only one of his books.[3]

A special problem for one seeking to make a just estimate of Whitlock's literary reputation in Belgium during and soon after World War I, lies in the fact that Whitlock was in Belgium eyes a diplomat first, a writer second. Thus according to Belgian canons of good taste he was exempt from adverse criticism of his writings. One could quote a diplomat, praise him, or even ignore him on occasion, but not attack his writing publicly in print. Consequently it is fair to conclude that Whitlock's writings in Belgium during his lifetime received kid-glove treatment, the kind of "diplomatic immunity" that goes beyond our American understanding of the term and of which Whitlock himself may have been unaware. In reading Belgian "reviews" of Whitlock's writings, then, one must note all the degrees and nuances of *praise* offered, confident that no *dispraise* will appear. An unflattering corollary of the above might be that the literary productions of a diplomat, except insofar as they bear on his diplomatic roles, need not be taken altogether seriously, no more seriously, perhaps, than the Sunday paintings of a politician like Winston Churchill. Consequently, one should not expect Belgian reviews of Whitlock's writing to be as thorough or penetrating as though they concerned a foreigner without diplomatic connections, or a native Belgian.

A final consideration for anyone attempting to assess Whitlock's literary reputation in Belgium from 1917 to 1934 issues from the flat statement by a highly placed, present member of the Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Francaises in Belgium, that Whitlock was elected in 1922 to foreign membership

in this distinguished body not because of his literary achievements, but because of gratitude for his role during the war.

Beginning with *Un Américain* (1917) and *Lincoln* (1920) and reaching a climax of praise with *La Belgique* (1922) that was already becoming muted with *Narcisse* (1932), the Belgian reviewers of Whitlock ordinarily saw him as a distinguished diplomat, a heroic individual, or as a friend of Belgium whose writings more or less brilliantly illustrated whichever of the above roles they chose to emphasize. By the time of his death, however, one of Whitlock's newspaper obituaries, though demonstrating a considerable knowledge of his writings, relegated them to the status of mere leisure-time pursuits.[4] Other obits mentioned only *La Belgique* among his literary achievements.[5] Two of Whitlock's long-term friends and admirers, however, the Countess Carton de Wiart and Gustave Van Zype, stand as marked exceptions to the prevailing tone of criticism. Though both admired Whitlock the man and diplomat, both, and especially Van Zype, took his writings seriously, and both wrote substantial accounts of his life and writings at the time of his death. What makes the penetration of his comments on Whitlock especially remarkable, especially when discussing the untranslated works, is Van Zype's confessed inadequacy with the English language.[6]

In the words of the Countess Carton de Wiart, the first to translate one of Whitlock's works, *Un Américain d'aujourd'hui* was much appreciated ["très gouté"] when copies reached Belgium from France in the summer and fall of 1917, soon after U.S. entry into the war. (By early April, Whitlock, as representative of an enemy power in Belgium, had been forced to leave Brussels for Le Havre, seat of the Belgian wartime government.) Whole articles of praise, including one by the patriarchal French writer Maurice Barrès, were devoted to Whitlock's autobiography. Shortly after publication it received an extensive tribute, including some analysis, from the Belgian Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, whose spokesman praised Whitlock as eminent minister of the United States, man of action, able politician, lawyer, and in fifth and sixth places, as a journalist and novelist.[7] Written between the lines of this praise is the continuing Belgian defiance of the German army of occupation, together with appreciation of Whitlock's previous role as "ministre protecteur," and

of U.S. entry into the war, which Whitlock had more and more openly favored and supported while in Brussels.

In contrast to *Un Américain*, Whitlock's *Abraham Lincoln* (1920), seems to have been passed over by the Belgian reviewers in almost total silence. Though he was perhaps Whitlock's most ardent literary champion in Belgium, the only thing that Van Zype could find to say about *Lincoln* was that it was translated by its author. One can now only speculate on why this work, which had a moderate success in two American editions and one British edition before it appeared in France, evidently failed in Belgium. Perhaps the alien subject matter, the long delay in publication since its first appearance in English in 1909, and the quality of the translation, over which Whitlock struggled painfully for a considerable time, were all factors in its quiet Belgian demise.

As had been the case in the United States when *Belgium* was published in 1919,[8] Whitlock's reputation as a man of letters reached new heights in Belgium with the publication of *La Belgique sous l'Occupation Allemande* in 1922. In a letter to his close friend and editor Rutger Jewett, Whitlock himself took note of this heady development in his literary career: "Perhaps it will interest you to know that *Belgium* in the French translation is out, and has had an immense success in the press. All the Paris newspapers published literally columns in review of it, and the Brussels papers, of course, did likewise."[9] What must have been particularly gratifying to Whitlock was this first—regrettably, also his last—experience in the European press of selected praise that went beyond the recognition of his diplomatic skill, his humanity, and his friendship for Belgium. Finally, it appeared, he was becoming appreciated as a writer, not merely as a diplomat who also wrote.

The review of Whitlock's memoirs in *La Nation Belge*, however, still sounds a familiar note. Here his writings are praised because in reading them, one experiences more joy in discovering a man than in rediscovering a diplomat. For this reviewer, the work is chiefly valuable as it reflects Whitlock the man (and diplomat) of fine and subtle sensitivity.[10] According to this critic, the Belgians will not *learn* from Whitlock's work, they'll do better; in reading it, they will relive the war, the anguish, hope and indignation that this compassionate, "resonant" soul underwent.

But before the French translation of Whitlock's work appeared, the new note of Belgian Whitlock criticism had already been struck by a reviewer in *Le Soir* (Brussels) of 1919. Here *Belgium* is described as a book which portrays the war with such an accent of truth, such moving melancholy, and *such literary excellence* [italics mine] that it should have been written by a Belgian, and indeed, one regrets that it was not.[11]

Among the several Belgian newspapers enthusiastically reviewing *La Belgique* in 1922, the most glowing tribute was offered by *L'Indépendance Belge*, on the occasion of Whitlock's election to the recently founded Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Francaises. Here, moreover, one finds a striking departure from the kind of praise Whitlock the writer had generally received in Belgium up to this point. He is portrayed as above all a man of letters, revealing subtlety, emotion expressed soberly, great talent and delicate sensitivity. Aware that Whitlock calls himself a realist, this reviewer nevertheless sees *La Belgique* as a work dominated by great and profound idealism, which was before the war full of illusions.[12] One detects in this review the influence if not the hand of Gustave Van Zype, who along with being a playwright and journalist, became the editor-in-chief of *L'Indépendance Belge* after the war.

In his final assessment of Whitlock's life and work for the Royal Academy following Whitlock's death in 1934, Van Zype once again gave special attention to *La Belgique*, this time as a work set apart from Whitlock's works of imagination by its exact, moving but restrained account of his 30 months under the German occupation endured with the Belgian people. Van Zype sums up *La Belgique* as a masterful portrayal of reality, from which the imagination is banished.[13] One must conclude, then, that *La Belgique* was appreciated as an expression of literary, though not necessarily imaginative talent, and not just as an interesting revelation of Whitlock the diplomat and great-hearted man.

Whitlock's last work translated into French was *Narcisse*, which first appeared in installments in the Belgian society weekly *L'Eventail*, from December 20, 1931 to February 7, 1932. Whitlock summarized the story of its Belgian publication up to the date of his letter, and accurately anticipated its publication as

a book (in June, 1932), though he proved unduly optimistic as to its eventual critical reception:

> I forgot to tell you that whilst I was in Brussells I arranged for the translation in French and publication of *Narcissus*, which seems to have excited a tremendous amount of interest and, if I may say so, pride in Belgium. Gustave van Zype wanted to print it first as a *feuilleton* in *L'Eventail*, and then to bring it out in book form, and I told them to go ahead and do it. Nell's old secretary, Mademoiselle Polinet, made a translation which van Zype revised; he is going to write a Preface for it, and then *L'Eventail* are [sic] going to bring it out as a book in their series of publications. . . . I don't suppose there will be a penny in it for anybody. . . .[14]

As always, Van Zype did everything possible to make his friend's work a critical and popular success in Belgium. Most important, he put on the line his own considerable reputation as Permanent Secretary of the Royal Academy, journalist and art critic, by writing a glowing preface to *Narcisse*.

In fact, however, the impact of *Narcisse*, even with Van Zype's preface, was not great enough to cause any critical stir in Brussels. And since, according to *L'Eventail*, copies were still available in 1934 at the time of Whitlock's death, one could infer that sales of this volume had not been brisk, just as Whitlock feared. Reviews of *Narcisse* are almost impossible to find except in the newspapers of Antwerp, the home of the romance's protagonist Van Dyck and his great artistic mentor Rubens. Indeed almost half of Whitlock's story is set in Antwerp, much in Rubens' famed "Italian" palace. It is scarcely surprising, then, that *Narcisse* should have attracted attention in that city, especially since the Anversois are fiercely proud of their metropolis, very possessive of Rubens, and jealous to assess and preserve the reputation of their greatest painter. The limited critical attention paid to *Narcisse* in Brussels may be partly explained by Whitlock's long retirement from public life compounded by long absence from Brussels (apart from summer vacations spent there), and by the irregularity of the legend's appearance as a book published by a reputable but not highly prestigious magazine some time after its initial publication in serial form. Add to this the equivocal

nature of the work itself, which led to widely divergent critical opinions of it from the moment of its first appearance in English.[15]

The *Neptune*, a nautical newspaper of Antwerp, paid a thoroughly conventional, "diplomatic" tribute to Whitlock's *Narcisse*. Along with mentioning Belgium's gratitude for the former American ambassador, it praises his evocation of Belgian scenes, including one in the Rubens house.[16] From the more sophisticated, more cultivated critic of the Antwerp *Métropole*, *Narcisse* receives more severe—and serious—scrutiny, politely signifying that its author's years of diplomatic immunity to criticism are over. Indeed this is the *only* piece of Belgian criticism of Whitlock I have found that circumvents the special privileges of the diplomat as writer—and does so in a wickedly clever way. Because Mr. Brand Whitlock is—or was—an eminent diplomat and a great friend of Belgium, the critic of *Narcisse* would not wish to write a single word that could cause him pain. That is why the reviewer must address his reproaches to the preface writer, Mr. Gustave Van Zype, who should have put Mr. Whitlock on guard against certain blunders or tendentious interpretations that depreciate his little novel. He should at least have told his friend that there *was* no Belgian art as such in the time of Rubens [the Belgian nation having been formed in 1830], but only Flemish art, and that to put the phrase "Belgian art" into the mouth of the seventeenth-century artist Jordaens is to be guilty not merely of nonsense but of absurdity. The critic also chides Van Zype for not correcting Whitlock's false assertion that Rubens had a "bourgeois taste" for riches. "Everything demonstrates, on the contrary, with the great Flemish painter, the absence of such a sentiment. What characterizes bourgeois taste is ostentation; showing off, the ridiculous and infantile pleasure of demonstrating to the world that one is rich . If Mr. Brand Whitlock finds such ostentation in the joy that Rubens felt in surrounding himself with beautiful things, with owning beautiful furniture and feasting his friends royally, then he is confusing, as they say, a hawk with a handsaw" [translation mine]. Services like those suggested above would have been worth a lot more to Van Zype's friend Whitlock than writing him a preface stuffed with fulsome praise ("une préface banalement louangeuse").[17] It is clear from the tone of this criticism that Whitlock, the classic innocent abroad

in spite of his urbanity, had stepped into an Anversois hornets' nest by allegedly maligning Pieter Paul Rubens, Antwerp's darling. Hypersensitive as he was to criticism, one can only hope that no clipping service sent Whitlock this brilliantly vicious invective, perhaps the only unvarnished Belgian criticism he ever received!

Though *Narcisse* seems to have been generally ignored by the Belgian press when it appeared in book as well as serial form, it was mentioned by several reviewers at the time of his death as his most recent book to be translated, as further proof of his attachment to the Belgian people,[18] and of his taste in artistic matters.[19] One reviewer felt that this last volume especially bore the mark of his spirit and talent.[20]

In conclusion, one notes that Whitlock's literary reputation in Belgium, except as indicated by one scathing review of *Narcisse* written long after his retirement as ambassador, is consistently veiled, and in a measure falsified owning to his diplomatic position, which dominated the view that Belgian reviewers and critics took of him to a degree that would be unimaginable in the United States, if a foreign ambassador were to offer his literary wares to the public. To the extent that one can separate Whitlock's literary reputation from his diplomatic status among the Belgians, one would have to conclude that while both *Abraham Lincoln* and *Narcisse* were damned with no praise or little praise, *Un Américain d'aujourd'hui* was enthusiastically received as a manifestation of the American spirit of individual liberty and conscience, illustrated by the achievements of Brand Whitlock himself. The contrast between the libertarian spirit of the Americans and the authoritarian rule of the Germans is all but explicit, even while the Belgians are being ground under the iron heel. It remained for *La Belgique*, however, to receive the final accolade; it was perceived not only as a manifestation of its author's noble spirit, but also as a product of literary genius at work on those subjects from which the imagination is necessarily banished ("l'imagination en est bannie").[21]

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NOTES

1. My study is based on a survey of francophone sources because Whitlock's works, having been translated into French, were chiefly reviewed by francophone publications. I want to express here my gratitude for the opportunity afforded me by a grant from the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States of America, Belgium and Luxembourg (Fulbright Commission) to study Whitlock at the Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er in Brussels during the summer and fall of 1979.
2. *Belgium: A Personal Narrative* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918); *La Belgique sous L'Occupation Allemande*, trans. Paul de Reul (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1922). The first of Whitlock's works to be published in French was *Un Américain d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1917). [*Forty Years of It*], translated by Whitlock's loyal friend and supporter the Countess Carton de Wiart while she was confined to a German prison during the summer of 1915. This was followed by Whitlock's own translation of *Abraham Lincoln* (Paris: Payot & Cie, 1920); *La Belgique*; and *Narcisse/La Légende de Van Dyck* (Bruxelles: l'Eventail, 1931 [1932]), translated by Alice Polinet, who had been Mrs. Whitlock's personal secretary during the Belgian years. Two other interesting works that draw upon Whitlock's experience in Belgium but which have not been translated are *Uprooted* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1926), and *Transplanted* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927). In order not to offend his Belgian hosts by several unflattering portraits of Belgian aristocrats projected in *Transplanted*, he eventually changed its setting to France. This change was unfortunate in the first place because it caused Whitlock great pain to execute, in the second because his Belgian readers, taking for granted that this novel concerned the French with whom Whitlock spent his retirement years, seem not to have suspected his original intent. Another possibility, of course, is that at least a few of Whitlock's Belgian readers recognized his portraits of their contemporaries and enjoyed or failed to enjoy them in discreet silence.

   Concerning Whitlock's agonies over his "Belgian novels," see his unpublished Journal, Brand Whitlock Papers, Library of Congress, Container 5, January 30, 1925, and Container 44, December 14, 1926, among other entries.
3. New York *Times*, 25 May 1934, pp. 22-23.
4. *L'Etoile Belge*, 25 May 1934, p. 1.
5. See, for example, "Les Obsèques de M. Brand Whitlock," *Le Petit Niçois*, 27 May 1934, n.p.
6. *Galeries des Portraits*, Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Francaises, No. 117 (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1972), pp. 375-97.
7. The above tributes, including quoted material, are found in Countess Carton de Wiart, "Brand Whitlock," *Revue Générale*, 15 July 1934, pp. 13-16.
8. For example, the Boston *Transcript*, 28 May 1919, p. 6 described *Belgium* as "a document with a soul, the kind that make [sic] literature imperishable," and *Nation*, 7 June 1919, p. 919 called it "a literary masterpiece by a literary artist." (Quoted from Eleanor Steffens, "Brand Whitlock: an Essay, a Checklist, and an Annotated Bibliography," Diss. Case Western Reserve 1972, p. 84, a remarkably thorough and helpful work.)
9. "To Rutger B. Jewett," 7 April 1922, *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock/The Letters*, ed. Allen Nevins (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), I, 341.

10. *La Nation Belge*, 24 January 1922, p. 1.
11. *Le Soir*, 16 June 1919, p. 3, cols. 1-3.
12. *L'Indépendance Belge*, 6 October 1922, p. 1.
13. *Galerie des Portraits*, IV, 393. The praises showered on Whitlock's *La Belgique* in Belgium were duplicated when they were not overshadowed by the French reviews. The *Mercure de France*, No. 141 (1920), 857-58, discussing the English version, called it the best book produced in the United States by the war. While the review dedicated to *La Belgique in Le Figaro*, 28 Jan. 1922, p. 2 still chose to focus more attention on Whitlock the man than on the writer, the review appearing in *Le Temps*, 22 Jan. 1922, p. 2 praised Whitlock for his fresh, graciously intimate style that has the power to bring new life even to well known events. When *Le Mercure*, No. 163 (1923), 252-53 also reviewed the French version, it combined praise of Whitlock the writer of "infinite talent" with the prescient warning that the great, mysterious, pitiless and irresistible German High Command of which Whitlock wrote, still exists, with the same ambitions, goals and dreams as before. It would begin the war again tomorrow, today if it could. When will the Americans and others open their eyes, this reviewer wondered.
14. "To Rutger B. Jewett," 16 Dec. 1931, Whitlock Papers, Library of Congress, Container 47.
15. Critical comments ranged from the Boston *Transcript*'s assertion that nothing Whitlock had done approached this romance "in sheer beauty of conception, in sureness of analysis, and in happy execution," to *Books*' judgment that "as a work of fiction it [*Narcisse*] hardly rises above the level of a pretty story." See Steffens, *Brand Whitlock*, p. 139 quoting from Boston *Transcript*, 26 Sept. 1931, p. 1 and *Books*, 15 Nov. 1931, p. 20.
16. Rev. of *Narcisse*, *Neptune*, 10 July 1932, p. 2, col. 4.
17. Rev. of *Narcisse*, *La Métropole*, 11 Sept. 1932, Review Section, col. 5.
18. *Le Matin*, 26 May 1934, p. 5, cols. 2-3.
19. *La Nation Belge*, 25 May 1934, p. 3, col. 2.
20. *L'Etoile Belge*, 25 May 1934, p. 3, col 7.
21. *Galerie des Portraits*, p. 393.

WILLA CATHER AND THE "AMERICAN METAPHYSIC"

BARRY GROSS

Those critics who pay attention to Willa Cather at all agree that *One of Ours* is her worst book. Reviewing it in October, 1922, Edmund Wilson called it a "flat failure,"[1] her "least satisfactory" performance.[2] Maxwell Geismar, who takes Cather more seriously than most critics—devoting a seventy-page chapter to her in his *Last of the Provincials*—thinks "*One of Ours* is Cather's weakest novel."[3] Louis Auchincloss, in *Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Woman Novelists*, declares that, "with the exception of *One of Ours*, [Cather] maintained an extraordinarily high level in her fiction."[4]

Much of the negative response is clearly based on the conviction that a woman has no business writing about war. Wilson attributes the failure of the novel to "the special handicap of [Cather's] having to imagine her hero in relation to the ordeal of the war."[5] Edward Wagenknecht, in his *Cavalcade of the American Novel*, attributes the failure of the last part—the war part—of *One of Ours* to the fact that "it was not Willa Cather's material."[6] W. J. Stuckey, in his book on Pulitzer Prize novels—*One of Ours* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1922—finds that "Miss Cather is unable to create convincingly her hero's [war] experience."[7] Arthur Hobson Quinn, in *American Fiction: A Historical and Critical Survey*, complains that "Miss Cather showed no special capacity for the description of the skirmishes in which her hero figures."[8] Auchincloss considers the "fighting scenes in France . . . certainly not good when contrasted with those of Erich Maria Remarque or Norman Mailer, but . . . not bad if considered as exercises by a nonparticipant who has done her research conscientiously."[9]

Erich Maria Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, all right. But Norman Mailer? Auchincloss' anomalous and gratuitous mention of Mailer in the context of World War I novels unwittingly reveals the unadmitted bias behind all this criticism: *One of Ours* is *necessarily* specious when compared with "the real thing," "the genuine article," that is, with the testimony of those—those *men*—who were really there, who really fought the war. In his book *The Twenties*, Frederick Hoffman argues that the "spiritual definition" Claude Wheeler achieves before his death must be considered "the worst kind of contrivance" because it "was so remote from contemporary accounts." Cather, after all, "had not fought the war . . . her descriptions of battle were secondhand." Hoffman concedes that "this need not have been a fatal deficiency, for war had been brilliantly described before by noncombatants." What makes it fatal in Cather's case is that, according to Hoffman, Cather "could not possibly have had an experience similar in kind to Hemingway's."[10]

Not possibly? And how valid are the firsthand experiences of those whose accounts constitute the criterion to which *One of Ours* is implicitly compared and in comparison with which it is found wanting in credibility? Ernest Hemingway was, we must remember, a very young eighteen when he finally crossed the Atlantic in May, 1918. He was in the trenches for all of seven days when, on July 8, he, still eighteen, was struck by the exploding fragments of a trench mortar. He spent the rest of the summer in the hospital, he spent all the early fall on convalescent leave, and returned to the trenches in October. The Armistice was signed in November. And what of other contemporary accounts—*Three Soldiers, The Enormous Room*? John Dos Passos was twenty-one, E. E. Cummings was twenty-three when they, sheltered Harvard Esthetes and decidedly noncombatant, drove ambulances during part of 1917.

To the extent that the war experience is masculine, the criticism of *One of Ours* is sexist. Not only did Cather, being a woman, not fight the war; it is also assumed that, being a woman, she could not possibly have had an experience similar in kind. Perhaps we should not be surprised to discover the extent to which sexism has conditioned the critical response to *One of Ours*.

It is certainly not surprising to find it so blatantly expressed in a letter Hemingway wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1923:

> Look at *One of Ours*. Prize, big sale, people taking it seriously. You were in the war, weren't you? Wasn't that last scene in the lines wonderful? Do you know where it came from? The battle scene in *Birth of a Nation*. I identified episode after episode, Catherized. Poor woman, she had to get her war experience somewhere.[11]

But it has also dominated the criticism and evaluation of all of Cather's work. Consider the final evaluation of her in the influential *Literary History of the United States* by the Misters Spiller, Thorp, Canby, Johnson, Ludwig, and Gibson, faint contempt in the guise of praise:

> Her art was not a big art. It does not respond to the troubled sense of American might and magnitude realized but not directed, and felt so strongly by such men as Sinclair Lewis in the same decades. . . . Her colleagues among the men "sweated sore" over that job, whereas her books rise free and are far more creative than critical. She is preservative, almost antiquarian, content with much space in little room—feminine in this. . . .[12]

Whence this acceptance of *size* as a standard, size determined by how much one sweats over and feels strongly about matters of might and magnitude, a standard that, by definition, necessarily debars a Willa Cather from the ranks of major artists, even from the ranks of critics, and sentences her to that backwater reserved for those who are merely "creative," for those who are presumably content with much space in little room, the dusty, musty little room—or is it tomb?—only antiquarians inhabit?

Sexist, no doubt. But the sexist bias is a symptom of a larger and, I would argue, more grievous one, the American preference for youth over age, for experience over reflection, no matter how callow the experiencer and how shallow the experience, no matter how mature the reflector and how profound the reflection. Sweating over and feeling passionately about might and magnitude is perceived not only as masculine but as American; calm reflection on ideas, ideals, values, especially if they are located in the past, is perceived not only as feminine but as unAmerican. The net result is the disenfranchisement of an entire gender and of all of those of the other gender who manifest similar preoccupations.

The problem has always been with us. In 1940, in his essay "Reality in America," Lionel Trilling complained about the American opposition "to the genteel and the academic," the American "alliance with the vigorous and the actual,"[13] the American belief in "a thing called *reality* [which is] one and immutable, . . . wholly external, . . . irreducible," and the American conviction that "the artist's relation to reality [is] a simple one [:] reality being fixed and given, the artist has but to let it pass through him."[14]

In 1940 Trilling's jumping-off point for his attack on "the chronic American belief that there exists an opposition between reality and the mind and that one must enlist oneself in the party of reality."[15] was V. L. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*. Trilling locates the poles at Parrington's denunciation of Hawthorne and James and his praise of Dreiser.

According to Parrington, Hawthorne failed "to change fashion in creeds" and "remained cold to the revolutionary criticism [of his enthusiastic contemporaries who were] eager to pull down the old temples;"[16] he "knew no fierce storms"[17] and preferred the "barren field [of] the past."[18] As for James, "the 'odors of the shop' are real, and . . . those who breathe them [are] guarantee[d] a sense of vitality from which James is debarred. The idea of intellectual honor is not real, and to that chimera James was devoted."[19] Thus, both Hawthorne and James are guilty of the one "deadly sin"—a "turning away from reality."[20]

Dreiser, on the other hand, is praised for being "impatient of the sterile literary gentility of the bourgeoisie . . . as if wit, and flexibility of mind, and perception, and knowledge were to be equated with aristocracy and political reaction."[21] What faults Dreiser has are "accepted and forgiven" because they are seen as "the sad, lovable, honorable faults of reality itself, or of America itself—huge, inchoate, struggling toward expression."[22]

> His books have the awkwardness, the chaos, the heaviness which we associate with "reality." In the American metaphysic, reality is always material reality, hard, resist-

> ant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant. And that mind is alone felt to be trustworthy which most resembles this reality by most nearly reproducing the sensation it affords.[23]

This "indulgence . . . is extended even to the style of [Dreiser's] prose"[24] in that "whoever finds in [the ungainliness of Dreiser's style] any fault at all . . . is objecting to the ungainliness of reality itself."[25] And that is because, Trilling argues, Dreiser "thinks as the modern crowd thinks when it decides to think: religion and morality are nonsense, . . . tradition is a fraud."[26]

Cather is, in effect, the twentieth century's Hawthorne, the twentieth century's James. She is condemned for failing to change fashion in creeds, for being cold to the revolutionary criticism of her enthusiastic contemporaries who are eager to pull down the old temples, for knowing no fierce storms, for preferring the past, for devoting herself to the "unreal" idea of intellectual honor, for believing in religion, morality, tradition. Thus committing the deadly sin of "turning away from reality," she is debarred from the American metaphysic articulated and personified by those allied with the vigorous and actual, those enlisted in the party of reality, those who, because they have, presumably, known the fierce storms, know that religion and morality are nonsense and tradition is a fraud.

That is really what Wagenknecht is saying when he complains that Cather could "use only the themes of her youth."[27] That is really what Hoffman is saying when he complains that Cather "was unable to reproduce the vitality of her subject [the pioneers] —such as, for example, O. L. Rolvaag was able to give it in *Giants in the Earth*" and that she "failed . . . to explore the facts of modernism with the uninhibited honesty of a Hemingway."[28] That is really what Geismar is saying when he complains that "her summary of 'machine change' in the West is curiously naive and remote in comparison with Sherwood Anderson's picture of the same historical process in *Winesburg, Ohio* or *Poor White*" and that "she is not only scornful of but hardly tries to understand . . . the increasingly respectable age of wealth and machines."[29] And that is really what Trilling—yes, even Lionel Trilling—is saying when he complains that "it has always been a personal failure of her talent that prevented her from involving

her people in truly dramatic relations with each other."[30] This bias is extended even to the style of Cather's prose: in 1926 Edmund Wilson summed her up by saying, "Willa Cather is a good craftsman, but she is usually rather dull."[31] Though that "but" seems to intervene and qualify, what Wilson is really saying is that such craftsmanship goes hand in hand with dullness, as if to value such craftsmanship is to object to the ungainliness of reality, the ungainliness of America.

At this late date it should not have to be said, but apparently it does: *One of Ours* is no more about World War I than *Moby Dick* is about whaling or *The Great Gatsby* is about bootlegging, than *The Natural* is about baseball or *Henderson the Rain King* is about Africa. It is not about the war in Europe but the war in the United States: the enemy is not the German Hun, the victim is not the raped Belgium; the enemy is Claude Wheeler's philistin brother Bayliss and the materialism and avarice he represents, the victim is an American tradition that lies bleeding under the greedy boots of a generation of Bayliss Wheelers. As Claude says,

> there isn't much . . . in living at all, going on as we do. What do we get out of it? . . . You wake up in the morning and you're glad to be alive, it's a good enough day for anything and you feel sure something will happen. [But] it's all the same in the end. At night you go to bed—nothing has happened. . . . If we've only got once to live, it seems like there ought to be something—well, something splendid about life, sometimes.[32]

The difference between Cather and the Hemingways, the Dos Passoses, the Cummingses is not one of gender but one of generation. If, as Hoffman says, "the young men went into the war without a sense of tradition,"[33] it was because, two decades younger than Cather, they did not know—could not know—that there *was* an America in which something had *happened*, something splendid. Cather knows it and Claude can just glimpse it,

> felt sure that when he was a little boy and all the neighbors were poor, they and their houses and farms had more individuality. The farmers took time then to plant fine cottonwood groves on their places, and to set osage orange hedges along the borders of their fields. Now these trees were all

> being cut down and grubbed up. . . . With prosperity came a kind of callousness; everybody wanted to destroy the old things they used to take pride in. The orchards, which had been nursed and tended so carefully twenty years ago, were now left to die of neglect. It was less trouble to run into town in an automobile and buy fruit than it was to raise it. The people themselves had changed. He could remember when all the farmers in this community were friendly toward each other; now they were continually having lawsuits. Their sons were either stingy or grasping, or extravagant and lazy, and they were always stirring up trouble.[34]

From the vantage point of France Claude realizes that

> there was no chance for the kind of life he wanted at home, where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down. He had begun to believe that the Americans were a people of shallow emotions . . . and if it was true, there was no cure for it. Life was so short that it meant nothing at all unless it were continually reinforced by something that endured; unless the shadows of individual existence came and went against a background that held together.[35]

He finds something that endures, a background that holds together, in the spectacle of thousands of anonymous and obscure farmboys and "roughnecks" and "low-brows" whose lives are suddenly given significance by the "fateful purpose" in which they are caught up.

For Claude—and, Cather wants to say, for all the Claude Wheelers—it is a "miracle," because it ensures the survival of the race, of civilization itself:

> No battle field or shattered country he had seen was as ugly as this world would be if men like his brother Bayliss controlled it altogether. Until the war broke out, he had supposed they did control it; his boyhood had been clouded and enervated by that belief. The Prussians had believed it, too, apparently. But the event had shown that there were a great many people left who cared about something else. . . . He knew the future of the world was safe; the careful planners would never be able to put it into a straight-jacket—cunning and prudence would never have it to themselves. . . . Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real source of power among men. As long as that was true, and now he knew it was true—he had come all this way to find out—he had no quarrel with Destiny.[36]

Cather could not and would not forget what she had seen, deny what she had known. The experience, the reality of the frontier that she had witnessed in Nebraska "gave her mind an abiding image of . . . what so few have associated with the pioneer tradition—of humanism,"[37] as Alfred Kazin has noted, a humanism that is not to be confused with what is currently called "humanistic" education which, as best as one can tell, has something to do with being "humane," "humanitarian"—kind, compassionate, benevolent. Rather, it is that rigorous system of thought to which *human* ideals and the perfection of the *human* personality are central and for which the values and standards of the past are thought of and used as guides. It is the source of what Kazin calls Cather's "spiritual clarity," not merely a matter of "cultivation and sensibility" but "of the imagination and the will."

It is humanism that is under attack in the Prussian march across Europe. It is humanism that is under attack in Bayliss Wheeler's ceaseless acquisition of land and things. And it is the attack on humanism that Ludwig Lewisohn alluded to in 1932 when he wrote of Cather, "She has been from the beginning concerned with the realities of the soul, which have been essential realities to her, and this is a great quality in her and in this age almost an heroic one."[39]

In *every* age but, perhaps most particularly, in ours. Recall the scene in Saul Bellow's 1970 novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in which Mr. Sammler, a European intellectual, a survivor of the Holocaust, is heckled off the lecture platform at Columbia University by militants shouting, "Why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He's dead. He can't come."[40] Bellow notes that Sammler is "not so much personally offended by the event as struck by the will to offend," by the "passion to be *real*," a "*real*" that is "brutal," a "*real*" that "accept[s] . . . excrement as a standard . . . together with the idea of sexual potency."[41] This "passion to be *real*"

makes Sammler feel "somewhat separated from the rest of the species, if not in some fashion severed—severed not so much by age as by preoccupations too different and remote."[42] This "passion to be *real*" makes no allowance for the possibility that "a human being, valuing himself for the right reasons," can achieve and restore "order, authority."[43]

In *One of Ours* a dissatisfied American farmboy finds right reasons to live by and die for where his culture has failed to provide them and, in so doing, achieves and restores order, not just in his name but in the name of that culture. That, finally, is why the novel—and Willa Cather—is held in such low esteem. Her insistence that there *are* right reasons to live by and even die for violates and rebukes the American metaphysic, the American passion to be *real*, which rejects such preoccupations as remote, rendering those who insist on them separate, if not severed, from the rest of the species.

In 1932 Ludwig Lewisohn predicted that, because "claims have been made for her which are childishly extravagant, . . . it is more than likely that in the inevitable reaction against indiscriminate touting the work of Willa Cather will suffer from undue neglect."[44] It has come to pass, but the touting was not indiscriminate and the claims were not childishly extravagant. The claims were made for her by an older generation, the generation which, as Kazin puts it, had "to make room for Hemingway." To that generation, Kazin says,

> her importance . . . was a simple and moving one: she was its consummate artist. To critics sated with the folksy satire or bitterness of the village revolt, she suggested a preoccupation with the larger motives; to critics weary of the meretriciousness of Cabell and Hergesheimer, she personified a poised integrity; to critics impatient with the unkempt naturalism of Dreiser and Anderson, she offered a purity of style.[45]

But the very qualities which made Cather important to one generation have made her anathema to subsequent ones. Her "purity of style" is interpreted as dull craftsmanship. Her "poised integrity" is interpreted as inhibition, evasion. Her "preoccupation with the large motives" is interpreted as a "turning away from reality." And yet what was true then is true now. To those

sated with satire and bitterness, weary of meretriciousness, impatient with the unkempt, Cather offers something better, something else. For those who believe that there *are* right reasons to live by and even die for and spend their lives searching for them, for those who believe that the life of the mind and the spirit *is* the essential reality, for those who believe order and authority need not be strait-jackets and can make life livable, Willa Cather is, like Hawthorne, like James, one of ours.

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NOTES

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15. Trilling, 8.
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19. Trilling, 11.
20. Trilling, 5.
21. Trilling, 9-10.
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26. Trilling, 15.
27. Wagenknecht, 322.
28. Frederick Hoffman, *The Modern Novel in America* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1967), 70.

29. Geismar, 186.
30. Lionel Trilling, "Willa Cather," *After the Lost Generation*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 56.
31. Wilson, 232.
32. Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Random House, 1971), 47-48.
33. Hoffman, *The Twenties*, 70.
34. Cather, 88-89.
35. Cather, 345.
36. Cather, 357.
37. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 184.
38. Kazin, 184.
39. Ludwig Lewisohn, *Expression in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 539.
40. Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1971), 42.
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THE EVANESCENCE OF WRIGHT MORRIS'S *THE HUGE SEASON*

RICHARD DAVERMAN

At the beginning of the present time sequence of Wright Morris's *The Huge Season* (1954), Peter Foley—a self-effacing, perpetually detached professor of dead languages—sees a picture of his old college roommate, Jesse Proctor, on the front page of the May 4, 1952 *New York Times*. Proctor is Professor Foley's opposite—a brash professional activist, a joiner of every movement—and because of those crusades, he is sitting before Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Upon seeing this photograph of Proctor, Foley throws into the fireplace his life's work: an unfinished, autobiographical novel that focuses on Foley's college experiences during the nineteen-twenties. To Foley, the twenties was the decade of heroes. Due to that heroic past, Foley considers himself "blighted." He is a captive of the past, a person unable to live his life in the present. And the present, the bourgeois nineteen-fifties, is itself a pale reflection of the past. Too late for the age of heroes, Foley lives in the age of "bullshit." By throwing his manuscript into the fireplace, Foley throws off the stultifying hold of the past. But what is the nature of his new understanding? And why does the picture of Proctor in front of the McCarthy committee provoke it? Wright Morris never explicitly answers these central questions of *The Huge Season.*

For many readers, frustrating loose ends like these are characteristic of Morris's fiction and represent flaws in his technique. I would like to argue, however, that this ambiguity—the thematic slipperyness at the center of each of his novels—provides their leitmotif. Too often, I think, readers mistake Morris's purposeful ambiguity for an absence of form. Morris does not want to re-

duce the chaos of life into neat formulas. He suggests that life cannot be described completely, each moment containing so much content that the "truth" of that moment is no less than the sum of each participant's impressions plus whatever they missed. Morris says: "Since I find nothing simple, why should I simplify?"[1] He tries to make his novels as multifarious as life itself. This theory does not, of course, justify the sloppy structuring of a novel. However, the evanescence of *The Huge Season*'s theme demands a correspondingly ineffable structure.

That structure is complicated. Past and present exist side by side through the novel. Morris alternates chapters entitled "Peter Foley" with those called "the Captivity." "The Captivity" bears a resemblance to Foley's unfinished manuscript, but it does not contain the pieces which Foley quotes from his work, so, apparently, they are not the same. "The Captivity" is a first person, autobiographical account of Foley's early years. It recounts the past and explains why the past blights Foley, giving us the material that the "Foley" sections contemplate. On the other hand, the "Foley" sequence is a third person narrative that details Foley's actions on May 5, 1952, the day after he sees Proctor's picture in the *Times*. Physically, Foley spends the day going to New York City to see Proctor, but more importantly, these chapters combine Foley's thoughts on the present with his reactions to the past. Both sequences work toward May 5, 1929, the day the twenties ended for Foley and Proctor, the symbolic center of the novel. The past sections move chronologically forward, the present sections remember backward. By understanding the acts of that day, Foley frees himself from the past. The picture of Proctor causes the epiphany, but Foley must travel to New York City to confirm its content. As the day progresses, Foley explains the captivity and the nature of its release.

To the characters of *The Huge Season*, the memory of the past is so powerful that the present day world of their senses seems unreal by comparison. This preoccupation with the real is reminiscent of Plato, as Wayne C. Booth has pointed out.[2] Morris dislikes the tendency of the modern age to identify the real with the material level of life. Like Plato, Morris sees another reality—the world of ideas—behind the world perceived through the senses. He believes that ideas change the perception of physical

reality, making thoughts just as important, or perhaps more important, than the empirical world. Often in Morris's fiction, thoughts attain a near-physical state; the characters—and the readers—think they perceive these ideas as tangible presences. To Foley and Proctor, the past is real, but the present is not. While ideas become increasingly palpable, the empirical world grows more and more shadowy, changing according to the observer, sometimes proving difficult to perceive at all. By using their presence as a symbol, Morris raises the ontological importance of ideas.

At certain points in the novel, however, the past—an idea—seems too weak to blight the characters of *The Huge Season*. Why don't they simply declare themselves free, forget the past, and begin living in the present? Morris uses the image of a magnet to describe them, comparing the continuing hold of the past to the lines of force which a magnet generates. The magnet's lines of force are invisible, yet their effect on the filings, arranging them into neat little rows, is clear. In the same way, the twenties myth holds Proctor, Foley, and their friends in its thrall, despite the fact that the force may not seem sufficiently powerful to the materialist observer. Like the power of the magnet or the hold of the past, the newspaper picture of Proctor in front of the McCarthy committee seems too weak to provoke Professor Foley's response. Why does he throw his manuscript into the fireplace? The reader must search through *The Huge Season* to establish the lines of force.

II

To Professor Foley and his activist friend Proctor, the past cannot be separated from their college roommate, Charles Gans Lawrence. Lawrence is the novel's Gatsby figure: rich, mysterious, attractive, the man in the advertisements who has, apparently, everything. Morris has long admired D. H. Lawrence, from whom this Lawrence evidently acquires a name and some characteristics. According to Morris, D. H. Lawrence lived his life in the "immediate present." He believed that good art would proceed from a well-lived life, and accordingly, he attempted to live sensually, not as an aesthete. Unlike many American authors, Lawrence's fictional interests did not turn from the confusing

cross currents of the here and now to a simplified view of the past or to the untrammeled purity of the wilderness.[3] The Lawrence of *The Huge Season* shares with his namesake the dedication to living fully and to questioning conventions of modern society. Referring to Charles Lawrence, Foley quotes from his own book: "'. . . every generation must write its own music, and if these notes have a sequence the age has a style'" (104).[4] However, Lawrence does not represent pure action; he is also dedicated to idea. Like Gatsby, Lawrence believes he can transform the world into his platonic conception of it. He is a man of action; yet his action proceeds from an incredibly strong will which refuses to acknowledge ordinary human limitations. He begins to play tennis only after a skiing accident left him with an elbow that would not bend. According to Foley, Lawrence ". . . killed himself with thought . . . being as good as dead once he had made the decision. The actual shooting little more than an afterthought" (291) . Every one of Lawrence's acts is done with a touch of elan that sets it, and him, off from the ordinary run of humanity. Lawrence plays tennis on a world-class level, but he plays the game without ground strokes: the ball never touches the ground on his side of the net. When he meets a player of superior skill, Lawrence refuses to alter his losing style and thus unnerves his opponent. He wins the match through sheer force of personality, not through technique. But in Lawrence—and here is where he becomes distinct from his namesake—Morris embodies a theme that he finds common in American literature: ". . . the tendency, long prevailing, to start well then peter out."[5] Already in his sophomore year, Lawrence is bored with tennis and college. He engages in a series of increasingly self-destructive acts, until he is fighting bulls in Spain.

Lawrence had read *Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*; both had a tremendous effect on him. He models himself on the Hemingway code hero, the person who trusts only physical sensations and basic emotions that are too strong to be articulated—in the imagery of the novel, the things that aren't bullshit. In many of Morris's novels, another novel floats between the lines. Because of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, the twenties are no longer virgin territory for fiction. For this reason, Morris writes about people

who are responding to the novels of the period rather than to the decade itself. Morris is not part of the contemporary absurdist movement, but as this reflexive technique shows, he occasionally exhibits some of their characteristics.

After being gored, Lawrence commits suicide, twenty-three years to the day before Proctor and the House Un-American Activities Committee appear on the front page of *The New York Times*. Lawrence's suicide cements his hold on the imaginations of Foley and Proctor. As Professor Foley says, "The single shot that killed Lawrence had crippled all of them" (18). Professor Foley seems more crippled than Proctor. He lacks any engagement with present day life. After Lawrence, nothing seems worth doing. Throughout his life, Foley never dates, never engages in sports, and worst of all, never publishes. In Europe, he half-heartedly sends postcards to the girl back home, as if that will take care of sex. When his phone connection is cut before his plans are finalized, Foley muses: "He was free, he realized to let the matter drop or to show up later. He was not committed. A state of mind that came to him naturally" (82).

Unlike Foley, Proctor is active, but all of his actions are open imitations of Lawrence. In college, Proctor begins writing a novel in which the major character is a thinly veiled version of Lawrence. Proctor knows that he is, in the terminology of the novel, a "shit-heel," because he uses Lawrence for his own purposes, but he proudly says, "I'm going to write the greatest book a shit-heel ever wrote" (181). He calls the novel "Querencia," after the place in the bullring where the bull feels safe. Proctor quickly records Lawrence's past and catches up with his present. At that point, Proctor is stymied. After Lawrence is gored, Proctor knows that the Lawrence character must die, that any other ending would be false to the rest of his novel. But Proctor is frightened of his growing power over Lawrence, and rightly so. He is afraid that Lawrence may take a hint where none is intended. And for that reason, the novel remains unfinished. As Morris says in *The Territory Ahead*, putting down the facts straight, without the intellectual intervention of the author, is a well-established American tradition. For Morris, this lack of thought constitutes an intellectual and artistic abdication. He feels that technique must shape the raw material, giving

it form, making it coherent. By themselves, facts never explain the world: they must be ordered through technique to create a statement.[6] Foley and Proctor write their novels hoping that the meaning of the past will be implicit in the facts. Like anyone reading their books, Foley and Proctor must get to the ends of their works in order to find out what they are about. No wonder the books remain unfinished. After Lawrence dies, Proctor takes up the active life that he perceives to be the outstanding characteristic of Lawrence's short, heroic existence: he becomes involved with, in turn, the Communist Party, selling canes at the World's Fair, the Civil War in Spain, and smuggling Jews into America during World War II. Proctor is active but frenetically so, as he takes up one cause after another, always searching for some purpose.

Throughout the novel, Morris characterizes Proctor as a martyr, a person who seeks self-slaughter rather than success. In front of McCarthy, in the scene reported by *The New York Times*, Proctor makes the committee laugh. Asked if he was a member of the Party, Proctor responds:

> "Back at that time, he replied, he had been a very good American. A good American had to believe in something good. The Party had been it. It had been something in which a man could believe.
>
> Did he mean to say he was no longer a good American?
>
> If he was, he answered, he wouldn't be here.
>
> In Russia perhaps?
>
> No, just in jail, he had replied." (12)

To Foley, this sounds exactly like the Proctor he met as a freshman in college, the person who mocked his own Jewish heritage. In the novel's climactic scene, Proctor reveals that the accident in which he shot himself in the foot, ruining his career as a track star, was not an accident at all. To no one's surprise, Proctor admits he shot himself purposely. He wanted to show Lawrence, he said, ". . . a Jew who could give it up" (274). In each case, his martyr's response allows Proctor to escape the risk of failure by quitting at the outset. Before McCarthy, Proctor finesses the committee with a laugh. His action will keep him out of the fight, and it will not cause change. To his friends, Proctor confesses that, given more courage, he would have shot McCarthy.

But he allows none of that anger to surface. In playing his usual martyr's role, Proctor indulges his tendency toward premeditated ineffectuality.

Foley recognizes the same impulse within himself. At the end of *The Huge Season*, he thinks back to his own attempt at action—a failure of course—when he wished to register as a conscientious objector to the draft. His lengthy, philosophic appeal was never heard over the loud, irregular beat of his heart. Because of his heart murmur, he was rejected by the draft before he ever had a chance to resist. This leads Foley to decry the urge to stay uninvolved, saying sarcastically:

> The doing of anything led to action, all action was blended with evil, but one could *be* good, one could only be good by sitting on one's hands. Otherwise they would get bloodied in an earthly, temporal fight of some sort. Settling nothing. For what was ever settled here on earth? (300)

Here, Foley seems to be a disciple of Lawrence, as though, like Proctor, he is fascinated with action. Nevertheless, he also states that action by itself is not enough—the epiphany brought on by the picture of Proctor in front of the McCarthy committee and confirmed by his visit to New York City, the major insight of the novel:

> Did they lack conviction? No, they had conviction. What they lacked was intention. They could shoot off guns, at themselves, leap from upper-floor windows by themselves, or take sleeping pills to quiet the bloody cries of the interior. But they would not carry this to the enemy. That led to action, action to evil, blood on the escutcheon of lily-white Goodness, and to the temporal kingdom rather than the eternal heavenly one. That led, in short, where they had no intention of ending up. The world of men here below. The good-awful mess men had made of it. (299-300)

In *The Huge Season*, action by itself is not enough. It must be judged together with the intention which motivates it, an intention which must seek to engage life with the hope of changing it. Foley quotes with approval the letter Héloïse wrote to Abélard:

" 'Not the result of the act but the disposition of the doer makes the crime: justice does not consider what happens, but through what intent it happens' " (273). Proctor and Foley had admired Lawrence's level of activity; Proctor attempted to imitate it, Foley was rendered catatonic by it. However, upon seeing the picture of Proctor in front of McCarthy, Foley perceives that the motive behind Proctor's martyrdom and Lawrence's suicide are essentially the same: the refusal to involve themselves with life in an attempt to make changes. Furthermore, they are repeating themselves rather than responding to the present in ways that are new. Both reasons are significant.

Given Morris's platonism, activity is the level of observable reality, the level which the materialist considers real. Intention corresponds to the platonic level of idea which suffuses action and changes it. Here is one example from the novel: in the course of Foley's everyday life, he often runs across a tramp. At first the tramp troubles Foley because he "seemed to have no pride" (26), but as Foley continues to see the tramp, he comes to a grudging admiration of the man: even at the laundromat, watching his clothes spin behind the glass door of the machine, the tramp seems at ease, especially in comparison to the harried housewives who surround him. The words that Foley uses to describe the tramp are "intact" and "self-contained," the same phrases that he uses to describe Lawrence upon his arrival at college. In contrast, Foley, Proctor, and the later Lawrence skew their activities by attempting to copy somebody else. Lawrence, for example, accustomed to the flattering attention of his roommates, begins to imitate himself. He loses his self-possession and becomes dependent upon the regard of others.

In this, Lawrence anticipates Gordon Boyd of *The Field of Vision* (1956) and *Ceremony in Lone Tree* (1960). Like Boyd, Lawrence possesses a great deal of promise when young. People flock around him because of the aura of excitement which he creates; he makes it seem as though "anything might happen," that the prosaic ordinariness of life might at some point be completely thrown over. But, like Lawrence, Boyd crosses some invisible line of the mind and becomes a parody of himself. Boyd attempts to fail, but since he knows only the clichés of failure, his failure never becomes complete. To the casual observer,

Lawrence's bullfighting is all of a piece with his earlier exploits; to the more experienced Lawrence-watcher, his acts are desperate attempts to repeat former successes. He no longer tries to do anything new. Instead, he tries to create the impression of freshness, while people who know him well perceive that he is copying himself in increasingly self-destructive acts. Again, both imitation and self-destruction are important. By committing suicide, Lawrence attempts the gesture which will transfix his audience rather than the authentic act which engages life meaningfully. He joins what Foley calls, "The steady erosion of the liberal mind. Winant, Matthiessen, Forrestal . . ." (290-91). For their parts, Proctor and Foley, both in their respective ways, imitate Lawrence, Proctor through action, Foley by wearing Lawrence's clothes. It is not the actions themselves which condemn these two, but the desire to imitate someone else. The level of intention—an idea—is just as important as the act itself.

Because of Morris's platonism, the figure of Lawrence creates some confusion among readers of the novel. Lawrence takes himself out of time and becomes the eternal figure admired by his followers; therefore, he is considered to be a positive figure by many critics—although usually with some reservation.[7] There are many things in *The Huge Season* that, like Lawrence, are "out of time"; in fact, the contrast betwen the fixed and the fluid is one of the dominant motifs of the novel. A picture of Lawrence playing tennis, for example, hangs over Foley's bed. It is the moment stopped, frozen for eternity. Only the ball is in focus, its trade name clearly visible, while everything around it is blurred. Similarly, in Paris, Foley buys a post card picture of the Seine, the shadows of the people walking by the river preserved forever, the Seine stopped in its movement, even though, as Foley knows, it looks exactly the same today while being entirely different. Thus, Foley juxtaposes the mutable present moment with the eternal. Lawrence, photographs, and the past itself have one thing in common: they are finished and complete. The arrangement of their parts is known. They can be contemplated—like art. As Foley tells his students, art has an immortal status that transcends the mutable:

> Once a work of art existed, he had told them, once it had been imagined, truly created, it was beyond the reach of vandalism. . . . The outward form could be shattered, become smoke and ashes, but the inward form was radioactive, and the act of disappearance was the transformation of the dark into the light. Metamorphosis. The divine power of art. (110).

The important words here are "imagined" and "truly created." By being imagined, these works enter the mind of the human race and are passed down through succeeding generations. By losing their physical properties, they gain power. But, these works must be imaginative, not copies of something else.

While in New York City, Foley, trying to kill a little time, watches a Disney film entitled *God's Half-Acre*, a film about "the symbolic zero of Hiroshima." Despite the tremendous devastation which the radioactive cloud portends, it does not seem so horrible to Foley: he calls it a "miraculous birth" and compares it to a "flowering plant" (168). Morris often uses imagery of heat and light, destruction and creation. All instances of heat do not create light. Conversely, out of destruction something creative can grow: "In the light of this blast, in this moment of revelation, they would turn from . . . [the past] . . . and take refuge in self-slaughter, or the ultimate truth" (169). Again, heat or destruction are not good in themselves; they only make a confrontation with "ultimate truth" possible. Lawrence's suicide is not the awesome act it seems; it is heat without light. It continues to have power over the minds of Proctor and Foley because it is part of the past; thus, it is known and has been simplified. Lawrene's suicide does not have the power of "truly created" art because it is not imaginative.

During his visit to New York City, Foley remembers an extraordinary vignette that revolves around this theme. It involves his cat, back in Philadelphia, and a chipmunk. The cat catches the chipmunk, and Foley, expecting it to be dead, carefully extracts it from the cat's mouth. But the chipmunk is only playing dead and, at the instigation of a light cuff from the cat, begins a dance which allows the chase to begin again. Foley stops this chase by locking the cat inside, giving the chipmunk a chance to escape. But the chipmunk, apparently, does not want that

opportunity. Throughout the summer, the cat and chipmunk find each other.[8] Even though the chipmunk seems suicidal, Foley considers the animal to be a positive evolutionary force. Foley calls its behavior a mutation, similar in some ways to the audacity which people like the early Lawrence show: "[The incident with the chipmunk] led Foley to look into Darwin . . . and to spend nights brooding on a creative evolution of his own. Founded on what? Well, founded on audacity. The unpredictable behavior that lit up the darkness with something new" (167). The notion of audacity at times causes action, especially nonconformist action, to be an end in itself in Morris's work. For example, the drunken sailor at the novel's close plays his trumpet in an archetypal "I am," an artless blast that condemns Foley's conformity. But as Foley continues his thoughts about the chipmunk, he shows that audacious action is good only when it aids survival: "If what Nature had in mind was survival, Man has ceased to be at the heart of Nature and had gone off on a suicidal impulse of his own. And Foley's chipmunk, among others, had got wind of it" (168). Even though the chipmunk is a captive—like Foley and Proctor—he engages life in order to continue, not obliterate it, thus providing the antithesis to Lawrence.

In *The Huge Season*, the empirical level—in this case, the level of observable actions—must be judged in conjunction with the idea which suffuses those actions—the desire to engage life imaginatively. Foley says: "You couldn't call a man a captive who had lost all interest in escape" (10). He doesn't need to repeat the past, but he does not need to run from it either. His life will consist of imaginative reformulations of his experience. If he is truly alive in his imagination, he need not be active physically. Foley must, however, live his life in authentic response to the moment and not cheapen it through imitative or suicidal gestures. His response must be new—it cannot copy something else—and it must be motivated by a healthy intention—it cannot seek self-destruction.

At the end of *The Huge Season*, Morris describes the new Foley:

> How explain that Lawrence, in whom the sun rose, and Proctor, in whom it set, were now alive in Foley, a man scarcely alive himself. Peter Foley, with no powers

> to speak of, had picked up the charge that such powers gave off—living in the field of the magnet, he had been magnetized. Impermanent himself, he had picked up this permanent thing. He was hot, he was radioactive, and the bones of Peter Foley would go on chirping in a time that had stopped. No man had given a name to this magnet, nor explained these imperishable lines of force, but they were there, captive in Peter Foley—once a captive himself. (306)

In this passage, Morris draws together some of the imagistic patterns of the novel—permanence, radioactivity, magnetism, captivity—all things that have seemed negative throughout *The Huge Season*. But Foley has transformed them into positive forces. Morris does not say how this will manifest itself. But it seems likely—and ironic—that he might finally write the novel that he threw away in *The Huge Season's* early chapters. Now he knows how to write it truly, imaginatively; he will no longer attempt to salvage the facts, but will arrange the facts so that the novel is a finished work of art.

In many ways, *The Huge Season* is a difficult novel. The character motivations, the elaborate time structure that sets past and present off against each other, and the subtle nature of Foley's new understanding do not present themselves immediately. The concept of "intention," however, is no less airy than the novel's structure. It operates on a plane far less palpable than the physical. Just as Foley must look beyond action to understand intention, so the reader must look beyond appearance in order to understand why the picture of Proctor before McCarthy changes Professor Foley completely even though no external change has taken place. *The Huge Season* is not a poorly motivated novel, nor is it structured haphazardly. To give "intention," the idea behind the visible, the correct fictional treatment, the structure of *The Huge Season* forces the reader to look beyond the visible to see that Professor Foley's change is entirely in his imagination. He can continue living exactly as he did before, but his new conception of the world will transform each act, making his life "real."

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NOTES

1. Wright Morris, "*One Day*: November 22, 1963–November 22, 1967," in *Afterwards: Novelists on their Novels*, ed., Thomas McCormick (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 26.
2. Wayne C. Booth, "The Two Worlds in the Fiction of Wright Morris," *Sewanee Review*, 65 (Summer 1957), 375-99.
3. Morris makes these comments in "The Immediate Present," *The Territory Ahead* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1958), pp. 223-228.
4. This and all subsequent citation refer to *The Huge Season* (New York: The Viking Press, 1954).
5. *The Territory Ahead*, p. xiii.
6. *The Territory Ahead*, pp. 3-12.
7. For example, David Madden, *Wright Morris* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 111, and Wayne C. Booth, p. 379.
8. Morris also uses this story for a non-fictional account entitled "Nature Since Darwin," *Esquire*, 52 (November 1959), pp. 64-70.

CONSCIOUSNESS REFRACTED: PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE IMAGINATION IN THE WORKS OF WRIGHT MORRIS

JOSEPH J. WYDEVEN

Photographs, perhaps more than the products of other artistic media, defy generalization. We think we understand, or have grasped, a portion of a civilization or a culture, or the general world view of a particular photographer—and then another photograph comes our way, we turn the page, we see another exhibit. Perhaps this is true because photography by its very nature is equipped to exploit the adventitious and the circumstantial. A novelist or an artist in oil or water color, although he may bring no more of his consciousness to bear on the final product, yet must shape recalcitrant materials so that they reveal his vision. The intentionality of the aesthetic is somehow more convoluted in photography because in essence the camera already begins with the given world in which we live our experiences. Part of that aesthetic derives from the fact that the camera lens is a technological imitation of a living organism. The dialectic of the camera eye and human purposes creates an ambiguity—an ambiguity which finds its peculiar way into the final product which is the photograph-as-art.

This ambiguity has been the source of inspiration and inspired theory in the works of Wright Morris, novelist and photographer. Morris, in many of his works, deliberately mediates between visual and expository media; at a fundamental level critics have remarked that his prose is visual in intent and focus; on the other hand, Morris has himself remarked that photographs need captions to be thoroughly understood in any historical sense. Thus his novels rely on visual effects—the things Morris makes his

readers *see*—and his photographs have almost always been combined with prose texts.

It is useful to break Wright Morris' concern with photography into four stages. Born in 1910, Morris first used the camera in 1933, on a *wanderjahr* in Europe. The photographs taken were apparently "straight" and independent of any complex artistic intention. The second stage began a few years later, when Morris conceived the idea of combining short prose texts with photographs. He thought of his written texts as "condensed prose pieces, lyrical in nature, in which I attempted to capture a moment in time, or the verbal equivalent of a visible impression . . . a species of snapshots."[1] Morris's first national publication was "The Inhabitants" (1940), a photo-text experiment with photographs and prose texts facing each other across the page. In his introduction Morris protested against the use of photographs merely as illustrations, and he argued that in his own work "Two separate mediums are employed for two distinct views. Only when refocussed in the mind's eye will the third view result."[2] In 1946 Morris published the book-length *The Inhabitants*, a modified and extended version of the earlier work. Two years later Morris published *The Home Place* (1948), a striking photo-text novel in which the photographs were coupled with narrative. The photo-text novel experiment was not repeated in *The World in the Attic* (1949) because of the difficulty experienced by the audience in making the two media cohere: the narrative time-flow seemed contradictory to the photographic "still-life."[3]

The third stage, beginning in 1954, has to do primarily with priorities. Morris virtually withdrew from active photography, apparently because his career as a novelist was taking precedence. Readers of the novels of the early fifties, nevertheless, will recognize that elements of the visual enter strongly into both the content and the form of those books: the static panning "camera" in the descriptions of *The Works of Love* (1952), the "photographic" properties of the mirror in the early pages of *The Deep Sleep* (1953), and later the relativity of vision amounting to an epistemology in *The Field of Vision* (1956). After 1954 Morris did little public work with the camera. There were two photo-texts published later, but *God's Country and My People* (1968) added no new photos to those already published in book form,

and *Love Affair: A Venetian Journal* (1972) used color photographs, taken as snapshots for "fireside, nostalgic viewing"[4] and not initially intended for publication.

The fourth and final stage is Morris's renewal of interest in photographic theory and what may be called the metaphysics of photography. In the wake of the hubbub over Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, Morris has contributed some important cautionary notes on the culture which all but absorbs photographs, often without digesting their true significance.[5]

Given this development, it is apparent that Morris's work in photography has been almost unique: amid the welter of academic and professional discussions of photographic practice and theory, and more important, of the relationships between photography and language, Morris is virtually alone in combining language and photography in carefully planned and innovative ways. Few other contemporary writers' careers have been so involved with the theory and practice of the visual as a means of knowledge and a spur to the imagination. Photographers are notoriously unwilling to discuss theory; and while many novelists strive for visual descriptive effects, few incorporate visual concerns into their work in fundamentally epistemological ways. Morris, that is, in both his novels and his photography, is preeminently interested in the *ways* in which we see; and novels like *The Deep Sleep, The Field of Vision, The Man Who Was There* (1945), and *The Fork River Space Project* (1977) deal directly with the theme of vision and its potential for further imaginative creation within human life.

To approach Morris's photographs after reading his novels is to re-experience, almost as if through *déjà vu*, something of the lives of his characters. The photographs enrich that experience, giving it an anchor in reality, so that the photographs and the prose reinforce each other. This sounds like a banal, obvious statement, but the point is that Morris understands how easily we take experience—objects, environments, stray artifacts presented to consciousness—for granted, and the effect of his work is to shock us into new recognitions. The photographs are particularly important in this regard, for they are speechless, and they confront us with a world of the everyday which in normal

life we have been trained *not* to see because the objects within the photographs are mundane, out of style, even verging on the obsolete. These photographs—and this is surely Morris's intention—take us, once we allow them sway over us, into the realm of the sacred—in Mirceau Eliade's word, into the hierophantic. As Morris told Peter Bunnell, many of the objects before his camera serve as "secular icons," having "a holy meaning they seek to give out."[6]

Morris's photographs have long puzzled literary critics who have appreciated the novels and have felt the need to come to terms with the photo-texts as well.[7] On the other hand, perhaps because of Morris's insistence that photographs need words if they are to tell us very much, few critics of photography have commented on that body of work.[8] There are important exceptions, of course, but on the whole there has been little work done on Morris's photography which moves beyond the appreciative. In the remainder of this essay I want to take one or two steps further, first (in most cases) by severing the relations between photo and text and then by using others of Morris's texts to clarify what I believe to be the artist's intentions in the photography. What this entails is a kind of typology of artistic motivations, at least a clarification of some of Morris's statements in relation to some specific photographic texts. I want to break these motivations into three categories, according to Morris' interests in, 1) "the thing itself," 2) the idea of "equivalence" in photographic practice, and 3) "metaphotography." It should be noted that these categories are hardly self-contained, and further, that they are simply heuristic in nature. Individual photographs may be inserted into other categories than the ones I employ. My intention is not to be definitive, but rather to further critical thought about the photographs which have intrigued readers and viewers for so many years.

"The Thing Itself"

Morris, surely, is not deceived by this term, and on the whole there are probably better ones. But the term has some validity, if only because of its status historically in terms of ontology, and second because of its recurrence in photographic journals and discussions of theory. "The thing-in-itself," says Morris, "has

my respect and admiration. To let it speak for itself is a maximum form of speech."[9] In photographic practice we have the example of Edward Weston, who spoke of "the thing itself" found in the viewfinder as a kind of metaphysical presence within the object, the thing-seen-in-its-essence. Weston wrote in his *Day Books*: "To see the *Thing Itself* is essential: the Quintessence revealed direct without the fog of impressionism—the casual noting of a superficial phase, or transitory mood. This then: to photograph a rock, have it look like a rock, but be *more* than a rock.—Significant presentation—not interpretation."[10]

"The Thing Itself" also recurs as one of five criteria isolated by John Szarkowski to distinguish between photographic methods. In Szarkowski's usage, the "thing itself" refers more or less to straight photography: "The first thing that the photographer learned was that photography dealt with the actual; he had not only to accept this fact, but to treasure it; unless he did, photography would defeat him." However, the photographer came to understand "that the factuality of his pictures, no matter how convincing and arguable, was a different thing than the reality itself."[11] The argument is often made that the camera *cannot* depict "the thing itself," precisely because by framing the object and removing it from the world of real experience, it creates rather an abstraction, removed from life. But the argument can be turned about: by removing the object from time and allowing continuous focus and frame, the camera frees us to see the object as it looks (at least from one side), removed from subjective obstacles to comprehension. Some readers will recognize in this argument something of the viewpoint of phenomenology: to see into the *essence* of something is to bracket off the personal and reduce subjective distractions—to remove the "obviousness" of the object in order to see it with fresh eyes. This—or something similar to it—I want to argue, is the intent of some of Wright Morris's photographs. It is necssary only to add that Morris makes no claim that the object is "real" or realistic in photographic, visual terms.

There are many photographs by Morris which fall into this general category, and I have selected three which may be called "institution" shots, for they picture for us the architectural places in which lives are conducted within the human community.

What these three photographs have in common is the fact that all three are directly frontal in nature, with the photographer, in Morris's words, "face to face to the fact."[12] In two of the three, the structures are dead-center, clearly the point of focus. But more interesting, perhaps, is the fact that all three give the illusion of depthlessness—an illusion which reduces the "realism" of the objects and renders them in nearly surreal terms. The starkness of each of the structures is emphasized through the photographic technique whereby the sky is darkened and given the status of a backdrop, cold and flat behind the structures. The frontal stance provides us with no inkling of what the structures look like from the side. In "Wellfleet, White House,"[13] the surreal quality is further manifested through the tree branches running diagonally across the front of the house, appearing nearly as silhouettes across the stark white of the house. This is a photographic effect often seen in Morris's photographs—the sharp and vivid contrast which emphasizes sheer black and white values and reduces detail in the dark areas.

The objects in these three photographs appear to have no substance or body; they could be flat-planed *pictures* of objects rather than objects. One may attribute this quality, perhaps, to Morris' attitude when facing the objects with the naked eye and the technological lens. He took these photographs for a reason, after all—and that reason may be deduced from his 1945 novel *The Man Who Was There*. In that novel Morris writes of Agee Ward, the man of the title who is conspicuous by his absence, but more important by his *presence* in the objects he leaves behind. Agee Ward had slowly come to understand that he had an overwhelming need to *remember* his past by *describing* those objects of his past through paintings. He leaves one of his "canvasses" unfinished, for instance, because he can't remember the correct posture of the objects:

> One of the hardest pieces to fit has been the pump. It has twice been in—and once erased out—for either the barn is much too close or the pump is much too far away. This problem may have more to do with the weight of a full pail of water—*fetched* water—than it has with the actual position of the pump. The only solution to this was to draw both pumps in, reconsider the matter, and then

> take one pump out. This he did, but the pump that he left was where no sensible pump would be. And the one he took out was the pump in which he couldn't believe.[14]

Memory, that is, confuses the *felt* pump with the one which makes visual sense.

In later years Morris has expressed his interest in the "repossession" of objects through the photographic lens. Once he has the photograph, he says, he no longer needs the object itself.[15] This is, in his words, an act of "salvage," a motive to help the world remember what it is busily discarding. The epigraph to *God's Country and My People* is from Samuel Beckett: "Let me try and explain. From things about to disappear I turn away in time. To watch them out of sight, no, I can't do it."

For Morris, then, the photographs I am distinguishing as contained in the "Thing Itself" category are direct "descriptions" of things found in the world. The emphasis—as in the grain elevator, "GANO"—is on the structure itself, not on its relation to its environment (although the sky is crucial to all three of the images by reason of background spaciousness which dramatically pushes the object into the surface foreground). These are objects which, framed and centered as they are, call for ontological recognition, not necessarily as real objects in the world, but surely as objects which have validity in the imagination: the objects, that is, are *of* the real world, but they transcend their status as "real" in that world by showing us something of the play of the imagination upon these materials. Photographs in this vein would appear to be ambivalent—even ambiguous—statements about the contrast between the object existing in the world and the object as found and focused upon imaginatively. The "Thing Itself," that is, has been taken over by the imagination, the resultant image covered with a kind of dreamlike aura, a product finally of the mind and of the chemical bath.

The Photograph as Equivalent

The concept of the "equivalent" has long been part of the history of American photographic practice and theory, particularly in the works of Alfred Stieglitz and Minor White. Stieglitz, who had deliberately turned to clouds as subjects in order to

counter criticisms that he "influenced" his human subjects to get desired results, spoke of these cloud photographs as "*equivalents* of my most profound life experience, my basic philosophy of life."[16] The "equivalents" were attempts to reduce the *expected* photographic content so that the viewer looked only at what lay within the frame itself: the "extraneous pictorial factors intervening between those who look at the pictures and the pictures themselves" were lessened and the audience was free to look precisely at what was there.[17] The photographs became nearly abstract in nature, historical materials having been deliberately extracted. It is significant that Wright Morris, too, began with cloud photographs, although he was led quickly to move beyond them to forms more immediately recognizable in the world at large.[18]

The abstract nature of the "equivalent" has been seized upon by Minor White as the ideal occasion for "meditation," with the photograph the focal point for the viewer's quite personal response and mental activity. For White, such photographs involve a kind of mystical transaction between the image and the viewer, with the photograph a visual metaphor for a state of mind or an emotion. He thinks of the "equivalent," it would seem, as a visual counterpart to T. S. Eliot's objective correlative, at its most successful an image which can call up similar associations in the minds of different viewers. White has experimented with many types of photographs in this mode, but very rarely has utilized straight images, perhaps feeling—like Stieglitz—that pictorial content is often too distractive.[19]

Wright Morris's photographs often have certain similarities to those of Minor White in the"meditative" vein—with the important difference that Morris deals almost exclusively with the given world, not in the abstract, but in the straight manner, often with the camera directly confronting the objects of the world through his typical "frontal stance." Morris's photographs in the "equivalent" manner can be identified largely through their anecdotal content. Whereas the "Thing Itself" photographs urge a kind of aesthetic penetration on the part of the viewer, the "equivalents" have an interest in interpretation, the materials laid out within the frame distinctly in relation to each other. Often the photographs deal with a dualism of one kind or an-

other; certainly the three I have selected as illustrations for this category give themselves to such interpretation. We may find Stieglitz useful once again in coming to terms with Morris; of his "equivalents" Stieglitz says: "My photographs are a picture of the chaos in the world, and of my relationship to that chaos. My prints show *the world's constant upsetting of man's equilibrium, and his eternal battle to reestablish it.*"[20] Wright Morris's "Baltimore Steps, Painted and Unpainted" and the photograph of the houses with the cracked concrete in the foreground are deliberately dualistic in nature and must be interpreted in terms of the ongoing human endeavor to combat the forces of nature in the interests of civilization and culture. "Baltimore Steps" is quietly dramatic through the technique of juxtiposition. The structure shown in the approximately right two-thirds is in need of repair; it is the victim of poor maintenance over an extended period of time. The brick and the wooden steps are weather-beaten, in contrast to the carefully painted steps and the distinctive brick of the structure to the left. Clearly, part of Morris's "meaning" here is that human nurture is required to combat the weathering forces of nature left to themselves. The photograph as a whole has much to tell us about degrees of pride in ownership and the deliberate steps taken in the interest of maintaining human culture through the upkeep of human dwellings. Thus, the photograph is an "equivalent" in that it draws attention, specifically and concretely, to the struggle between natural and cultural values.

The next photograph (Number 5), which appears in published book form only in *God's Country and My People*, makes a similar kind of statement, although perhaps a bit more dramatically. It deliberately employs what might be called a split-frame technique, with the two "halves" of the photograph held in juxtaposition. (Similar photographs, both well-known, which use this technique are Stieglitz's "The Steerage," in which the two decks of a ship are visually separated into a social class hierarchy; and more dramatically, Eugene Smith's photograph of a corpse being shunted from the side of a ship into the sea: the photo is divided diagonally in terms of both shade and structure, the body a blur of white in sharp contrast to the darkness of the ship and the water which lies below.)[21] In the Morris photo-

graph the dualism of nature and culture is once again apparent, the upper approximate two-thirds representing the world of men and women through the structures which nurturing civilization has erected for their use, the bottom third showing the forces of nature at work in the process of undermining that civilization. Nature there—again through normal weathering processes—is seen to be eating away at the concrete which shores up the houses and keeps them from sinking into the ground—from whence, the picture suggests, they came. Reader-viewers of Morris will remember other photographs in this vein—in one case, of a house apparently being pulled down into the eroded earth; in another of a planed wooden board being reclaimed by the earth.[22]

Yet another example of "equivalence" is the well-known photograph "Uncle Harry, Entering Barn" which concludes *The Home Place*. This is one of the rare occasions when human beings are found in Morris's photographic work, and this is characteristic of the type in that we get no glimpse of the face, and thus individuality is reduced for the sake of a more general comment. That is, the old man *represents* something; his own particular identity is not at issue. Here Uncle Harry enters the darkness of the barn through an archetypal doorway. The message need not be belabored; the quotation across the page in *The Home Place* is sufficient:

> Out here you wear out, men and women wear out, the sheds and the houses, the machines wear out, and every ten years you put a new seat in the cane-bottomed chair. Every day it wears out, the nap wears off the top of the Axminster. The carpet wears out, but the life of the carpet, the Figure, wears in. The holy thing, that is, comes naturally. Under the carpet, out here, is the floor. After you have lived your own life, worn it out, you will die your own death and it won't matter. It will be all right. It will be ripe, like the old man.[23]

In summary, the three photographs I have selected as "equivalents" have in common an important element of interpretation, founded on what may be termed archetypal responses to human experience. The viewer looking closely can see that the photographs mean to speak to the issue of human involvement in natural processes, sometimes in terms of a direct dualism, some-

times merely through the element of experience generalized in archetypal, and therefore universal, terms.

The Photograph as "Metaphotograph"

What I am terming metaphotography in Morris's work is a decided penchant for the self-conscious use of the camera to comment *on* photographs as photographs or to draw attention to the photographer, though not always directly, in the production of the final framed image. The clearest example of this is "Model-T with California Top," showing Morris's shadow in the lower right foreground. This is a photograph, as Morris tells us, he rejected as being inappropriate to his intentions when taking it. It was only after several years that he accepted the result for what it clearly showed.[24] According to John Szarkowski, the photograph shows an object having its picture taken; the inclusion of the photographer within the frame adds a ceremonial significance: *now* the photograph is one of an interaction between automobile and photographer, and the Ford appears posed and proper as an object with a personality of its own.[25] Clearly there is a difference when the photographer's shadow appears, for that shadow adds an epistemological comment that would be lacking if the car were shown alone. The camera itself becomes an important element in this photograph, for its presence informs us that we are looking at a *means* of knowledge.

Another photograph, "Front Room Reflected in Mirror," shows another typical Morris interest—in mirrors, the mirror being "one of the durable and inexhaustible metaphors we use in the interpretation of what we think constitutes reality."[26] Like the camera, the mirror functions as a kind of lens, this one reflecting back the objects of past experience. We know that the photographer is present precisely because we are led to look for him: he *must* be there, just beyond the mirror's frame. In his 1953 novel *The Deep Sleep* Morris has his character Paul Webb looking into a mirror: "So he had looked at the bed, then he had turned and faced the mirror on the dresser, where everything in the room seemed to be gathered, as if seen through a lens."[27] Morris makes much of this relationship in the opening pages of the novel, and

the mirror, like a lens, becomes a deliberate instrument for the attainment of knowledge and clarity of thought.

Similarly, in this photograph, the mirror calls attention to itself and the objects in the photographer's immediate environment. We might say that the mirror functions in much the same way as a camera, focusing on historical materials and framing them in the "viewfinder." Looking at the photograph we are led to considerations of time similar to those to which photography itself has historically addressed itself: we are left with the paradox that we are at *this* moment involved in time already long past. The photographs on the wall and table, of course, reinforce this view, but what seems most interesting is that by framing the mirror within the rectangle of the whole image, Morris moves us another step back into past time. Thus time is spatialized—and that on several levels, and one recognizes another of Morris's concerns in his fiction. In *Cause for Wonder,* for example, Howe meditates: "Due to certain accidents of my boyhood I feel that time exists in space, not unlike the graphic charts that hang on the walls of up-to-date schoolrooms. On the charts the past lies below, in marble-like stratifications. . . ."[28]

Perhaps the most interesting of the three selected for this category is the photograph of a snapshot showing a family standing in front of a house. The snapshot is tacked up on what appears to be the outer wall of a human dwelling. Again there are several dimensions of time present in the image as a whole, the first the time *within* the snapshot which obtained when it was taken, the second the time during which the snapshot was attached to the wall which forms the background, the third the moment when the photographer snapped the image as we find it now—and finally, the time of our present act whereby *we* view the entire image.

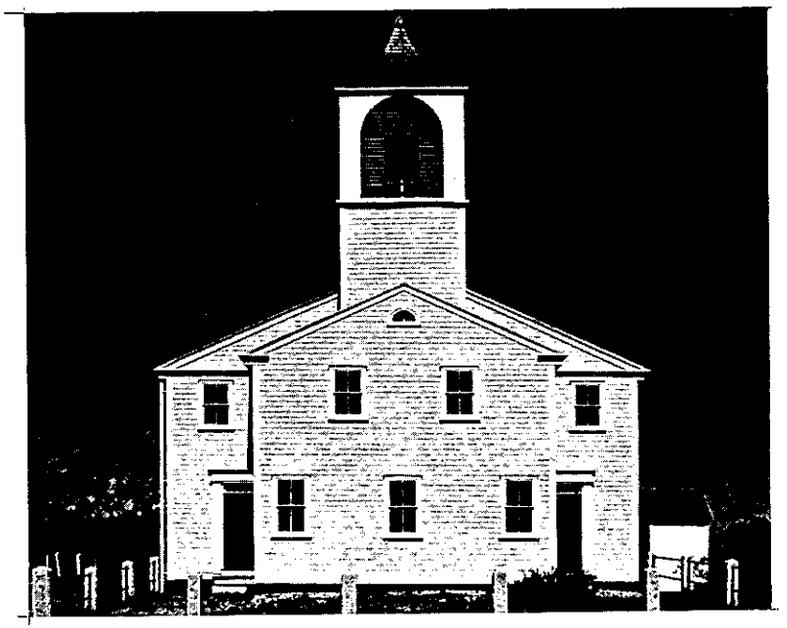
The participants in the snapshot are lined up before the house to have their picture taken. In the novel *The Home Place,* in which this photograph appears, Morris makes much of the ritual in which the family members comment, apparently, on the quality of this snapshot's endurance over a number of years. The snapshot is, as these characters remark, faded. One character, Clara, remarks, "Most of us dead and gone, think it would be fadin'! . . . Same as me an' you are fadin'."[29] As a novelist, that is, Morris

adds yet another dimension of time, that in which the novel's participants deliberately view their lives in the past as given in a still image. And we, the readers of *The Home Place*, are onlookers bringing our own memories to the interactions between characters in the text, the photograph, and the content of the photograph distanced through visual space as well as time. This is a complex series of events, and it speaks clearly to Morris's "metaphotographical" interests. Photographs are a means of knowledge, but that knowledge is not easily acquired, and words are necessary to explain the complexities of what we see. What Morris impresses upon us is that the art of seeing (through photography) involves layers and layers of subtle interrelations. Photography, finally, becomes an epistemological inquiry into the *means* of our understanding of reality.

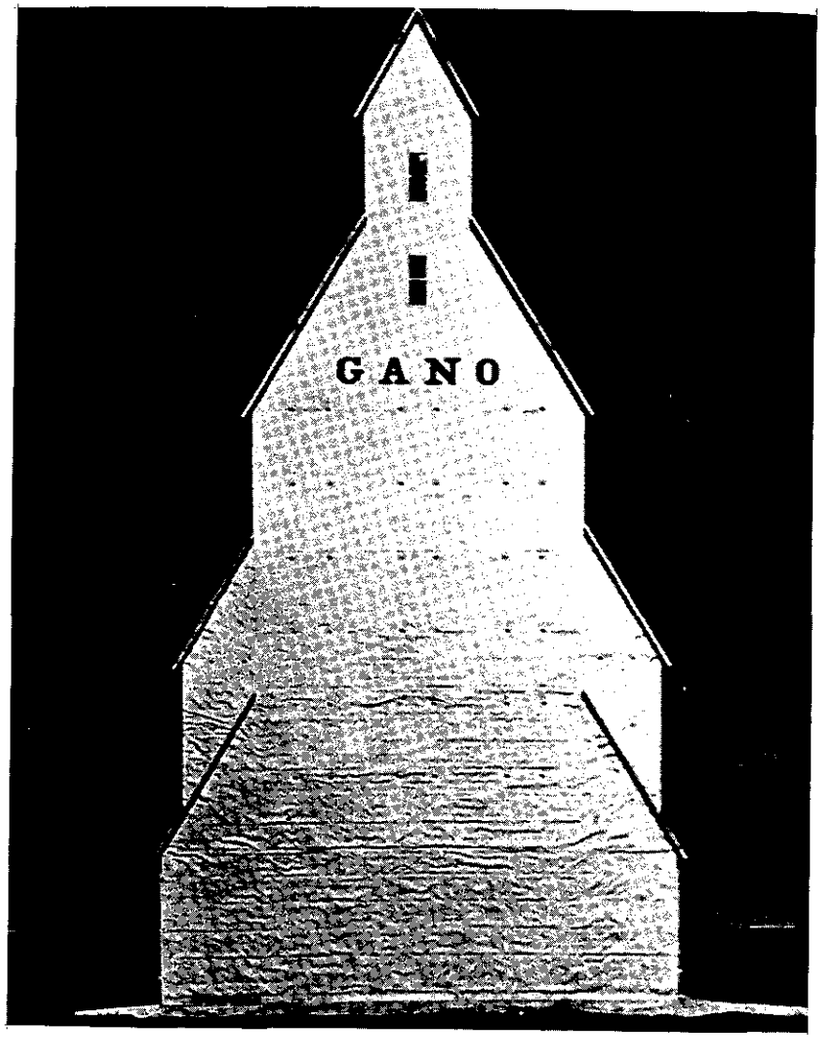
Mention of various novels and Morris's interest in time and space within these novels makes clear how closely his fiction has employed methods which were first the province of his photographic concerns. There is, of course, a great deal more evidence for this "collusion" between Morris-the-novelist and Morris-the-photographer than it is necessary to present here. My purpose has been to urge the viewer to seek out further relationships between vision and thought in Morris's work. As his photography has not yet been sufficiently studied, particularly in relation to his novels, readers may find this attempt to view the photographs of some use. As Morris remains one of the most important "visual novelists" in our literature, we have need of a criticism which more closely examines both his fiction and his photography in ways which reveal his work to us more completely and immediately.

Bellevue College

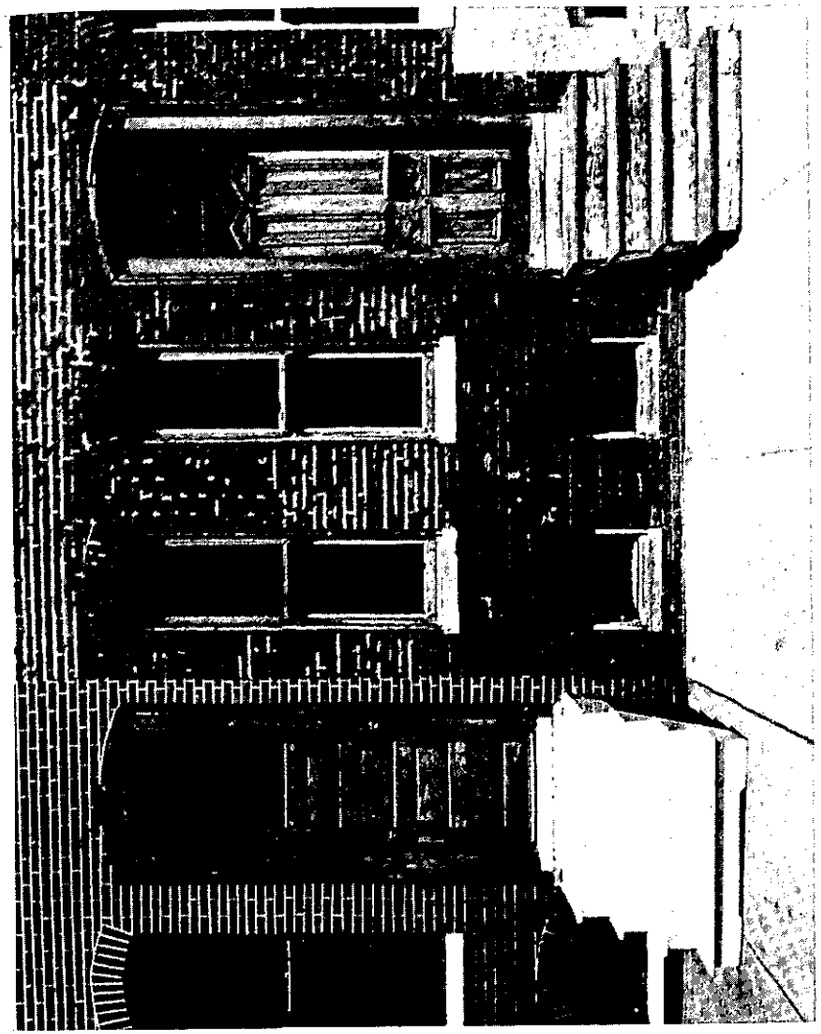
1. *"Wellfleet, White House"*



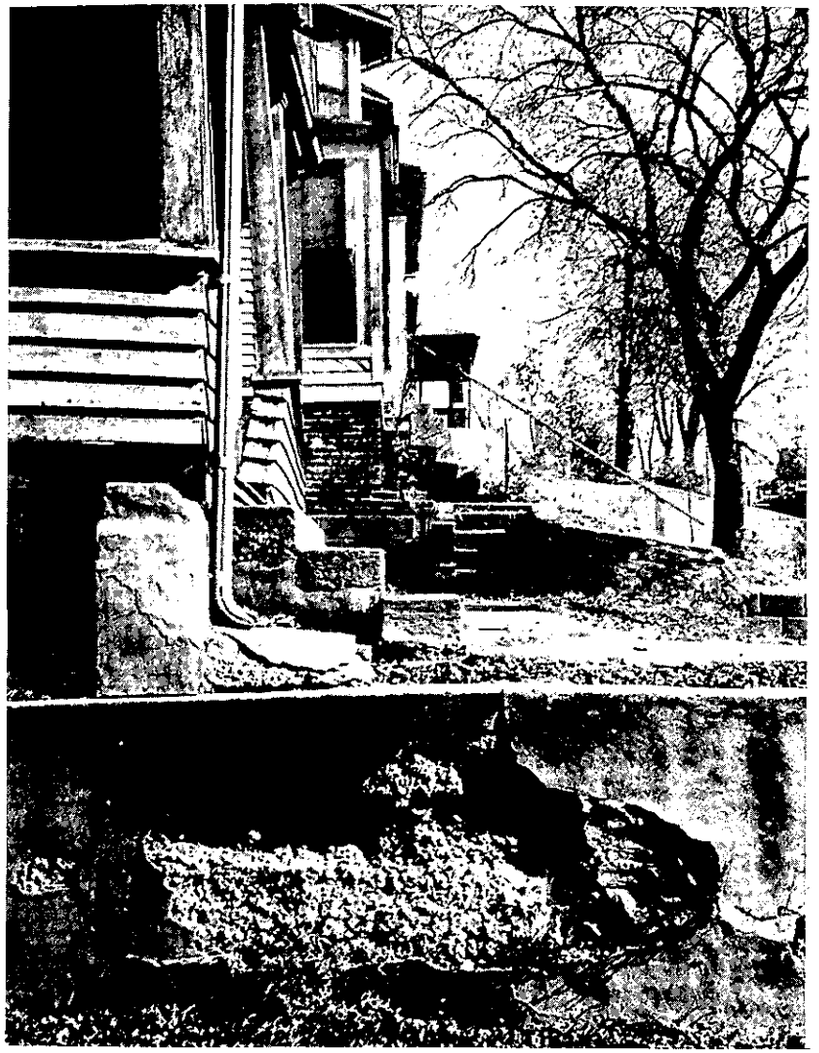
2. *[Title unknown]*



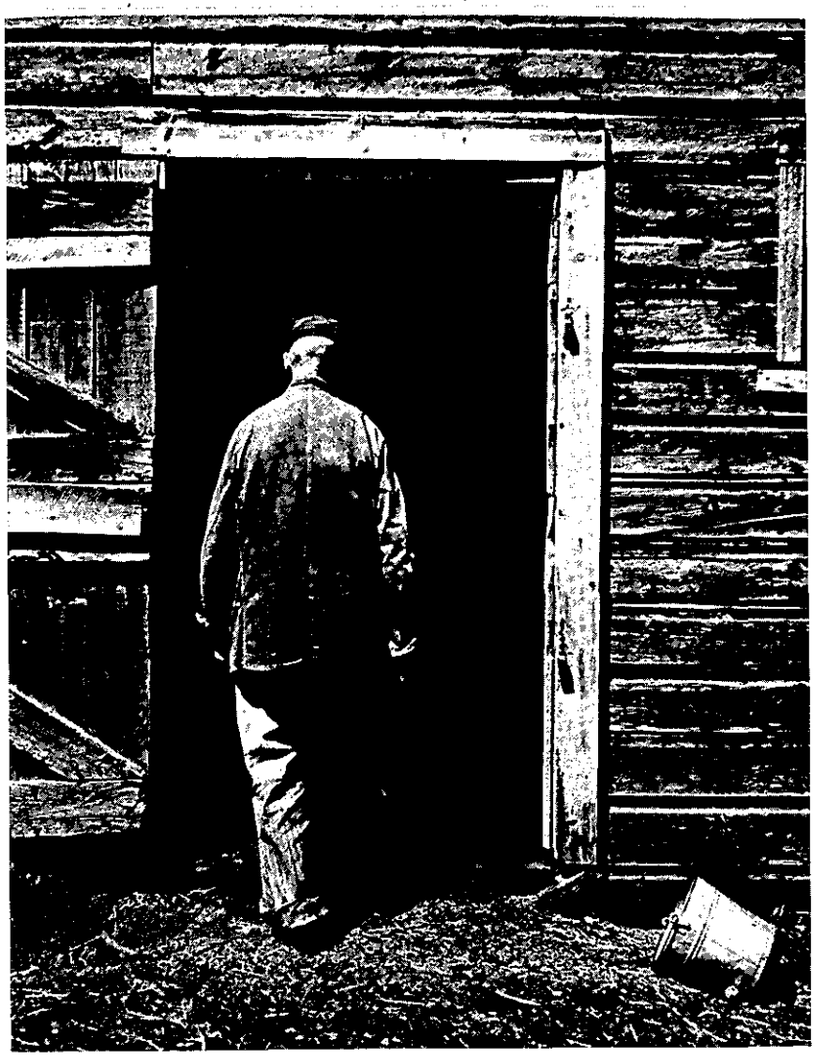
3. *"Gano"*



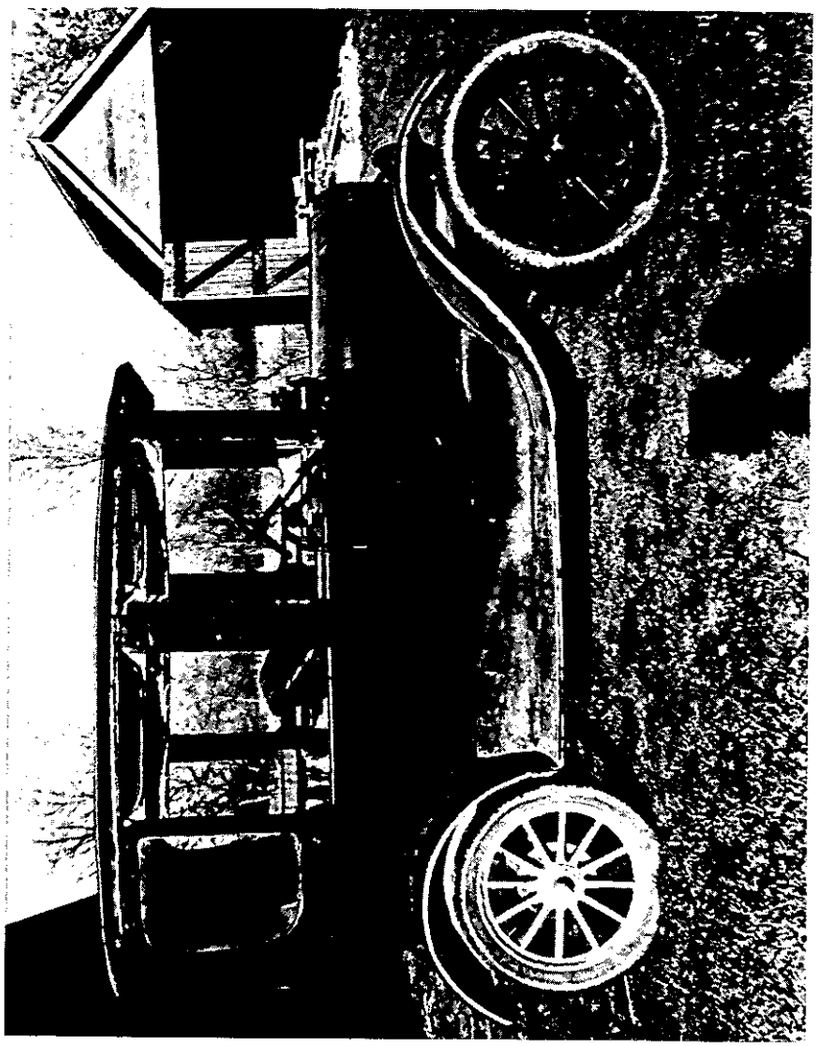
4. *"Baltimore Steps, Painted and Unpainted"*



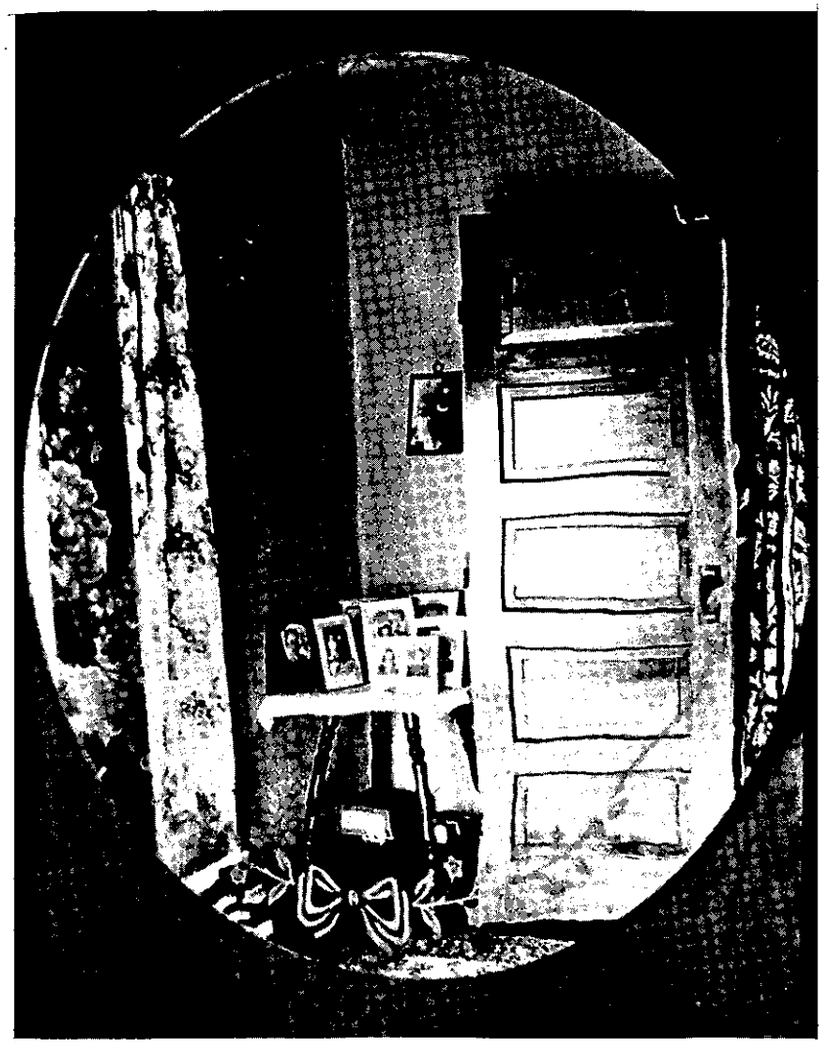
5. *[Title unknown]*



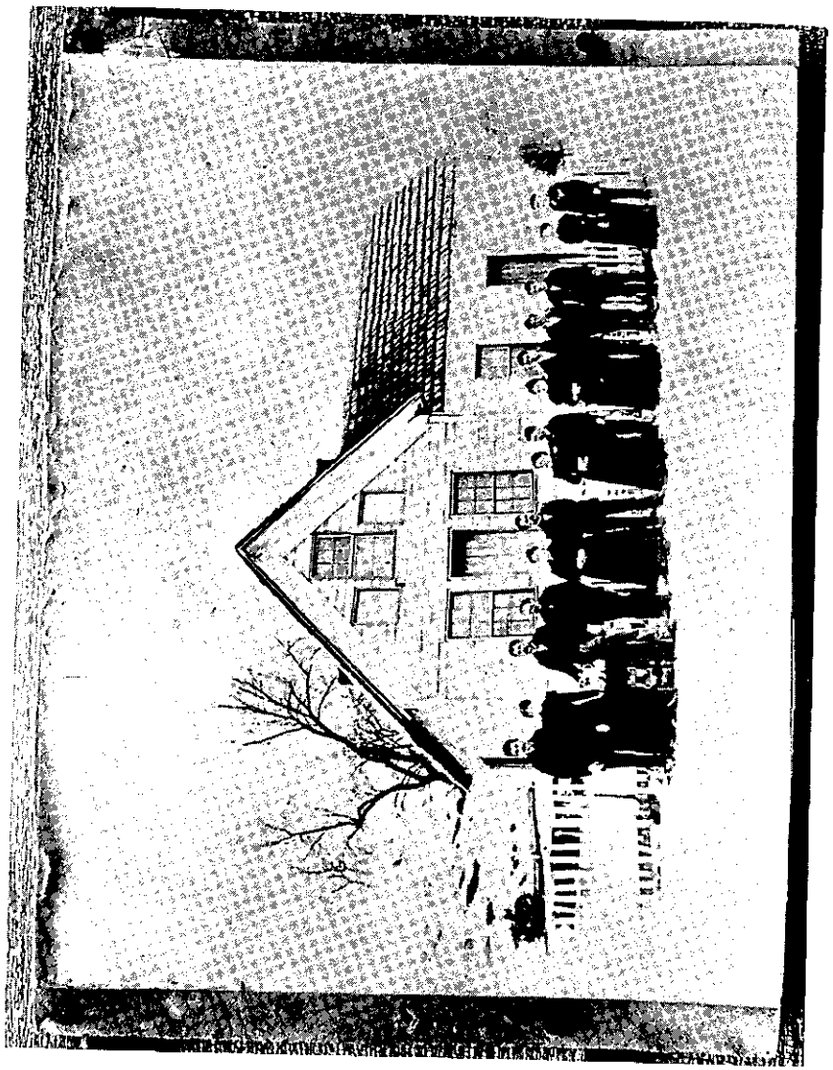
6. *"Uncle Harry, Entering Barn"*



7. *"Model-T, With California Top"*



8. *"Front Room Reflected in Mirror"*



9. *[Title unknown]*

NOTES

1. Wright Morris, "Interview," in *Structures and Artifacts: Photographs 1933-1954* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p. 111.
2. Wright Morris, "The Inhabitants," in *New Directions in Prose and Poetry 1940*, ed. James Laughlin (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1940), p. 147.
3. See *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 115.
4. *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 116.
5. See Wright Morris, "Photographs, Images, and Words," *American Scholar* 48 (Autumn 1979), 457-69; and "In Our Image," *The Massachusetts Review* 19 (Winter 1978), 633-43.
6. Wright Morris, "Photography and Reality: A Conversation Between Peter C. Bunnell and Wright Morris," in *Conversations with Wright Morris*, ed. Robert Knoll (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 148.
7. Alan Trachtenberg's "The Craft of Vision," *Critique* 4 (Winter 1961-62), 41-55, remains one of the best inquiries into Morris' photography and its relation to the fiction, but it now needs updating. See also G. B. Crump, *The Novels of Wright Morris: A Critical Interpretation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), pp. 50-61.
8. But see James Alinder, "Wright Morris: You Can Go Home Again," *Modern Photography*, March 1978, pp. 116-25, 193; and A. D. Coleman, "Novel Pictures: The Photofiction of Wright Morris," in *Light Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 242-46.
9. "Interview," in *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 118.
10. *Edward Weston: The Flame of Recognition*, ed. Nancy Newhall (New York: Aperture, 1971), p. 41.
11. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 8.
12. "Interview," in *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 112.
13. I am using the titles, when available, from *Structures and Artifacts*.
14. Wright Morris, *The Man Who was There* (1945; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 82.
15. See "Photography and Reality" in *Conversations*, p. 151.
16. Alfred Stieglitz, quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 160.
17. Stieglitz, quoted in Norman, p. 161.
18. See *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 122.
19. See Minor White, *Rites and Passages* (New York: Aperture, 1978); and Minor White, editor, *The Way Through Camera Work*, a special issue of *Aperture*, VII (1959). For theory, see White, "Equivalence: The Perennial Trend," in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. Nathan Lyons (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), pp. 168-75.
20. Stieglitz, quoted in Norman, p. 161. The italics are mine.
21. Stieglitz's "The Steerage" is to be found, among numerous other places, in Robert Doty, *Photo-Secession: Stieglitz and the Fine-Art Movement in Photography* (1960; rpt. New York: Dover, 1978), p. 119; Smith's photograph is to be found in *W. Eugene Smith: His Photographs and Notes* (New York: Aperture, 1969), n.p.

22. See "Near Oxford, Mississippi, Eroded Soil," in *Structures and Artifacts*, p. 27; and *The Home Place* (1948; rpt. University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p. 58.
23. *The Home Place*, p. 176.
24. See "Photography and Reality," in *Conversations*, pp. 145-46.
25. See John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs: 100 Pictures from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), pp. 148-49.
26. Morris, "Photography and Reality," in *Conversations*, p. 140.
27. *The Deep Sleep* (1953; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 6.
28. *Cause for Wonder* (1963; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 31.
29. *The Home Place*, p. 155.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON WRIGHT MORRIS'S TREATMENT OF "MY KIND OF PEOPLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, SELF-DEPRIVED, SELF-UNKNOWING"

KEITH CARABINE

In a notorious sequence in the middle of *Main Street*, Sinclair Lewis hangs on the slender frame of Carol Kennicott an essay on Midwestern life and literature in which she is alleged to conclude concerning Gopher Prairie:[1]

> It is an unimaginatively standardised background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. . . . It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God.

I begin with Lewis's acid view of Main Street (typical of course of the 'revolt from the village' which characterised the work of such different writers as Edgar Lee Masters, Willa Cather and Hemingway) because his stance and fictional performance are so diametrically opposed to Wright Morris's. The "unimaginably standardised background" characterised by "a sluggishness of speech and manners" is precisely the world Morris, in his Midwest fiction, chooses to explore. The figures who Lewis the moralist scornfully pigeon-holes as "the quiet dead" are accepted by Morris as "my kind of people, self-sufficient, self-deprived, self-unknowing."[2] Moreover, and more importantly, they provide the very foci through which Morris examines and presents his version of Middle America and of the human condition.

Lewis's inability in *Main Street* to demonstrate an alternative lifestyle (embodying the positives of " 'spirit' and 'happiness' ") to that of 'the quiet dead', undercuts his confident moralistic stance, and more significantly, betrays a writer who would not think through the problem of *craft* his "version" of Middle America sponsored. Morris in contrast is a bolder and surer writer than Lewis because, as much of his fiction, essays, and photographs show, he has grappled all his career with problems of technique and vision which Lewis skipped. In fact Morris's oeuvre constitutes, from this perspective, a sustained presentation of and commentary upon the *demands* his attachment to his chosen subject made upon his craft, and how his dedicated examination of his craft revealed complexities he had intuitively believed were inherent in his subject.

The key figure for any examination of the complexities Morris's faith in both his subject ("my kind of people") and his skill revealed is "the father" who has haunted his fiction from the beginning. I have therefore concentrated in the first part of this essay on how Morris coped with, and finally mastered, the problems raised by and embodied in the "father" and in the second part, because I believe the great boon of Morris's struggle was the perfection of a voice and style supremely amenable to a representation of his "kind of people," I analyze at length one very minor figure—Bud Momeyer of *Ceremony in Lone Tree* (1960)—who nonetheless serves as a fit embodiment of Morris's fictional prowess.

As the three quotations below illustrate, whenever Morris confronts the figure of the "father"—whether in photo-text or novels—he simultaneously exhibits his major fictional preoccupations and rehearses the procedural difficulties he encountered in, and the solutions he discovered for, his chosen subject.

> Where do you go except back where you came from?
>
> I can't tell you how many people have lost track of where they were going—how many people are not too sure of where they are from.
>
> Dear Son—Have moved. Have nice little place of our own now, two-plate gas. Have Chevrolet 28, spare tyre, wire wheels. Crazy to be without it, now get out in country, get out in air. Have extra room, wouldn't be so crowded, nice and quiet in rear. Nice warm sun there every morning, nice view in rear. Have plan to sell day old eggs to high class Restaurants, Hotels. Soon send you to Harvard—send you to Yale. Saw Robin in yard this morning. Saw him catch worm.[3]

As you probably know, it is smart to advertise. Adam Brady did it when he wanted a wife, Will Brady did it when he wanted an egg, as the only problem is in knowing what you want. Knowing, that is, how to put it in ten or twelve words. But that can be quite a stickler. Take something like this:

> FATHER AND SON seek matronly woman
> take charge modest home in suburbs.

Was that what he wanted? Well, he thought it was. But he would have to wait and see what an ad like that turned up. If what he said, so to speak, had covered the ground. On the advice of the girl in the office, he ran that ad in the "Personal" column, as he was looking for something rather special, as she said. He gave his address, of course, as the Paxton Hotel. The lobby would be just the place for a meeting like that. It would not be necessary for him to inquire what such a woman had in mind, as it was there in the ad, and all the woman had to do, was answer it. . . .

. . . . . .

When you know what you want, perhaps you still have to learn how to ask for it.

> FATHER seeks large matronly
> woman to mother homeless boy.

Was that too plain? He would drop the large. Somehow, when he was a boy, matronly women were all large.

> FATHER seeks matronly woman
> as companion growing boy.

Perhaps it was best to keep the father out of it.[4]

My father, from his irregular orbit, wrote his son predictable letters, drilling his periods through the free sta-

tionery found in second-class hotel lobbies, the stub pointed pencil chained to the desk. *Dear Son—Have found you new mother.* Indicating he was lacking in neither faith nor talent. Most of his letters were written as want ads:

> FATHER SEEKS MATRONLY WOMAN
> FOR HOMELESS BOY.
>
> He looked for and found himself in the Sunday Help Wanted column. His son, having in mind more readers, addresses himself *to whom it may concern.* He has spent most of his life speaking up for people who would rather remain silent (like his father) or live at peace with those who cry for help only in their sleep.[5]

As the "voice over" legend of the first passage shows, Morris firmly locates the meaning of his subject and of his artistic purpose in that most venerable search of all in American life and letters, namely that of identity, both personal and national. Similarly Morris's cool ironies in the third passage do not disguise the filial piety and the personal need which fire his artistic resolve: in "speaking up" for the "silent" he is also enabled to rediscover his own origins.[6] Morris thus believes as did Twain and Sherwood Anderson before him, that because he was born in "the navel of the great continental land mass" and because that "navel" was also "beneath the buckle of my belt" he was therefore in a unique position to explore the territory of the American character.[7]

It is typical of Morris's craft that even as early as *The Inhabitants* he juxtaposes the central question of his own fictional career ("Where do you go except back where you came from?") with a demonstration of a fictional answer he discovered. The letter locates the "home place" of the vernacular and is the expression of the limited syntax of the voiceless which Morris takes as his starting point. As the passages confirm, the problem for the "father" and for the "son" (author) reside in the syntax available to the former and usable by the son. The syntax of the letters and the "ads" in which the "I" and the definite and indefinite articles are omitted, confirm his father's "faith" in the cliches of materialism and of the American dream to provide himself with an identity and to draw his son back into "his irregular orbit." However, as all the passages illustrate, his "want ads" are written by a man unable to articulate his wants: after all "when you know what you want, perhaps you still have to learn how to ask for it." The father is therefore "maimed" by his syntax: and yet the son, if he wants to "speak up" for his father must in truth begin with the only syntax they have in common—that embodied in the limited patterns of vernacular speech.[9]

It is remarkable that Morris as early as *The Inhabitants* prefigured his subsequent discovery of what he calls "a mind-blowing statement" of Yeats in his last introduction to his plays.

> '. . . As I altered my syntax I altered my intellect'.
>
> . . . It says simply that syntax shapes the mind, and it is syntax that does our thinking for us. If the words are rearranged, the workings of the mind are modified. Man is not free to think, as he believes: he is free to think along the lines syntax makes possible, as trains commute to those points where the rails are laid down. He is more of a prisoner of syntax than of sex.[10]

Morris's grasp of the resonances of this central insight is one key to his achievement. His "kind of people" like the father are "prisoners of syntax"; they are locked in by the inevitable ("self unknowing") belief in, and acceptance of the clichés which encapsulate and entomb their experience.

The Inhabitants is a seminal work in Morris's career because the dramatic monologues represent Morris's experiments with a whole range of voices which explore the potential availability of the vernacular for fictional purposes. The father's letter is more idiosyncratic than most of the pieces which attempt to mimic the vernacular, but it is typical in that Morris deliberately dons the straight-jacket of his characters' syntax in order to test his own ability for verbal action. And he does pull off one superb effort. The closing, seemingly inconsequential, "Saw Robin in the yard this morning . . . catch worm," records a simple completed action which serves, simultaneously, to explain why the father will continue to dream (he too, one day, may fulfil his reveries) and to point up his confusion of his material plans with the natural spontaneous gesture of the "Robin."

Yet despite this felicity there are several clear reasons why Morris could not continue to "speak up" for the father within the strict boundaries of his syntax. Firstly, such a faithful mimicry begins either to demean the characters; or, if the author is felt to be earnestly pumping "significance" into them he becomes like Steinbeck a solemn bore. Secondly, the voice will quickly appear mannered. Thirdly of course the novel will lack (as Flaubert who grappled with similar problems feared) "the element of entertainment" and thus fail to hold the attention of "to whom it may concern."[11] Fourthly the writer would quickly discover, as did Will Brady, that the syntax of the "ad" had not "covered the ground" of either his desires or his designs.

The struggle with the syntax of his father, embodied in the letter, prefigured Morris's make or break attempt throughout the middle and late nineteen forties to develop in *The Works of Love* "a fiction style which opens up, reappraises, the familiar cliched vernacular"; "a modified vernacular style to permit the intrusion of tones, moods, and qualities that ordinarily would be excluded from the vernacular."[12] The end result is Morris's version of the free indirect style which Gertrude Stein played with in *Three Lives* and which Joyce mastered in *Ulysses*. As the pun in the title of Morris's most recent novel (*Plain Song: For Female Voices*, 1980) acknowledges, the free indirect style is a form of *plain song* whereby the vernacular provides the basic beat, and the voice of the author (to continue the figure) provides counterpoint and descant.

Thus in the passage from *The Works of Love* the phrase "as you probably know, it is smart to advertise" remains on the one hand faithful to Brady's sincerely hopeful focus and to the words and values he earnestly accepts and seriously rehearses; and on the other deftly invites the reader to at once share and question Brady's too ready acceptance of the clichés of advertising. Similarly Morris's bland representation of Brady's sober appraisal of his situation ("the only problem is in knowing what you want") infiltrates an ironic counterpoint because Brady's thought is (unconsciously) a massive understatement of the central theme of identity. Thus the gentle, but painful play of Morris's humour invites us to acknowledge that, given Brady's past attempts at "the works of love" no "ad" could possibly "cover the ground"

of his persistent longing. Typically, as Brady ponders how to "put it in ten or twelve words" he allows Morris to quizzically infiltrate the "stickler" they both share as composers. Again Morris, as ever, uses the girl's ready cliché—"he was looking for something rather special"—"to permit the intrusion" of a wry, life-enhancing comedy as we note how the girl (inadvertently) acknowledges precisely *why* Brady ("a man with so much of his life left out") claims both the author's attention and our own. But, too, we see, as Brady *literally* cannot, that "to put it in ten or twelve words" is the beginning not the end of the enquiry, is a source of, not the cure for, his problem. Brady's problem ("it was there in the ad") is that "syntax shapes his mind" and that neither the syntax of the 'ad' nor the clichés of the American dream would enable him to recognize, let alone fulfill, his "wants."

His creator is luckier. Because he believes that "through voice he learns what he feels and hears what he thinks" he can "wait" and "see" what his commitment to Brady's voice will "turn up."

As Morris anticipated as he laboured for years at *his* work of love—"speaking up for people who would rather remain silent" (like Brady and his father)—he discovered "that in Brady's emotionally muted relationships and in his failure to relate to others there was the drama, however submerged, of much American life."[14] It is because Brady "personally" has always been "out of it" as a lover and father that he becomes the type of the Plainsman "West of the 98th Meridian" who "in the dry places" (like the prophets of old) "begin to dream" (p. 3). As Brady's attempts at "connection," based on his nation's clichés of self-fulfilment through material success continually collapse, his *dreams* of "connection" become increasingly more speculative and imaginative until by the end we almost believe that "the man who was more or less by himself" has both embodied and transcended "the malady of his race." We are almost persuaded that Brady in his last role of Santa Claus (the world's greatest lover after all) justifies Morris's noble contention that he "redeems himself and all of us."[16]

That finally Morris's use of, and relationship to, Brady shows signs of strain can be traced to the restrictions imposed by limiting the focalization of the novel to a single, simple conscious-

ness. Thus despite the authorial "ploy," and much as I am moved by Morris's awesome commitment to Brady's vision, and by his determination to persuade us of his discovery that Brady was a fit medium for his own imaginative capacity to wonder, profoundly, about the human condition, nonetheless I remain aware, especially when "the big things . . . happen to him," of a disjunction between the imperative purposes of the author and the muted gropings of Brady, between the amplifications of the author's voice and the restrictions of his characters' syntax.[17]

One such moment occurs in the third section in *The Works of Love*, entitled 'In the Moonlight'. The title is appropriate because cut off from his young wife and the son who was foisted on him by the young prostitute, Mickey, Brady sits alone one night in his candling-room trying to figure why his "son" would read *Journey to the Moon*. The sequence is too long to quote in full but it clearly provides Morris with an opportunity to rehearse, over emphatically and I think unconvincingly, his sense of his fictional preoccupations and aims.

> There before him lay the city . . . —where many thousands of men, with no thought of the moon, lay asleep. He could cope with the moon, but somehow he couldn't cope with a thought like that. It seemed a curious arrangement, he felt, for God to make. By some foolish agreement, made long ago, men and women went into their houses and slept, or tried to sleep, right when there was the most to see. . . .
>
> . . . Without carrying things too far, he felt himself made part of the lives of these people, even part of the dreams that they were having, lying there, stranger, even, than a Journey to the Moon.
>
> And the thought came to him—to Will Jennings Brady, a prominent dealer in eggs—that he was a traveller, something of an explorer, himself. That he did even stranger things than the men in books. It was one thing to go to the moon, like this foreigner, a writer of books, but did this man know the man or woman across the street? Had he ever travelled into the neighbour's house? . . . That might be stranger, that might be harder to see, than the dark side of the moon.

> Perhaps it was farther across the street, into that room where the lamp was burning, than it was to the moon, around the moon, and back to earth. Where was there a traveler to take a voyage like that? Perhaps it was even farther than twenty thousand leagues under the sea. Men had been there, it was said, and made a thorough report of the matter, but where was the man who had traveled the length of his own house? . . .
>
> . . . Was it any wonder that men wrote books about other things? That they traveled to the moon, so to speak, to get away from themselves? . . .
>
> When he returned the *Journey to the Moon*, he spoke to Mrs. Giles, the librarian, and tried to phrase, for her, some of the thoughts that were troubling him. Had any man taken, he said, a journey around his own house?
>
> Not for public perusal, Mrs. Giles said.
>
> That would be a journey, he said, that he would like to take, or, for that matter, a journey around his own son. (pp. 134-5, 137)

Brady's meditation is too overtly Morris's self-conscious exhibition of the daring and "strangeness" of his own "traveling" (including *his* visions of Brady). It over-solicitously confirms the determination and visions of the author. For example Mrs. Giles's reply ("not for public perusal") to Brady's question "Had any man taken . . . a journey around his own house" provides a lovely joke, but Morris's wit does not disguise the fact that Brady's unembarrassed question is too "big" for him and too coyly self-reflective on Morris's part.

Morris laboured for years over, and wrote several drafts of, *The Works of Love*. As he knew, the need to develop "a consistency of tone" so as not "to question or ridicule the sober tenor of Brady's existence" was itself "a problem" and "a challenge" because the reader's attention must of course be held.[18] More important, I suspect, as a source of difficulty for Morris (and of strain for the reader) is, however, that Brady inevitably serves as both protagonist *and* vehicle for commentary. And, on occasion, as the sequence illustrates the two functions are at odds. Brady is at once too sober and naive and too knowing; at once simple

and at once the expression of Morris's noble and profound sense of the mystery and freshness of his chosen subject. The end result is that Morris does not escape either mannerism or solemn boredom in such portentious moments as: "And the thought came to him—to Will Jennings Brady, a prominent dealer in eggs—that he was a traveller, something of an explorer, himself."

It is, of course, a mark of Morris's boldness as a novelist that he faces up to these potential disjunctions in choosing Brady as his focus in the first place: but it is no surprise that even a novelist of his craft—given the difficulties Morris encountered during the writing of *The Works of Love*—should set it aside for two years and write *Man and Boy* (1951), the first of his "multiple voice" fictions.

Though in 1975 Morris found "it hard to understand the great enthusiasm I brought to the multiple voice fiction I was once so fond of" surely it is no accident that his greatest novels—*The Deep Sleep* (1953), *The Huge Season* (1954), *The Field of Vision* (1956), *Ceremony in Lone Tree* and *One Day* (1965)—are "multiple voice" and that they are much less open to the "charges" than can be brought against *The Works of Love*.[20] This is because the more perceptive, or articulate or intellectual characters (such as Webb, Foley, Lehmann and Boyd) are more natural commentators upon the world they inhabit and observe than the more inarticulate figures. Morris is therefore more able to "keep the puzzle puzzling, the pattern changing and alive" because he can leave his readers to bring the thoughts and preoccupations of all the voices into their own "field of vision."[21] He can, too, dramatise through consciousnesses almost as intelligent and as quizzical as his own, the generating ideas of his fictional world. We are thus enabled to measure the voiceless simple characters (such as Mrs. Porter, Parsons, Lawrence, the McKees, Paula Kahler, Bud Momeyer) against the more conscious and articulate characters. (They are not necessarily, of course, more rooted or more generous, stabler or wiser; and they usually have less horse sense.)

It is not surprising then, that after grappling with the problems Will Brady raised, that Morris's subsequent fiction treated "the self-sufficient, self-deprived, self-unknowing," characters with

less self-conscious involvement and, because of his mastery of the "multiple voice" fiction, with greater authority. To put it simply: after *The Works of Love* he wove his patterns with greater ease because he knew what he could and could not do with both his simple characters and his intellectuals and artists. It is to the most limited of Morris's "self-unknowing" characters I now must turn.

II

Bud Momeyer, the postman in *Ceremony in Lone Tree*, is regarded as so stupid by his long-suffering wife, Maxine, that she thinks "No-one in his right mind . . . paid attention to what Bud Momeyer said"; and even the equable, dull McKee finds him so boring and infuriating that he imagines that "one day Bud would say 'how's tricks, McKee?' and McKee would put his hand on his head and squash that mailman's hat like a pot down over his ears."[22] One can hardly blame them. Bud spends most of his time working at two jobs and his scant leisure hunting cats for bounty with a bow and arrow rescued from a neighbour's attic. Yet, as I hope a close reading of the following passage will show, it is a measure of Morris's achievement that he can take the extraordinary risk of committing his narrative to a voice of such massive ordinariness and yet still infiltrate "the intrusion of tones, moods and qualities" which engage our attention and convince us that Bud's mundane life has been faithfully drawn and given shape; and furthermore that it contributes without strain and without an over-exhibited self consciousness, to the pattern and significance of the novel.[23]

> That was the sort of thing Bud didn't know until his route got back to normal, and Mrs. Milton Ashley had the time to bring him up to date on her son Milton, who was busy making a name for himself in the world. At the end of the war Standard Oil had sent him to the Far East with his family. Before the piece appeared in the Lincoln *Courier*, most of the people on Bud Momeyer's route knew that Milton Ashley had received the Order of the Siam Crown, Fourth Class, pinned on him in Bangkok by the Ambassador himself. If the letter was from Milton, with

one of those foreign stamps, Mrs. Ashley would open it there on the porch or ask Bud to step into the hallway while she read it to him. Bud had been a classmate of Milton's at Roosevelt High. Milton came to school in his mother's electric car just before the bell rang, ate apples during recess, and once a year had a birthday party to which Bud, being in his class, was invited to come. As far as Bud could recall, Milton had never actually spoken to him. He had carried Milton's mail for more than ten years before the article appeared in the Omaha *World-Herald* citing Milton's achievements and listing his old Lincoln school friends who would remember him. Bud Momeyer's name had appeared in that list. Several people remarked on that and often asked Bud what was new about Milton, as if he might know, and thanks to Mrs. Ashley keeping him posted, he usually did. His children were Wendy, Judy and Ronald; they had already flown more than sixty thousand miles, which was the equal of flying around the world two and half times. Mrs. Ashley flew the children home to Lincoln for Christmas every two or three years. Bud had met the children, always surprised to see how pale they looked from such a hot country, and Mrs. Ashley had referred to him as their father's old friend. Their mother was usually in bed when he came by with the mail. When she and one of the children were lost at sea, Bud Momeyer was invited to the memorial service, for which he had to go out and buy another blue suit. His name appeared in the paper as an old close friend. None of this was important or changed his life or made him swell-headed or the like, but it was the sort of thing he couldn't explain to Maxine. Why he would rather work than take a vacation, that is.

The Ashley family was just one of many that Bud Momeyer, in no way related, had somehow got to be part of. Take the coffee he had on cold winter mornings with Mrs. Rossiter. A woman of eighty now, almost blind, with one hip so bad she could hardly walk, yet as bright and independent as any person he knew. While she had her sight TV was a help, and in her seventies she had taken to watching baseball, soon knowing more about the game than most men ever did. All summer long he had to give her time to keep him up to date. When Milwaukee won

the Series, she had him in to eat a dish of prune whip in celebration.

Although he was married and the father of a daughter, which were things he had in common with so many people, Bud had more in common with their families than he did with his own. His opinion was asked. Was it the uniform? It helped. When they saw him without it, they never asked him any questions.

When he didn't show up, there were people who phoned. He certainly knew their kids better than his own kid, especially the ones who liked to walk along with him, or those whose stories he got in detail from their worried parents. Maxine hardly ever said a word to him. When the mail cart came into his life and changed his old habits, Bud had lain awake nights like some of the people who talked to him. He wasn't losing his life or his kid, but he was losing everybody else's, and in some strange way these other families were his own. Their problems seemed to be the ones he could help. When he told Mrs. Clayton she was looking better, as she often was at nine twenty in the morning, he didn't have to be around at suppertime when she looked much worse. The secret was in the mail pouch. He had to move on. Only when the last letter was delivered did he have to come home. The strangest feeling Bud had had in all his life was when it occurred to him that Maxine might be telling Mr. Pollard their mailman, what she told nobody else. A bigger fool than Leo Pollard, Bud Momeyer had seldom seen. (pp. 109-112)

This sequence justifies Eudora Welty's appraisal of Morris: "Laying sure hands on the daily is Wright Morris's forte. What the rest of us may have accepted too casually, he sets upon with his own highly specialised focus."[24] Miss Welty recognizes that on the one hand in "laying sure hands" Morris effortlessly accepts and has a ceremonial respect for "the daily," and on the other hand as "sets upon" captures, Morris's "highly specialized focus" also appropriates "the daily" for his own artistic purposes.

As we have noted the free indirect style enables Morris to produce a counterpoint of two or more voices. The more mundane the consciousness as with Miss Stein's 'The Good Anna' and Bud,

the greater the risks. There is (as in *The Works of Love*) an absence of "action" (as event). As Flaubert recognized, "painting in monotone without contrasts" is "not easy," and raises the concomitant danger that the author's wrought "subtleties will be wearisome."[25] Or one might add, as with 'The Good Anna' we cease to hear her voice because of Miss Stein's over insistent, mannered modulations which draw attention to the author's cleverness at the expense of the exhibited consciousness. Or, in contrast, as with Joyce and Bloom, an occasional opacity, resulting from deliberately difficult transitions (allegedly) faithful to Bloom's mind at play in the City of Dublin.

In common with his illustrious predecessors Morris discovered (in Flaubert's words) that "everything is a question of style."[26] Thus though Flaubert chafes at "his uninterrupted portrayal of bourgeois existence"[27] and though Bud can be seen to illustrate "an unimaginably standardised background," authorial "play" is set against apparent dullness. "Having in mind" more readers than Miss Stein, Morris avoids her mannerism because he plays (largely) *through* Bud rather than with him. (We cannot, as we have seen, say this of all of *The Works of Love*). And because Bud is a "simpler" consciousness than Bloom (less alienated, less quizzical and more committed to his clichés) and because he is not used by Morris to elucidate his purposes Morris is rarely either opaque or pretentious. The risk Morris accepts of course is that he has less opportunity to dazzle than Joyce. Yet I believe, as I hope my analysis will show, that no writer in English since Joyce has employed the free indirect style with a more disturbing "play," of comedy, pathos and submerged menace than Morris.

The first cliché of the passage—"Milton . . . was busy making a name for himself in the world"—expresses personal and communal values, and readily serves, we come to realise, as Mrs. Ashley's comfortable and evasive explanation for her son's failure to return home with his family at Christmas, or even for their funeral service when they die at sea. How delicately Morris plays off "in the world" against the resolute provinciality of "one of those foreign stamps." How apt the details are—"the electric car" and "apples during recess"—which establish that Standard Oil had found a fit representative in this youth from a frugal

family who never *played.* Given Bud and Milton were classmates, how neatly Morris times his revelation that Bud can soberly recall: "Milton had never actually spoken to him." How slyly Morris establishes ("Several people remarked . . . and thanks to Mrs. Ashley keeping him posted, he usually did") the mundane chain of gossip Bud so enjoys, then jocosely exploits the only pun Bud would be capable of—"posted." How seemingly pointless is Morris's bland acceptance of Bud's sober recital of the Ashley's flying log, and then the shock as we learn laconically "she and one of the children were lost at sea."

Bud so defers, so accepts the clichés of sentiment which appear, so to speak, in ascending order of bathos ("Old Lincoln school friends," "their father's old friend" and finally "an old close friend") that out of respect for his customer so blithely confident of his attachment to her son he cannot remember talking to and for a woman he has rarely seen ("[she] was usually in bed when he came by with the mail") he feels obliged "to go out and buy *another* blue suit."

The end of the first paragraph is pure Morris; "the sort of thing he couldn't explain to Maxine. Why he would rather work than take a vacation that is." The transition is at once surprising and funny, pathetic and inevitable: surprising and funny because the link between the details released and the opinion expressed seems so tenuous; pathetic because anybody, it would seem, would need to break out of this round of dullness; inevitable because the author has no successfully rehearsed, and colluded in, the small satisfactions of a life built upon a pattern of acceptance. Thus Bud's "that is" serves to register his private sense of the fitness and meaning of things *which the author does not betray.*

Bud would certainly seem to fit under Carol Kennicott's umbrella description of "a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable." But as Morris develops the ramifications of Bud's "that is" we see that he sincerely believes with increasing conviction that "The Ashley family was just one of many that Bud Momeyer, in no way related, had somehow got to be part of"; that he "had more in common with these families than he did with his own"; that "He *certainly* knew their kids better than his own"; and that "in some strange way these other families were

his own"; and that finally "Their problems seemed to be the ones he could help." As we recognize the justice of Bud's satisfaction (after all Mrs. Ashley and Mrs. Rossiter would vouch for his kind assistance) we register, too, the pathetic and frightening lack of "connection" between Bud and his family. Morris's deliberate tentativeness ("somehow," "in some strange way") is richly suggestive.[28] It is faithful at once to Bud's ready, if slightly bewildered, acceptance of the role his uniform and mail pouch have sponsored, and to Morris's bemused recognition that this mundane figure is simultaneously happy with and "maimed" by his syntax. Surely, too, it is no exaggeration to note that Bud's groping sense that though "no way related" he had nonetheless "somehow got to be part of" the Ashley's, earns Morris's respect and wonder because locked in though he may be by his clichés, Bud both embodies his creator's sympathy and enables his author to search out, share and confirm his common identity with people whose problems (like Bud's, like his father's) "seem to be the ones he could help." Truly, too, through a commitment to such ("silent") voices Morris could "learn what he feels and hear what he thinks." And what Morris feels and hears precludes both Carol Kennicott's brisk dismissal, Willa Cather's abrasive scorn for (say) Lou and Oscar, the mediocre petit bourgeois brothers of Antonia, or Hemingway's sarcasm at the expense of 'The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife'.[29]

Which is not to say, of course, that Bud is neither satirised nor used as a vehicle for satire. The very fact that we have been obliged to share the author's blend of wonder and detachment before Bud's half conscious knowledge and before the happy compensations of his job means that, on the one hand we understand why Bud lies awake at night worrying more about how to rid himself of his new mailcart than about, say, his daughter's burgeoning sexuality or his wife's loneliness; and on the other hand we "hear what the author thinks" namely that it is not surprising his more conscious characters such as Bud's wife Maxine and Boyd endure, respectively, lives of quiet and unquiet desperation. Moreover it is not surprising given a world of kindly yet unconscious Buds that, in his daughter Etoile's words, it is because "Nobody wants to know why" (p. 117) that a Charlie Munger can shoot people like clay pigeons, or Bud's nephew

Lee Roy can run over and kill two bullies because he is tired of being pushed around. It is not surprising in a world lacking in fundamental human "connections" that modern "ceremonies" are debilitated. It is no accident that we begin to feel that perhaps Maxine is right to think "we're all stark mad" (p. 91); and that the nuclear explosion is an apt metaphor for a world in which characters shelter behind clichés rather than confront the stark reality of murder and the bomb. Yet, too, such has been the generosity of Morris's vision we recognise, unlike Boyd, that to ask people to "WAKE BEFORE BOMB" (p. 31) which is the central motif of the novel, is to demand what they will not, and perhaps cannot, perform. As Cowie in *One Day* (1965) realises in a meditation central to an appreciation of Morris's "self-unknowing" characters.[30]

> Increasing numbers had given up their conscious lives. A non-conscious life they still lived, and the future looked bright for non-conscious dying. But to be fully conscious was to be fully exposed. Cause for alarm. As a matter of survival one gave it up. At one and the same moment this was an act of salvation and an act of destruction.

For Bud to confront the potential "destruction" residing in his habits would demand another syntax, and such a syntax would destroy his "salvation" would destroy those connections, (however banal and dull), essential to his sense of "that is," and to his being in this world.

In the broadest meaning of the novel the values and precarious stability not just of Middle America, but of all mankind, depends upon the half conscious acceptance of the communal clichés and the small "daily" ceremonies they entail. This does not mean that we do not wince as we realize that Mrs. Ashley can sincerely believe that Bud, her morning confidante, is her son's "old friend." Yet after all, as we realize with grim amusement, what "connection" has the old lady with her son than the communal acceptance of her son's achievements recorded in the earnest gossip of Bud, in the *Lincoln Courier*, and in the *Omaha World Herald*? (Fame indeed for a son of Nebraska and rehearsed in dead pan fashion by a famous Nebraskan son!)

The provinciality of the characters' horizons is then at once pathetic, comic and given the larger issues the novel raises, terrible, even absurd: yet not dismissed. As Morris has said, and as his whole career demonstrates:[31]

> I am a son of the Middle Border and however concealed I represent a sensibility like Mark Twain's right down the center. I will accept the absurd if I can see it in reasonably human terms, humanized essentially by humour. I will accept the absolutely grotesque if I can see it in a context that makes it human.

Only then can he present "an authentic terror, one which you cannot dismiss as ridiculous or absurd."[32] Morris begins with the mundane, with the syntax of the vernacular and reveals to us, as he is so fond of saying, that "In the world of great fiction nothing is so strange as the commonplace, the familiar."[33] Thinking of a Will Brady, or a Bud Momeyer, nothing either is so funny and pathetic, so grotesque and so ordinary, so unnerving and so authentically human.

It is Morris's great distinction in Midwest letters that though he is "a son of the Middle Border" he is also simultaneously the inheritor of a European commitment to the novelist's craft and of Lawrence's noble sense of the novel's vital importance in a world where "we cannot bear connection. That is our malady." To those who his fiction does "*concern*" we recognize that Morris did not exaggerate when he claimed:[34]

> A successful passage in fiction for a brief moment completes circuits that are usually broken, connects nerves and tissues we didn't know were there. We have the use, briefly, of sensation, that are new, the tingling of life in a limb numb with sleep.

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NOTES

1. *Main Street* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1920), p. 265.
2. *Earthly Delight, Unearthly Adornments,* (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 8.
3. *The Inhabitants,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946) unpaginated. The passage appears roughly three-fifths of the way through.

4. *The Works of Love,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), pp. 175-177. All page references in the text refer to this edition.
5. *God's Country and My People,* New York: Harper and Row, 1968), unpaginated. The passage appears towards the end. It faces, appropriately, a photograph of three makeshift, improvised mail boxes standing on a spot which looks like a scrubby field rather than the side of a lane. The homeplace of the vernacular awaits news from departed kin.
6. "I began to think about Brady in the mid-forties. . . . A few years before, my father had died in Chicago, and I was pondering his life and how little I knew him. This led me to think about origins," *Conversations with Wright Morris* ed. by Robert E. Knoll, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 76.
7. "National Book Award Address, March 12, 1957." *Critique* 4 (Winter 1961-62), p. 74.
8. "The facing photograph is an anonymous city row-house, which because it is seen in threequarter view and because the sidewalk cuts off into whiteness, looks (to use Morris's favourite phrase) both 'in and out of this world'."
9. In his 'The Writing of Organic Fiction', Wayne C. Booth uses the phrase "maimed woman" to describe Lois McKee of *The Field of Vision and Ceremony In Lone Tree,* and Morris acknowledges "That is the right word: maimed" in *Conversations,* p. 99.
10. *About Fiction,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 67.
11. Flaubert's phrases. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert,* 1830-57, ed. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 179.
12. *Conversations,* pp. 110 and 111.
13. *About Fiction,* p. 133.
14. *Conversations,* p. 77.
15. One of three quotations on the flyleaf of *The Works of Love* is from Lawrence: "We cannot bear connection—that is our malady.'
16. *Conversations,* p. 75.
17. The phrase "big things" is Wayne C. Booth's *Conversations,* p. 77. Booth's lecture on 'Form in *The Works of Love*' reprinted in *Conversations,* (pp. 35-37) is a very fine appreciation of the novel.
18. *Conversations,* p. 77.
19. *Conversations,* p. 88. Morris's remarks reflect his abandonment of the form after *One Day.*
20. It is also no accident that Morris's "multiple voice" fictions occupy only one day. He is thus able to hold his characters to a horizontal time present in relation to "narrative" and at the same time he can move "vertically" in and through his characters' consciousnesses and, in particular, their memories of time past.
21. The phrase is Boyd's in *The Field of Vision* (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), p. 155.
22. *Ceremony in Lone Tree* (New York: Atheneum, 1960), p. 70, p. 55. All page references in the text refer to this edition.
23. My discussion would be appropriate for scores of passages in Morris's fiction which speak through such (seemingly) ordinary, commonplace voices as

Mr. & Mrs. Ormsby *Man and Boy* (1951); Mrs. Porter *The Deep Sleep* (1953); the McKee's *The Field of Vision* (1956) and *Ceremony In Lone Tree*; Luigi Boni and Wendell Horlick *One Way* (1965); Floyd Warner *Fire Sermon* (1971) and *A Life* (1973; Madge, and Cora and Emerson Atkins *Plains Song* (1980).

24. Eudora Welty, quoted on the back cover of the Bison paperback of *One Day*, 1976.
25. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert* 1830-1857, p. 179. Flaubert refers to his struggle with Part II, chapter 3 of *Madame Bovary*.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Morris's tentativeness can also perhaps be traced back to filial respect: "For my father, intimate knowledge of another person was a form of forbidden knowledge." (*Earthly Delights, Unearthly Adornments*, p. 8). At moments like this one realizes how Protestant Morris's background was.
29. Lou and Oscar are presented as "little men" who seem to live only to ensure Antonia's position is constricted and hopeless. In contrast "My Antonia" inspires the narrator's pious wish to imitate Virgil and to be "the first to bring the Muse to my country" (*My Antonia*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918, p. 264). That Morris avoids both zealous piety and withering scorn is for me a mark of his more just vision.
30. *One Day* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 365.
31. *Conversations*, pp. 27-28.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
33. *About Fiction*, pp. 73-74.
34. *Conversations*, p. 119.

FROM CONROY TO STEINBECK: THE QUEST FOR AN IDIOM OF THE PEOPLE IN THE 1930s

Douglas Wixson

It has been many years now since industrial workers were common figures in American fiction. One of the best American novels of the laboring man ever to appear was Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933). John Dos Passos called it "an absolutely solid, unfaked piece of narrative."[1] Whit Burnett, editor of *Story*, wrote: "It's the nearest to an American Gorky I've encountered. *The Disinherited* is a biography of most of America, pre-war, war-boom, post-war, depression and awakening."[2] Conroy's credentials for writing American proletarian literature were impeccable. Conroy, the son of a miner in north-central Missouri who was an official in the UMW, grew up in a mining camp, worked in railroad yards and factories, and later edited *The Anvil*, a magazine devoted to publishing descriptions of life in the factories, unemployment, and hunger. New writers like Erskine Caldwell, William Carlos Williams, Nelson Algren, James T. Farrell, Langston Hughes appeared in *The Anvil*. The worst days of the Depression produced a crop of writers whose creative fervor and spirit of rebelliousness would leave a permanent impression on American literature. Their subject was experience: what it was like to be a black in Alabama, jobless in Detroit, a family on the road, on skidrow in Chicago. It was difficult to avoid such experience in the early Depression. *Fortune* magazine observed in 1932 that in the mining industry alone "1,200,000 souls [are] dependent upon some 240,000 unemployed and distressed bituminous miners, most of whom live in six states in regions where coal mining is the only important enterprise, where merchants are bankrupt, banks closed, schools without funds, and once wealthy residents in actual want."[3]

The Disinherited, as well as most of Conroy's other work, is, however, a great deal more than a chronicle of bad times among workers in the 1930s; if it were *only* "proletarian fiction" it would have perished long ago on the scrap heap of fiction dominated by political ideology and fixed in moribund particularities. In fact *The Disinherited* has come through eleven printings, has been translated into many languages, and continues to be taught in courses wherever there is interest in social realism, regionalism, and documentary art.

Conroy's *The Disinherited* is literary art of a particularly American brand: it is rooted in American humor, the tall tale, oral narrative, popular tradition—and Whitman's "democratic vistas."[4] Like Whitman (and Emerson) Conroy identifies with the common life; factory villages are as much a part of the whole order of society as Manhattan avenues. Like Whitman too Conroy's interest is in the native idiom, the common man's speech. Whitman wrote in his preface to *Leaves of Grass*:

> The English language befriends the grand American expression . . .it is brawny enough and limber and full enough. On the tough stock of a race who through all change of circumstances was never without the idea of political liberty, which is the animus of all liberty, it has attracted the terms of daintier and gayer and subtler and more elegent tongues. It is the powerful language of resistance . . . it is the dialect of common sense.[5]

Conroy, like Whitman, captured in his art the rhythms and idioms of the American language spoken by ordinary working people. Like Twain he drew upon material from native legend and popular lore.[6] Conroy created a new figure in American literature, the migrant worker, a dispossessed laborer on the road in search of a job, and with luck a new life. The collective experience of the disinherited, Conroy showed, was not some isolated phenomenon affecting a few unfortunates in society; rather it involved *all* people, some through actual suffering, the rest because this experience entered into their imaginations, the effect of which would have important consequences for American literature.

Similarly, the frontier experience had acted upon the imagination of the American people but with quite opposite results. The

frontier expanded the American vista and created an American myth of success gained through determination and luck. The Depression, on the other hand, shattered this myth, calling in to question the optimistic vistas of the American republic.[7] Both experiences, frontier and Depression, had to do with fundamental changes in the idea of community, and contributed a new popular lore, a unique idiom, a myth, and a literature.

Conroy played a significant role in creating a literature and folklore that constitute an important legacy of the 1930s. Conroy's novels and short stories are not only grounded in native folklore and popular tradition; he *added* to these traditions, most significantly in the creation of an area of study called industrial folklore. Finally, Conroy's two novels, *The Disinherited* and *A World to Win* (1935), are closely linked to a great new American myth that took shape in the 1930s, the search of a dispossessed people for a new form of community.

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The first part of *The Disinherited* is set in a mining camp in northern Missouri during the first decade of this century. The actual Eagle Mine, as well as the one of Conroy's novel, consisted of a tipple and a semicircle of camp houses, at the extreme end of which was Liam Byan's Barroom, "a favorite haunt of the miners."[8] The mine manager was on friendly terms with his miners who, despite unsafe working conditions (or perhaps because of them), were relatively well paid. Most of the miners were immigrants from Wales, Ireland, and England, who had arrived by way of southern Illinois. They were veteran miners, skilled in the traditional method which consisted of placing a shot, digging out the coal, then hand-loading it into cars pulled by burros.

As late as the turn of this century near feudal conditions still prevailed in certain mining regions of the Middle West. Indeed, Conroy suggests this in his description of Monkey Nest, the miners' name for the Eagle Mine located near Moberly:

> Cold and white like the belly of some deep-sea monster incongruously cast out of the depths, the dump dominated Monkey Nest camp like an Old World cathedral towering over peasants' huts. (p. 9)

The Disinherited describes the hand-loading era of coal mining when little distinction existed between skilled and unskilled workers. The shot-firer received an extra hazard bonus (and, like Larry's father, often met an early death); but, in general, there was no economic or social ranking among miners at that time. Reflecting closely actual mining conditions *The Disinherited* portrays a close-knit, unstratified industry in a period when coal was just beginning to compete with oil—and lose. The introduction of machines, the importation of strike-breakers, and falling prices of coal hasten the miners' involuntary transition to alienated factory work in northern cities.

When World War I sends young miners like Ed Warden to France the breakup of Monkey Nest is already complete; only a few scattered drift mines are still worked by individual miners eking out a narrow existence. *The Disinherited* follows uprooted Monkey Nest families into northern factory cities like Toledo and Detroit to work on assembly lines in automobile plants—if they are lucky. Unemployment grows steadily worse in the early Depression until the tentative communities of displaced factory workers in cheap real estate developments (with names like "Rosewood Manor") can no longer hold together. Henceforth, the twice "disinherited" must drift as migrants in search of work and a new community; or perish even as the timbers of the mines they were forced to abandon are slowly crumbling.

In a qualified way Conroy's Monkey Nest matches Herman R. Lantz's classic description of "coal town."[9] Lantz's sociological study of a southern Illinois mining village shows a community poised between a vanishing frontier and an urbanized, popular society. Anglo-Irish and Italian immigrants have established patterns that include a strong family life, communal spirit, and sense of mining as a craft. Belonging to the frontier the mining community exhibits the lawless behavior of "wide-open" towns elsewhere in the West, together with a cyclic pattern of economic crisis and political radicalism. Lantz's study treats the period after 1914 when a growing sense of impersonality and resignation had began to alter the community's traditional patterns, especially its communal spirit. Smaller, more rural and isolated than Lantz's "coal town," however, Conroy's Monkey Nest fits more closely Robert Redfield's anthropological description of a "folk society."[10]

Characteristic of a folk society are the closeness of its constituent families, their immediate contact with nature, and the rich abundance of lore that springs from the contacts and the communal life. In Conroy's novel all these things are on the verge of eclipse. Conroy, to borrow Granville Hick's term for George Gissing and Thomas Hardy, is a "figure of transition" recording the conflict between change and changelessness.[11] Things are passing even as the narrator in *The Disinherited*, Larry Donovan, describes them; economic downturns, industrialization, modernity touch even this tiny, remote community. From 1900 to about 1910, the period during which Larry is growing up in Monkey Nest, mines were shut down as strikes throughout the mining industry brought turmoil and scabs into coal communities. Work conditions deteriorated quickly; accidents increased and pay lowered as unemployed and inexperienced workers gravitated to the mines in search of work. A scheme of payment encouraged speed and negligence with respect to safety. After the strike was broken strike-breakers settled in the community and union members left for other occupations. Conroy describes these radical alterations, the disintegration of a rural folk community and the rise of an urbanized mass culture in which members of the older community must first find a job and beyond that a place in the yet undefined new form of community.

Like D. H. Lawrence, Richard Llewelyn, Thomas Hardy, and many other denizens of folk communities undergoing radical transformations Conroy experienced the early stages of transition to an industrialized society where mass culture competed with and nearly extinguished older popular traditions.[12] Monkey Nest was still close to nineteenth century American popular tradition, such as the tall tale, frontier humor, popular legend, superstition, and popular comedy, when Conroy was young. Lawrence rejected the mining community of Bestwood, coming to recognize its importance in his art only later in his life; Conroy, on the other hand, never really broke away in spirit from his early experience. Conroy's writings chronicle the changes wrought in the people who move from primitive folk communities such as Monkey Nest

into the cities to find work in the factories. Rather than portraying the eclipse of native popular tradition in the transition to urban culture, as Hardy did, Conroy traces its re-emergence in the factory, on the road, and in new fragmentary communities wherever laborers struggled to maintain a life that was not totally alienated from what they had experienced as children in communities such as Monkey Nest. And by preserving, however tenuously, their traditions and values nurtured in places like Monkey Nest they might preserve themselves from the effects of rootlessness and alienation characteristic of the new urban dispossessed. At least this is the message we perceive through the figures of Larry Donovan who at the end of the novel returns to Monkey Nest, renews his ties to the past and ventures forth again to seek social and political change in the company of Hans, a Liebknecht follower in the Spartacist Revolt of 1919.

In many important ways Conroy's work as a novelist is the literary equivalent of work undertaken by folklorists, notably George Korson, in their search to capture the last survivances of native folk culture. In 1926, when Conroy was first formulating the shape his own work would take, Korson's first mining folklore research appeared in the *United Mine Workers Journal*, followed soon after by his classic study, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch*, and in 1943, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle*. In his study of Pennsylvania mining communities Korson concluded that miners were folk since "(1) Their songs behaved like folksongs. 'Their homespun ballads spread in the charactertistic way of folklore. . . . The songs and ballads which sprang from the soil of the anthracite coal region have in them the crude strength, the naturalness and the freshness of things that grow out of the earth'. (2) Miners were isolated in remote villages, set apart by harsh, dangerous work, and they retained an old life-style."[13] A limitation on Korson's work, which brilliantly gathers together the legends, superstitions, customs, songs, and ballads of miners, is that beyond seeing industrialization as a threat and reason for the decline of folklore he was unable or unwilling to recognize its transformations in urbanized milieus. What he viewed as commercial, or linked to radical ideologies, he rejected out of hand. Conroy, on the other hand, perceived the messages in the folklore and experienced first-hand the symbiosis of folk and mass culture. Rather

than dismissing new forms of popular expression he saw that some exhibited the vigor, freshness, and directness of the folk experience he knew from instinct. *The Disinherited* abounds with mining and railroad lore as I have already indicated; but the popular culture of the dispossessed workers in the cities appears with greater frequency and power after the first part of the novel when Larry Donovan leaves Monkey Nest, spends a brief stint in the Wabash railroad shops, where the lore and language are rich and traditional, and then joins the millions of jobless on the road, seeking a new life in some distant factory city.

Several currents flowed together in the early 1930s—as Conroy was gathering material in factories for his writing—which would alter radically the mainstream of American literature. Arlin Turner, the late American literature specialist, tells us about a new ingredient in American letters: "It was about 1930 that Constance Rourke, F. J. Meine, and Napier Wilt discovered the native humor and began dusting it off for others to study, notably Walter Blair, who followed second in what has become a dynasty of scholars working in this humor in Chicago."[14] While folklorists gathered materials Lewis Mumford, Howard W. Odum, B. A. Botkin, and others were defining the nature of regionalism and beginning to bring attention to literature, folklore, and art rooted in place and local particularity. In Missouri, Conroy's contemporary and friend, Thomas Hart Benton, was at work studying the "American Scene." "By 1931," Matthew Baigell writes, "the desire to find American roots for an American art culminated in a determined search. That year the term 'The American Wave' was coined to describe both a movement and an attitude working toward an art which could express without foreign influence the spirit of the land."[15] The Depression gave impetus to regionalism; it forced writers to stay at home; then recovery measures under the New Deal, such as the Works Progress Administration, paid them to re-evaluate their regional and national identity. State guidebooks, mural art, and collections of oral history and folklore resulted from New Deal art and writers' projects. Like Twain and Melville before them, Benton and Conroy understood that America is a land where work is, in Irving Howe's words, "the ground of character, the shaper of life."[16] While Vance Randolph collected songs and ribald tales in the Ozarks, and B. A. Botkin

published his annual *Folk-Say, Regional Miscellany* from Norman, Oklahoma—two men who were to play a role in Conroy's life and work—Conroy edited *The Anvil* from his rural address in Moberly, Missouri. In an effort to help create a working-class literature Conroy sought authentic portrayals of the dispossessed who labored in Southern cotton fields, in Detroit and Toledo auto factories, Des Moines steel mills, and Hannibal rubber heel plants. The American literary mainstream of the 1930s experienced an awakened interest in the common man's lot, the small town, and regional particularity, such as shaped the work of writers in obscure towns like Moberly and Oxford, Mississippi.

Conroy went into the factories again in 1938 when Nelson Algren helped him find a job on the Illinois Federal Writers' Project in Chicago, whose head was John T. Frederick, a regionalist and scholar and former editor of *Midland* magazine. Participating in a "Staff Conference in Industrial Folklore" in July of 1939, Algren and Conroy proposed a collection of industrial folklore, similar to *These Are Our Lives* which the Southern F.W.P. had recently published.[17] The proposed volume was never completed, owing to the dismantlement of the Project when war came, but Conroy's fieldwork, often conducted in bars on North Clark Street where workers gathered, did appear in B. A. Botkin's *A Treasury of American Folklore* in 1944. Further, it provided material for very successful children's stories, such as *The Fast Sooner Hound*, which he wrote in collaboration with the Black novelist, Arna Bontemps. Conroy never abandoned the spirit of community and cooperation nurtured in the coalfields.

Following his dispossessed worker along the highways and in boxcars to the factory cities Conroy showed that myth-making and tall tale telling continued in industrialized America wherever men felt the urge to entertain with stories that would stretch the imagination of their fellow workers and introduce an element of play in monotonous jobs. Conroy's industrial tales place the backwoodsman, to use Constance Rourke's expression, in the factory. Davy Crockett becomes the "Sissy from Hardscrabble County Quarries"; Sam Patch is transformed into "Eddie La Breen, the High Diver," and so forth. Humorous characters, drawn after native American models of frontier humor, had earlier appeared in Conroy's work as I have tried to indicate. The "Barker" of

The Disinherited is a rootless migrant worker who puts the bite on auto workers. "I got a $75.00 pay waiting for me out at Flint," he says.

> but I'm damned near deadbroke. Got hi-jacked in a joint in Hamtramck. I just lack two-bits of having enough carfare to get home. If you'll lend me the quarter, I'll send you a dollar by mail. First time I ever had to do this. I've been walking up and down here trying to screw up courage to ask somebody."

The Barker is one of the "rootless drift" (Rourke's term) who follow in the wake of the itinerant factory worker. Such characters were part of the American scene in the Depression, just as "scalawags, gamblers, ne'er-do-wells, small rapscallions, or mere corncrackers" had been in the frontier.[18]

But a more important contribution to American letters, or at least one that has left a more profound impression on American life, was Conroy's creation of the migrant worker as a memorable figure in American literature of the 1930s. *The Disinherited* anticipates Constance Rourke's appeal for a literature as native art which through the use of the "environmental subject" would help our culture define itself.[19] Rourke argued that the "center of growth of any distinctive culture is to be found within the social organism and is created by peculiar and irreducible social forces."[20] The migrant worker, the road, the quest for a new form of community that would not altogether efface the best elements of the old, these are Conroy's contribution to a new subject-matter in American literature shaped by the social forces and native cultural traditions of the 1930s.

The Disinherited describes the breakup of an older, close-knit community and traces the course of workers to northern factory cities where they are eventually laid off and forced in the initial years of the Depression to make their way back home on the road as best they can. Conroy writes:

> As the factories closed or cut their forces and hours, the exodus from the city increased in volume. We lived by the Chicago pike, and had nothing better to do than to watch the procession pass. Some in shiny new sedans but more in asthmatic antiques, creaking under burdens of

> furniture, bedding, lares and penates, children, and even Kentucky hound dogs, their long ears flying like banners in the breeze. (p. 224)

By the time Conroy wrote *A World to Win* (1935) the migrant worker was a common figure in the landscape of the Great Depression.

A World to Win describes a migrant family, packed into a deteriorating Model T, gone West to search for work, leaving behind ugly factory cities and decaying mines. In Utah the family finds temporary work in beet fields owned by a Mormon bishop who describes the dispossessed Missourians thus:

> Transients. They came in this morning and I hired 'em to help in the beets. Better than hirin' Mexicans, I reckon. Plenty of the saints need work, but most of 'em are too lazy to work in beets. Besides, the woman needs to see a doctor. They've five children with them, and they can work in the beets the same as the Mexican children, I guess. That's the way lots of the white families work it when they want to lay up a nest egg for the winter. Only the two littlest ones would only be in the way and ruin more than they'd thin.[21]

Terry Hurley, the father of the migrant family, has two sons, Robert and Leo, whose paths divide after childhood, remain separate owing to conflict between the two half-brothers, and finally join again as a result of circumstances at once grimly real and humorously ironic. While Leo looks for work in the West with his family, Robert hopes to become a writer, frequenting a bohemian milieu in St. Louis. Leo fails to get work and Robert does not become a writer; but both succeed in realizing a more significant purpose during the bleakest years of the Depression: a spirit of "brotherhood" and unity that extends beyond to people like themselves everywhere. The most striking passages in the novel concern the Hurleys' experiences as migrant workers in the West. As such, *A World to Win* bears comparison with Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, which realizes artistically the great potential Conroy's story of "flivver tramps" held as subject-matter for modern mythmaking.

Conroy's novel takes the Hurleys (Terry, Leo, Leo's wife Anna, and their five children) west in the Ford to California, supporting themselves by odd jobs wherever there is work, but unwilling to scab in a Butte mine. Following a rumor of work in California lettuce fields the Hurleys arrive only to find a strike. Unlike the Joads the Hurleys still have a home, no matter how hopeless, to which they may return. Conroy writes:

> They saw the vigilantes rounding up strike leaders and sympathizers into a cattle car for shipment out of the state. Trying for odd jobs, desperate, trying to get back to Green Valley, the only place they knew to go now, and all the time Anna nearing her hour. (p. 292)

The quest of Conroy's migrant workers for employment in the West turns into an anxious retreat to Missouri in the feeble Model T. The Hurley's flight homeward, like the Joad's odyssey West, is an account of unwelcomes in small towns, a gasping and wheezing engine, grim circumstances and courage. Anna, like Rose of Sharon, gives birth to a stillborn child, but then dies cruelly in a ditch. By accident Leo joins in a protest march and becomes a fugitive. Like Tom Joad he discovers a purpose in helping his fellow unemployed workers. It is interesting to compare Leo's newfound purpose with Tom's declaration to Ma Joad. Leo says,

> Some time we'll go down to the city halls ever'where, and we'll go inside t' stay. We won't come out no more, and then women won't have t' die in ditches like my Anna did. If she was the only one, I'd say it didn't amount t' so much only t' me and her and her children that's left without 'er. But they ain't nothin' just or right about a world that lets such things go on. But they's millions like Anna was and like I am, and we ougn't t' never stop fightin' long as such things keep on. And we won't. (p. 337)

Tom Joad: (p. 337)

> I'll be ever'where—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they

> know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why I'll be there.[22]

Despite the remarkable similarities in their conversations Leo reveals none of Tom Joad's perception of a higher faith in or identification with "the people." The people whose cause Leo takes up are simply others like himself and Anna. Steinbeck's version of "the people" is mystical, idealized. Conroy's is forged on the anvil of lived experience. Steinbeck's art occasionally runs the risk of sentimentality; Conroy's art employs realistic methods that juxtapose folk imagination, vernacular expression, literalism, and grotesqueness. Apart from the less distinguished, often pure "road documents" of Nathan Asch, James Rorty, and others, Conroy's depiction of the migrant worker on the road was the most compelling and significant antecedant of Steinbeck's to appear before *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939.

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All great social and economic upheavals in the past have caused itineracy; indeed the picaresque novel was born in such circumstances in 16th century Spain.[23] As early as 1892 a folk poet named Sam Walter Foss celebrated the disenchanted worker, disappointed in his search for work in the city.[24] The "Wobblies" in the early part of this century made the itinerant laborer a topic of folksong and ballad.[25] Dorothea Lange's and Walker Evan's photo documentation of the migrant worker in the 1930s are viewed today as art; yet the suffering the Federal Security Administration photographers attempted to record was intended as social realism, not as a matter for a detached aesthetic.[26] Conroy's genius lay in recasting the quest theme of the dispossessed out of native materials. Steinbeck lifted Conroy's itinerant worker into the realm of myth and epic, a dispossessed *people* in search of a new life and a new community in Caanan.[27] Conroy had taken the road before Steinbeck to portray through literary narrative the idiom and experience of the American worker.

H. L. Mencken had early recognized the power and authenticity of Conroy's writing, publishing his stories alongside those of another young author who sought an authentic idiom and myth for his people, William Faulkner. Given his own considerable work on the spoken American language Mencken was doubtlessly

impressed by Conroy's use of language which draws upon the resources of orality characteristic of a folk society and working class milieus. In the manner that Benton reworked native elements in his American Scene paintings Conroy refashioned speech to symbolize everyday events and the lives of ordinary people within a social context. Mencken's influence on Conroy was to correct an inclination toward orotund phrases, lapses into stylized literary diction drawn from his early admiration of Macaulay and Browne. Apart from these occasional stylistic incongruities Conroy's language was so effective that contemporary critics, when *The Disinherited* first appeared, praised the novel for its vividness and truth. "In remarkably vivid prose," John Chamberlain wrote in *The New York Times,*

> the world of the working stiff jumps at you from the pages of *The Disinherited*, carrying with it the smell of burning chemicals, of cheap gin mills, of flop houses, the sound of rasping saws, the discomfort of cold winds off Lake Erie, the troubles of second-hand cars and of shoddy love affairs snatched at whenever one is not too tired from the daily grind.[28]

When *The Disinherited* appeared again in the early 1960s in a new edition Warren Beck, a Faulkner specialist, wrote:

> The workers seen in this novel are patient yet not without dignity, resilient under disaster, genial and helpful to companions who lived with them. They seem more real than Steinbeck's or Dos Passos' commoners, less forced into thematic melodrama, more representative of a sturdy individual life. . . .[29]

While Steinbeck was writing *The Grapes of Wrath* Conroy gathered new materials for a study of rural migration of workers to the cities. His search for authenticity of expression and experience inevitably led him into documentary art.[30] As if to refuse the temptation of fiction Conroy accepted a Guggenheim in 1935 to study the Negro's flight to Northern industrial cities. Teaming up with Arna Bontemps while on the Illinois Writers' Project Conroy wrote *They Seek a City* (1945) which later revised and expanded became *Anyplace But Here* (1966). Conroy's natural sympathy lay deeply with the people, not "the people." He could

not ignore the fact that their homelessness continued to be a social fact and that the blacks probably suffered more than the whites. Life and work are one for Jack Conroy; and this fact alone no doubt steered him in a course away from literary narrative after his second novel, *A World to Win*. Circumstances were such that Steinbeck carried the migrant worker to greater literary recognition than did Conroy. What we have, nonetheless, in *The Disinherited*, *A World to Win*, and his short stories are great and lasting artistic achievements.[31]

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NOTES

1. Letter dated December 1933, to Conroy.
2. *Sat. Rev. of Lit.* (November 11, 1933), 1643.
3. *Fortune Magazine*, 6 (September 1932), 27.
4. Of particular use to this topic are Daniel Hoffman, *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961); Walter Blair, *Native American Humor* (New York: American Book Co., 1937); Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham, ed., *Humor of the Old Southwest* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964); Tristram Potter Coffin and Hennig Cohen, ed., *Folklore: From the Working Folk of America* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973); Victor R. West, *Folklore in the Works of Mark Twain*, Studies in Language, Literature and Criticism (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1930); Bruce Jackson, ed., *Folklore & Society: Essays in Honor of Benj. A. Botkin* (Folklore Associates: Hatboro, Penn., 1966); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950); Constance Rourke, *American Humor: a Study of National Character* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1953); Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942); Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
5. Malcolm Cowley, ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1959), pp. 22-23.
6. See Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain, The Development of a Writer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962); Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966).
7. See Dixon Wecter, *The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941* (New York: Macmillan, 1948); Jack Salzman and Barry Wallenstein, eds., *Years of Protest, A Collection of American Writings of the 1930s* (New York: Pegasus, 1967); and Pells's book.
8. Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963), p. 13. All subsequent references are to this edition.
9. *People of Coal Town* (Carbondale: Southern Ill. Univ. Press, 1971).
10. "The Folk Society," *Amer. Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1947), 293-308.
11. See *Figures of Transition; a Study of British Literature at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

12. See especially Lawrence's "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside," in *The Portable D. H. Lawrence*, Diana Trilling, ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 613-23.
13. Quoted by Archie Green, *Only a Miner* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 23.
14. "A 'Want-List' for the Study of American Humor" *Studies in American Humor*, 2 (October, 1975), 116.
15. *Thomas Hart Benton* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1975), p. 58. See also Benton's *An Artist in America* (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1968).
16. In his review of Alan Trachtenberg's *America & Lewis Hine, Photographs 1909-1940*, in *The New Republic* (October 29, 1977), 30.
17. This document is found in the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, along with other mss. from the FWP bearing Conroy's signature. See also, Robert H. Byington, ed., *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, Smithsonian Folklife Studies (1978), No. 3.
18. Rourke, *American Humor*, p. 63.
19. *The Roots of American Culture*, pp. 288-89.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
21. Jack Conroy, *A World to Win* (New York: Covici, Friede Publishers, 1935), p. 281. All subsequent references are to this edition.
22. John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1951), p. 572.
23. See Javier Herrero, "Renaissance Poverty and Lazarillo's Family: The Birth of the Picaresque Genre," *PMLA*, 94 (October, 1979), 876-886. For a treatment of the "poor white" in fiction—this is not Conroy's migrant worker—see Sylvia J. Cook's *From Tobacco Road to Route 66* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1976).
24. His poem, "The Road to Boston," is printed in *The Gilded Age and After*, John A. DeNovo, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 166-67.
25. See Joyce L. Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices, an I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Mich. Press, 1965), Chap. 3.
26 See Clas Zilliacus. "Radical Naturalism: First-Person Documentary Literature, "*Comp. Lit.*, 31 (Spring 1979), 97-112.
27. A great deal has been written on the subject of the quest motif in Steinbeck and community. See especially Peter Lisca's "The Dynamics of Community in *The Grapes of Wrath*," in *From Irving to Steinbeck*, ed. Motley Deakin and Peter Lisca (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1972), pp. 127-140. It is an interesting fact that both Steinbeck and Conroy were published by the same editor, Covici. See Thomas Fensch, *Steinbeck and Covici* (Middlebury, Vt.: Paul S. Erikson, Publ., 1979).
28. *NYT* (Nov. 21, 1933), 17.
29. *Chicago Trib. Mag. of Books* (May 12, 1963). The quest for community was also an important theme of Faulkner's work. See Philip Momberger, "Faulkner's 'Country' as Ideal Community," in *Individual and Community*, Kenneth H. Baldwin and David K. Kirby, ed. (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 112-136. Also, Pells's *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, Chap. 3.

30. I refer the reader to William Stott's *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973) for a discussion of documentary art.

31. *The Disinherited* has re-appeared in a hardcover edition (Cambridge: Mass.: Robert Bentley, Inc., 1980); and an interesting sample of Conroy's work is edited by Jack Salzman and David Ray in *The Jack Conroy Reader* (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1980). I draw the reader's attention also to *Writers in Revolt: The Anvil Anthology*, 1933-1940, Jack Conroy and Curt Johnson, eds. (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1973).

THE WESTERING EXPERIENCE IN FULTON COUNTY, INDIANA: A HISTORICAL STUDY IN MIDWESTERN AMERICAN CULTURE

Robert Glen Deamer

There are two major sources for the study of the cultural history of Fulton County, Indiana. In 1909 a newspaper editor, Marguerite L. Miller, of Rochester, Indiana, was inspired to collect personal narratives by Fulton County pioneers. She then printed these narratives in a two-volume book which she titled *Home Folks: A Series of Stories by Old Settlers of Fulton County, Indiana.* One other personal narrative by an original settler, Benjamin C. Wilson, was printed in the Rochester *Union Spy* in 1875, and has been reprinted by the Fulton County Historical Society. In addition to these stories by early settlers, the student of Fulton County's cultural history now has a volume of sixty-six family histories titled *Fulton County Folks*, published in 1974 and written, for the most part, by members of the various families.[1] While the material in these two books is not as extensive as one might wish, it *does* provide the essential story of Fulton County from its first white settlement in the 1830s; and, placing the books side by side, what one really has are two sets of memories: memories of nineteenth-century Fulton County and memories of twentieth-century Fulton County. To study the memories recorded in these two books, and to compare the two books, is, as I hope to show, one effective way of discovering some of the root-values in rural Midwestern culture and of gaining a sense of the quality of life, past and present, in a fairly typical Midwestern county.

I should perhaps state at the outset that I tend to be negative about Midwestern history and culture. I believe that Warren

French is right when he describes the Midwest as "a culture that has always piously overprompted itself and produced little that creates any sense of the central role of sacrality in expanding human experience."[2] And I have found nothing in *Home Folks* or in *Fulton County Folks* to abuse me of this view. With rare exceptions, the stories told and the sensibilities revealed in both books are startlingly devoid of truly cultural values. I mean by this that there is no evidence in either book that Fulton County "folks" ever formed a meaningful relation either to the land which they sought or to one another as members of an integral society. The evidence is quite the opposite. As such, what these books actually attest to is the failure of Midwestern culture—or, at least, the cultural failure of one Midwestern county.

That failure began with westering, with the American dream of building a new, better, freer life in a virgin land. The westering experience in Fulton County is of course recorded in *Home Folks.* There is, however, a significant, unintentional irony in the very title of this book—for most of the Fulton County settlers were *not* home folks in any truly westering way. As Max Westbrook has pointed out, the founding of a home is potentially, ideally a sacral act, and it is *the* defining act of American westering: "A home . . . represents for the sacred man the ordering of one's family under God; and the founding of the home is comparable to God's original act of bringing order out of chaos. To the profane man, a home may represent [solely] a financial investment. . . . To found a home in a sacred way is to tap primordial energies—within one's self and within the universe—and to relate the home to the real. To consider a home an investment is to serve profane values, to divide one's self from regenerative contact with the original."[3] Coming into a new country, building log cabins in the virgin wilderness, the Fulton County westerners were of course fronting a unique chance to found their homes and to relate to the land in a sacred way. At the very same point in our history an archetypal American westerner, Henry David Thoreau, was doing exactly this at Walden Pond.[4] And at least one Fulton County family, the Rannells—who left Virginia because they found slavery intolerable—were also doing so. "[F]reeing his slaves and pushing out into a new country, 'The Great Republic of the West,' as he was wont to call it," William

Rannells built a "house of logs, such as was generally found in the far west in those days [1838]." By 1842 a new "house was finished—large, substantial, and the counterpart, as far as possible, of the old home in Virginia."[5] The story of the Rannells—which contains vivid and affectionate memories of both a daughter and a grandson of William Rannells—makes it clear that westering for *this* family was indeed meaningful. They founded in Fulton County a Southern, family-centered, genial, truly cultured way of living—*minus* the slavery which they had repudiated.

With the exception of the history of the Rannells family, though, the homesteading recorded in *Home Folks* was darkly willful and acquisitive—profane rather than sacred. Most of the Old Settlers' stories show them viewing their relation to their new homes and to the new land solely in terms of economic aggrandizement. For this they should perhaps not be blamed too harshly, since a goading pressure for economic success is part and parcel of American democracy; and I am not suggesting that these settlers should have been as conscious of the spiritual possibilities of westering as the man who—unknown to them—was just then building a hut at Walden. But I am surprised, even disappointed, by the absence of *any* sense of novelty or excitement or exuberance in their accounts of the westering experience. "The country was new," says Job V. Pownall; "therefore a wilderness and swamps. We therefore contracted ague, and had it to our satisfaction."[6] This seems to be about all that the Old Settlers thought about the newness of the country. And the references to the actual homesteading experience—clearing the land, building log cabins—are equally vapid. William A. Ward, for example, does not find the experience even worth writing about: "To go into the details of constructing a home, clearing land and the many privations sustained by my people, would lengthen this effort too much."[7] Benjamin C. Wilson does describe the homesteading process, noting very matter-of-factly that "We settled right in the woods; not one foot of land was cleared on our claims prior to our coming." But all that he really cares to emphasize about this experience is how *hard* it was: "I want to say just here to those of the present time [1875] who are complaining about hard times and the hardships they are enduring in order to get a start in the world, that you have not yet taken one lessen [sic]

in hard labor or experienced any such thing as hard times."[8] Again, I have no wish to deny that homesteading *was* hard, but it seems to me that, with only a little imagination, it could have been something more, too. It is clear that these settlers did not, like Thoreau, go to the woods because they "wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life"; and it is equally clear that, living in the woods, they did not experience the "forest-change" which Frederick Jackson Turner so fondly proposed as the essential characteristic of frontier life. They knew what they wanted—land ownership, economic aggrandizement—before they reached the Fulton County frontier, and they never wavered in their wholehearted dedication to this major goal. The constant theme—the fundamental value—in both *Home Folks* and *Fulton County Folks* is "Progress." As such, both books abundantly illustrate the truth in John Ditsky's reminder that "we have created this our culture almost exclusively out of the matter of male intellectuality, a raw and rugged assertion of will like the firearm over the fireplace."[9]

Westering in this sense, as an assertion of will merely, leaves no room for transcendence—for the impulse toward spiritual renewal and rebirth which lies at the heart of America's westering dream—or for the creating of a cultural landscape, a vibrant, living sense of place. None of the settlers seem seriously to have wondered about themselves *in relation* to the virgin land: they wanted simply to make the land productive and themselves prosperous. Although he was "not quite six years of age," George Perschbacher "walked every step of the way from York county, Penn., to Indiana." Eventually his father "bought eighty acres north of [the] Tippecanoe river. . . . It was a dense forest, covered with tall timber of beach, walnut, oak, [and] ash." When George, his older brothers, and his father finally reach their new home (1845), the essential reason for their long journey is suddenly and starkly revealed: "We were well pleased for it was the first foot of real estate [that] we [had] ever owned."[10] Like most of the Fulton County settlers. Perschbacher speaks from the self-satisfied, sharply limited point of view of one who has Made It, successfully homesteaded, in a new country. There is, no doubt, something to be said for a fierce determination to survive and to prosper—but successful homesteading alone can not, and

did not, create either an admirable culture or a cultural landscape. Take, for example, the settlers' attitude—often inimical, rarely more than indifferent—toward the wild animals in "what was then called Tippecanoe country." "I have seen from two to three deer in a drove," says Perschbacher, "but as there were no hunters in our family, they were of little use to us."[11] Or: riding horseback, Jonas Myers' father discovered a black bear—even then (1839) a rare sight in Fulton County. "He called a dog which chased the bear up a tree. Securing a club, Father climbed the tree and struck the bear on the head, and when it fell to the ground, the dog killed it."[12] No mysticism, no mythology in Fulton County about Old Ben or about the spirit of the wilderness!

I see the problem here as the one which Max Westbrook has analyzed in his stimulating book on Walter Van Tilburg Clark: American democracy, with its "awesome demands" for personal responsibility and personal success, places the individual "in a profane rather than a sacred relation to his world."[13] This was clearly the case in the settlers' attitude toward their new home, the new land, the new landscape. It was even more clearly the case in their attitude toward the original inhabitants—the Potawatomi Indians—of Fulton County. For the evidence is strong that—as earnest and earnestly progressive democrats—the settlers were compelled, blindly compelled, to transform Fulton County into an image of the prosperous agricultural Garden that they remembered having left in New York or Pennsylvania or Ohio. And this meant that the closer-to-home image of The Old Northwest as "territory," Indian territory, had to be changed. It quickly was.

> I shall never forget [says William A. Ward] with what deep regret I witnessed my red brethren bunched together and driven like cattle from their native land, to a place selected for them by the Government, beyond the "Father of Waters." Among them were my boyhood playmates and staunch friends, whom I regarded with brotherly affection, and who held a friendship for me equal to kinship. Out of their kindly disposed feeling for me, they had offered me gold and enough land to make me a wealthy man, had I taken advantage of them, which I am glad to say I refused to do, notwithstanding that I was repeatedly urged to ac-

> cept their generous offers. They were gathered together,—the chief [Menominee, who had been bound hand and foot and thrown into a log jail atop a wagon], braves, squaws and old men—some walking, some on ponies, some in wagons because [they were] too old to walk, and started westward on their long journey. For more than a mile I followed them out of town [Rochester] fully determined that I would go with them, my mother following and as much determined that I should return home.[14]

Ward's regret is genuine and causes his writing suddenly to gain impressive strength; but his sorrow could neither appease the disgraceful, tragic event nor alter its cultural consequences for Fulton County. The event—which Ward witnessed as a nine-year-old boy—was, after all, the infamous Trail of Death (1838) during which the last of the Potawatomi in Marshall and Fulton counties were driven single-file through the small frontier town of Rochester, and all the way to Kansas. Ostensibly, this march West was in accordance with a legitimate treaty—one which Chief Menominee had not signed in the first place; in actuality, it was the consequence of the settlers' insatiable greed for land.[15] This image of the Potawatomi being marched through the frontier settlement stands, then, at the threshold and at the heart of Fulton County's history—an image that haunts Fulton County "folks" to this day; an image that residents with roots in this county's past, myself included, would like to forget, and cannot forget. Without necessarily accepting the ontology of D. H. Lawrence's view that "the unappeased ghosts of the dead Indians act within the unconscious or under-conscious soul of the white Americans, causing . . . the Orestes-like frenzy of restlessness in the Yankee soul, the inner malaise which amounts almost to madness, sometimes[,]" or that the American landscape "is full of grinning, unappeased aboriginal demons,"[16] one can see very clearly that the removal of the Potawatomi is *the* crucial event, a watershed, in the history—social, economic, cultural—of Fulton County. I mean by this that the Indian removal left the settlers alone and free to pursue the commitment to cash-crop farming, to business, and to Progress which was their foremost reason for coming West in the first place. Their urge to change the "territory" could now be gratified without resistance; a profane, and typically Mid-

western, attitude toward land—agriculture as business—would be permanently established.

Indian removal achieved, westering—such as it was for these Midwestern pioneers—ended, there is not much more to be said about Fulton County. What we have, again, is the poverty of a culture with no impulse toward transcendence, toward, that is, a truly westering experience. Thoreau went to the woods "to transact some private business" related to "the importance of a man's soul and of to-day"; but the Fulton County pioneers went to the woods *for business*, indeed. Not surprisingly, then, in 1875 the oldest living settler, Benjamin C. Wilson, gave a pep-talk to the fellow citizens of his county, assuring them that "It is progress and improvement that makes wealth" and that "There is . . . a future for Fulton county that we know not of, in which the coming generation will far excel the present in wealth and personal enterprise." Indeed, "If we could have even at this late day a through-line railroad, Rochester would soon hum with manufactories and general industry, the population would be doubled in a remarkably short time and citizens who are now worth hundreds of dollars could count their wealth by thousands. The farmer would find a direct market for all his produce, and for his wheat, corn, oats, potatoes, etc., he would receive the same prices paid at other county towns. Not only this but his farm and timber land would be increased in value from 25 to 50 per cent."[17] Wilson's dream-image of Fulton County as a wealthy, progressive agricultural *and* industrial—as opposed to a truly agrarian—society is, historically, a central myth of Midwestern American culture, a myth that he dwells upon lovingly. For only "Those who have had the experience"—he claims—can "comprehend the change that [Fulton County] has passed through from a howling wilderness, possessed almost exclusively by savage Indians, who practiced all manner of barbarities, to a fertile county, inhabited by a moral, intelligent, wealthy and progressive people."[18] True enough, perhaps—but Wilson's astonishing lack of insight into the moral and cultural realities of the very history that he helped to make does not speak well for the quality of the westering experience in Fulton County.

And we are living with the legacy of this experience—a bitter heritage. Perhaps our present vapid, secularized, atomized,

commerce-oriented society can not be traced solely to the failures of our first settlers; but they did begin a tradition of cash-crop farming and economic individualism which, in the American Midwest, has yet to be changed. The record of this impoverished heritage, for Fulton County, is *Fulton County Folks*. Here are the up-to-date stories of the most prominent Fulton County families, and there is simply very little in all of these stories of any real interest or importance: no fresh experience to be related, few lives of a quality that compells or inspires. How can there be when the values by which a people lives are still those which Benjamin C. Wilson urged them to pursue: business, progress, wealth? *Home Folks* has the intrinsic interest of having been written out of the actual westering experience: *Fulton County Folks* is only, as I have said, the record of the failure of this experience. One thing that *Fulton County Folks* does, though, is to illustrate Frederick Jackson Turner's insight into one aspect of the American "wilderness experience": it bred the ideal, the myth of the self-made man.[19] *This* is what, on the evidence, still moves, still motivates the people of Fulton County. Everywhere in *Fulton County Folks* there are proud references to certain self-made men—farmers, merchants, businessmen, doctors—and indeed some of these stories are, in themselves, quite remarkable. But we have long been aware of the cultural limitations of the self-made man, and of a society committed solely to this ideal.[20] One is reminded of Santayana's observation that a truly attractive culture requires "the love of a certain quality of life, to be maintained manfully"; that "the prize of life [is] worth winning, but not worth snatching."[21] This is what most of the first settlers forgot when—seeking land ownership more than they sought a new landscape or a new life—they came into Fulton County; and this is what most of the people of Fulton County, trapped in the Midwest's myth of progress and economic success, seem still to forget.

If we are going to talk seriously about the culture or the cultural heritage of the Midwest, it seems to me that we are going to have to get back to the quality of individual lives. For the people of Fulton County this would mean remembering that at least one pioneer, William Rannells, did not come to the county solely for land; or that a struggling doctor, Winfield Scott Shafer,

not only visioned but actually founded Rochester College; or that Marguerite L. Miller single-handedly preserved their early history in *Home Folks*; or that Col. Isaac Washington Brown dedicated his life to working and speaking for the saving of birds. "It is this life of the individual, as it may be lived in a given nation, that determines the whole value of that nation," as Santayana said; "and America will not be a success, if every American is a failure."[22] The same is true of the American Midwest.[23]

Rochester, Indiana

NOTES

1. Marguerite L. Miller correctly predicted in a letter (September 16, 1940) to the editor of the Rochester *News-Sentinel* that "in years to come *Home Folks* will grow in greater and still greater value as history." She not only collected the personal narratives contained in the book but also set the type and bound the pages. Happily, the Fulton County Historical Society has sponsored a hardcover reprint (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth, n.d.) of both volumes of this book: My references are to this hardcover edition, hereafter cited as *Home Folks*. *Fulton County Folks* is edited by Shirley Willard, president of the Fulton County Historical Society, and published by Walsworth. The Fulton County Historical Society plans to publish a second volume of family histories, which will also be titled *Fulton County Folks*, in 1980.
2. Book review in *The Old Northwest*, 3 (June 1977), 200.
3. Westbrook, *Walter Van Tilburg Clark* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 12.
4. I have analyzed Thoreau's relation to the American westering experience in "Thoreau: Walking Toward England," *The Westering Experience in American Literature: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Merrill Lewis and L. L. Lee (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 1977), pp. 85-93. Cf. also my essays on "Stephen Crane and the Western Myth," *Western American Literature*, 7 (Summer 1972), 111-123, and on "Hawthorne's Dream in the Forest," *Western American Literature*, 13 (Winter 1979), 327-339.
5. *Home Folks*, II, 91, 89-90, 90.
6. *Home Folks*, I, 128.
7. *Home Folks*, I, 2.
8. Wilson, "Fulton County—What I know about its early settlements," *Fulton County Historical Society Quarterly*, 10 (August 1974), 7-8, 8. First printed in 1875 in the Rochester *Union Spy*.
9. "'Directionality': The Compass in the Heart," *The Westering Experience in American Literature*, ed. Lewis and Lee, p. 219.
10. *Home Folks*, I, 105, 106, 107.
11. *Home Folks*, I, 106, 108.
12. *Home Folks*, I, 94.

13. Westbrook, pp. 12-13, 13.
14. *Home Folks*, I, 6.
15. See Otho Winger, *The Potawatomi Indians* (Elgin, Ill.: The Elgin Press, 1939), pp. 33-53.
16. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1951), pp. 44, 60. First published in 1923 by Thomas Seltzer.
17. Wilson, pp. 23, 24, 23.
18. Wilson, p. 5.
19. Turner develops this idea in his essay titled "The Problem of the West," *Atlantic Monthly*, 78 (September 1896), 289-297.
20. See, for example, my essay titled "The American Dream and the Romance Tradition in "American Fiction: A Literary Study of Society and Success in America," *Journal of American Culture*, 2 (Spring 1979), 5-16. This issue of the *Journal of American Culture* focuses on the self-made American; it has also been published as a hardcover book: *Onward and Upward: Essays On The Self-Made American*, ed. Thomas D. Clark (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979).
21. George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 31, 37. First published in 1922 by Constable and Company Ltd.
22. Santayana, p. 64.
23. This paper was presented at the 1978 meeting of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature and at the 1979 meeting of the Popular Culture Association in the South.

ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDWESTERN LITERATURE: 1979

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This bibliography includes primary and secondary sources of Midwestern literary genres published, for the most part, in 1979. Criteria for inclusion of authors are birth or residence in the Midwest; fiction with Midwestern locales are included irrespective of their authors' ties with this region.

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New periodicals are listed here which first appeared usually in 1979 and in some way relate to Midwestern literature, either by content or locale. Descriptive notes follow each entry.

Blue Buildings. No. 1—(November 1978-), 3 issues per year, $5 per year. Tom Urban and M. R. Doty, editors; 2800 Rutland, Des Moines, Iowa 50311. *Poetry is published by this little magazine; many of its contributors are Midwesterners.*

Corridors. No. 1—(Spring/Summer 1979-), 2 issues per year, $5 per year. Jane Dobija, editor; 1100 Wayburn #3, Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan 48230. *Poetry, short fiction and drama are featured in this little magazine; "the purpose of the magazine is to promote writers from the Detroit area."*

Hemingway Notes. Vol. 5—(Fall 1979-), 2 issues per year. $5 per year. Charles M. Oliver, editor; Department of English, Ohio Northern University, Ada, Ohio 45810.

Scholarly journal publishing essays and reviews concerning Hemingway. Volumes 1-4 were published in 1971-1974.

Kenyon Review. New series, vol. 1–(Winter 1979-), 4 issues per year, $12 per year. Ronald Sharp and Frederick Turner, editors; Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio 43022.
The reappearance of this literary review which suspended publication in 1970; essays, poetry and fiction.

Madison Review. Vol. 1–(Spring 1979-), 2 issues per year, $4 per year. Jay Clayton, editor; Department of English, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.
A little magazine which publishes poetry, fiction, essays, and reviews; "half of the contributors are University of Wisconsin students."

Magic Changes. No. 1–(December 1979-), 4 issues per year, $12 per year. Donald G. Bullen and John P. Sennett, editors; 1923 Finchley Ct., Schaumburg, Illinois 60194.
Each issue of this little magazine is devoted to a special theme; publishing poetry, fiction, reviews, and art.

Passages North. No. 1–(Fall 1979-), 2 issues per year, $2 per year. Elinor Benedict, editor; Wm. Bonifas Fine Arts Center, 7th Street and 1st Avenue South, Escanaba, Michigan 49829.
"To stimulate and recognize writing of high quality in the Northern Michigan region; to bring to the same region writing of high quality from other parts of the nation–and beyond"; poetry, short fiction, essays, art.

Pikestaff Review. No. 1–(Summer 1979-), irregular, $5 for 3 issues. James R. Scrimgeour and Robert D. Sutherland, editors; P.O. Box 127, Normal, Illinois 61761.
Poetry, fiction, and art are published in this little magazine; contributors are not limited to the Midwest.

Pub. No. 1–(1979-), 3 issues per year, $2.75 per year. Daniel R. Betz and Axelander Gold, editors; Ansuda Publications, Box 123, Harris, Lowa 51345.
Poetry, fiction, essays, drama, and art are featured in this little magazine.

Sackbut Review. Vol. 1–(Fall 1978-), 4 issues per year, $3.50 per year. Angela Peckenpaugh, editor; 2513 East Webster Place, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211.
A little magazine, many of whose contributors are from the Midwest; poetry and art are published.

Sez/A Multi-Racial Journal of Poetry & People's Culture. No. 1–(Winter 1978-), 2 issues per year, $6 for 4 issues. Jim Dochniak, editor; P.O. Box 8803, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408.
A little magazine providing "a vehicle of exposure for the many talented local, state and midwestern-regional writers"; poetry, fiction, essays, reviews and art are published.

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