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in memory of

ELEANOR COPENHAVER ANDERSON

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The last photo of Sherwood and Eleanor Anderson together, aboard the S.S. Santa Lucia, February 28, 1941.

In Memoriam

ELEANOR COPENHAVER ANDERSON
1896 - 1985

Nearly forty-five years after Sherwood Anderson's death on March 8, 1941, Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson, his wife of nearly eight years that were productive and contented for both of them, has joined him on the hill overlooking Marion, Virginia, where Anderson's monument proclaims confidently for both of them that "Life Not Death is the Great Adventure."

Eleanor was proud that she was, as she liked to say, a mountain Virginian, an Elizabethan, but she was much more. She was born in Marion, Virginia, on June 15, 1896 to distinguished parents, Bascom E. Copenhaver, Superintendent of Schools in Smythe County, and Laura Scherer Copenhaver, author, English teacher, and founder of an organization for marketing the handicrafts of mountain women. She graduated from the University of Richmond in 1917, received a certificate in social work from Bryn Mawr in 1920, and an M.A. from Columbia in 1933.

As part of the work for a course at Columbia, Eleanor had, while at home in Marion, interviewed Sherwood Anderson in late 1931. The interview focuses on Anderson's *Poor White*, his novel dealing with the industrialization of an Ohio town. The topic was of particular interest to Eleanor; she had, since 1920, worked for the National Board of the YWCA, with much of her time spent in social work among young women in mill towns in the South.

Anderson had, since his move to Virginia in 1925 and his purchase of Marion's two weekly papers in 1927, become friendly with Eleanor's parents, particularly her mother; the attraction between Anderson in his fifties and Eleanor, twenty years younger, continued to grow. They were married on July 6, 1933.

The marriage was fulfilling for both, and their careers were mutually enriching; Anderson discovered the mill girls with whom Eleanor worked and who were to provide the magnificent portraits in *Perhaps Women*, *Beyond Desire*, and *Kit Brandon*; Anderson often traveled with her and, Eleanor recalled, sometimes wrote her reports for her.

From 1937 to 1947 Eleanor was head of the Industrial Program of the YWCA, culminating her long service to the causes that promised social and economic reform, and in her years of what were, for her, retirement she recalled her role in the causes of the past: marching in support of Sacco and Vanzetti, speaking on New York street corners for FDR in 1932, supporting, with Sherwood, the causes of the 1930s. She retired from the YWCA in 1961.

Eleanor's second career had been that of maintaining the literary legacy of her late husband. Since his death in 1941, she not only collected and cared for the thousands of letters, manuscripts, and other materials that she graciously presented to the Newberry Library in 1947, but she welcomed dozens of Anderson scholars and aficionados, giving generously of her time, encouragement, and support. She was a member of the Society since its beginning in 1971. Those of us who were fortunate to know her will miss her greatly. Eleanor was a gracious lady and a great woman. Like Sherwood, we are richer for having known her. She died on September 12, 1985, in Marion, and this volume is dedicated to her memory.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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HJALMAR HOLAND, THE KENSINGTON RUNESTONE, MYTH, AND HISTORY

ROBERT D. NARVESON

What do Eskimo kayaks that once hung in a cathedral in Oslo have to do with a stone carved with Nordic runes found on a hilltop in rural Minnesota? The ability to suggest a plausible answer to such a question marks the historian as rhetorician. The art of the rhetorician begins where certainty leaves off; and not much in history is certain. To the drama of history is frequently added the drama of conflicting versions of history, the latter often at least as interesting as the former. Such was the case in the controversy over the Kensington runestone, denounced by academic scholars as a hoax, but championed by Hjalmar R. Holand as authentic.

Holand labored for fifty years against nearly unanimous skepticism from the scholarly establishment. Like his contemporary Ole Rolvaag, Holand was animated by a desire both to celebrate his Norse heritage and to move himself and his fellow countrymen to emulate the hardy resourceful, and enterprising Norse spirit. Like Rolvaag, he steeped himself in stories of the Norse immigrant pioneers who settled the American plains, as well as in the Icelandic sagas that preserved tales of Norse settlement and exploration before Columbus. In the spirit of the sagas, Holand tells a story that celebrates heroic adventure. But whereas Rolvaag, whatever his use of actual incident, wrote avowed fiction, Holand insisted that he was reconstructing historical truth. He played what Peter Elbow calls "the believing game," and tried always to find evidence and argument in favor of his theories. Historians and linguistic scholars, trained in skepticism, accepting only what must be rather than what might

be, demand a more rigorous kind of proof. They have not been kind to Holand. They have not, however, been able to demonstrate convincingly that Holand was wrong. While common sense resists one's accepting his story as historical truth, it remains an intriguing possibility, and unless convincing proof of a hoax comes along, Holand's work, existing between the clearly historical and the clearly mythical, will have its influence.

Who was Hjalmar R. Holand? In his autobiography, *My First Eighty Years*, we learn that he was born in Holand, Norway (near Oslo), on October 20, 1872, came to Chicago at age eleven, and a few years later moved to Wisconsin. He earned B.A. and M.A. degrees, the latter at the University of Wisconsin, intending a literary career. For some years he made his livelihood as a traveling salesman of books and maps, all the while collecting literary material and writing articles. In 1908 his "rather large" (Wierenga ii) history of Norwegian settlements in America was published in Norway. Thereafter he wrote, besides his publications on the Kensington stone, a number of other books on Norse immigration and pioneer history. Meanwhile, on his Door County (Wisconsin) acreage, he pioneered the raising of apples, at which he prospered, using his earnings to support his literary work. He also earned money by lecturing, and in 1950 (at age seventy-eight!) held a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. His last book appeared when he was ninety years old. He died on August 8, 1963.

One of his recent defenders, Robert A. Hall Jr., a respected linguist (though of Romance rather than Scandinavian languages), describes Holand as having been an obsessed man (*The Kensington Stone is Genuine*). Holand had become interested in the controversy concerning the Kensington runestone while interviewing Scandinavian pioneers for his immigrant history. That a fourteenth century runestone should turn up in a field of a Swedish immigrant settler in Minnesota in 1898 strikes one as so suspicious that the first assumption must be of a hoax. Even a casual acquaintance with the history of scientific, literary, and historical hoaxes in America and elsewhere makes such an assumption inevitable. As Holand readily conceded, "the claim [that] Norse explorers penetrated to the very center of the North

American continent one hundred and thirty years before Columbus sighted San Salvador . . . will be met with the greatest skepticism" (Holand, *Westward* vi). Moreover, linguists and runologists of this country and, even more influentially, of Scandinavia had from their first examinations in 1899 stressed the strangeness of the runes and the language, and rejected the stone as a patent modern forgery. If Holand had begun his investigation with a study of the text, perhaps he too would have rejected the stone out of hand. But Holand believed he could trust the word of the Swedish farmer who claimed to have uncovered it. He therefore began with the assumption that it was genuine, and saw his task as squaring the runes on the stone with what could be known of fourteenth century runic writing and squaring its message with what knowledge could be reconstructed of Norse expeditions at the time.

Holand had a full measure of Norwegian determination. According to the text on the stone, it was carved by members of expedition on an //opdagelsefard// (journey of discovery) in the year 1362; and Holand himself undertook an //opdagelsefard// of his own, through geology, archaeology, dendrology, history, linguistics, and runology, in pursuit of those putative explorers. Beginning his journey in 1907, he acquired possession of the stone and gradually elaborated a wide-ranging theory according to which the stone would have to be genuine. In five separate books (*The Kensington Stone, Westward from Vinland, America, 1355-1364: A New Chapter in Pre-Columbian History, Explorations in America before Columbus, and A Pre-Columbian Crusade to America*) between the years 1932 and 1962, he went over the essential grounds, setting the story in a new perspective each time and adding new grounds based on new discoveries and revised theories. The reader who follows his reports through these books must be impressed both by his industry as an investigator and by his commitment to his cause. He was evidently undismayed and undeterred by opposition. He devoted fifty years of his life to convincing a willing public and a skeptical scholarly audience of his claims. Whatever the merits of his work as historical investigation and reconstruction, he conducted his campaign with a literary and rhetorical skill that has earned him a minor place among writers of the Midwest.

Though Holand's point of departure was the Kensington stone, the story as it evolved ranged from Norway to North Dakota, touching upon Iceland, Greenland, "Vinland" (which Holand locates in Rhode Island), and Hudson Bay. The essential outline of Holand's story was clear already in the table of contents of his second of five volumes, and it reached near classic form in the final one:

- I. The inhabitants of a Greenland settlement, reportedly having abandoned their Christian faith, mysteriously disappear.
- II. The King of Norway orders an expedition to find them and bring them back to the faith.
- III. Members of the expedition discover a sea by which they penetrate deep into the heart of the North American continent, where they divide into two groups.
- IV. One group remains with the ships and eventually reports back to Norway.
- V. The other, having traveled a thousand miles inland and lost half its members in a massacre, allies itself with a tribe of the native inhabitants and builds a colony that thrives for four hundred years.

I need hardly point out that this is the outline for an epic tale. Well told, it must win many readers, who would not be much concerned about whether it were true. Holand, however, insisted that his story be accepted as fact, or at least that his evidence be accepted as authentic. Because the mass of academic authorities disputed his evidence, more of Holand's effort was devoted to making the case for the authenticity of his evidence than to dramatic rendering of the epic journey he sought to reconstruct. And exhibit A on which his case depended was the text engraved on the Kensington Stone, which reads:

8 Goths and 22 Norwegians on exploration-journey from Vinland through the West We had camp by 2 skerries one days-journey north from this stone We were and fished one day After we came home found 10 men red with blood and dead AVM Save from evil have 10 of (our party) by the sea to look after our ships 14 days-journey from this island year 1362 (Holand's translation, *Westward from Vinland*, 101).

Holand felt keenly his position as an outsider to the academic and literary establishments. An immigrant, an alien to the American culture, he did not even try to have his first history (written in Norwegian) of Norwegian immigration to America published by an American publisher, but instead undertook to publish and market it himself. That experience may have influenced him to publish privately his first book on the runestone as well (though he was now writing in English). He had reason to be confident of a market among Scandinavian-Americans. The same interest that moved Holand to study the subject would also move them to find interest in his reports. They would be less critical than scholarly readers and more attracted to his intriguing story. Holand manifestly attempted to satisfy these readers. As soon became evident, he did so successfully. His subsequent volumes found commercial publishers, who recognized the appeal of the topic and the competence of the writer. Nor has their judgment altered since his death. Most recently, Dover has adjudged his *Westward from Vinland* appealing enough for reprinting and issue among its paperback reprints, unchanged except that its earlier subtitle has now been made into its title: *Norse Explorations and Discoveries in America, 982-1362*.

Discussing literary works by Cather, Neihardt, and Rolvaag that he denominates "plains epics," Paul Olson makes the point that these works "are historical in source and feeling. In the case of our authors, the events recorded—or events very like them—did happen" (284). Olson suggests that "The presentation of the past as heroic and as a model for future enterprise by the storytellers of one's childhood and youth must exercise a powerful influence on the imagination of the writer so inducted into the great world" (266). That influence was as strong on Holand as on Rolvaag, Cather, and Neihardt. One sees Holand not only admiring strong characters and great enterprises; one sees his admiration of the Norse explorers and settlers; one sees him taking them for models to emulate in his own endeavors; one sees him commending their example to his readers.

A sense of cultural identity as Norwegian-Americans manifested itself in the writings of both Ole Rolvaag and Hjalmar

Holand, who were close contemporaries (Rolvaag was born in 1876, four years later than Holand). Rolvaag's dedication in *Giants in the Earth* reads: "To those of my people who took part in the great settling, to them and their generations I dedicate this narrative" (v). Rolvaag's title is often felt to be ambiguous. Does it refer to those hostile forces of nature that are personified in old Norse myths? It does, as Steve Hahn ("Vision") persuasively argues. Rolvaag seems to have wished to strengthen that interpretation in the English version, since there he quotes in full the verse in Genesis from which the title comes, whereas in the original Norwegian edition it had been elided to refer unambiguously to "mighty men which were of old, men of renown" (Haugen, "Introduction" xxi). By direct implication, these "mighty men" were the resourceful and indomitable men and women who, in spite of those hostile forces, settled the land and peopled the territory. Rolvaag has the pioneer wife Beret reflect: "That these vast plains, so like infinity, should ever be peopled and settled, would be a greater miracle than for dead men to rise up and walk! . . ." (*Giants* 127). Yet, when Rolvaag wrote in the 1920s, that peopling and settling is exactly what had taken place. The generation to which he belonged looked back in respect and wonder at the qualities of the people—their own forebears—who had effected the miracle. Introducing the 1930 version of his Norwegian-language history of Norse immigration (*Den Siste Folkevandring*), Holand wrote in a similar vein:

The history of their migrations is a saga of distress and need, but not one of despair; a saga of toil without surrender; and a saga of struggle without defeat. Their motivating force was not a lust for power to dominate others, nor was it the passionate pursuit of personal glory or revenge. It was, rather, the love they felt for family and kin, combined with a joy in peaceful pursuits, that moved and sustained these Norwegian pioneers. (*Norwegians in America* vi)

Neither Rolvaag nor Holand wrote "jeremiads," those lamentations over decline in character in the present generation that Sacvan Bercovitch finds characteristic of much writing by

descendants of those who settled the Eastern seaboard. The American jeremiad, Bercovitch writes, exalted the past above the present as a way of exhorting an audience to rise to the challenge of the future. I do not detect the flavor in the writings of Rolvaag or Holand. They too pose the implicit challenge to themselves and their generation to be worthy of their past; but they do not denounce their own generation for having declined in greatness. They seem merely to accept that conditions are different, and while they may look back with some wistfulness as well as admiration at the past, they do not regret that such demanding times are gone.

Rolvaag's chief collaborator in translating *Giants in the Earth* from Norwegian to English was Lincoln Colcord, who wrote of the novel that "when we lay it down, we have gained a new insight into the founding of America." Many would say that by the 1870's when the action of the novel occurs, America was well past its founding. Colcord's claim would not, however, inspire that cavil in minds such as Rolvaag's or Holand's. From the viewpoint of the Norwegian-American, the pioneer epoch was the period from mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century and the locale was the Midwest where the immigrants from Norway subdued woodlands and prairies.

It was not only their recent past that kindled the admiration and imaginations of these Norse-Americans. The great migration from Norway to the American Midwest, that began in the 1840's and continued through the beginning of this century, inevitably revived interest in the Norse migration, nine centuries earlier, from Iceland to Greenland and beyond, as recorded in the Icelandic sagas, whose earliest written versions date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Rolvaag and Holand belonged to a folk for whom the Icelandic sagas were part of their cultural baggage. Among Norwegian immigrants and their descendants, interest in tales of these ancient voyages has always been high. "[Ole Rynning, in 1837,] was the first of many to point out parallels between the ancient voyages of Norwegians to 'the distant strands of Vinland the Good' " and the coming of modern immigrants (Semningsen 27). Books concerning these ancient voyages were reviewed and summar-

ized and debated widely in the immigrant press (Wahlgren 121ff.)

While it is not unexpected that Americans of Norse background should think of themselves as inheritors of the old Norse tradition depicted in the sagas, Einar Haugen points out that the interest has not been confined to these circles:

It is apparent that the Norse discovery has played important role in the affections and imaginations of the American people. Norwegian-Americans have appropriated Leif Ericson from the Icelanders as a kind of national saint, a symbol of group assertion. But even among old-stock Americans these early Viking explorers have been enveloped in an intensely romantic haze. Scandinavians and Americans alike whose enthusiasm has been unhampered by a critical sense have seen vast perspectives of forgotten Norse colonies in the American wilderness, a regular Norse empire stretching from Massachusetts to Minnesota. They have more or less unconsciously wanted to magnify the importance of the Norse discoveries. (158)

In stressing "enthusiasm . . . unhampered by a critical sense," Haugen the scholar distances himself from those uncritical enthusiasts who lovingly embrace the old sagas. Yet that distance disappears when Haugen dedicates his translation and interpretation of the Vinland sagas "TO THE BRAVE NORSEMEN OF OUR DAY WHO SAIL THE COURSE OF LEIF AND ERIC FOR THE FREEDOM OF THEIR NATIVE SOIL" (*Voyages* iii). What one notices in Rolvaag, Holand, and Haugen, and could doubtless find repeated in dozens of sources, is pride in their heritage and a desire to be worthy successors of their forebears.

Given this long-standing propensity among his countrymen, it does not surprise us that Holand wrote about modern Norse pioneers and medieval Norse explorers of "Vinland the Good" in much the same language, celebrating similar heroic virtues and noble motives. No reader can doubt that he expected his Norse-American readers to find his vision as attractive and inspirational as he himself did. He won admiration and sympathy even from many who remained unconvinced of his argu-

ments. Haugen shows himself to be one of these. Commenting on the controversy over the Kensington runestone, he writes:

Mr. Holand has presented some very plausible arguments in its favor; he has shown that it is not lightly to be dismissed. His notable talent of persuasion and his charm of manner have won him a great following, to whom this is a sacred stone. (156)

What he does not mention, but takes for granted, is Holand's patience, good temper, and perseverance in the face of scholarly rejection. The analogy between the adventurous historical voyaging of Holand through hostile scholarly waters into unexplored territories, and the early Norsemen who crossed the stormy North Atlantic to discover Vinland, is not one that readers of both Holand and the sagas are likely to overlook. Modern Scandinavians may regret, as Haugen says, that the Norse efforts resulted in no empire comparable to those of the Spanish, French, and English in later centuries; they nevertheless feel a kinship with those who preceded them across the Atlantic, and find inspiration in the qualities of character that made their exploits possible. Will they not also admire the exploits and qualities of character of Holand the historical scholar?

In both *Den Siste Folkevandring* and *Westward from Vinland*, Holand accepted legend as fact when it suited his purposes. Convinced of his explanation of the evidence, he considered other interpretations only in order to explain them away. The honored stance of the reputable historian is to assume that legend is untrustworthy unless there is evidence to prove otherwise. Holand was not inclined to do that. He intended the reader to accept, as he himself did, that the events he narrated really happened. He also intended to narrate a near-mythic tale which has an essentially aesthetic and rhetorical appeal. His interests, and the interests he assumed his principal readers would have, reflected the complex allegiances of an immigrant whose cultural heritage remained a potent influence on his character and outlook. To the tradition of the Icelandic sagas, Holand, like Rolvaag, adds Christian themes appropriate to the setting: a band of men characterized by energy, courage, and strong resolve, undertake a mission that results in discovery and

eventual colonizing of a new land. Adopting the stance of the epic author, Holand was not the aloof, objective, distanced historian, dispassionately seeking explanatory laws or patterns. He told of "an undertaking prompted, not by greed of gold, but born of brotherly love and the hope of saving human souls" (*Westward* iii).

In the course of celebrating what he regarded as the heroic Norse character, he was also, I have the impression, enacting it. His resolve to persevere in the face of scepticism and scholarly scorn must often have been stiffened by thought of his exemplary ancestors.

Exactly herein lies a problem. Hall (70) pointed out that Holand had to keep in view his double audience of ordinary readers and critical scholars. The runestone skeptics were critical of those ordinary readers. They noted, as I have been doing, the ethnic pride, so strong among Scandinavian-Americans; but because, as their roles required, they played the doubting game rather than the believing game, they regarded the pride as a source of willful blindness of which both Holand and his readers were guilty. There is little wonder that academic historians such as Samuel Eliot Morrison dismissed Holand's work as wishful thinking and special pleading (quoted in Chapman 111). Historians have a number of objections to Holand's procedures. Some of these are described by Hall:

In the presentation of his material, Holand tends to romanticize and over-dramatize. He does not enable the reader to distinguish immediately between attested fact (e.g. the royal order to Paul Knutson) and his further hypotheses based thereon (e.g. the connection of the stone's //opdagelsefard// with the Knutson expedition). Holand does not use the caution which I, for example, would be inclined to use in distinguishing between what we are sure about, what is probable, and what is plausible. (69-70)

Hall discusses other criticisms of Holand:

1. He is an amateur, deficient in scholarly care, integrity, and method (68).
2. He relies on sworn affidavits, as if they somehow had scholarly force (72).

3. His continual debate over a fifty year period, amounting to an obsession, has biased him (73).

Having examined these criticisms from a scholarly perspective, Hall concludes in each case that there is less to the objection than meets the eye.

Had I the space, Holand's offenses were easily illustrated. They are everywhere in his writings. Yet many readers, after following the jousts between Holand and his critics, shared the sentiments of Cyrus Gordon, whose interpretation of these quarrels was as follows:

Obviously such a disturber of the *pax academica* is not welcome on the campus as a faculty member, and he did not have a career in the university system. But for half a century he stood up against the professional runologists and slugged it out point by point, . . . (Quoted in Hall 69).

The *ad hominem* argument can clearly cut both ways! *Ad hominem* arguments, of course, do not change the mind of a reader whose opinion has already been formed by an evaluation of evidence. Runologists do not appear to believe that Holand's "slugging" has won him many of the disputed points, and the runologist R. I. Page, reviewing Hall's book in *Speculum* (1983), savages Hall's explanation of the disputed runes.

Haugen's remark in 1941 remains valid today: "Whether one regards [the runestone] as spurious or genuine, its undeniable presence in Alexandria, Minnesota, is very hard to explain. If it is a hoax, it has not yet been unmasked; if it is a voice from the past, its title to speak is still in doubt" (157). Hall summarizes the opposing cases and concludes: "It seems to me, on the basis of the evidence presented by both sides and also of that now available in the great corpora of mediaval runic inscriptions. . . [that] with perhaps 98% likelihood, . . . the inscription of the Kensington Stone is to be considered genuine" (92). Considering the dubious tale one must swallow in order to accept the stone as genuine, one is surprised to discover that its defenders still find persuasive obstacles in the way of rejecting it as fake. Holand's research tried to show that the language more easily conforms to what is known now of 14th century usage than to what was known in the 19th century. How could a forger have made up

such a language? Who might this forger have been? Sources that he might have copied have not been found, though many have been proposed which Holand shows to be inadequate to the purpose. Many of the runes, on the other hand,—38 percent of them, according to Page in his review of Hall's book (751)—are "anomalies." If these are authentic runes, how come so many of them occur in no other runic document?

The reader ends up faced with two improbabilities, one that the stone could be authentic, the other that it could be a forgery. Except to a few scholars and to the Alexandria tourism industry, and perhaps not even to the latter, very little is at stake on the issue of the stone's authenticity. No practical consequences ensue in either case: What does it matter to readers of his books (aside from those battenning their Nordic pride and those defending the official scholarly consensus) whether Holand is right or wrong, so long as he pleads his cause eloquently and in an attractive manner? And that I believe he does. The art in such a matter is to appear to have very little art beyond logic and clarity. He must appear not to be making his evidence up. Where conclusive evidence is not available, he must search out the most persuasive arguments. Holand is pretty persuasive. But he has something else going for him. Holand asks his readers to contemplate heroic and tragic adventure undertaken for lofty motives. His opponents denounce a petty prank. Even a reader whose skepticism has the upper hand most of the time may nevertheless entertain a secret, academically disreputable, hope that Holand is right—especially if that reader happens to be an American of Scandinavian ancestry. I recognize that this is not a sound modern historian's perspective; it is, however, an allowable literary one. Many a novel masquerades as history. Myth is a powerful prop to values in a culture. Sometimes, perhaps, influenced by such considerations, we are willing to suspend disbelief and simply enjoy the attempted reconstruction of lost events, especially when it is the product of a vigorous and imaginative effort to show why these obscure events may be real.

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CHARLES M. RUSSELL: LITERARY HUMORIST

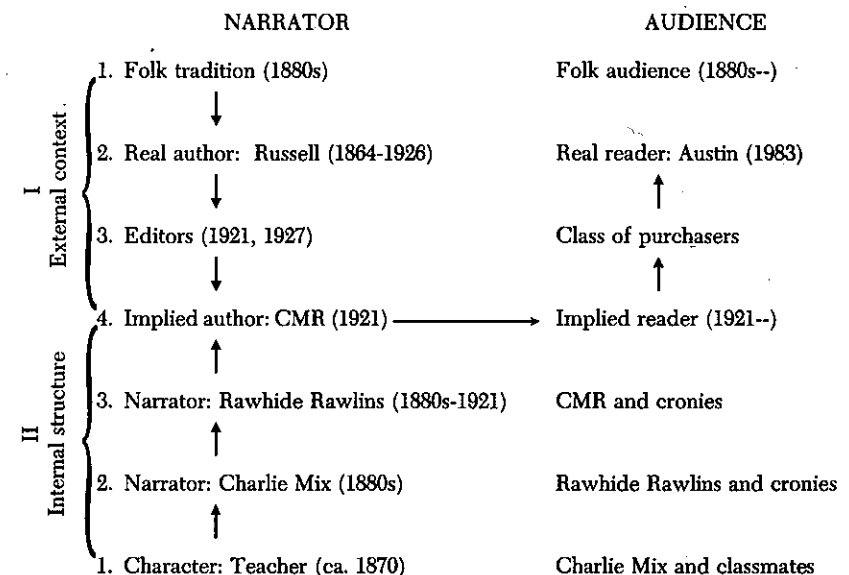
JAMES C. AUSTIN

The best of the old Western tale tellers, according to distinguished authorities, was Charles Marion Russell (1864-1926), the cowboy artist. He could let go a yarn that would put Will Rogers into awed silence.¹ Many of his stories are in print, though they are evidently pale in comparison to his original oral telling. Still, they are contributions to American culture.

I propose to show how Russell, through deceptively complex artistry, transformed folklore into literature. I will do this by analyzing (1) the background—folklore, biography, and editing—that went into bringing Russell's stories to the printed page, and (2) the internal structure of a representative story as it reflects this background.

My method is outlined on the accompanying chart.² The original folk tale reaches me, the reader, only through a series of narrators. Not only is it handed from one teller to another until it reaches the printed page, but the process is repeated in the story itself. The framework, the structure, of the story is almost a mirror image of the external context. It is more than a twice-told tale; it is a kind of reconstruction of the process of the transmission of folk tales.

On the chart, the left-hand column lists the narrators, real, mythical, or fictitious. For every narrator there is an audience, real, mythical, or fictitious. When people talk, they talk to someone. The listeners (audience) are listed in the right-hand column. I, the real reader, am getting the story from someone who told it to someone, etc., etc., until it was put into print, and I, being someone who purchased the printed version, have the privilege of reading it.

POINT OF VIEW
IN CHARLES M. RUSSELL'S
"WHEN MIX WENT TO SCHOOL"

I. External Context

The folk tradition was the source of Russell's tales. That is, they were stories told orally during the 1880s, the great days of the cowboy and the open range, and were repeated whenever the boys got together on into the 1920s. Russell described the tellers and the audience in his Foreword to *Rawhide Rawlins Stories*.

When I came to Montana, which then was a territory with no railroads, reading matter of any kind was scarce. Where there's nothing to read, men must talk, so when they were gathered at ranches or stage stations, they 'amused themselves with tales of their own or others' adventures. Many became good storytellers.³

When Charles M. Russell "came to Montana" in 1880, he had just turned sixteen. Rebelling against the genteel culture of St. Louis, Missouri, he never went back except as a visitor. He died in Great Falls, Montana, in 1926. He experienced life as a shepherd, a trapper, a horse wrangler and night herder, and

for some months as an adoptive Blood Indian. He married in 1896 and, with his wife's prodding, settled down to the exploitation of his talents as illustrator, sculptor, and painter.⁴

Meanwhile, he developed, half-consciously, a remarkable verbal talent. He posed as an illiterate, despite the fact that he came from a cultured family and attended—briefly and grudgingly—schools in New Jersey and St. Louis. He usually refused to spell in anything but his own phonetic or anti-phonetic way. But when he turned his oral folk experience to the printed page, he proved to be a writer, not of great wisdom, but of tolerance, perception, and humor, who had the opportunity and intelligence to record the passing of the free-range era in words as well as pictures. He was a great letter writer, and his letters, usually illustrated, have been collected and published. He also wrote local-color sketches and introductions and even some comic-sentimental verse.

Russell was conscious of the difference between the art of telling a story and the art of literature—between the oral raconteur with his live audience and the writer with his remote print-oriented reader. Mark Twain made a point of the difference between the two forms in his own lecturing and writing. The written version lacks, "for instance, fictitious hesitations for the right word, fictitious unconscious pauses, fictitious unconscious side remarks, fictitious unconscious embarrassments, fictitious unconscious emphases placed upon the wrong word with a deep intention back of it."⁵ Russell's task, like Twain's, was to bridge the gulf between the folk teller and the remote reader. Russell once used the term "paper talk" in self-disparaging reference to his writing, and the expression was used as the title to a posthumous collection of his letters.

Now, before the "paper talk" got to a printed version, it went through the hands of editors, publishers, copy-editors, typesetters, and proofreaders—and probably of Russell's wife, Nancy. Most of the tales that reached print were collected in *Trails Plowed Under* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1927), published the year after Russell's death. All but eight of these had been previously published in *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* (Great Falls: Montana Newspaper Association, 1925). The

three books featured illustrations by Russell. In fact, the stories were treated as background for the pictures.

Russell's publishers eliminated the crudities of punctuation and spelling that flourished in his private letters, but they retained the indications of dialect pronunciation and grammar. The readers for whom the stories were published were more genteel and literate—not to say priggish—than Russell's cronies. The Doubleday edition, published in New York, was even more elegant in punctuation, format, and choice of illustrations, than the earlier Great Falls editions. Publishers and editors categorize their audiences, whether I, as reader, like it or not. And I must submit to this categorization—however reservedly.

A fourth collection of Russell's stories illustrates the effect of editors and friends on the end results of an author's work. Twenty-two years after Russell's death, a limited edition of some of his oral stories as retold by friends and acquaintances was published as *Rawhide Rawlins Rides Again: or Behind the Swinging Doors* (Pasadena, California: Trail's End Publishing Co., 1948). Much more free in references to the outhouse and the whore house, these stories represent a phase of Russell's story telling that is neglected in the more genteel publications. But, although they are retold by such professional writers as Irvin S. Cobb and Will James, they lack the vitality of Russell's style. As readers of the 1980s, we are unimpressed by the bawdiness and let down by the anecdotal slickness. Russell was a better writer than that, regardless of his editorial restraints.

We come now to the character in this string of narrators. Let us call him CMR as writer—the figure that Russell with his background plus his editors would like us to envisage: the implied author, the idealized author, the public image. In "A Few Words about Myself," written in 1926 as an introduction to the forthcoming *Trails Plowed Under*, CMR characterized himself:

Life has never been too serious with me—I lived to play and I'm playing yet. Laughs and good judgment have saved me many a black eye, but I don't laugh at other's tears. I was a wild young man, but age has made me gentle.

Thus the genial author to his gentle reader. Throughout his printed works, CMR's words about himself were few and self-effacing.

Self-effacing as he may be, it is this implied author who must make the crucial contact with his reader. The success or failure of any piece of writing—indeed, of any act of communication—depends on the relationship set up between the implied author and his chosen reader. That relationship may be one of teacher to student, of preacher to sinner, of salesman to customer, of con man to sucker, or even of confessor to priest. In Russell's case, it might be characterized as that of a casual entertainer to a remote but sympathetic audience.

And it is at this point, too, that the reader must put himself into the relationship. At least temporarily, he must be willing to be entertained, cajoled, sermonized, or conned. He must not only accept but participate in the role of the ideal reader—the sympathetic reader that the implied author is reaching out to. Thus, I, lounging in my suburban Midwestern study, knowing that I paid my money for this fine copy of *Trails Plowed Under*, must reach out to the author and understand.

II. Internal Structure

Next, we come to the analysis of the text—to show how it reflects the string of authors or “narrators” who composed it. To make the text real, I have chosen a story that I think is representative of Russell's literary craft, “When Mix Went to School.” It was published in; *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* in 1921 and reprinted in *Trails Plowed Under* in 1926.⁶ The two paragraphs set up the narrative chain. Paragraph 1:

“School days, school days, dear old Golden Rule days—that's the song I've heer'd 'em sing,” says Rawhide Rawlins, “an' it may be all right now, but there was nothin' dear about school days when I got my learnin'. As near as I can remember them he-schoolmarms we had was made of the same material as a bronco-buster. Anyway the one I went to in Missouri had every kid whip-broke. He'd call a name an' pick up a hickory, an' the owner of the name would come tremblin' to the desk.”

The first thing we note is the use of quotation marks, followed by the words “says Rawhide Rawlins.” Presumably we have somebody introducing the narrator, Rawlins, and presumably this is CMR. These are the only words he says in the whole story, but they are enough to make us feel him lurking in the background. We also note that they are in the present tense—the so-called “historical present”—intended to give the illusion that “you are there.” It is a conventional device in folk narration and suggests the first-hand down-home grammar of the tale. The reader is being pleasantly shifted from CMR, the writer, to the fictitious narrator, Rawhide Rawlins.

The speaker in the quotation marks is Rawhide Rawlins. He speaks mostly in the past tense in this introductory paragraph. Here is a case of a deliberate shifting of responsibility. The real author says to the implied author that a further disguise is needed: We have to put a paper figure up here, so that we and our friends and our collaborators will not be directly responsible for the crudities of expression and impression that we call forth in our rendition of folk humor. The Rawhide Rawlins of the original *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* is not merely a pseudonym, nor is he a full-fledged character presented by the author or implied author. He is never described in any of the three volumes of stories. He takes part in some of the stories, but mainly as an observer; and more often he is only the narrator of a tale of someone else, as in the present instance. He serves as the mouthpiece of the real author but he is not to be taken as the real author, for he exhibits prejudices that the real author does not share.

Rawlins is never individualized. Rather he is a type—an archetype, we could even say—of the Western story teller of the 1880s. We are given no description of the setting in which he tells the story, but we assume that he is telling it at the ranch or stage station or behind the swinging doors of the Western saloon. CMR is among the listeners, now sharing his experience with his implied ideal reader. We have a unique reference in Paragraph 1 to a Missouri childhood, but we cannot assume that this is Charles M. Russell revealing autobiographical facts. Many cowboys of the Northwest came from Missouri and the Midwest,

as well as from Texas, New York, Canada, and California. None were born in Montana. Yet it is the Montana "dialect" that characterizes Rawhide Rawlins. It is a dialect different from that of the Oklahoman Will Rogers, for example. It is not the pronunciation ("I've heer'd 'em sing") nor the grammar ("when I got my learnin'") but the figures of speech ("then he-school-marms we had was made of the same material as a bronco-buster"). In fact, it is the figures of speech that make up almost the whole artistic value of the Rawhide Rawlins—Charles Russell—stories.

The first paragraph of "When Mix Went to School" introduces the reader to Rawhide Rawlins. In the second paragraph, Rawlins introduces Charlie Mix and smoothly shifts us from the past tense back to the historical present.

"Charlie Mix—maybe some of you knowed him—that used to run the stage station at Stanford, tells me about his school days, an' it sure sounds natural. As near as I can remember, he's foaled back in the hills in New York state. There's a bunch of long, ganglin' kids in this neck of the woods that's mostly the offspring of old-time lumber jacks that's drifted down in the country, an' nobody has to tell you that this breed will fight a buzz-saw an' give it three turns to start."

The tale is supposedly a true relation. "Charlie Mix" may be the real name, or the range name, of someone Russell knew. Russell did use real names occasionally, but more often he followed the Western tradition of avoiding or disguising the name. He began the story "Night Herd," for example: "This yarn, a friend of mine tells—I ain't givin' his name 'cause he's married, and married men don't like history too near home." At any rate, we are told just enough about Mix to give him a certain credibility as a Western character, to place his original telling of the story somewhere around the 1880s, and to place the setting of the story itself in upstate New York in, say, 1870. But these details are questionable and are designed to distance us—the ideal implied readers—from first-hand experience of the story. This distancing is enhanced by two other artifices. First, we are already prepared to disbelieve by the hyperbolic style of Rawhide Rawlins. Second, we are not allowed to hear Mix in

his own words until the very last sentence of the story.

The first two paragraphs of "When Mix Went to School" are only the frame and scene setting, yet they comprise about a quarter of the tale. Mix's story is short and simple. The roughneck students in Mix's one-room schoolhouse run out of town every schoolmaster that can be hired. Finally, their fathers get together and hire a prize-fighter from New York City. This prize-fighter, though nameless, is the center of the action. He is the only person in the string of narrators and characters involved in the story to receive any direct description or characterization.

"This gent's head is smaller than's usual in humans. There don't seem to be much space above his eyes, an' his smile, which is meant to be pleasant, is scary. There's a low place where his nose ought to be, an' he could look through a keyhole with both eyes at once. His neck's enough larger than his head so that he could back out of his shirt without unbuttoning his collar. From here down he's built all ways for scrappin', an' when he's standin' at rest his front feet hang about even with his knees . . ."

The prize-fighter turned teacher knows how to handle the situation. As the boys advance on him, he knocks them out one by one. He is a kind of updated answer to Washington Irving's Ichabod Crane and Edward Eggleston's Hoosier schoolmaster—certainly a part of the American folk tradition. The story ends with Rawhide Rawlins, the prize-fighter-teacher, and Charlie Mix with his fellow students all talking at once—in the most complicated tangle of double and single quote marks that Doubleday & Company could, with all their meticulousness, not quite deal with:

"When he gets through bringin' his scholars back to life, teacher tells the boys to get their song books an' line up.

"Now," says he, 'turn to page 40 an' we will sing that beautiful little song:

*"Every Monday mornin' we are glad to go to school,
For we love our lovin' teacher an' obey his kindly rule.*

"He makes us sing that every mornin'," says Mix, 'an' we was sure broke gentle.'"

Mix's words, the last sentence of the story and the only words

directly quoted from him, round out the connection between "School days, school days," and the "he-schoolmarm's" as "bronco-busters" of the first paragraph. Further, they cap the tall-tale savagery with laconic understatement.

It turns out, then, that the naive cowboy artist, Charles Russell, brandished a smart literary artistry. Hiding behind an amazing array of masks, he nevertheless persuades us to love him and to laugh with him, without necessarily condoning the vulgarity and violence that he talks about. There is a pleasant romantic distance, in time and space and sentiment, given to the vulgarities. Further, the tall-tale exaggeration of Rawhide Rawlins's style lets us know, from the beginning, that we are not to take this seriously.

Yet, with all the distancing, in time and space and sentiment, there is still an immediacy to those aspects of the story that Russell wants us to feel. Though we are looking through binoculars, we are there. We can see and hear the prize-fighter-teacher, the schoolroom, the big punch-out, and the singing session. We get this through the description, but it is a minimal kind of description which selects a few details and exaggerates them. It is caricature rather than photographic realism. Also, the use of direct speech from Mix and from the teacher is selective but effective. And throughout the story the present tense not only gives immediacy but holds the chronologic and narrative complexities in control.

I am ready and eager to admit that Charlie Russell would have laughed off this pedantic analysis. After all, wasn't the best teacher a subhuman bare-knuckles boxer? I am pretty sure that Russell was only half conscious of his natural craftsmanship in bringing the folk tale to the printed page—and beyond. But I am trying to understand—in more than the sentimental way of many of Russell's admirers—how such natural craftsmanship works.⁸

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Will Rogers's Introduction to Charles M. Russell, *Trails Plowed Under* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1927). See also "Why and Wherefore" in Russell's *Rawhide Rawlins Rides Again* (Pasadena, California: Trail's End, 1948).
2. I acknowledge indebtedness to Seymour Chatman and other structuralist and communications theorists. But otherwise, neither the pleasure nor the blame is anyone's but mine.
3. Charles M. Russell, *Rawhide Rawlins Stories* (Great Falls, Montana: Montana Newspaper Association, 1921).
4. A thorough bibliography of Russell's art and writing is Karl Yost and Frederic G. Renner, *A Bibliography of the Published Works of Charles M. Russell* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1971).
5. Mark Twain, "Platform Readings," in Bernard DeVoto, ed., *Mark Twain in Eruption* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1940), p. 224.
6. Russell, *Trails Plowed Under*, pp. 65-67.
7. Strictly speaking, there should be a closing single-quote-mark to follow the opening one at "turn to page 40 . . ." But should it be following "an' we will sing that beautiful little song"; or should there be opening and closing single-quotes around the verses of the song? Doubleday cleverly uses italics to make us overlook this deficiency and to capture the ambiguity of the oral tale. Certainly my quibble is trivial, but it points up the subtle complication of Russell's multiple point of view.
8. I gratefully acknowledge the goading of Lyle S. Woodcock, of St. Louis, Missouri—a Russell collector—who got me going on a subject that has been in the back of my mind since I was ten years old in Great Falls, Montana, in 1933.

RICH MAN, POOR MAN:
JANET AYER FAIRBANK'S "SUFFRAGE NOVEL"

MARY JEAN DEMARR

To a reader of the 1980s, Janet Ayer Fairbank's *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1936) may seem curiously both current and dated. Its depiction of the struggles for women's suffrage reminds one, often painfully, of the battle for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, and its treatment of pacifism during the period immediately preceding and during the First World War reveals uncomfortable parallels with the social unrest of the Vietnam War period and even, perhaps, the current debate over American policy in Central America. Yet the social, political, and economic backgrounds before which Fairbank's characters move are so different from ours as to seem almost unrecognizable in some ways. This creates a curious ambivalence in a contemporary reader and suggests some artistic problems presented to a social novelist working with materials with which she was intimately connected, even though the world she described had already begun to pass away.

Fairbank (1878-1951) was born into a prominent Chicago family and had a notable career as a volunteer worker for many of the liberal causes of her day. Among her major involvements relevant to *Rich Man, Poor Man* were woman's suffrage and Democratic Party politics. Additionally, during World War I, she was active on the Woman's National Liberty Loan Committee as well as on the Illinois Committee of the Woman's Division of the Council for National Defense. These causes may seem to comport oddly with her novel, which generally treats woman's suffrage sympathetically, but which also assumes the Progressive wing of the Republican Party as the true home of political

liberalism and which reveals sympathy toward pacifism. Doubtless because of Fairbank's involvement in the campaign for women's suffrage and her general sympathetic treatment of Barbara Jackson Smith, the novel's suffragist character, *Rich Man, Poor Man* has frequently been described as a "suffrage novel," a label that is at once too broad and too narrow.

The novel begins on June 14, 1912, as the Republican Convention is about to start, and ends in the spring of 1929, with its banker-protagonist looking confidently but a bit wearily toward a future in which he sees only ease and no challenges. Using as her center a couple active in liberal political and social causes, Fairbank parallels their personal growth or development and the changes in their relationship with the course of the causes in which they concern themselves.

Actually the third in a trilogy (the earlier novels are *The Cortlandts of Washington Square* [1922] and *The Smiths* [1925]), this novel stands alone quite well; its major connection with the earlier novels is through the character of Ann Byrne Smith, protagonist of the earlier novels but a relatively minor character in the later book (she is the grandmother of the protagonist of *Rich Man, Poor Man*, benevolent and empathetic, but on the fringes of the action). Also tying the three novels together, however, is the theme of feminism—or, at least, of the relationship of men and women in marriage.

As our novel opens, Hendricks Smith, the protagonist, has just come home to Chicago from Harvard, eager to observe the Republican Convention and to work for Teddy Roosevelt, who he is certain will prevail. His Stand-Patter father is horrified; a banker, he considers T. R. a traitor to his class and a danger to the economic system. His fulminations against T. R. sound remarkably similar to those of later conservatives against Franklin Delano Roosevelt (and we are reminded that Fairbank was a Democrat writing in the early years of the Depression) and more recently against the Kennedys. Mr. Smith wishes Hendricks to come into the bank with him, but Hendricks refuses and becomes a journalist. The splitting of the family thus parallels the splitting of the Republican Party as a result of Roosevelt's candidacy.

Very different from Hendricks in background, Barbara is a Kansas librarian when they meet during one of Hendricks' fundraising trips for the Progressives. Deeply involved in the suffrage campaign and in liberal Republican politics, she has already achieved a reputation as a fiery and effective political speaker. Her close-cropped hair (in 1912, long before flappers were bobbing their hair as a sign of rebellion) symbolizes her sturdy independence as well, perhaps, as her lack of conventional femininity and the sexual coldness which she later reveals in marriage. She lives with and apparently supports her aged grandfather, and she has clearly made a special place for herself in Elida, Kansas. That she works is not a matter of choice, but she values her ability to contribute to her community and emphasizes the fact that women like her are not unusual in Kansas. Her appeal to Hendricks seems, from the beginning, curiously ambiguous—perhaps paralleling his own feelings of ambivalence about his family and class. Barbara appeals to him both because of the political ideals which they share and because of the very independence in thought and action which makes her so strikingly different from the women he knows in Chicago or Boston.

Fairbank uses Barbara's Kansas as a symbol of purity and innocence. Prohibition of both alcohol and tobacco makes it a far more wholesome place to live than the sophisticated and corrupt Chicago which is the novel's main setting. The conventional tension between East and West is here transferred to the Midwest, with Kansas carrying the symbolic meanings often associated with the West and Chicago those usually given to the East. Adding emphasis to this dichotomy, the oppression of Kansas' small farmers and tradesmen by the bankers and merchants of the East is deeply felt by Barbara, who is suspicious of all that Hendricks, the Harvard-educated son of a wealthy banker, represents in his person if not in his ideas. And Barbara's liberated appearance and life are evidences of the greater equality of the sexes there. What we see of Kansas tends to support both Barbara's view of it as idyllic and Hendricks' view of it as provincial and dusty. And similarly, when Hendricks takes Barbara to Chicago after their sudden marriage, we see it as supporting both Hendricks' picture of its vigor and

wealth and Barbara's notion of the political corruption, endemic poverty, and oppression of workers which contrast with the frivolity of the social life of the wealthy class into which she has uncomfortably married.

Through early portions of the novel, Hendricks and Barbara are held together by their common political convictions, and Hendricks defends her against the slurs of all of his relatives except his grandmother. His dedication to T. R. and the increasing knowledge of the under-side of Chicago life earned through his journalistic work keep Hendricks loyal to their mutual ideals. But even he is upset by the lengths to which her devotion to suffragism carries her. After the birth of their only child, a daughter, Barbara is found to suffer from a heart condition which necessitates bed rest. And yet she spends hours at the telephone lobbying for the passage through the Illinois legislature of the bill which would—and did—give the vote to the women of Illinois. After passage of the bill, she travels down to Springfield for the celebration—and is taken seriously ill as a result. Her headstrong action is seen by everyone in the family, including Hendricks, as a thoughtless betrayal of her husband's and baby daughter's welfare. But Barbara shows no regret; when Hendricks, in a special railroad car, comes for her, she says little more to him than

"I certainly never thought that Illinois would be the first State east of the Mississippi to give women the vote! It will help the national campaign immensely. I can scarcely wait to get into it."¹

This dedication, this almost single-hearted devotion to her cause, is the reason the novel has sometimes been described as a "suffrage novel." It would, however, be more accurate to call it a "progressive novel," for suffrage is only one (if the most prominent in the first half of the novel) of the political causes observed here. Given nearly equal attention in some sections of the novel is the cause of pacifism. A better definition of the novel's central concerns, then, would base its thematic unity on politically liberal ideas of the day, particularly as reflected in the history of the Republican Party and foreshadowing (though this is not overtly indicated) that Party's loss of its progressive

impetus as the Stand-Patters, represented by Hendricks' father, achieve full control.

Barbara's intellectual history and the story of her changing relationship with Hendricks reveal the working out of these themes. Hendricks, the novel's protagonist, seems often to represent the authorial viewpoint, as well as it can be determined, and he generally maintains a rather balanced view, being able to see several sides of issues. Sometimes, he is made representative also of his generation—especially in his political differences with his father (Hendricks taking the liberal side and appearing a radical apostate to his father, as the two represent the wings within the Republican Party) but also in his gradual conversion to support for American entry into World War I and his brutal awakening to its reality in the trench warfare in France. Barbara serves more clearly as a symbolic character, important for what she represents and for her influence on other characters, especially on Hendricks. And what she represents is principally the devotion to liberal causes and the idealistic certainty that the world can be reformed and made pure which is also associated with Kansas.

The political difference between Hendricks and Barbara is illustrated by his less fervent belief in women's suffrage. To him it is only one—an important one, but nevertheless only one—of a complex of progressive causes that he believes in. To her, a practitioner of "single-issue politics" before that term existed, suffrage long seems the only cause. When Barbara aligns herself with the Congressional Union, the more militant branch of the National Women Suffrage Association, a brief but revealing exchange with Hendricks ensues:

"There's only one plank that I am interested in, and that is woman suffrage."

"There's more than one issue in the United States," Hendricks said slowly.

"Not for me," Barbara replied, closing her lips with a new tightness which brought the discussion to a close.
(268)

Thus their early political unanimity is shown for the sham it always was. Barbara supported T. R. and the Progressives because she believed that they gave women the best hope for

suffrage. Hendricks supported them because he believed in the entire package of liberal causes which T. R. espoused. Additionally, Hendricks was more caught up by the charismatic leader and had the added impetus of his rebellion against the ideas of his staid father. Barbara's political ideas need no analysis—they were simply there, as natural to her as breathing and as obvious as her own ability to fend for herself and care for her aged grandparent.

Thus when the times, especially the coming of the first world war and the unsought effects of the splitting of the Republican Party by the Progressives, force other issues upon them, their reactions are predictably different. Barbara adds one cause, that of pacifism, but that cause is always for her inextricably linked with that of women's suffrage: like many others, she is sure that if women, in both the Central and Allied Powers as well as in the United States, had the vote, then war would never occur. She becomes a two-issue person, but her fiery devotion to the cause of women's suffrage is not lessened, and it always remains primary to her.

Hendricks' experience is more complex. He, too, initially adds the cause of pacifism, but he gradually undergoes the same intellectual odyssey as millions of his compatriots. Here a digression may be helpful, to analyze the functions of two other women characters, for they symbolize various attitudes toward the war and represent types of womanhood which contrast significantly with Barbara.

Hendricks' sister Annette is a young woman, brought up to be decorative and charming. She falls deeply in love with a young German nobleman and becomes engaged to him. When he is called back to Germany at the beginning of the hostilities, she persuades him to marry her secretly so that they may have one night together. Karl had been much lionized in Chicago and after his sudden departure, she finds much sympathy, at first, but feelings soon change. Annette never reveals the fact of her marriage, but she continues to defend Karl and his nation against all criticism. For a time, she seems simply realistic in doing so, for others doubt the accuracy of the atrocity stories coming out of Europe. Her defense of her "fiance" is unshaken. But after he dies heroically, she, too, is affected by the inexorable currents

of historical events and public opinion; released from the necessity to defend, she begins to doubt the absolute rightness of his cause, although she never denies him or her love for him.

Soon after, she again falls deeply in love, this time with a young French noble, and this time public marriage occurs and she goes to France with him. Now only the French cause has any justice in her eyes. Her opinions, we realize, are second-hand; she takes on the ideas of her man, whatever those opinions may be, defending them fanatically as her own. Intellectually, she has no real life. She is representative of an ideal middle-class Chicago femininity, living through and for her husband. The fact that she eventually realizes that the French marriage was a mistake, divorces her husband, and almost immediately remarries, this time an Irishman, only reinforces the depiction of Annette as a charming woman, loving and nurturing, who knows how to live only through a man. She is an extreme contrast to Barbara, who is never very passionate sexually and always absolutely independent and consistent in her political ideals.

The other woman is Lucy Abbot, a gay young socialite who people had rather expected would marry Hendricks. After Hendricks' marriage to Barbara, she weds a wealthy but middle-aged man and continues to flirt with Hendricks and any other man around. Later, in France, when she and Hendricks meet again, she quite intentionally seduces him. Hendricks recognizes her complete self-centeredness, always "determined to have what she wanted at any cost" (p. 463). Their affair is brief; initially tormented by guilt about both her and Barbara and believing her protestations of love for him, he is freed from any concern for her by his discovery that she had also had an affair with his younger brother and that her protestations of love to Pete had been almost identical to those he had heard himself. Lucy, then, is the purely selfish and sexual woman, living for the sensation of the moment, loving the admiration of men, and feeling no compunctions about hurting others. Barbara is like her only in the intensity of her concentration upon one thing and the carelessness about other things resulting from that intensity. Barbara is a much more sympathetic character, because the focus of her concern is not selfish like Lucy's, but the contrast

between these two characters serves both to make Barbara seem more likable and to point up the potential destructiveness of such devotion to one thing only as each of these two women represents.

The similarities and differences of these three women, then, help to develop major themes of the novel, as the women themselves influence the protagonist's development. Like Barbara a pacifist at the beginning of the hostilities in Europe, Hendricks likes Karl and for a time sympathizes with Annette's defense of him and his homeland; but he, along with the general public, changes in opinion gradually, leaving Annette alone in her loyalty to the German cause. Ultimately converted to the cause of war, he serves in France, participating in some of the worst of the trench warfare. His affair with Lucy, coming as he is recuperating from the wounds, both physical and psychic, of that warfare, teaches him something more about human corruption. Thus on his return home to Barbara, he is no longer the idealist that he once was or that she wants him to be.

In depicting the war, Fairbank shifts back and forth between Barbara's activities in the United States and Hendricks' life at the front. We see Hendricks grappling with life and death, trying desperately to survive, while Barbara's continued concern with votes for women seems in this context trivial and shallow. Her thoughtless comparison of her three-day jail term with Hendricks' battle experience shows clearly how little she understands. In a letter which Hendricks receives after he has come through a bloody exchange with the Germans, she writes,

"I came down to help [picket the White House], and the day I went out we were all arrested, and this time held for trial and convicted. They gave us a choice of paying a fine or serving three days in jail, and of course we refused to pay, as we wanted the honor of serving a jail term for suffrage. It really was thrilling, and I feel now that I can understand something of what you are undergoing. The jail was filthy, filled with rats and unfortunate terrible women who were so utterly indifferent to suffrage that they actually did not know whether they had the right to vote or not." (431)

Crucial here in trivializing Barbara's experience is the fact that we never see it directly; this passage from her letter is the fullest description we are given, and it is placed almost immediately after a very moving and graphic depiction of Hendricks' terror and revulsion in battle.

As presented in the novel, then, Hendricks' experiences of war involve true suffering and are for him a maturing experience. Barbara's experiences at the same time simply make of her "a more efficient and a surer person" (521). The contrast between Hendricks' greater breadth and humanity and Barbara's limited but intense vision is thus intensified by their separate war experiences.

Their reunion after the war only leads them to a final break. Both are aware of the fragile nature of their marital bond, and both are determined to try to strengthen it. And yet one brief conversation brings them closer than they had long been, reminds us of the gulf between their attitudes, and precipitates the actual break. They talk, over dinner on Hendricks' first night home, trying to catch up on all that has happened to them during the separation. As Hendricks tells Barbara of Annette's most recent marriage, he says,

"She fell in love, Babs, . . . desperately in love—much too much to bother about conventions. Don't you think there is something splendid in being swept away like that?"

"Why, no, I don't," Barbara said reasonably. "It is uncontrolled, if you like, but I don't see where the splendor comes in." (524).

As they talk, ironically, her face reveals "the ardor which he had looked vainly for before" only when she discusses the campaign for woman's suffrage (525). Here, in brief, is revealed the emotional distance between them. Yet Barbara tries to cross it. Much to his joy, she suggests that they have another child, seeming to want the child as much from a sense of obligation to Hendricks, however, as from her own desires. He is deeply touched by her "sweetness" (527); the depth of his emotion leads him to wish for absolute honesty with her, and so he confesses his affair with Lucy. This Barbara cannot accept, and she turns away from him, leaving them with a sham marriage that endures

in name only for several more years. Her offer of another child, ironically, has precipitated the end of their marriage.

Later changes in Barbara are consistent with her intense concentration on her central cause. The pure and innocent Kansan, detesting tobacco and alcohol and distrusting such amusements of the wealthy as the theater, becomes a Bohemian inhabitant of Greenwich Village, who both smokes and drinks (during the Prohibition of which she had thoroughly approved) and even enters into an adulterous relationship.² But these changes are actually far less drastic than they seem, for they are merely superficial glosses over Barbara's enduring concern for her causes. The arena has shifted, and the world of ideals and people living by ideals now seems to Barbara to be in New York and, after suffrage has been gained, in other causes.

What happens, then, is that Barbara remains a basically static character while the world around her changes, and her consistency is shown not as a virtue but as a weakness. Even her commitment to her cause is made questionable, subtly, in several ways. After the disagreement which precipitates her break with Hendricks, we learn later, she had tried to go after him and had been saved from this surrender only by the fact that the elevator had already taken him down. The man whom she later wishes to marry tells Hendricks that his "mistake was to let her walk out on you. There are times when a woman needs a clubbing." He says proudly, "Well, she can't get away with a thing with me, and when she got used to it she liked it" (611). Whether intentionally or not, Fairbank uses here the old stereotype the woman who must be mastered, making a mockery of Barbara's absolute sense of the equality of the sexes.

The achievement of the vote for women is passed over almost in silence, surprisingly, as one would have expected this culmination of years of work and sacrifice to have been a high point in Barbara's life. But instead we simply learn that she has grown increasingly radical. As Barbara and Hendricks are growing more and more apart but before an open break has occurred, Barbara takes an apartment in Greenwich Village. Seeing her new friends, Hendricks is amazed at the apparent change in her. Although this is not made explicit, it seems likely that the loss of her old cause has made it easy for her to turn to

other causes that might seem to replace it. From his viewpoint, she seems to have changed "to an astonishing extent."

She was much more combative than she had been before, and she now considered herself an authority on various matters about which her husband suspected she knew very little. (596)

In the novel's last scene, an epilogue set in the spring of 1929, happily married to the independent yet feminine woman who seems to represent this novel's ideal woman, Hendricks visits New York and chances upon a May First gathering in Union Square. Barbara is speaking, with the "clarion note which he could never forget, and which carried him back to Kansas and his young manhood" (625). He stops to listen, in a moment which brings back to him all that was best of her in their early days together.

Her slim figure had thickened somewhat, and he noticed with something like shock that now other women were cutting their hair off, she had let hers grow. She wore it in an untidy coil on her neck. He did not know what she was talking about, and did not care, for he knew that nothing she could say would matter. Phrases in her beautiful, warm voice came over to him. (626)

The speech seems to consist largely of banal phrases about democracy, rights of labor, and the dying capitalist system, although Hendricks never becomes sure of her actual topic. But that doesn't matter, and in a beautiful moment—which is perhaps also the greatest denial of Barbara's actual understanding of the causes to which she has given her life—we are told that

She finished in a burst of applause, and Hendricks turned away. He did not want to speak to her, but he was glad that he had had a glimpse of her in action, for now, instead of remembering her as she had looked in the courtroom on the day of their divorce, he could think of the spiritual beauty in her face when uplifted, as she always was when speaking, by complete belief in whatever cause it was which she was championing. That wholehearted commitment seemed to him a wonderful thing, and as he made his way through the dwindling

crowd he found himself envying, as he always had, her power of consecration. (626)

For Barbara, then, a social, political cause, most principally that of women's suffrage, had always been central to who and what she was. As it turns out, finally, what was central was not the cause itself but the having of a cause. And thus the apparent radical change in her ideals and way of life is only a superficial change, for the dedication to an ideal—any liberal or progressive ideal—remains. Being almost totally nonintrospective, she never realizes this. But even as her dedication to her causes is ultimately undercut by the novel, Barbara herself is not made unappealing. Her very consistency and her idealistic longing to change the world for the better are attractive.

Hendricks does not fare much better, although at first glance he may seem to. He is now in a fulfilling second marriage and is successful in his work. What he feels for Barbara is simply nostalgia for youth and idealism. But the principal tone of the novel's ending for him is ennui—his boredom with a life that is *too* pleasant, too easy. And there Fairbank leaves us. But that last scene, we must remember, occurs in the spring of 1929, and the novel was published in 1936. The implications for the future of both Hendricks and Barbara are clear. Hendricks will certainly be knocked out of his wearisome complacency, and Barbara will soon have every right to believe that she and her co-workers for social change had been prophets. But Fairbank does not take us into the momentous events that were so soon to come. Instead she leaves us contrasting the smug worldview of the 1920s with the liberal idealism of the days shortly before the first world war. While she intended us to set against both those historical periods the very different Depression period so soon to come, she had no way of knowing that later readers would also contrast with them another experience of war and another wave of feminism. Political and social idealism did not seem quite so easy to Fairbank by 1936 as they had in 1912—and her novel reminds us that they may seem even less easy in the 1980s.

Rich Man, Poor Man, then, is a novel of social change which illustrates the complexities of human involvement in causes and movements. Since Fairbank was herself a social activist before she became a novelist, it was not surprising that early readers

and reviewers would see in her fiction what they expected from her, a reflection of the causes she had herself worked for. And she did make use of those causes—but not as a propagandist. Thus this novel is not truly a “suffrage novel” at all; rather it is a novel depicting the period which saw the climax of the suffrage movement and which makes some use of that movement as a subordinate theme illustrating larger concerns. Whether the novel at last suggests that social activism is futile or worthwhile is unclear, as its ending points toward a troubled future while also summing up a tumultuous past.

Indiana State University

NOTES

1. Janet Ayre Fairbank, *Rich Man, Poor Man* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), p. 252. Despite her rather pointed reminder here of Illinois' crucial role in giving its women the vote by legislative enactment, the first state to do so and the first state east of the Mississippi to allow them the vote, she does not later remind us that Illinois was also the first state to ratify the federal amendment (in a close race with Wisconsin).
2. Ironically, Hendricks had begun the process which was to lead to such apparently radical change, when he introduced her to life in Chicago and persuaded her that an occasional social drink would not lead to doom and that the theater could be uplifting and satisfying.

THE VILLAGE GROWN UP: SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND LOUIS BROMFIELD

ROGER J. BRESNAHAN

At the conclusion of *Tar*, Sherwood Anderson's semi-fictional portrayal of his own boyhood in the Midwest, we find the boy acting out his frustrations the day after his mother's funeral. Tar's mother's death represents for the reader as well as for the narrator a distinct break with the past: in a very subtle way, Anderson shows us that the quiet village life of the American village is coming to an end. Wandering down to the railroad station, Tar wishes he were a traincar to be carried off somewhere. Then he imagines being buried in a grain car. Finally coming to terms with his grief, he doggedly decides to get back to his work of hawking newspapers on the station platform. The book concludes with the narrator's observation: "Although he did not know it Tar was, at that very moment perhaps, racing away out of his childhood."

In this conclusion, like that of *Winesburg, Ohio*, in which George Willard's native town becomes "a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood," place plays a significant part.¹ The place is not, of course, the whole significance, but it contributes to the portrayal of human experience. "The Book of the Grotesque," Anderson's intended title, suggests more clearly the focal points of the novel than does *Winesburg, Ohio*. Yet it may be suggested that the settings of Anderson's novels, as well as those of his contemporary, Louis Bromfield, are more than just the places where the narrative enfolds. They serve to illumine the narrative itself. In *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White*, as in Bromfield's *The Farm* and, to a lesser extent, *The Green Bay Tree* and *Possession*, the setting becomes an addi-

tional character, changing as the narrative progresses and acting as a foil to the human characters.

Perhaps the reader is conscious of this extra character most strongly in *Winesburg, Ohio*, but it is in *Poor White* that Anderson uses the technique most effectively to mirror changes taking place in the narrative. In Bromfield's work, too, we see the towns changing and, as they change, mirroring the changes taking place in the characters. In the "go-getter" years encompassed by these five novels momentous changes were taking place in American life. According to cultural historian Daniel Boorstin, it was an era of individual achievement and personal enterprise.² Anderson and Bromfield, however, were not so enthusiastic. In Anderson's writings there is an overriding awareness that "progress" is inevitable. Yet this seeming acquiescence is deceptive, for progress is often one of Anderson's grotesques, particularly in *Poor White*. In *The Green Bay Tree* the industrial phase of Midwestern history is similarly a grotesque that enables Bromfield to explore the notion that the independence native to the American spirit is lessened by the coming of the factory and its peasant workers.

In *Possession*, and especially in *The Farm*, Bromfield perceives the changing Midwestern town as a more complex character—still a grotesque, but a multifaceted one. The change has already taken place, and so the visible decline of a Jeffersonian agrarianism takes on a cost of fatalism. Ironically, it was only later, after his experiments at Malabar Farm and the trip to India resulted in his 1937 novel, *The Rains Came*, that Bromfield saw he could, in some small way, "restore man's relationship with nature" as an individual self-sufficiency that sought to combine modern theories of agriculture with romantic notions derived from Jefferson, Rousseau, and Thoreau.³

Sarah Shepard, Hugh McVey's stepmother in *Poor White*, brought from New England a Calvinist belief in hard work. Though the disappointment of her own hopes for her husband's future reduced her at last to silence, Hugh retained something of her pioneer optimism. Working his way eastward from Mudcat Landing in Missouri, he eventually settles in Bidwell, Ohio, on the eve of that town's growth as an industrial center. In large

part, Hugh is responsible for that growth since his inventions bring the new prosperity. Hugh's arrival in Bidwell coincides with a time when people's "minds had turned toward the arrival of the new forward-pushing impulse in American life."⁴ Everyone in that hopefully-named town seemed to be intent on the coming of the factories and the need to wake up the town. McVey's first invention is a plant-setting machine which he conceives while watching laborers planting cabbage. The human and the mechanical are strangely confused, as they often were with early machines. Watching the motions of the farm laborers, Hugh "forgot they were human" (80), but the machine he devised mimicked the arm motions of the human planters.

Anderson's view of the effect of industrialization on the towns and villages is a complex one. He shows us the frustration of the harness-maker, previously secure in the knowledge of his craft, suddenly faced with cheaper, machine-made harnesses. Yet the same craftsman invests his life's savings of \$1,200 in the factory which is to produce Hugh McVey's inventions. When the company spends \$1,200 on a lathe to do the work of a hundred men, the harness maker thinks that his investment has grown a hundred-fold, yet "he wondered why he could not be happy about the matter." (133) How the new way of life will affect the spirit is also ambiguous. "All over the country, in the farm houses, and the growing cities of the new country, people stirred and awakened, Thought and poetry died or passed as a heritage to feeble, fawning men who also became servants of the new order." (61-62) Still, Anderson does realize the potential for freeing people from drudgery for spiritual pursuits: Hugh's corn-cutting machine "took all the heavier part of the work away" so that the laborer's arms did not ache with weariness and he had time to think. The wonder and mystery of the wide-open places got a little into his blood." (224)

Poor White contains Anderson's most fully developed reflection on the changes that have taken place, an allegory of industrial men and women "as mice that have come out of the fields and live in houses that do not belong to them. They live within the dark wall of the houses where only a dim light penetrates, and so many have come that they grow thin and haggard with the constant toil of getting food and warmth."

Although "now and then a bold mouse" promises to lead the others in a revolt against the builders of the house, it always comes to nothing. The mice often reminisce about the good life they lived before, but none return to the fields "because long living in droves has made them afraid of the silence of long nights and the emptiness of skies." (112)

The allegory of the mice, to which Anderson had hazarded something approaching an answer in *Marching Men* (1919), finds reverberation in Bromfield's early success, *The Green Bay Tree* (1924). In that novel, the Town (never named by Bromfield) consists of the Hill and the Flats. The immigrant factory workers live in the Flats and work at the Cyclops Mill which has destroyed the natural beauty of the Town. *The Green Bay Tree* chronicles the fortunes of the Shane family whose steel mill, now passed into other hands and greatly expanded, blights the lives not only of the helpless immigrants and blacks whose bodies feed it, but even of the wealthy Shanes themselves. Ultimately, the Hill, where the most prominent citizens once lived, is swallowed up by the expanding mill. Though the Shanes won't give up their ancestral home, the mill surrounds them, killing their gardens and dropping soot on their house.

There is not much complexity here. The Mill, representing the industrialization of the Midwest, is the villain. Old Julia Shane dies in her house, but her daughters are compelled to seek their happiness elsewhere—Lily by fleeing to a sybaritic life in Paris and Irene by throwing herself into settlement-house work in the Flats. As elsewhere in his work, Bromfield's bitterness over the destruction of rural life carries over into his portrayal of the non-native laborers:

In the Flats, as the years passed, new tides of immigrants swept in, filling the abominable dirty houses to suffocation, adding to the garbage and refuse which already clogged the sluggish waters of the Black Fork. . . . And none of these new residents learned to speak English. They clung to their native tongues. They were simply colonists, transplanted, unchanged and unchanging. . . . And the town held it against them that they did not learn English and join in the vast chorus of praise to prosperity.⁵

The change from rural village to dirty industrial town is also

in the background of Bromfield's *Possession* (1925), though fewer references are made to the Town and the Mill. Much of the action in *Possession* takes place in New York and Paris. Even at these distances the blighting effect of the Town and the Mill that dominates it is present. Lily Shane's luxurious life in Paris is funded by the Mill. Her cousin, Ellen Tolliver, has had to escape the stultifying atmosphere of the Town in order to pursue her career in music. Even in Paris "it was extraordinary how clearly the Town rose up before them. . . . All the years that Lily had lived in Paris could not alter the fact. . . . Yet all her wealth came out of America, out of the factories in the dirty Town which they both despised."⁶ Strangely enough, among the friends Lily and Ellen cultivate in Paris is one named Schneidermann whose blast furnaces at Saarbrücken have similarly despoiled the European countryside.

Bromfield's largest canvass for showing the "march of progress" was his 1933 novel, *The Farm*. This novel opens in 1900 when the main character, Johnny, is a baby. It moves freely through the history of the family as Johnny comes to know more about his ancestors. Of these, the Colonel was the first to come to Ohio, arriving from Maryland in 1815 in the company of a guide and a Jesuit priest. By philosophical disposition, the Colonel is a democrat of the Rousseau mold. Yet he discovers that his wilderness-reared guide "was all surface and had no more depth than a friendly dog."⁷ The Jesuit, on the other hand, was thoroughly intellectual. The Colonel's philosophy settles somewhere between those two extremes — the Jeffersonian dream of the yeoman farmer, but tempered by the hard edge of reason. Into the history of his family and that of the Western Reserve there also come the dream-like figure of the Lost Dauphin and the practicality of Johnny Appleseed.

Bromfield gives much attention to the practice of agriculture before the mechanical age. "In those days the country had not yet been invaded by Czechoslovak and Silesian peasants, nor by ideas of 'scientific' farming, and the farms had less the feeling of orderly checkerboards imposed upon the earth than of little colonies which had grown out of the earth and belonged to it." (76) The end of the era of the farm and the beginning of the

commercial era is signalled by decay. The once prosperous farms are abandoned:

... it was the time when one by one the farms of the original settlers and their sons were falling into the hands of tenant farmers who carried their degradation to the ultimate depths. When a farm became too poor to be worth a tenant's trouble he simply abandoned it and occupied another and farmed that wretchedly until its poor exhausted soil no longer had any value. The Town had conquered in more ways than one. It won not only the economic struggle, but it attracted the sons and daughters who should have carried on the destinies of that land cut out of the wilderness such a little time before. . . .

It was a rich land and bit by bit the richness had been pilfered. (268-269)

Ultimately, the ancestral farm, cutivatedly, expanded, and maintained with great diligence since the time of the Colonel, also falls victim to commercialization and is sold to land speculators.

Bromfield's Jeffersonian agrarianism, worked out through the history of the Western Reserve, makes him seem to have valued the original English and Scottish stock over newer immigrants. His references to Jews, particularly in *Possession* and *The Green Bay Tree*, open him to charges of anti-Semitism such that David D. Anderson has felt constrained to show that Bromfield's was not "traditional anti-Semitism [but] a peculiarly Midwestern variety" where Jews are perpetually unknown and alien, the exploiters who are themselves being exploited.⁸ *The Farm* corrects the anti-Semitism of the earlier novels:

In that changing world there was no prejudice against Jews. One sat beside them in school and sometimes they came to supper and often enough to play in the vacant lots or in the skeletons of houses in the process of construction. If you were aware of anything which set the Jews apart from yourself, it was a difference of tradition, for the rich, colorful, sensual tradition of the Jews was doubly exotic against the thin, meagre background of that transplanted New England town. (159)

As with Bromfield's marginal anti-Semitism, so too his depiction of other immigrants seems tinged with nativist superiority,

but when he turns his attention fully to the plight of the immigrants there is only genuine compassion. Describing the workmen as they left their twelve-hour shift at Cyclops Mill in *The Green Bay Tree*, he observes their desperate lives with pointed accuracy: "They were free now to return to their squalid homes, to visit the corner saloon or the dismal, shuttered brothels of Franklin Street, free to go where they would in the desolate area of the Flats for twelve brief hours of life." (87)

When Johnny accompanies his father to collect rents in the Flats, he is shocked by the "look in the eyes of those haunted, exploited Bulgarians ladling soup greedily out of a bowl in the middle of the table." (*The Farm*, 157) Bromfield observes that "black slavery . . . was gone forever, but something else had taken its place, worse in the fundamental greed of its motives." (157) At this point in *The Farm* Bromfield's indignation cries out: "It would, I think, be impossible for men to have lived under worse conditions of oppression, economic, political, or spiritual. . . ." But businessmen and industrialists continued to profit from unrestricted immigration coupled with a high protective tariff. "That was why men like Aldrich and Lodge and Smoot sat in Washington making certain that no one should interfere with the businessmen." (156)

Little can be salvaged of the rural prosperity which characterized the Jeffersonian dream. Bromfield's novels before his Malabar Farm experiment and his trip to India offer little hope. Sherwood Anderson's view of prosperity remained one of sardonic humor. *Poor White* is set at the opening of the era and *The Farm* at its closing. Yet for both Anderson and Bromfield there were at least partial solutions which may be glimpsed, even in the early works. One such glimmering solution appears in *The Green Bay Tree* as the Shane mansion is about to be razed to make way for a new railway station. A Calabrian workman carts the old statuary from the gardens of the mansion and sets it up in his own little garden in the flats. There the Venus of Cydos and Apollo Belvedere, "scrubbed clean of the corroding soot" and placed on pedestals "which he himself constructed of bricks and concrete," reigned over a little garden where "the workman cherished them earnestly":

So in all the desert of the great mill town there was one corner at least where beauty was worshipped in a humble settling of cabbages and tomato vines. In the evening when the light was not too bright, the little corner looked for all the world like a bit of a Florentine garden. (336-37)

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NOTES

1. Sherwood Anderson, *Tar: A Midwest Childhood*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Cleveland: Case-Western Reserve University Press, 1965), p. 215; *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Modern Library, 1919), p. 303.
2. Daniel Boorstin, *Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. ix.
3. David D. Anderson, *Louis Bromfield* (New York: Twayne, 1964), pp. 152-55.
4. Sherwood Anderson, *Poor White* (New York: Viking, 1920), p. 70. Subsequent references to this work appear in parentheses.
5. Louis Bromfield, *The Green Bay Tree* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1924), p. 110. Subsequent references to this work appear in parentheses.
6. Louis Bromfield, *Possession* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1925), p. 258. Subsequent references to this work appear in parentheses.
7. Louis Bromfield, *The Farm* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), p. 3. Subsequent references to this work appear in parentheses.
8. *Louis Bromfield*, p. 38.

SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S UNPUBLISHED STORIES

WILLIAM V. MILLER

Early in his writing career Sherwood Anderson kept few manuscripts; and when others expressed an interest in collecting and studying even his most fragmentary drafts, he found this interest puzzling if not ghoulish. But his attitude changed from "puzzled" to "practical" when he found in the mid-1920's that people would pay for his discarded attempts.¹ Many of the holographs and typescripts of Anderson's work are available to us today because of that late discovery. Among those manuscripts, most of which are gathered in the Newberry Library in Chicago, are included the eight unpublished stories which are the subject of this study. Until recently these stories were unread except by a few stray habitués of special collections. They are "exhumed" here to examine their intrinsic worth, why they were never published, and how they illuminate the published stories which have found a wide and admiring audience.

The unpublished stories came to light during a systematic search for story versions through all of the Newberry manuscripts. The search was a beginning stage of a project to prepare a much-needed edition of Anderson's stories. Before his death in 1941 Anderson had projected a complete edition of his stories, but neither he nor anyone since had been able to provide an adequate edition. Ten potentially valuable stories were identified during the original excursion through the manuscripts; however, two were subsequently rejected: one ("Harry Breaks Through") had been published in an obscure anthology and another, upon closer scrutiny, was judged to be lacking in necessary form.

A close description of one of the best of the stories, a short tale called "Bob," suggests some of the strengths and weaknesses of the stories. The original manuscript is a very rough draft with the following penciled note on the first page initialed by Eleanor Anderson: "Roger Sergel thought this good—the flaws of 'I'm a Fool' but different."³

The story is similar to some of Anderson's best-known stories in a number of respects. The setting is the racehorse scene of such stories. As in these two stories, the narrator of the story is the young protagonist who is initiated, or at least learns, in the mode of a *Bildungsroman*. "Bob" also includes a motif of primitivism—in the sense of idealizing animal traits—that one finds not only in such a racing scene story as "The Man Who Became a Woman," but also in Anderson's veiled racist feelings for Blacks as expressed, for example, in *Dark Laughter*. Horses like Doctor Fritz are, in the words of the story, "amazingly like people" but often purer, more courageous, and more beautiful. They sometimes serve as foils for the corrupted, vulnerable people around them. Also, the sensuality of Bob's feelings for the horse is another instance of the heavy sexual ambience one finds in many of Anderson's stories and, of course, in *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Perhaps the most distinctive quality the story "Bob" shares with other stories is the technique of building the story around the essence of a single character. We recall the titles and subtitles of the *Winesburg* stories, each featuring not just the individual but also the quality or qualities which epitomize the individual—Wing Biddlebaum's giving hands, Curtis Hartman's pervasive struggle between his sensual needs and his religious role. The narrator in "Bob" discovers a little core of love and gentleness within the hardened "yegg," feelings nurtured in Bob's childhood when he had been raised among horses.

Why was this story or a more polished draft of it never published? Perhaps it was too much like "I Want to Know Why"; or, if the composition of "Bob" predated that of the well-known story, "Bob" might simply be an earlier version rejected when the richer narrative took control of his imagination. However, more apparent reasons may account for its being

withheld. Especially when "Bob" is compared with the other racehorse stories, it is inferior in the fullness and adequacy of the setting details, in the development of the central character, and in the quality and dramatization of the theme. The reader does not care enough about Bob, and the nature of the interior-exterior contrast of Bob's life does not seem adequately significant. These deficiencies contrast with the thematic resonance of the youth's poignant questioning and the rich sensuous imagery of "I Want to Know Why."

When one surveys all of the eight stories for the purpose of determining why they were not published, three major aspects of the stories come to mind: three of the stories were probably intended to be parts of novels; some of the sexual themes might have regarded as being in bad taste; and, at least in one story, the autobiographical element might have been too embarrassing to the living people behind the fictional portraits.

Anderson wrote seven published novels, not one of which was a complete success. The novel form was not congenial to the fictional aptitudes of a writer who seized an idea whole or not at all and believed that life was lived in moments. In addition to the seven, he started a number of other novels, before his first novel was published in 1916 as well as throughout his career. A few of these abortive efforts were reshaped into such stories as the excellent "Unlighted Lamps," whose chief character, Mary Cochran, was apparently to have been the central figure of a projected novel.

Among the eight story manuscripts three appear to be episodes in, or at least the reworking of materials from, projected novel-length works featuring the characters Talbot Whittingham, Sidney and Jane Bollinger, and Earl or Mark Graybeal.⁴ While the three have enough unity to be considered in a complete collection of stories, they are lacking, in varied degrees, in the unity and focus which the larger context of a novel might have provided.

The story "Fast Woman" will serve to illustrate the measure of unity and the limitations in these segments of larger fictive wholes. "Fast Woman" is a twenty-page story set in Cincinnati, Ohio, and loosely constructed around the life of the fourteen-

year-old boy Talbot Whittingham. In the dialectic of the story Talbot's Uncle Jerry's life style of gambling, drinking, and womanizing is contrasted with that of Talbot's father and his sister, Jerry's wife. The latter two build their lives around religion and money. At least from Jerry's point of view, his wife is frigid. In part because he has no children, Jerry assumes the role of Talbot's mentor, particularly concerned that Talbot learn the distinction, often set forth in Anderson's writing, between women who are unselfish givers to men and those who are sexually inhibited and exploitive.⁵

The story builds slowly and very digressively until Jerry begins telling a bookmaker at the race track about a woman named Mary Gordon, while Jerry's intended auditor, Talbot, listens nearby. It is a melodramatic tale familiar to readers of Anderson, featuring a vicious jockey who marries Mary, who had been an unsuccessful prostitute, and Jerry's efforts, after he is smitten by the dark, diminutive Mary, to mitigate the jockey's abusive exploitation of his wife. The drunken jockey is thrown from a horse and killed, and Mary comes to be kept by Jerry. But in her inner purity, she cannot go on living as Jerry's mistress. She takes a job cooking, is overworked, and soon dies. "Too bad," says the bookmaker, and Jerry "looking at Talbot" agrees and says, "I wish when I was your age I'd a known about women what I know now."

In a continuum with a completely amorphous sketch at one pole and a perfectly formed story at the other, "Fast Woman" has enough thematic unity to be regarded more story than sketch; but is not well focused, the extreme events strain credulity, and the heavy-handed moralizing suggested above vitiates the story's impact. It could be considered as an episode in a much larger story of Talbot's development, as in an earlier form it probably was.

A second plausible reason for withholding these stories from publication is the nature of the sexual themes. *All* of these stories, with the exception of "Bob" which, as we have seen, also has a sexual motif, treat sexual problems between men and women. To the contemporary reader these stories may not seem offensive enough to warrant repression, nor remarkably more erotic or unconventional than Anderson's better-known fiction,

but what *could* be offensive to some are such scenes and actions as Bob's relations with the horse, the casual pickups, the romanticizing of prostitution, incestuous feelings, and the superiority of some casual matings to the sexual behavior within marriage:

An autobiographical problem is a third possible factor affecting the decision not to publish at least one of these stories, "Brother Earl." Under this same title in his *Memoirs*. Anderson recounted the tragic story of his younger brother Earl who visited Anderson and his family during the Elyria years and then was not heard from in thirteen years.⁶ Earl was found in the streets of Brooklyn in 1926, the victim of a stroke, and died in March, 1927. In 1935 Anderson wrote to his older brother Karl that he was starting a long fictional work based on Anderson's sense of Earl's life,⁷ but the most unified manuscript version of this proposed work that we now have might have been embarrassing to the family, had it been published.

The story setting appears to be very similar to the Elyria scene and features three characters, types which recur frequently in Anderson's fiction: a know-it-all businessman (the Anderson role he later rejected); the misunderstood, victimized wife; and Earl, the businessman's artist brother, who feels guilt for being parasitical. The central action occurs when the wife, in an ill-considered attempt to help Earl, offers herself as a nude model in a context which clearly suggest seduction. Earl misunderstands and feels humiliated and furious that his brother and wife would ignore his human needs in stereotyping his role as an artist. The story does have thematic interest and plot intensity; but touching as it does to some measure on a real relationship and living people in questionable taste, it is not surprising that it was not published.

Every career writer must have hundreds of abandoned writing projects like "Brother Earl," and one can only conjecture about why some stories are not published, especially borderline stories like the eight described here. The three aspects of the stories outlined in these remarks could plausibly have inhibited the publishing process. But, of course, these stories are limited in varied degrees by the usual problems of form: lack of focus,

vague motivation, blurred thematic points. These "lost" stories are intrinsically valuable and interesting; moreover, as is often the case with such borderline stories, as I have at least obliquely suggested, they underscore with hyperbolic lines and colors the salient and subtle in the best of Anderson's fiction.

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NOTES

1. See especially his letters to Burton Emmett, November 26, 1926 and March 10, 1929, *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters*, ed. Charles E. Modlin (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984) and to Katherine A. White, August 7, 1930, *Letters of Sherwood Anderson*, ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), pp. 220-1.
2. Unpublished letter from Ben Hubesch, September 21, 1936, Viking Correspondence, The Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.
3. Roger Sergel was head of the Dramatic Publishing Company in Chicago and Westport, Connecticut, and a long-time friend of Anderson.
4. See Gerald Carl Nemanic, "Talbot Whittingham: An Annotated Edition of the Text Together with a Descriptive and Critical Essay" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, 1969) and Walter B. Rideout, "Talbot Whittingham and Anderson: A Passage to Winesburg, Ohio," *Sherwood Anderson: Dimensions of His Literary Art*, ed. David D. Anderson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1976).
5. For a detailed study of Anderson's women see my "Earth-Mothers, Succubi, and Other Ectoplasmic Spirits: The Women in Sherwood Anderson's Short Stories," *MidAmerica*, I (Fall 1973), pp. 64-81. Reprinted in *Critical Essays on Sherwood Anderson*, ed. David D. Anderson (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1981), pp. 196-209.
6. "Brother Earl," *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), pp. 309-11.
7. Letter to Karl Anderson, March, 1935 *Letters*, p. 311.

JAMES THURBER'S MIDWEST IN MY LIFE AND HARD TIMES

DOUGLAS A. NOVERR

James Thurber's *My Life and Hard Times* was published in late 1933 within the context of the dramatic one hundred days of the New Deal legislation of Franklin Roosevelt with its emergency acts, its relief measures, its financial measures, and its industrial regulations.¹ In the wake of these corrective measures came a "boomlet" and some degree of optimism about the nation's financial future as the president assumed "broad Executive power" to shore up the devastated infrastructure and to stimulate production, put people back to work, and to restore confidence in the nation's institutions. While Roosevelt had demonstrated that he was a strong and fearless leader and had become a reassuring friend in his radio "fireside chats," many remained uncertain about the many alphabet soup organizations and their regulatory directives and powers while others feared that a demagogue had been awakened in the fatherly upper-class aristocrat whose New Deal might or might not be a fair or square deal.

In the plethora of measures, agencies, and efforts came confusion and uneasiness as all segments of society were affected by directives and increased regulation and supervision. Bankers and investors as well as farmers and workers could react in wonder and uncertainty about whether measures would benefit them. The brief "boomlet" of the spring of 1933 was followed by a downturn in the fall, and even the recovery in the spring of 1934 did not produce a sustained recovery. In fact, the worst was yet to come in 1934—a year which saw violent strikes and

labor unrest and which prompted the rise of political and social demagogues on the radical left who all had their own panaceas and axes to grind.

In late 1933 people desperately wanted to believe that FDR's "brain trust" would turn things around and that national faith and trust were needed. However, many of the early programs had failed to produce results, and a state of desperate emergency still existed. Reassuring words and frequent press conferences could restore a measure of confidence, as these certainly did, but the grim facts could not be dispelled by rhetoric.

Although Thurber's comic autobiography says little directly about the Great Depression and in fact focuses on the period in Thurber's life (his "hard times" up to the Armistice in 1918), the book does have a number of important references to the early 1930's. In his "Preface to a Life" in the book Thurber notes that the comic writer of "light pieces" "talks largely about small matters and smally about great affairs" and that "your short-piece writer's time" does not paint a broad, detailed picture of one's time, nor should he feel compelled to. The comic writer prefers a human scale and perspective where routine patterns domestic situations, and one's ordinary circumstances serve to remind one of life's embarrassments, confusions, and accidents. The comic writer (as distinguished from the humorist) is uneasy with the contemporary world and is preoccupied with dealing with such concerns as approaching middle age, absentmindedness, and involuntary actions that leave one humiliated or chastised by life.

To Thurber, one can only write his memoirs about the ever present terrors of life as it conspires to upset his attempts to order and control life and to behave in a sensible and reasonable way. The "short-piece" writer cannot look at life as a naturalist or realist novelist might in one or two volumes; he must rely upon "short accounts of [his] misadventures because [he] can never get so deep into them but that [he] feel[s] [he] can get out."² In referring to events of the early 1930s, Thurber's comic persona mentions "the ominous rumblings of dynasties of the world moving toward a cloudier chaos than ever before," the crumbling of the commonwealth, as well as to "enormous strides" in such things as "theoretical economics, and the manu-

facture of bombing planes. . . ." 11-12). The future is ominous, for whenever economic and political disruptions occur war may be sure to follow.

To men like Walter Lippmann and Lincoln Steffens (both mentioned in *My Life and Hard Times*), Thurber would leave the job of political and social analysis and the documentation of the national experience. For him the minor difficulties of his life were enough to make him maladjusted, anxious, and melancholic.

My Life and Hard Times, then, looks back to Thurber's early life in the East Side of Columbus, Ohio, during the period from about 1903 (when he was nine years old and the family had just returned to Columbus after two years in Washington, D. C.) to late 1918 (with the Armistice that ended World War I and the year that Thurber ended his education at Ohio State University). As Thurber indicates in his "A Note at the End," he deliberately passes over the "hard times of my middle years . . . leaving the ringing bells of 1918, with all their false promise, to mark the end of a special sequence." (112) He is emotionally unable to deal with the period from late 1918 to 1933, particularly with the "mistaken exits and entrances of [his] thirties". (113) Thurber's career during this period included two exits from Columbus (to Paris in 1918-1920 to work as a code clerk for the State Department in Washington, D. C. and in Paris and again a return to Paris in 1925-26 with his first wife when he tried unsuccessfully to write a novel) as well as exits and entrances from the world of journalism. It had taken Thurber some ten years after his first exit from Columbus to find himself as a writer and cartoonist with *The New Yorker* and to find the best circumstances that allowed him realize his skill as a writer of short pieces who would show that "personal time" had universal meanings.

My Life and Hard Times demonstrates Thurber's realization of the importance of his Midwestern roots and background to his comic vision and temperament. His early life in a Midwestern city could now be looked at fondly and critically, for with emotional distance and the passing of time "the sharp edges of old reticences are softened" (112) and the comic vision comes into clear focus. As Thurber looked back to this "special sequence" before his own life had become confused and disordered and before the nation headed into the dramatic changes

of the 1920's and early 1930's, he realized the importance of his family, their unusual and lively domestic life, and his mother, Mary A. Thurber (to whom this book is dedicated and who often has the last word that settles the confusions that always break out between one and three o'clock in the morning in the Thurber household). Thurber defined humor as being best when it "... lies closest to the familiar which is humiliating, distressing, even tragic. Humor is a kind of emotional chaos told about calmly and quietly in retrospect."³ His life in Columbus up to 1918 had been the "best of times and the worst of times", but out of the "emotional chaos" emerged a mature theory of comedy, a Midwestern style and identity forged from his formative years in Columbus, and a passionate commitment to the craft and discipline of literary humor. Now secure and successful in the Eastern literary world, Thurber would demonstrate that his Midwestern and Ohio accent and his Columbus identity gave him his artistic center.

Thurber knew he could never be a Conradian type romantic wanderer in exotic places, a novelist, or an autobiographer who could use his life to chronicle the times in a dramatic way. In the familiar and commonplace he could find comic catharsis. Humor could enrich our lives with fancy, delight, and laughter, as well as reconcile us to the limitations, disappointments, and ultimate tragedies of life ("the claw of the sea-puss gets us all in the end" as he reminds us of "the inevitable doom that waits in the skies.")

In looking back to the Columbus of his youth and early adulthood, Thurber found the domestic and small-scale social comedy where the humorous and the tragic lie close together. This was a remarkably mundane world that was insulated and provincial. But its humdrum qualities and its stability were the sources of its charm and relative innocence. It was a world of silent films, of men struggling to tame recalcitrant automobiles as if they were still horses, of individuals who had eccentricities, paranoias, delusions, and fits without the dubious benefits of psychology or psychoanalysts to explain them as disturbed behavior. It is a world where prominent business men or doctors can panic at the reports that the dam has broken or can be verbally attacked by a family servant. The many mistaken

confusions and befuddlements are accounted for in such a matter-of-fact, documentary way and with such restraint and understatement, that near tragedies are always directed toward comedy and fantasy.

Thurber's mad comic world always originates out of confusions, false assumptions, seemingly logical behavior, and improbable sequences of events. Common sense can fail completely as the illogical takes over until order is restored. At the domestic level order is restored in the "More Alarms at Night" chapter when Mother chides a confused and disoriented father and made him sleep in her room after Roy, Jamie's younger brother, had awakened his father and said, "Buck, your time has come!" and told Charles to get up, which he did and then shouted the entire family up.

On another occasion Mother orders Jamie and her husband to bed after the son had awakened his father at three a.m. in order to learn the name of the capital of New Jersey and caused his father to dress and flee the room, running "out into the hall, his coattails and shoelaces flying" in a stunning exit. Mary Thurber is indeed a rich comic character in the book with her confused and groundless fears of mechanical machines, her remarkable presence of mind to take a dozen eggs and two loaves of bread in the panic of the dam break, her throwing a shoe through the neighbor's window to get their attention, and her defense of the people biting Airedale dog Muggs because he was a good judge of character and because he was always sorry after biting someone and had never bitten her.

In his 1954 "Reply to the Ohioana Sesquicentennial Medal Award" Thurber noted that without Mary Thurber he "would never have been able to write what I have managed to write" and that he hoped to be able to tell stories as humorously and skillfully as she could.⁴ Mary Thurber was the dominant figure in the Thurber household, often, as Robert Morsberger has noted, creating zany diversions and ludicrous situations that enlivened the domestic scene.⁵ Her irrepressible spirit provided her middle son with inspiration and an attitude that informed his humor. Looking back on his boyhood and young adulthood in Columbus from 1903 to 1913, Thurber found that his mother provided him with not just a comic character: she provided him

with a comic attitude and domestic comic situation. Her house was a comic stage replete with doors that were always opening and closing or refusing to open or being slammed shut and locked.

As many people realized during the Depression, the simple pleasures and humorous amusements of family life were to be cherished, and Thurber realized that the pre-modernity world and its individual scale, its flexibility, and its rich diversity had changed significantly. By no means was this pre-World War I Columbus environment an ideal world. But its small-scale quality made it human. The frightening and potentially dangerous mass panic of over 2,000 people on the East Side of Columbus the day the Scioto River dam supposedly broke only lasted two hours as the "Afternoon of the Great Run" chastised a community and made them painfully aware of their irrationality and panic.

However, the mass hysteria of World War I with its unreasonable fears about German-Americans and its paranoid mentality continued well into the 1920s and became, as Thorstein Veblen called it, the "dementia praecox" of the 1920's.⁶ The mass culture stimulated by advertising and film stars brought with it the worship of the automobile and technology that signaled the beginnings of "group civilization." In *My Life and Hard Times* Thurber paid, as he stated, tribute to "... individuals about during the first decade of the century, each possessed of his own bright and separate values,"⁷ Thurber's Columbus is one that is not socially stratified or homogenized. Its Broad and High Streets are the locus of a society where individuals are known for their eccentricities and peculiar predispositions as well as for their commonness and ordinariness.

Thurber treats another Columbus and Ohio institution—that of Ohio State University—with genial humor and somewhat sharper satire. As an aspiring student who had a disability of poor eyesight (at the age of seven Thurber had been blinded in his left eye when his older brother accidentally shot him with an arrow), Thurber was victimized by a regimented curriculum and certain requirements in science, physical education, and military science that he could not reasonably satisfy. In a reverse paraphrase of the famous gangster film, *Little Caesar*,

Thurber says, "Not being able to see, I could take it but I couldn't dish it out." (Thurber also has a parody of the famous grapefruit scene with James Cagney and Mae Clark in *Public Enemy* when Roy, Jamie's younger brother and the practical joker in the family, hit the family dog Muggs in the face with a grapefruit at the breakfast table.)

In the "University Days" chapter Thurber has his fun with the university's emphasis on vocational education, its small-minded and inflexible teachers, its overemphasis on football, and its lack of a varied student body because of the prevalence of dim witted and unimaginative agricultural students. The strongest satire is reserved for the unfortunate way the university succumbed to the hysteria of WWI. Thurber describes how each morning "thousands of freshmen and sophomores used to deploy over the campus, moodily creeping up on the old chemistry building." This compulsory military drill was outdated and irrelevant to the horrible modern warfare of tanks, machine guns, trench warfare, and chemical weapons. As Thurber satirically notes,

It was good training for the kind of warfare that was waged at Shiloh but it had no connection with what was going on in Europe. Some people used to think that there was German money behind it, but they didn't say so or they would have been thrown in jail as German spies. It was a period of muddy thought and marked, I believe, the decline of higher education in the Middle West. (96)

Thurber's perspective was, of course, shaped by the fact that he had worked as a code clerk at the American Embassy in Paris in late 1918 and early 1920 and had toured the famous battlefields at Verdun and Soissons in the immediate aftermath of The Great War. In looking back at his university military training, Thurber presents a devastating portrait of General Littlefield, commandant of the student cadet corps. As a student who had failed drill his first three years, the hopeless senior was badgered and bullied by General Littlefield even though Thurber had tried and had in fact been able to master the intricacies of parade drill movements.

Thurber's own experience at Ohio State was, especially in his last two years when he became active in the campus newspaper

and literary magazine and became socially active and popular, by and large rewarding and beneficial. However, his first three years there had been filled with embarrassments, painful self-consciousness, and academic frustrations. The "sharp edges" of these "old reticences" have been "softened" by the passing of years as Thurber remembers the pathos of those individuals who accepted the educational institution for what it was and had to do.

As an informal and sketchy history of Ohio State, the "University Days" chapter does show how the school began to measure excellence by the performance of its increasingly successful football team in the Western Conference or by the drill performances of its cadet corps—both irrelevant to the primary purpose of education. To Thurber, military drill and draft board physicals, which for him came weekly, were evidence of the increasing regimentation, depersonalization, and accelerated insanity of American life in rapidly changing times. The process of examining candidates for military induction is done by grim and humorless specialists who mechanically perform their duties. Muggs, the Thurber family dog, had more personality than these men.

As Thurber moves toward his own uncertain future, the tone of *My Life and Hard Times* become darker and more ominous. Thurber's metaphor for the out of control future is the wild ride he takes at a Columbus amusement park on the Scarlet Tornado roller-coaster with Byron Landis, who takes the two of them off on a hair raising surge in order to see if he can run the machine. On the title page of the book Thurber provided a cartoon of the Scarlet Tornado roller-coaster, which stands in sharp contrast to the electric runabout cars that might go out of control but which did not leave one frightened and terrified, only angry and embarrassed.

Thurber's book ends with his being awakened by the sounds of "bells ringing and whistles blowing" to celebrate the November, 1918 Armistice. The sound grows "louder and more insistent and wilder" as the relieved nation celebrated its relief and release from a war that had brought confusion and tragedy as well as an end to American innocence. America was headed

for the roller-coaster ride of the 1920s with its modernity, mass culture, and economic cycles. Indeed, as Thurber notes, a "special sequence" had ended, as confusions and panics would come with startling regularity. Thurber preferred to remember the clocks of Columbus that punctuated life and marked time for a pre-war society that had continuity and personal time. As he said in his "Reply to Ohioana Award" in 1954,

I have lived in the East for nearly thirty years now, but many of my books prove that I am never very far away from Ohio in my thoughts, and the clocks that strike in my dreams are often the clocks of Columbus.⁸

From the perspective of 1933 Thurber could say that he was "having a fine time now and wish Columbus were here. . . ." (38) He realized the richness, diversity, and comic potential of his Midwest Ohio city and his West Side Columbus neighborhood. He followed in the tradition established by another Midwesterner, Edward Eggleston, who believed that the best history was a record of a people's culture, not its politics and wars. For Eggleston, fiction could be history, and local color could provide a rich texture of the character of a region or locale. Thurber created a rich cast of Shakespearian characters who peopled a stage and acted out the dramas of everyday life. Like the enthusiastic and peripatetic Bottom in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Thurber not only directed the players but wanted to play all parts and to entertain himself and others.

Life was like the Mantell presentation of "King Lear" that Thurber describes in "The Car We Had to Push" chapter. As Jamie and his father watched the production, Lear, the Fool, and Edgar were interrupted by the Get-Ready Man, a local Columbus prophet of doom who rode around town in a big Red Devil car. The Get-Ready man punctuated the dramatic dialogue with his bellowed admonitions and warnings.

This fondly remembered incident serves as a perfect metaphor for Thurber's maturing comic vision. The tragic and the humorous are close together, and the comic is close to the serious. Life always interrupts art, and comedy reconciles us to our cosmic fate as well as teaches us to accept life's setbacks and limitations. Laughter is a saving grace, a gift from life to take.

In the rich human texture and comic vision of *My Life and Hard Times* Thurber created his company of players and his drama of man's follies and foibles—those “small matters” that ultimately matter more to us than “great affairs.” Columbus, Ohio provided Thurber with the individual scale he needed and the time that rang true.

As Thurber himself recognized, *My Life and Hard Times* was his finest work and his most mature comic vision. It was the cornerstone of the remarkably productive career that followed, and would provide the basis for *The Thurber Album*. It is not true, as Charles S. Holmes has stated in his nearly definitive 1972 biography of Thurber, that the title of *My Life and Hard Times* “would remind all readers that the book was written in the middle of a great economic depression and had absolutely nothing to say about it.”⁹ The book clearly reflected the uncertain mood of late 1933 as well as provided a way of understanding what had happened to Thurber and, indirectly, to the nation from 1918 to 1933. Thurber's gift of laughter and a comic vision of the near remote past was as important, if not more so, than all the many serious autobiographies that were published in the early 1930s or the serious fireside chats of a President groping for solutions while sounding confident and reassuring.

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NOTES

1. The “Preface to a Life” that precedes the nine chapters in *My Life and Hard Times* is dated September 25, 1933.
2. James Thurber, *My Life and Hard Times* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), p. 10. All page references are to this edition and hereinafter are cited in the text in parentheses following the quotation.
3. Quoted in Walter Blair, *Native American Humor* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, Inc., 1960), p. 174.
4. James Thurber, “Reply to Ohioana Award,” *Library Journal* (February 15, 1954), 275.
5. Robert Morsberger, *James Thurber* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), p. 101.
6. Thorstein Veblen, “Dementia Praecox,” *The Freeman*, V (June 21, 1922); reprinted in *The Culture of the Twenties*, ed. Loren Baritz (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970).

7. James Thurber, quoted in Morsberger, p. 103.
8. Thurber, “Reply to Ohioana Award,” 275.
9. *The Clocks of Columbus: The Literary Career of James Thurber* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 156.

A SPLIT IMAGE OF THE AMERICAN HERITAGE: THE POETRY OF ROBERT HAYDEN AND THEODORE ROETHKE

CHARLES R. CAMPBELL

Last summer I found myself imitating our founding fathers by making a pilgrimage across this broad land. Coming from the well-thatched hills and swamps of southern Michigan, I plunged into the never-ending space of plains; awed by the overpowering height of sky arching over the sand hills of Nebraska, the wheat fields of Kansas, the sand dunes of Colorado, and the stone and cactus of Arizona.

Did I say I was imitating our fathers? There was a slight variation. I was sitting in a soft electrically-controlled seat, bathed in streams of cool air, peering through tinted glass, with three-hundred and fifty horses pulling me, my family, and a twenty-two foot house down the road, and the whole conglomeration was kept at exactly 55 miles per hour by automatic cruise control. My journal from June 21 says, "Today it occurred to me that we're celebrating a uniquely American experience."

In the fall of 1968, my wife taught sixth grade in a parochial school in a sort of Irish Catholic ghetto in Syracuse, New York. Three of the boys were constantly telling her exciting tales of hunting trips "to the country." The boys had never traveled to another state or another city, but they enjoyed going together "into the country" to tramp and hunt. After listening carefully to several of these stories, she realized with horror that "the country," which was so important, so broad, and so wild, was the jumble of weeds and shrubs growing in and around the interstate cloverleaves in the heart of the city. These two widely separated American experiences are united in and through their

diversity. It is in the plurality of race and ethnic backgrounds, spreadeagled on this large continent, that we find the "makings" of this split image of the heritage. With Ralph Ellison's invisible man we can proclaim: "Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health." American poetic experience finds authenticity and strength in difference; in different images, and differences in the very doing of poetry itself. It is to two differing ways of seeing from American soil, that we now turn.

To loosen with all ten fingers held wide and limber
And lift up a patch, dark-green, the kind of living
cemetery baskets
Thick and cushiony, like an old-fashioned doormat...
(from "Moss Gathering," T.R.)

"That the burning blacks could not be reached
that the Crew abandoned ship,
leaving their shrieking negresses behind,
that the Captain perished drunken with the wenches:

"Further Deponent sayeth not."

Pilot Oh Pilot Me . . .
(from "Middle Passage," R.H.)

It's a long way from gathering moss for flower baskets in Michigan to the voyage of the slaver *Amistad*, yet, as part of an inescapable American heritage and a richly diverse poetic heritage, the two tales are intertwined.

Theodore Roethke has long been regarded as a poet of experience. His writings burn with the intensely personal feelings of a man torn by his desires and frustrations ("I have married my hands to perpetual agitation,/ I run, I run to the whistle of money . . .") In the poems of his mature years we see a man who has worked through his troubles, walked along the frayed edge of insanity and, "as a blind man, lifting a curtain, knows it is morning,/ I know this change:/ . . . The spirit of wrath becomes a spirit of blessing,/ And the dead begin from their dark to sing in my sleep." ("Journey to the Interior," *The Far Field*) Roethke's poetry builds a picture of a uniquely

American life; a white, middle class, Midwestern heritage of roses, greenhouses, hawks, jackrabbits, and telephone poles.

Robert Hayden's themes present another uniquely American heritage, stretching from the filth and blindness and death on board the slaver, "Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,/ the corpse of mercy rots with him,/ rats eat love's rotten gelid eyes....," To the contemporary "Witch Doctor," the jive black man, religious leader who "dances, dances, ensorcelled and aloof./ the fervid juba of God as love, healer,/ conjiver. And of himself as God." (*Selected Poems*) In the process of examining the poetry of Theodore Roethke and Robert Hayden we seek to experience the dialectical nature of these images of American heritage.

The lives and personalities of Roethke and Hayden seem to differ greatly (comparing the works and lives of Roethke and Hayden may be like comparing the strident tones of Buddy Rich with the ordered simplicity of the "Sweet Erma Preservation Hall Band"). Theodore Roethke's life and his poetry seem, in manifold ways, to represent the essence of American anxiety. He writes and interacts with people (as a kind of verbal jousting) with a bravado born of insecurity. Roethke's marriage to Beatrice was literally a salvation for him but his demands were almost too much for her. In *The Glass House*, Allen Seager writes:

At night he would not go to sleep until he had eight or nine blankets over him winter and summer, with a blanket or pillowcase to wrap his head in. This made him sweat so much that it would wake him after an hour or so and he would want a clean pair of pajamas; then he would go to sleep, wake up again and want another pair. There were often eighteen or twenty pairs of pajamas a week in the laundry. When he did sleep, he snored so loudly that no one could sleep in the same room with him."

(Seager, *The Glass House*, 238)

A frequent home guest, Robert Heilman, recalls that Roethke was "a bartender of reckless elbow and overbearing insistence" who hated sobriety among his guests. If party guests decided to leave before breakfast he would look incredulous, aggrieved, hurt, and unloved (Seager, *The Glass House*, 239). In his mature

years, Roethke received many awards for his work, but it was never enough. Insecurity and his fear of failure were never dimmed by adulation, whether from individuals, institutions or governments.

Both Hayden and Roethke were searching for a heritage; Hayden seeking a reality to be found in brotherhood, in others, in the people he met, and in history; Roethke almost always seeking for himself within himself. Roethke was well aware of this constant self-absorption. In *Poet's Choice*, published in 1962, he is asked to pick a "favorite" poem and he chooses "Words for the Wind," saying about it:

For those who are interested in such matters: the poem is an epithalamion to a bride seventeen years younger. W.H. Auden had given us his house, in Forio, Ischia, for several months, as a wedding present. It was my first trip to Europe. A real provincial, I was frightened by Italy, but within a few days, the sun, the Mediterranean, the serenity of the house changed everything. I was able to move outside myself—for me sometimes a violent dislocation—and express a joy in another, in others: I mean Beatrice O'Connell, and the Italian people, their world, their Mediterranean.

Part four (the concluding section) of "Words for the Wind" says it even better:

The breath of a long root,
The shy perimeter
Of the unfolding rose,
The green, the altered leaf,
The oyster's weeping foot,
And the incipient star—
Are part of what she is.
She wakes the ends of life.
Being myself, I sing
The soul's immediate joy.
Light, light, where's my repose?
A wind wreathes round a tree.
A thing is done: a thing
Body and spirit know
When I do what she does:
Creaturely creature, she!—

I kiss her moving mouth,
 Her swart hilarious skin;
 She breaks my breath in half;
 She frolicks like a beast;
 And I dance round and round,
 A fond and foolish man,
 And see and suffer myself
 In another being, at last.

Finding his meaning in others is, for Roethke, a rare and dangerous experience. In this quest for a very personal heritage Roethke plunges into "things," by making his young wife part of the root, the rose, the leaf, the oyster, and the star. In "Words for the Wind" Roethke recalls the "things" which are the themes of many previous poems, especially those from *The Lost Son and Other Poems*. In Roethke's world there is great correspondence between the inner life of the self and the life of nature; the cuttings, roots, weeds, moss become people who are pushing, shoving, and breathing: "even the dirt kept breathing a small breath" ("Root Cellar"). He is seeking a human heritage by pressing back into the beginnings of existence as represented in the life processes of plants, and even inanimate things come alive to fight and grow, against the surrounding forces.

That old rose-house,
 She drove into the teeth of it,
 The core and pith of that ugly storm,
 Ploughing with her stiff prow,
 Bucking into the wind-waves
 That broke over the whole of her,
 Flailing her sides with spray,
 Flinging long strings of wet across the roof-tops,
 Finally veering, wearing themselves out, merely
 Whistling thinly under the wind-vents;
 She sailed until the calm morning,
 Carrying her full cargo of roses.

(*Collected Poems*, "Big Wind," 41)

Roethke's view of nature reminds us of the world of the German romantics, though more specifically the vision of the modern romantic of Rilke. These lines from Rilke's *Third Elegy* sound much like Roethke's world of struggling inner animation.

Ah, there was no caution in that sleeper; sleeping,

but dreaming, but in fever, how he yielded himself.
 He, the new, the shy one, how he got entangled
 in the farther-grasping tendrils of inner action
 coming to pass, already interwoven as patterns,
 as strangling growths, as shapes of beasts of prey.
 How he gave himself to it! Loved his innerness,
 his wilderness within, this primeval forest inside him
 on whose silent debris of collapse light-green his heart
 stood.

Loved. Left it, went from his own roots into the
 powerful

sources where his little birth was already
 outlived. Lovingly he went down into the older
 blood, the gorges where terror lay, still glutted
 with the forefathers. And every horror knew him,
 winked and knew what was doing. Yes,
 the monstrous smiled . . . seldom,
 mother, have you smiled so tenderly.

(*Duino Elegies*)

Because of his insecurity and his problems in coping with a world of people, Roethke turns to the "farther-grasping tendrils," and "strangling growths" of nature. Roethke is probably more comfortable with Rilke's "primeval forest" and "gorges...glutted with the forefathers" than with the bright worlds of the university, the church, or the social structure. In reality, the pushing, sucking, grasping world of nature is more elemental and direct than the world of humans. Roethke once wrote, "I can project myself more easily into a flower than into a person" (Notebooks, reel 14, no. 194, Sullivan, *Garden Master*, 161). Ralph Mills notes that

What he is aiming at is a poetic history of the psyche (Roethke's phrase) which opens with the earliest stages of life and traces the evolution of the spirit in its ordeal of inner and outer conflicts, its desire for 'unity of being' . . . that final condition of grace which is a harmony of the self with all things.

(Ralph Mills, Jr., *Theodore Roethke*, 6, 7)

The growth of the human spirit or soul is one of Roethke's constant themes of identity. Starting with a kind of Spartan simplicity in the first poem of his first book ("Open Home")—

My truths are all foreknown,
 This anguish self-revealed,
 I'm naked to the bone,
 With nakedness my shield.
 Myself is what I wear:
 I keep the spirit spare.

—he soon realizes that the growth of the spirit depends on multiplicity, plurality, and conflict. In an essay entitled "On Identity" he says of the soul:

This (the soul) I was keeping 'spare' in my desire for the essential. But the spirit need not be spare: it can grow gracefully and beautifully like a tendril, like a flower.

(Roethke, *On the Poet and His Craft*, 21)

The soul or spirit which Roethke envisions is a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, a spirit which is "self-perceived" (*On the Poet and His Craft*, 21) and rises above the pettiness of confusion of the surrounding world. Along with this, we see a Rilkean emphasis on the uselessness of intellect and the power of passion.

THE RESTORED

In the hand like a bowl
 Danced my own soul
 Small as an elf,
 All by itself.

When she thought I thought
 She dropped as if shot.
 'I've only one wing,' she said,
 'The other's gone dead,'
 'I'm maimed; I can't fly;
 I'm like to die,'
 Cried the soul
 From my hand like a bowl.
 When I raged, when I wailed,
 And my reason failed,
 That delicate thing
 Grew back a new wing,
 And danced, at high noon,
 On a hot, dusty stone,
 In the still point of light
 Of my last midnight.

(*The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*, 249)

In this poem from his later years we see the soul which "dropped" as "she thought I thought," recovering only "When I raged, when I wailed/ and my reason failed." The self which Roethke is seeking is an "intuitive" self ("On Identity") a raging passionate self; not a self of logic and reason. We are reminded of lines from Rilke's "Eighth Elegy": "We set it in order. It breaks,/ We put it in order again and break down ourselves." Roethke's world of poetry is a living cycle of order—disorder, where the poet tries in his passion to bring order out of chaos and chaos out of order, while daring, even courting, the danger of "breaking down" himself. In all of this, the deep longing is for unity:

The wind rocks with my wish; the rain shields me;
 I live in light's extreme, I stretch in all directions;
 Sometimes I think I'm several.

("What Can I Tell By Bones")

With Robert Hayden, the path toward identity travels in a different direction. In place of the strident, anxious pounding of verbs, we find a world of quiet narrative and observation, a truly aesthetic world. Where there is excitement and passion, it is a distanced excitement and passion belonging generically to the story and its characters.

As a black poet in America Hayden has, perhaps, a more complex identity problem than Roethke. Roethke's search for self carries him primarily into himself and the unpeopled world of nature. Hayden searches for himself in others; digging into the ruins of his racial heritage and into the world of people surrounding him. Hayden gives us a kaleidoscope which uses faces, rather than bits of broken glass, for the basic stuff of design. The result is a quiet, though ever-changing vision of persons, a tumbling wheel of snapshots, always searching, always personal. As Hayden sorts through (his poetry is more like a "sorting through" than Roethke's "ragings") all of these sources, he is looking for two identities: his personal identity and his identity as a poet.

Every black artist has the serious problem of wondering whether he or she is a good artist or a good "black artist." What

does the phrase, "This is a fine example of black writing" really mean? Hayden, speaking of this problem says:

The tendency of American critics has been to label the established Negro writer a 'spokesman for his race.' There are, as we have seen, poets who think of themselves in that role. But the effect of such labeling is to place any Negro author in a kind of literary ghetto where the standards applied to other writers are not likely to be applied to him since he, being a 'spokesman for his race,' is not considered primarily a writer but a species of race-relations man, the leader of a cause, the voice of protest.

(*Kaleidoscope, Poems by American Negro Poets*, xx)

Hayden feels that the most important task of any poet (including the "black poet") is to simply illuminate human experience. He concludes his introduction to *Kaleidoscope* with these comments on "unity."

It has become expected of Negro poets that they will address themselves to the race question—and that they will all say nearly the same things about it. Such 'group unity' is more apparent than real. Differences in vision and emphasis, fundamental differences in approach to the art of poetry itself, modify and give diversity to the writing of these poets, even when they employ similar themes. And certainly there is no agreement among them as to what the much-debated role of the Negro poet should be. (XXIII, XXIV)

"Searching" is a constant theme of Hayden's poetic path; sometimes obvious—

Black turkeys children
dogs foraged and played
under drying fishnets.

Vendors urged laquerwork
and glazed angels
with candles between their wings.

Alien, at home—as always
everywhere—I roamed
the cobbled island,
and thought of Yeats,
his passionate search for
a theme. Sought mine.

("Kodachromes of the Island")

—many times hidden within the stories of Sue Ellen Westerfield, Frederick Douglass, the Witch Doctor, and others. "Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves" is illustrative of Hayden's quiet, picture-taking style. He finds her at a carnival:

Enacting someone's notion of themselves
(and me) The One And Only Aunt Jemima
and Kokimo The Dixie Dancing Fool
do a bally for the freak show.

So here I am, so here I am,
fake mammy to God's mistakes.
And that's the beauty part,
I mean, ain't that the beauty part.
She laughs, but I do not, knowing what
her laughter shields. And mocks
I light another cigarette for her.
She smokes, not saying any more.

Jemima sighs, Reckon I'd best
be getting back. I help her up.
Don't you take no wooden nickels, hear?
Tin dimes neither. So long, pal.

A grotesque billboard caricature becomes, in the course of twenty short stanzas, a warm real person. She could be black, yellow, or white—no matter—it's the careful process of observation, of looking behind, of acceptance that is important. In a piece like "Aunt Jemima of the Ocean Waves," Hayden shows his special gift of spinning lines which are, at the same time, passionate and detached.

Roethke once said that one of the main problems with a search for identity is "What to do with our ancestors?" (*On the Poet and His Craft*, 23). It is to his racial and spiritual ancestors that Hayden turns in much of his work. His ancestors are the famous names like Harriet Tubman,

And fear starts a-murbling, Never make it,
we'll never make it *Hush that now*,
and she's turned upon us, levelled pistol
glinting in the moonlight:
Dead folks can't jaybird-talk, she says;
you keep on going now or die, she says.

("Runagate Runagate")

or Frederick Douglass,

... this man
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze
alone,
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

("Frederick Douglass")

or the unnamed maimed creatures in "Night, Death, Mississippi":

Time was. Time was.
White robes like moonlight
In the sweetgum dark.
Unbucked that one then
and him squealing bloody Jesus
as we cut it off.

In this search for identity, Hayden keeps his pose of observer. Occasionally, there is great passion and emotion in the story and within the reader, but the poet remains primarily a concerned observer. Probably Hayden's most awesome published work is "Middle Passage."

Jesus, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy:
Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,
sharks following the moans the fever and
dying;
horror the corposant and compass rose.
Middle Passage:
voyage through death
to life upon these shores.

"Middle Passage" is a lengthy piece; a fabric woven from multiple narratives, passages from a slave ship's log, a ship's officer's diary, testimony at a court of inquiry, and names of Slavers. All human lives are stirred by periods of "passing over"; times when we pass from a standpoint of life to a standpoint of death, from knowledge to ignorance to knowledge again. This poem concerns a "passing over" of vital importance for Hayden as a black man, and a "passing over" experience for America. America's contradictory stance toward slavery is seen clearly in these words of a Cuban seaman (from "Middle Passage"):

And it distresses us to know
there are so many here who seem inclined
to justify the mutiny of these blacks.
We find it paradoxical indeed
that you whose wealth, whose tree of liberty
are rooted in the labor of your slaves
should suffer the august John Quincy Adams
to speak with so much passion of the right
of chattel slaves to kill their lawful masters
and with his Roman rhetoric weave a hero's
garland for Cinquez. I tell you that
we are determined to return to Cuba
with our slaves and there see justice done.

Cinquez—
or let us say 'the Prince'—Cinquez shall die.

The phrase "voyage through death/to life upon these shores" as well as the ironical names of the ships "Jesus, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy" are reminders of the supposed religious benefits to be gained by bringing "heathen souls unto Thy chastening." He uses the religious image as a tool with which to see more clearly the faces of a people treated worse than cattle.

In the quest for identity of these two American poets, neither Hayden nor Roethke turned to a "mainstream" religion to unify the spiritual dimension of their lives. Hayden's constant emphasis on others and on brotherhood meshes well with his Baha'i faith (Several of his poems concern the life of Baha'u'llah, prophet of the Baha'i faith.) In the powerful concluding stanzas of "Words In the Mourning Time" (From a book of that title appearing in 1970. These sections have been deleted in the 1975 *Angle of Ascent* collection.) Hayden speaks of brotherhood with images particularly fitting to his religious beliefs.

We must not be frightened nor cajoled
into accepting evil as deliverance from evil.
We must go on struggling to be human,
though monsters of abstraction
police and threaten us.

Reclaim now, now renew the vision of
a human world where godliness
is possible and man
is neither gook nigger honkey wop nor kike

but man

permitted to be man.

Roethke stayed aloof from organized religion altogether. However, in the previously quoted "On Identity," prepared for a forum at Northwestern University in February of 1963, just a few months before his death, Roethke speaks of his turning to "things" as a sort of religious answer for life:

Everything that lives is holy: I call
upon these holy forms of life. One
could even put this theologically: St.
Thomas says, 'God is above all things
by the excellence of His nature, nevertheless,
He is in all things as causing the being
of all things.' Therefore, in calling upon
the snail, I am calling, in a sense, upon
God. (*On the Poet and His Craft*, 24, 25)

In lines from "Fourth Meditation" Roethke cries

I think of the self-involved:
The ritualists of the mirror, the lonely drinkers,
The minions of benzedrine and paraldehyde,
And those who submerge themselves deliberately in
trivia. . . .

How I wish them awake!
May the high flower of the boy climb into their hearts;
May they lean into light and live;
May they sleep in robes of green, among the ancient
ferns;
May their eyes gleam with the first dawn;
May the sun guild them a worm;
May they be taken by the true burning;
May they flame into being!
("Fourth Meditation," *Collected Poems*, 169)

In the molding of these poems which form this split image of American heritage, both Roethke and Hayden make the Goethean move of striving for the universal, even the spiritual, by portraying the specific; for Roethke, the world of the snail; for Hayden, the lives of Aunt Jemima and Sue Ellen Westerfield.

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THE LIMITS OF REALISM IN JAMES PURDY'S FIRST OHIO NOVEL, *THE NEPHEW*

PAUL W. MILLER

Following publication of his first and second short novels, 63: *Dream Palace* (1956) and *Malcolm* (1959), both set in Chicago and based on his experiences there from 1935 to 1956, Purdy turns for the setting of his third novel, *The Nephew* (1960), to the small Midwestern town of Rainbow Center, modeled on Bowling Green, Ohio, where he lived from 1932 to 1935. In brief, the novel concerns the powerful influence of Cliff Mason, the nephew of the title, on his maiden Aunt Alma Mason, long after he has left Rainbow Center to join the army, and even after he has been reported missing and finally dead in Korea.

As will subsequently be shown, *The Nephew*, like the two previous novels, is realistic in its detailed representation, with slight modification, of some of Purdy's relatives, neighbors, acquaintances, and experiences. And the Ohio novel is much closer than the earlier novels to traditional Midwestern realism in that it undertakes to examine the long-term consequences of society's attempted control of individual freedom in a small town. But Purdy's novel is clearly at odds with traditional realism in its insistence on the power of the strong, eccentric individual to transform society long after his alienation and departure from the town of his birth, and even after his death, by his spirit's communion with the living. Indeed Purdy in several of his works emphasizes the power of the individual over society, and the power of the dead over the living, to a degree that has led critics to label his works surrealist, Gothic, or fantastic rather than realistic. Far from illustrating any

established "school" of twentieth-century writing, however, the style of *The Nephew* can perhaps best be described as "stretched realism," based on a vision of reality comprehending but fundamentally at odds with traditional realistic assumptions about the relationship of the individual to society and of the dead to the living. Constantly at war with the realistic conventions he employs, Purdy subverts the traditions of twentieth-century realism only to revitalize them in the light of his own distinctive vision of reality.

At the beginning of the novel, Alma, a retired schoolteacher with a gift shop that no one ever visits, tries to fill her empty days by waiting for infrequent, noncommittal letters from the nephew; gossiping with and about the neighbors; and bickering interminably with her 78-year-old brother Boyd, a realtor, over custard pie and the Rainbow *Sentinel*. After Cliff is reported missing, and she is gradually driven to abandon the dream of his joyous homecoming on which she had pinned her long-term hopes, she hits upon the notion of filling her days and finding consolation for her loss by writing Cliff's "memorial." Because of the paucity of appropriate material to be found for the memorial, she is eventually forced to abandon her project, but not before coming upon some shocking revelations about Cliff and her neighbors. More important, in the process of researching and abandoning the "memorial," she becomes reconciled with her irritating brother and her neighbors, from whom she has long been estranged. The mysterious agent of this reconciliation, appropriately, is the nephew himself.

Although it is the nephew's powerful impact on the town that gradually emerges at the central reality of Purdy's vision, it is the novel's many realistic reflections of his life in Bowling Green which make possible this vision's convincing portrayal. Indeed it has long been an open secret in the town that Rainbow Center is a near reflection of the small Ohio town where Purdy attended the State College (now Bowling Green State University). This was also the town where his divorced father William B. (Boyd?) and Aunt Cora lived at 135 Ridge Street in a house and neighborhood very similar to those portrayed in the novel, complete with a Heinz ketchup factory nearby as aromatically described in the chapter "An Odor of Ketchup." Indeed one of

my local informants has said that when *The Nephew* was published, it "rocked the town of Bowling Green" (Kilmer); another one noted that "everybody" borrowed her copy of *The Nephew*, enjoying its local scandal to the full (L. Harrington).

The surface realism of *The Nephew* can be illustrated from the two following passages that capture the flavor of life in the small Midwestern town of Rainbow Center in the early 1950s, and, not so incidentally, the flavor of life in Bowling Green about the same time, or perhaps a few years earlier. The first passage emphasizes the relationship of an aging brother and sister who have been living in Alma's house, and nattering at one another, for the twenty years since Boyd was widowed. The particular day described is special, however, since it is the day the nephew is reported missing in action in Korea (19). The second passage nostalgically captures the flavor—and smell—of midsummer in a small Midwestern town with a ketchup factory.

"I know you think Cliff's not coming back," Alma said, and her voice broke.

He had not seen Alma cry for too many years to remember. He did not know whether she could. However, at this moment for the first time in recent memory, he saw her come very close to breaking.

"I hope against hope is all," Boyd finally said in a subdued reverent voice.

"If it's the best you can do!" Alma's voice was hard and clear again.

She rose and went upstairs without her usual dispassionate *goodnight*.

Sometimes, after they had done battle together, as they had tonight, he would hear her later furiously breaking wind in her bedroom, and since she was such a proper fastidious person, he wondered whether she went to her bedroom at such times for the reason that she knew she was going to break wind, or whether she broke wind as an aftermath of their disputes together.

Once she had left the room, he leafed through the *Sentinel* a few more times, skimming the results of the state College's baseball victories, perusing the notices of new lots opening up on Sugar Ridge, turned the radio on for a moment to get the weather report, stuck his nose out the door to test the temperature, then went to his own

the door to test the temperature, then went to his own bedroom where he would toss and turn for an hour or two in his four-poster before drifting off into a restless old man's sleep.

In her room, too, Alma was restless, and sometimes muttered aloud about Boyd's insensitivity and blindness. A brother like him, or any brother, for that matter, left so much to be desired. (21)

In July, the wagons and trucks with the red juicy ripened fruit were already on their route to the ketchup factory, and a few days later one smelled the first intense high odor of mingled tomatoes, spices and sugar.

For the first few days of the ketchup "season," Alma was invariably ill. Fortunately, the smell lasted only a few weeks at the most—but those weeks made up the summer. At the first frost, with doors and windows closed, the trees dropping their leaves, one could forget about ketchup and the ketchup factory until another year.

This summer, with the heat and the heavy burning fruit attar everywhere, Alma remembered that Cliff too had disliked the smell of the cooking tomatoes. One July, when she had for once refused to teach summer school, she and Cliff had spent more than the usual amount of time together. One afternoon, for a solid hour, while playing checkers together, they had taken turns complaining vociferously against the ketchup factory.

"It's bread and butter to the people connected with the industry," Boyd reminded them soberly. "This whole town would be broke without ketchup." And he went on to remind them that even in the darkest days of the depression, the ketchup factory had kept going. "Can openers and ketchup continued to sell during the worst years of unemployment," Boyd concluded. And now, Alma thought, remembering her conversations with Cliff and sniffing the odor that announced summer in Rainbow Center, Cliff no longer existed, except for the "missing" in front of his name. (36-37)

As the prototypes of Boyd and Alma Mason in the novel, William and Cora Purdy provide interesting test cases of its realism in characterization. William (1877-1964) was the son of Boyd W. (William?) Purdy and Catherine Mason Purdy. (Note

that the names Boyd and Mason in the novel are taken unchanged from the Purdy family's Christian name Boyd and distaff surname Mason.) Following his divorce in 1930 from Vera Otis Purdy (1886-1962) in the nearby town of Findlay, Ohio, William took up residence at the Purdy family home in Bowling Green where (like Boyd in the novel, whose wife had died) he lived with his sister and earned his living as a realtor ("William Purdy"). And just as William's sister Cora (1879-1966) retired from teaching in Bloomington, Indiana, to run a gift shop in her home (IU Alumni; "Miss Cora Purdy"), so her fictional counterpart Alma, who had been "away most of the time teaching school in another town" (8), does likewise. But whether Cora's life in retirement was as empty and barren as Alma's in the novel, I have found it hard to determine from the several town residents interviewed who knew her. As for the gift shop itself, it was described by a neighbor of the Purdys, Florence Baird (the prototype of Fay Baird in the novel) as follows:

Cora's gift shop was a melange of the many products of the near and Far East; regional output of the United States such as pottery from Brown County, Indiana, Colorado, etc.: antique furniture, china and crystal: silver jewelry, etc. She had a great love for beauty in materials, workmanship, and glowing colors. (Oriental rugs, for example.) [Baird]

Apart from its listing of the gift shop's typical sales items, this excerpt from Miss Baird's letter is interesting for its aside on Cora Purdy's keen esthetic appreciation, a quality denied her fictional counterpart and thus heightening the emptiness of Alma's life. In the novel, though several realistic details of the gift shop are given, it is usually mentioned in the context of its failure to provide the fulfillment and satisfaction Alma had anticipated (34): by the novel's end, and thanks apparently to the transformation of her character wrought by the nephew, the gift shop's sales of "pottery and lace" are flourishing as never before (195-96). The portrayal of Alma and her gift shop, then, is broadly realistic in its detailed but very selective use of those aspects of the novelist's life in Bowling Green that heighten the fictional town's emptiness and its consequent need to be enriched by values that the nephew can supply. Extending the realism of

its portraits of Alma and Boyd, based on the characters of Cora and William Purdy, the novel shapes a recurrent autobiographical *persona* of Purdy's novels into the nephew of the title, but changes the setting from the years James actually lived in Bowling Green (1932-35) to the period of the Korean War (1950-52). Cliff is an American soldier who early in the novel is reported missing in Korea and who near the end is reported dead. (Purdy himself served briefly in the American army during World War II but was never posted abroad.) As in the two Chicago novels, the autobiographical *persona* of *The Nephew* is an orphan: as recently as 1960, however, when the novel was published, William and Vera Purdy, though divorced, were still alive and well. Purdy's repeated, almost obsessive portrayal of the autobiographical *personae* of his novels as orphans may reflect his sense that the shocking break-up of a family by divorce is comparable in its impact to the sudden death of loved ones. In *The Nephew* this association of divorce with death is evident when the autobiographical Cliff is "orphaned by the deaths of both his parents in a plane accident" (8), or when Boyd comes to live with his sister Alma after the death of his wife Netta (3, 34), just as his prototype William Purdy came to live with his sister Cora after his divorce from Vera.

Several of the Purdys' near neighbors as well as the Purdys themselves are included in the novel's realistic reflection of life in Bowling Green. Among these neighbors two of the most important are Mrs. N. R. Harrington (Mrs. Barrington in the novel) and Professor Bernard Nordmann of the State College (Professor Mannheim in *The Nephew*). Others include Florence Baird, also of the State College (portrayed as Faye Laird), a detective named Clifford Shrader (fictionalized as Willard Baker who "had been a private detective in Chicago" [16].) Mary Harbaugh (satirized as the Christian Scientist Clara Himbaugh); and Mrs. Chas. S. Van Tassel (a well-known Ohio historian's widow portrayed in the novel with her surname unchanged) [*Directory*]. Though Purdy has been pilloried in Bowling Green for having had so little imagination as to change the names of his characters only slightly from their prototypes' names, these Purdyesque names should not be so lightly dis-

missed. They not only give evidence of the novel's surface realism, but also, in the tradition of the *roman à clef*, provide local readers with clues to the actual characters the novelist had in mind. Adumbrating, but at the same time disguising the names of the characters portrayed, these altered names signal that even as they have been changed, so the characters portrayed may have been changed from their originals. Furthermore, Purdy's persistent echoing of the original names of the characters he writes about may reflect the primitive but still potent belief (reflected also in the sophisticated debates of the medieval realists against the nominalists), that names are a form of *mana*, aspects of reality giving those who know and use them power over the persons named, in this case the power to portray the individuals named, to the very life.

Some sense of Purdy's selective, freely adaptive realism in portraying the neighbors can be derived from his fictional portrait of Mrs. Harrington (1868-1955). As in real life, the fictionalized character was an avid gardener (4, 83). But whereas in her funeral notice Mrs. Harrington was described merely as "lame from childhood because of an injured knee" ("Mrs. Harrington"), in the novel the "old monarch," as Mrs. Barrington is called, is presented larger than life, with colorful attributes ranging far beyond her physical handicap, remarkable though it is:

Mrs. Barrington's fame in Rainbow center rested not only on her mansion and wealth but on an affliction: in her youth she had lost her left foot in an accident so gruesome nobody had ever repeated the exact details, and she had worn an artificial limb ever since . . .

In addition to her property and her artificial foot, Mrs. Barrington enjoyed each summer an additional notoriety, the trumpet vine which grew over the north end of her two-acre estate. Once in bloom, the trumpet vine became, year after year, the inevitable topic of comment. Visitors from other counties half across the state came to view it. The vine itself covered in extent half a city block. During its flowering, Mrs. Barrington often appeared outdoors, limping and busy, assisted by a small crowd of college boys, directing as was her custom all the yard-work on her

property, and bowing occasionally to some of the more appreciative "tourists." (82-83)

Purdy's fictional portrait of another neighbor, Dr. Nordmann (1887-1961) of the history department at Bowling Green State, is also quite recognizable despite its calculated departures from strict realism. Like Professor Nordmann, the fictional Professor Mannheim was a popular, respected Professor with a German accent (as a youth Nordmann served in the German Merchant Marine before emigrating to America in 1907 [*Alumni*]). And like Professor Nordmann, Professor Mannheim married one of his former students after his first wife died. But in order to portray his fictional professor as a member of a tiny minority whose academic tenure is threatened in a small, conservative Midwestern town, Purdy presents Mannheim as a Jew and a radical socialist, which his real-life counterpart was assuredly not. (In fact Nordmann appears to have been an arch-conservative defending the capitalistic way of life, challenging the right of female students in his classes to a college education, and even on occasion telling them, "You should be home having babies" [*Anderson*].)

The novel's reflection of the life of a small Ohio town, and of the Purdy family and their neighbors, is close to if not actually in the mainstream of Midwestern realism, as we have noted. And indeed the nephew himself, when we first hear of his alienation and departure from the town of Rainbow Center, seems like a classic victim of the Midwestern town's ostracism or excommunication of its more eccentric, sensitive and (sometimes) its most talented individuals. Examples drawn from Midwestern realists include such characters as "Wing" Biddlebaum (*Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio*), Paul Hardin and his mistress Evelyn (*Whitlock's J. Hardin & Son*), Zenobia Van Essen and Zenobia Ferguson (*Bromfield's The Farm and The World We Live In*), and Kate Gordon (*Santmyer's And Ladies of the Club . . .*) [*Hughes*]. But in fact the nephew is very different from any of the above characters, and hence a departure from Midwestern realism, since he is not only influenced by the town but has a powerful impact on it. He is also very different from *Anderson's* more sympathetic, likeable George Willard, whose impact on Winesburg is slight even though his reputation among the

townspeople is high. Thus whereas Willard's influence on the town is limited to a few of its "grotesques," and presumably ends or diminishes with his departure from Winesburg, Cliff Mason's influence on Rainbow Center in *The Nephew* persists, and actually grows, after his departure. The end result of the nephew's influence is his transformation of the narrow prejudices and petty cruelties of his Aunt Alma, the novel's best representative of Rainbow Center's traditional values, into broad acceptance of a wide range of human limitations and peculiarities, her own included. *The Nephew*, then, is a novel of affirmation, realistic in its reflection of life in a small Midwestern town, but visionary in its insistence on Rainbow Center's possibilities, however remote, for true community based on the town's eventual acceptance of the nephew's non-conformist values.

Viewed in the context of Purdy's two previous novels, Alma's transformation is made possible by her essential decency as well as by the mysterious influence of the nephew himself. In contrast to the corrupt denizens of South Chicago portrayed in 63: *Dream Palace* and *Malcolm*, Alma, despite her small-town prejudices and love of gossip, is a well-intentioned, respectable person capable in old age of learning from her mistakes when confronted by them. Moreover, her adherence to such traditional values as patriotism and neighborly hospitality (she always flies the flag on Memorial Day, and serves her fellow gossips generous servings of the best chocolate cream cake in Rainbow Center) keeps her and her neighbors from the extremes of greed and depravity that are daily manifested in the twentieth century urban jungle of 63: *Dream Palace* and *Malcolm*.

Although Alma's good intentions and the desperate emptiness of her life make her ripe for change, this change would never have come about without Cliff's powerful influence. One quality of the nephew that might help explain his extraordinary impact was his youthful potentiality, or at least the belief he aroused that "there was something about Cliff that might have proved exceptional," to quote the sage Professor Mannheim (131). Another quality that distinguishes him, indeed his distinguishing quality, according to Mannheim, "was the way he showed, in his face, how much he was expecting of life" (133).

Though these two qualities may go far toward explaining why Cliff was Alma's favorite among her four nephews, or why, though neither brilliant nor devoted to his studies, he was Professor Mannheim's all-time favorite student, they are inadequate to explain fully the persistence of his influence in Rainbow Center. A third quality, merely hinted at, but which I take to be much more important than the qualities already mentioned, is his sense of the eternal. It is no doubt this sense of being barely touched by time that gave him "that astonishing fresh look, as if he had just come out of a forest, perhaps, or even a pond, still dripping a little from his bath," or that enabled him "to sit with old people, to talk to them as though no gulf or barrier of age existed and to be at ease with them" (43-44). This same quality of being in the world and yet not of it may have given rise to his non-conformity and to his deep unhappiness with life in time-bound Rainbow Center, especially after the sudden, shocking death of his parents. More importantly, it may be Cliff's sense of the eternal that enables him to sympathize with, commune with, and powerfully influence Alma's spirit at the end of the novel, in response to her growing awareness of death and eternity.

We turn now from the mysterious sources of Cliff's power, to examine some details of the process by which Alma moves from her overriding concern with either the future, the past, or the "specious present" (45, 194) to an awareness of eternity that sees future, past, and present as one. One of the stages in this transformation involves the gradual collapse of her hopes that Cliff will return at some indeterminate moment in the future to redeem the bareness of her life in the present. Nor does her attempt to live in the past ultimately prove more rewarding than her fading hopes of the future. For although her conversations with Boyd about their shared memories of Cliff cause "vigor or hope" to stir in her as almost nothing else does, this dwelling on the dead past likewise fails to sustain Alma's flagging spirit. Finally, in a last desperate effort to preserve the past for the future, thereby giving meaning to the present, she hits upon the idea of writing Cliff's "memorial." But she is soon forced to recognize that Cliff's letters, which she had counted on as a primary source of material for the memorial, are almost devoid

of content. Moreover, though she loved Cliff deeply, she finds that she knows practically nothing about him, perhaps even less than some of his former friends (her near neighbors), to whom she has scarcely spoken over the years. In an effort to eke out her skimpy knowledge of Cliff for the memorial, she consults several of Cliff's former friends and admirers in the neighborhood—Mrs. Barrington, the "old monarch" with her enviable trumpet vine; the scandal-plagued Professor Mannheim, a Jew with unorthodox political views who years ago had been caught at the cemetery with a co-ed "in the absolute act"; and Willard Baker and Vernon Miller, who have weekend drinking parties with "women from out of town," and whom everybody in the neighborhood but Alma recognizes as a homosexual couple. But when she interviews these neighbors, she eventually uncovers the painful truth that Cliff hated Rainbow Center and probably did not even love the aunt who doted on him so. A further revelation, stemming from the discovery of huge, blown-up photos of Cliff in Vernon's room following a fire at Willard Baker's, is that Vernon loved Cliff. And though Vernon assures Alma that Cliff was not a homosexual, the reader may be left wondering whether Vernon was even then attempting to spare her the unvarnished truth. The heart attack Boyd suffers during the excitement of Willard's fire is another sustained shock to Alma, even though he gradually recovers some measure of his strength.

Perhaps more important than these revelations about Cliff and her fresh awareness of Boyd's—and her own—mortality, is the discovery of how blind and narrow her own life has been, excluding from her frame of reality much of what she found too painful to face, and much of what did not conform to her small-town Midwestern prejudices. She has not, for example, realized how much Professor Mannheim had suffered from fear of unjust dismissal from the college (125-27); how much Willard Baker had suffered as a child from his parents' preferential treatment of their brilliant younger son Joe, who became a doctor (175); or how Vernon, adopted by Willard from the Children's Home, had suffered from Willard's homosexual cruelties (190-92). Alma also learns that even as she has recently suffered from the knowledge that Cliff never loved her, so "the old monarch" has

long been pained by the truth that her long dead husband had never returned her love (205).

Some compensation for the pain of Alma's belated knowledge of the world comes from her recognition that she has more in common with Professor Mannheim, Vernon, and even Mrs. Barrington than her prejudices had allowed her to admit. By opening herself to the fears and misfortunes of others and becoming friends with them, she finds her grief over Cliff's death assuaged to the point where she is ready to put aside the memorial. She even finds consolation in Mrs. Barrington's final wisdom that although Cliff may not have loved Alma, she had loved him, and still does. "That's all we dare hope for in this life," the "old monarch" concludes, and Alma agrees. And the reader too is left with the knowledge that although Cliff failed to communicate his insights to his aunt during his lifetime, they became a vital part of her life after he was missing, through the mysterious ministration of his spirit.

The novel's last chapter, entitled "Threshold of Assent," ends with Alma and Boyd sitting in the approaching darkness of their living room, engaged in a brief retrospective conversation on their lives together. Serving as the novel's final affirmation of Cliff's values, this last conversation underlines Alma and Boyd's new sense of the brevity, fragility and precariousness of human relationships passing through time to the looming presence of eternity, and of the singular importance of their spiritual community with one another—and (by implication) with the nephew as well. Using the past tense mixed with the conditional mood to convey her acceptance of the pastness of their lives and the frightening prospect of their impending separation from one another by death, Alma evokes from Boyd a strong confirmation of her new outlook, coming like his "as if out of some eternal darkness." She setting is the night of Memorial Day, "Cliff's day," as Alma calls it, exactly one year after the novel's beginning. As Boyd's last words in this conversation imply, the nephew is a brooding presence in the room, no longer alienated from his aunt and uncle but silently communing with them and ministering to their spiritual needs:

I'm so glad you've been here, Boyd. It would be pretty all-alone by myself."

There was a kind of odd fear in her voice that made him look at her before he said, "I can say the same, Alma," his voice thin and trebly in the dark.

"I've thought of Cliff a bit today, Boyd," she said at last, and she felt he nodded. "This was his day."

"You mustn't ever feel he didn't know," she heard his voice coming to her as if out of some eternal darkness. (209)

Given Alma and Boyd's history of constant, petty bickering, it is hard to believe that the deep sisterly and brotherly love revealed in this dialogue could ever have been fully developed or expressed without the presence and influence of the nephew, ironically more communicative with Rainbow Center now that he is dead than when he was living.

The Nephew, then, like Purdy's two earlier novels, is realistic in drawing heavily on his actual experiences in the Midwest; it is even closer to traditional Midwestern realism in its conception and portrayal of the small town as a place where individual freedom is constantly threatened by the prejudices and conventions of society. It departs from traditional realism, however, as it suggests the possibility of the dead communicating with the living, and in the process, radically transforming society for the better. Hinting at the ultimate identity of past, present and future, if not in this world then the next, the novel portrays the communion of the living with the dead in the eternal moment that involves yet transcends the "specious present" (45, 194, 209). Indeed the novel ends with a vision of time-defying peace and harmony that had been realistically foreshadowed early in the novel, almost as though it were a brief, waking, impossible dream:

As they [Alma and Boyd] talked to one another in the dark, it even seemed to them that they were living their entire lives all at once, and were in command of their total personalities. Friends and relatives long dead entered into their conversation, and the hard implacable void of contemporaneity was dissipated. One could, so to speak, see land, breathe air. The night had lifted from night. (48)

In its last two pages the novel portrays Alma and her aging, valetudinarian brother sitting in the encroaching darkness and

apparently glowing with "phosphorescence"—in realistic terms, their white hair still shining in the waning light—that anticipates the imminent shedding of their corporeal bodies by their spiritual or ghostly selves (209-10). This traditional image of luminescence, long associated with the nocturnal appearance of disembodied spirits, apparitions and phantoms, recalls Purdy's use earlier in the novel of the ancient image of the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis to represent the soul's immortality as well as the miraculous renewal of life in nature (184). His realistic yet symbolic and supernaturalistic treatment of these images nicely epitomizes the way *The Nephew* draws upon traditional Midwestern realism in order to transform it "by a sea change/into something rich and strange."

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WRIGHT MORRIS'S EARTHLY MUSIC: THE WOMEN OF *PLAINS SONG*

ELLEN SERLEN UFFEN

At the beginning of *Will's Boy*, Wright Morris's autobiographical memoir, he writes, à la F. Scott Fitzgerald, of his search for what he terms an "image that is commensurate with my wonder," and discovers it to be a "vast tranquil pond on which a light rain is falling." The rain, disturbing the calm water, forms "endlessly renewed and expanding circles." This image Morris sees as his "own ponderable cosmos."¹ This is a clue to us. If what is termed a "sense of place" is an author's personal and visionary cosmos—the idea of a world—given life and finely shaped by language, then Morris, by defining the abstract mode of existence of his cosmos, has shown us a way to understand its concretion as the Great Plains of his novels. His is a fictive universe, whose core, once assigned form and "meaning," moves, like those ever-expanding circles, into every aspect of the work. The image of these Great Plains we encounter frequently in Morris's books, but nowhere is the sense of them felt more than in the book whose title itself calls attention to the importance of the image: *Plains Song for Female Voices*. Here, also, Morris is clearly expanding his vision. It is the women in the cosmos—or, more appropriately, as the cosmos—who form the radiating center of his field of vision.

The title, like the vision which informs it, reverberates. It refers first to the Great Plains of Nebraska, nature stripped to its arid essence. This is the larger background of the novel, a physical given and a formidable force which is not so much actually dealt with in the book (or elsewhere in Morris, for that matter) as it is a constantly felt presence. The title refers also to

the "plain" style in which Morris tells the story, a style characterized, as was its Puritan predecessor, by an absolute and general simplicity, a lack of verbal embellishment, crystal clarity, and a bardic straightforwardness and unpretentiousness—a language, it seems, which is exactly what it appears to be. Nor do we immediately suspect that there is depth to the simple "melody" which contains the words of the song: the title, that is, also refers to the "plainsong" (or "plainchant") of a medieval liturgical music, with its characteristic unadorned and unaccompanied quiet beauty, in the history of song, a kind of Ur-music.

To talk about the Great Plains, "plainstyle," and "plainsong," is really to use the same definitions, couched, in each case, in language modified only to accommodate the different realms in which the concepts exist. In context, even the liturgical aspect of the music fits, albeit in comic transformation, for, as we are told early of Cora Atkins, the central figure in the novel, "Cora had been raised a Unitarian, but she was not a stickler for denominations" (24).² And while it is true "She was God-fearing . . . there were things in the world that scared her even more" (54). Morris aims to keep his concerns solidly on Earth. The musical suggestion is meant to be a part of a generalized simplicity of presentation, a kind of nondenominational and homey song of the spirit. The music—the "style" and the "song" taken together—we can read as the way in which the story is told or "sung"; the Great Plains is the scene of the "song"; the song itself—its lyrics or content—is Cora Atkins, upon whose plainness the novel pivots. Another type of woman, the attractive kind, the narrator speculates early in the book, is chosen as a wife for reasons clear to everyone—of these, most obvious is that it flatters a man to possess her—but it is the plain woman who ". . . gets a second, appraising look to determine what it is the man sees in her" (7). And so we might read the whole novel: plainness which exists and functions on so many levels must, one would think, hide depths.

Cora, even as her name suggests, is the center of Plains Song, its essence. The book begins near the end, with her, old and dying. Then, quickly and seamlessly, in flashback, we have her story. We learn that Cora, at twenty, was sent by her father West to Ohio from Massachusetts, to her Uncle Myron, a hotel

and stable owner, in the hope that among Uncle Myron's customers, there might be a "taker" for the young woman. She soon meets and marries the laconic Emerson Atkins, who, with his brother, Orion, are homesteading government land in Nebraska's Great Plains. Cora returns to Nebraska with him in the wagon loaded with supplies and along the way has her first—and only—sexual encounter from which will in the proper time result her daughter, Beulah Madge. In the remainder of the book Orion will marry Belle Rooney.; his wife will give birth to Sharon Rose Atkins and two other girls, the second of whom will die, and Belle herself will die with the birth of the third child; Orion will fight in World War I and return home, shellshocked; Madge will marry and have three girls; Fayrene, Sharon's younger sister, will marry and have five girls (one of whom will produce the single male child mentioned in the novel, who will begin the fourth generation, which is not dealt with); Sharon Rose will study music, leave Nebraska for Chicago and then Massachusetts, to teach at Wellesley; the older generation will die; the second generation's children will grow up, some will marry, others will not. The action of the book spans a period approximately from the beginning of the twentieth century to the early seventies.

We learn only the barest facts of the life Cora led until we are introduced to her at the age of twenty. Her life, in effect, begins when the novel does, with her arrival on the Plains. And so really does the life of the Plains begin then since the land she is brought to had remained uncultivated and barren until Cora comes. Emerson Atkins' young wife is also as unlikely a progenitor of future generations as the arid Plains are a potential sustainer of life: "She was never spry, comforting, or twinkling . . ." we are told. "Not that she is cold, unloving or insensible. She is implacable" (2). Even as a young girl, Cora is tall and firm, "lean . . . angular . . . characteristically solemn," herself ". . . fully aware that her clothes hung on her body as if from a hanger, and no seamstress would refer to her chest as a bust" (3, 4, 5). To her brother-in-law, Orion, "She was indeed a strange beanpole of a woman . . ." (19).

Cora's most evident characteristic, perhaps, and the one which enrages Sharon Rose as she matures, is the explicitness of

her, her fierce claim on the external and her refusal to submit to analysis what she sees and feels. This, what Sharon sees as the "partially conscious" quality of Cora's life, is, on the contrary, to Cora, what gives her "the truth of the matter, quite beyond the resources of argument" (4). In Cora's world, everything has its explicit place and everyone has his/her chore to be done at an explicitly appointed time. This is order to Cora Atkins. It is this efficient control of what is hers that makes her content. The unexamined life is, for her, necessary to maintain order and is, therefore, the only one that is worth living.

Cora is made to seem a type of Earth Mother of the Plains, a creator and sustainer of life, as stolid and as plain as the land, as harsh and apparently unloving as it is, yet as yielding of riches if properly treated, and possessed of a dignity which arises from the certainty of knowing her place in the spheres. Morris's handling of her is never sentimentalized, as might so easily happen, given his material, nor is it without irony or humor, as is appropriate if Cora is to be felt as more than a cipher. Accordingly, Cora may be an Earth Mother, but no Molly Bloom is she. Cora is skinny and hardly the sensual type. She may give birth to a child—the event which effectively begins the future—but she will always bear the scar to remind her of the horror of Madge's conception: in the inn on the journey to Nebraska and Cora's new home, clenched fist in mouth, we are told, she allowed her "assailant to do what must be done" (14). Next morning, she discovered that she had bitten her hand to the bone. "Horse bit her," Emerson tells the doctor who treats her. So much for softness and sensuality. Her riches, even in this regard, must be taken, if not exactly by force, then certainly without her wholehearted concurrence.

Once arrived in Nebraska, Cora takes possession of her house, in context the ultimate domestic image and the changes in (or improvement of) which parallel Cora's own domestic development, again ironically because so very prosaically for an Earth Mother. It is an event—but little dwelled upon—to add linoleum to her house, and electricity, and an inside toilet, and a telephone, all of which Cora herself pays for with the money she has raised selling her own chickens' eggs. With each improvement, Cora's sense of place becomes stronger and so does our

identification of her with the house she has (with Emerson's help, initially) wrought. The house gradually begins to become one with the Plains. The land, too, is becoming domesticated. As the earth is worked and yields, the house is added to and changed, and Cora, simultaneously, works her way, more inextricably, into her world.

Houses, in fact, identify other people in *Plains Song* as well, and function in these other cases also as emblems of stability. The novel is punctuated by bits of progress on Cora's house, the importance of which is so woven into the fabric of life and narrative, that we often hear about the changes as aside almost, apropos of little else in context. We learn similarly about Fayrene's and Madge's houses. The latter woman, fittingly, one who feels an almost sexual satisfaction in domestic chores, marries a carpenter, who, of course, builds a house for her. Sharon Rose, interestingly, does not have a house (because she also lacks its prerequisite, a husband) but at one point, when an acquaintance of Ned's and Madge's speaks to them of his interest in meeting Sharon, he makes promises about nothing else but the sort of house he would build for the "right girl."

People, Cora especially, become so identified with their houses, that they do not—and Cora literally cannot—function away from them. The one time after her initial arrival on the Plains that we see Cora on a trip it is to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. She is driven there, miserably uncomfortable all the way, by Ned, Madge, and their daughters. Cora is so far out of her element that she closes down. In a gas station toilet, "Cora could do nothing whatsoever but sit there. All of her functions had stopped" (140). The "bedlam of the fair itself" dazes and bewilders her. Exhausted, she sits with her granddaughters for a photograph. The image she later saw was to her "so bizarre . . . it changed the substance of her nature" (142), as if the world outside of the Plains, by forcing her to see herself from the outside, to see the tangible fact of herself, made her the object of a kind of psychic rape, a violation of essence. Even as a young woman, before her marriage, we know she distrusted "the graven image" of mirrors: "She keenly and truly felt the deception of her reflected glance," especially since the mirror image "revealed so little of a person so large she was kept in

ignorance" (4). How much more intense, then, is this distrust after so many years of establishing her identity. She cannot now deal with an image so new, so physical, and so alien from that sense of being by which she has defined herself. Driving home from Chicago, they stop briefly for a boat ride; on the boat, Cora rises to get out, becomes confused, and falls into the lake. Ned drives them home without stopping.

When Cora dies, so identified has she become with the land and the house, it is poetically apt that they die, too. Indeed, near the end of *Plains Song*, as Sharon Rose drives with her niece, Caroline, to Madge's house, Caroline stops to show Sharon that

This pitted field of the stumps of dead trees was all that was left of Cora's farm. All that was left of the trees, planted by Orion and Emerson, that had led all the way to the pasture, where Sharon and Madge, bringing in the cows, ran like the wind to keep from stepping on something. "Nobody wanted it," said Caroline. "There was nothing worth saving." (200)

As they leave, "A machine, almost as large as a house . . . cut a swath through the field that left nothing but stubble" (201). Cora could't have lived to see the encroachment of the modern world, the machine invading and destroying her garden.³

The tone of *Plains Song* is determined by the vision of the characters, throughout most of the book by the way Cora, especially, sees and feels her experiences. Her connection to the land and the contentment she derives from it create a lyrical, elegiac mood which, in turn, suggests her harmony with her surroundings. We do not know this from Cora herself, of course. She is silent. Morris makes the event itself speak for itself. There are few authorial comments and very little analysis of behavior. The chameleon-like third-person narrator sees through the eyes of various of the characters, but rarely intellectually objectifies an event, much like a less exquisite Henry James, one who chooses to suggest depths, but not to plumb them. The result is a book of nuances. We feel what the people feel. If they do not think about the ramifications of their experiences, we cannot presume to. There is also little dialogue in the novel. When there is discussion, it feels oddly intrusive,

harsh human voices disturbing the natural silence of the environment—of which Cora is a part. If we "understand" Cora it is hardly because someone has told us how to. What we do recognize is the consistency of Cora's responses and these become a basis for our sense of her. Even given this, we are still not free to analyze in any traditional, critical way. Ideas are not what motivate Cora Atkins and to assign her a vision external to her intellectual or psychological purview is to impose on her a complexity she neither merits nor desires, and it is to do her a disservice. Cora is precisely what she seems to be.

This fact, however, is a difficult one for Cora's niece, Sharon Rose, to accept. Sharon is not content with an intuitive response to her environment. She does analyze and is herself open to analysis from us. Accordingly, with Cora's death and Sharon's ascendance to center stage, the tone of the book changes. It becomes less lyrical and somehow more furtive, as if the world of *Plains Song* were lessened by the superimposition of the analytical and the intellectual. Sharon, even as a young girl, put herself at odds with her aunt. She would allow Cora her simplicity because Sharon fears its reflection in herself; she sees the "great alarming silence of her nature, the void behind her luminous eyes" as a suggestion of "a similar hollow in her own being" (200). To protect herself, Sharon adopts an intense independence against the quietness of Cora and the seductive nature of the void. Sharon's stance presents an irony that she cannot recognize: it is Cora, in fact, who prides herself on her independence, on never being beholden to anyone. She is a woman who "would manage to care for what was hers" (56), including, perhaps most important, her unassailable belief in the correctness of how she lives. Once, when Madge tells Sharon she will marry Ned Kibbee, Sharon, hurt and enraged, "had screamed, 'Is he looking for a wife or a housemaid?'" Cora, to "teach her," smacks her on the palm with the back of a hairbrush, an uncharacteristically violent act for her, but an instinctive one. Cora "felt the deep silence of her soul threatened" (201) by Sharon's attempt to subvert what amounts to her essential nature and her harmony with what is hers.

It is ironic, too, that Sharon, the opposer of natural harmony, is literally a musician, a pianist possessed of a natural ear, who

plays, we are told, with the appeal of a "Wunderkind, a prodigy" (80). In music she is "nimble" able to evoke "the harmony of the spheres," but the evocation is ultimately false, the work of the Wunderkind as "conjurer" (81). Audiences may be drawn into the beauty of Bach's "Partita in B-flat Major," but the engagement, immediately glorious as it might be, is nevertheless ephemeral because it constitutes a response to artifice. This is emblematic of Sharon's own link to the real—natural—music of the spheres: "... her most habitual and salient characteristic" is "to withdraw, to disengage" (187), and preserve, at whatever cost, her "customary independence" (229), her choice, that is, of hiding her emotions. These characteristics are precisely those she finds most obnoxious in Cora. Her recognition of their likeness, her repulsion for the life Cora has chosen for herself and, at the same time, her odd pride in it because, despite all, Cora is strong and impressive and dignified, define the ambivalence of the adult Sharon. She appreciates Cora's choice and, at times, mourns her own inability to be a part of the plainness, yet Sharon despises Cora's sacrifice of the intellectual life. The overriding irony here is that Cora's lack of intellectual skills—or her choice not to use them—is what makes the real complexity of the novel. We can understand the mind and actions of Sharon Rose, but the essence of Cora remains enigmatic.

A further irony is that the harmonic center of the novel resides precisely in the mystery of Cora. With the increasing importance of Sharon Rose and the other three prominent female figures—Madge and her daughters, Blanche and Caroline—*Plains Song* not only loses its lyricism, but its sense of dramatic continuity as well. The book begins to fall apart—intentionally, I suspect, on Morris's part. With the loss of Cora, the wholeness that once defined life is also lost. This is suggested by a new abruptness of tone late in the book and, interestingly, what appears to be an abruptness also of characterization, a piece-meal quality of sorts in the literary making of the generations succeeding Cora. Whereas earlier we were given time to pause over passages, over characters and events, to linger over and savor them, now Morris allows no leisure for that luxury. There is now a specialization of character, a loss of wholeness, and consequently, a kind of spasmodic quality to the

response to experience which is, perhaps, an inevitable result of time. In another sense, what we have is the distillation of the core of *Plains Song*.⁴

With Sharon Rose, the qualities that were Cora's begin to be wrongly emphasized, misappropriated, unclearly focused. In her case, however, there is justification. She, after all, was not directly descended from Cora, but was the daughter of Orion and his first wife, Belle, a wild child of the Ozarks whom Cora used to marvel at, "so ignorant and so alive" was she (45). But Madge, Blanche, and Caroline are indeed the child and grandchildren of Cora and, accordingly, are literally extracts of her, each possessing a portion of the whole that is Cora, the portions changed from the original—usually intensified—only by the passage of time. Madge, for instance, is not a thinker, nor does she have any of the spiritual depth promised by the profundity of Cora's silence. She is a purely physical being with a soul of the most pristine domesticity. The fact that her chores were endless "reassured her"; she loved the feel of the washboard under her knuckles; she found great pleasure in the "glide of the iron" (110); she enjoyed sex, "scarcely admitting it to herself" (107); and, still quite young,

... Madge moved around like a grazing cow. She heaved herself out of chairs, eased down with a whooshing sigh, and yet these effortful movements seemed to increase her contentment. She oozed creature comfort. She smelled like a pail of warm milk or sheets dampened for ironing. (130)

Madge's oldest child, Blanche, resembles her mother not at all, but she is very like her grandmother in "her solemn composure," the "Sphinx-like" quality of her (131), even in the fineness of her fair complexion. As she grows, Sharon, who is normally intimidated by children, finds herself so entranced by the strange child (and perhaps by her resemblance to Cora), and by her peculiar, unreal beauty, that she arranges for her to be enrolled in a nearby school so that Blanche might spend weekends with her. At school, Blanche is absolutely at ease, but with no interest in any academic subject. She seems, in fact, utterly devoid of intellect, only a partial, other-worldly being, so much defined by the spiritual as to lack any other human

attribute. Nowhere is this clearer, or stranger, than in a scene toward the end of the novel, when Sharon returns to the Plains. She is having dinner with Madge, her family, and with her own younger sister, Fayrene, and her family. A bird—"a parakeet or a canary" (212)—is loose in the house. Blanche, a woman now in her thirties, extends her finger, the bird perches on it and pecks at some food she has placed between her front teeth:

Sharon could hear the sharp metallic click of the beak on the teeth. She believed her eyes, but her emotions were confounded. The kinship seemed so natural Sharon would not have been surprised if the bird had picked lice out of her hair. She felt withdrawn from the scene, as if she saw it through a window, or within the frame of a painting. (213)

Blanche's younger sister, Caroline, is as different from Blanche as Madge had been from Sharon. Caroline, who plays only a brief role at the end of *Plains Song*—she picks Sharon up at the airport in Lincoln and drives her to Madge's house—brings us intellectually, albeit superficially so, into the 1970's. Caroline, in whom the toughness of her grandmother has become something more like pigheadedness, is little more than an unflattering rubric of the new feminism. She brusquely accuses Sharon of having "turned it off because you couldn't face it" (198), not bothering to define the "it." We, however, can guess "it" to be a way of living—Cora's most surely—and she is correct, but incapable of understanding, or even wishing to understand Sharon's response. Yet Caroline herself is also unforgiving of Cora, to whom she blindly denies her having had the ability to choose. Cora "never complained," she explains to Sharon:

"At least I can complain," Caroline said, "She couldn't." With an effort, Sharon said, "She *could* have, Caroline, but simply *wouldn't*."
"Could or wouldn't, she didn't," said Caroline, "and now she's dead." (201)

Caroline is insensitive and sullen, unable, as Sharon is not, to see beyond the appearances of things. But Caroline is really as much a symbol of contemporary life, its philosophy, and its effect on the Atkinses as she is a functioning member of the family. The closing sections of *Plains Song*, in fact, are con-

cerned a great deal with feminism, an apparently anomalous subject in this novel until we realize that this theme, too, is meant ultimately to serve as a contrast to the beliefs of Cora which—and this is a contrast in itself—are not nearly so easily classifiable. Aside from Caroline, the only other feminist we have in the book is, in quite a different way, hardly more sympathetic: Alexandra Selkirk, a strident, flamboyantly comic figure, reminiscent of some of the grotesques of Morris's early novels, most notably Miss Throop and Miss Kollwitz of *What a Way to Go* (1962), befriends Sharon briefly in the last few pages of the novel. Other than these sections at the end, the only other inklings of feminism we are given are some ideas of Sharon's we learn about earlier, her desire, for instance to keep the adolescent, Blanche looking like a child, no one an "idling male would molest" (154), and her view that women are too willing to allow men to bag them like trophies (86); but these beliefs may as well be evidence, most simply, of a fearful overreaction to experience, or, more complexly, of latent lesbianism or asexuality, as much as they are of incipient feminism. To give Morris the benefit of his readers' doubts, his too brief and uncomplimentary view of feminism, housed as it is primarily in Caroline Kibbee and Alexandra Selkirk, may be ambiguous because Cora has been presented so absolutely unambiguously. These other women, that is, have made an idea into a lifestyle. They have refused to temper the abstract and the intellectual with the spiritual and, indeed, even with the physical. By so doing, they have sacrificed personal wholeness and the richness of the past, exemplified here by Cora Atkins.

It is a particular shock to realize that Caroline espouses feminist principles, but not because of who she is or, in fact, even because of what those particular beliefs are. The shock is that there is militant feminism at all; we have reached the 1970's unawares. The passage of time is dealt with in *Plains Song* approximating what occurs in reality: events, as they are happening, often seem to progress slowly, and then, with stunning swiftness, the present has gone. This way of comprehending the temporal is especially disconcerting in this novel because we are rarely precisely certain of where we are in time. Morris uses few historical markers. We do, however, have a

good idea of where the story begins. We know that Emerson Atkins and his brother, Orion, are homesteading government land on the Great Plains and that "The rich land along the Platte River had been settled, but just north of the Elkhorn, in Madison County, the brothers settled a claim . . ." (5). With a bit of research, we can set the date as early twentieth century.⁵ Later, Orion leaves to fight in World War I. Still later, the family travels to the Chicago World's Fair of 1933; President Kennedy is assassinated; we hear, casually, about the flower children and the Vietnam War.

The mentions are casual because the historical events and periods they signify are important only inasmuch as they provide a real temporal context. They give us a sense that the events which are occurring in the book are part of a bigger world in which other events of historical significance happen, although those events have little direct influence on Cora Atkins and her family. History is a simple given in *Plains Song*. We cannot not have it. Even the fictional events which, in the smaller context, we might consider important—births and deaths of family members, for instance—are, like the improvements to the houses, our other important indication of the passage of time, dropped in almost casually. Even the major characters of the novel die between chapters, often years before we actually hear of the event. We experience no inappropriateness, however, about this means of transmitting knowledge. It is not that the birth or death is meant to be understood as a minor occurrence, but rather that the event in itself does not matter. What is important is the effect of the event. The birth, death, marriage, having happened, is over and is immediately transformed into the past. The past, in this Wright Morris novel, is not a sentimental memory, a psychic area to be inhabited, or a concept to be enshrined in any way. Nor is it, or should it be Fitzgerald's place to which we are ceaselessly borne back. If Morris's characters elsewhere transform an event in the past to make of it a mythical pivot of the present, as with Boyd's kiss, for instance, or his theft of Ty Cobb's pocket, epiphanic moments in *The Field of Vision* (1956), they leave themselves open either to mockery or to pity. The theft becomes the only truly heroic act of Boyd's life and the kiss, for Lois McKee, is an

emblem for her of a kind of disembodied sexuality, alive only in the past and in dreams, but possessed of such strength that it can literally topple a bed in the present.⁶ Time, in *Plains Song*, in contrast, is in constant, inexorable forward movement. The past has indeed contained significant moments, but they are now over. The past correctly must be understood as a generalized determiner of the present and the future, a tide of experience in which no single event alone is decisive. Even Sharon Atkins, who, of all the characters in *Plains Song*, most opposes the influence of the past, realizes that "Whatever life held in the future for her, it would prove to reside in this rimless past . . ." (216) that she sees literally moving before her as she is driven away from Madge's house at the end of the novel. In the very "plainness" of the past and its quality of inarticulateness—embodied as they are in Cora—lies its potency. Significantly, Cora herself had no past. When she dies and becomes part of the Plains, what others remember of her becomes the future. Morris, in *Will's Boy*, makes this clearer. He, like Sharon in the scene above, is leaving the past—Chicago here—for the future, California in this case. (A recurring image, incidentally, in his novels, is this car ride away from something in time and space to something else.) He is travelling with his father: ". . . we crossed a bridge, the water black beneath it, with a big barn dark against the snow with a deep purple shadow beside it. Nothing special. Just something I would never forget" (129). This intimate moment of perception and visionary experience—this spot of time—looks ahead to the mode of Cora Atkins' existence as well as to Wright Morris's literary style itself. From moments such as this, recalled years later, he has fashioned the ponderable cosmos of *Plains Song*.⁷

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NOTES

1. *Will's Boy: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 1982; originally pub. 1981), p. 1. Further references are to this edition.
2. All references to *Plains Song for Female Voices* are to the Penguin edition (New York, 1981).
3. Marcus Klein, in *After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1964), p. 203, sees this, in the earlier Morris novels he discusses, in political terms. The drama of these books, he believes, "is in the threat to the

American past by the new—by the city, by business, in fact by any system of dependence, by any social liberalism, and of course by change itself." Morris' drama moved, he continues, from the "anachronistic" appeal of *My Uncle Dudley*, "to a sensibility of deep conservatism and a politics of Midwestern populism." Cora Atkins would not countenance such a notion, her politics, if she were asked, probably being in the ecumenical realm of her religion. But, of course, Klein is correct—the movement he traces is inevitable, although, perhaps, more fittingly imposed on the novels more intellectually amenable to it.

4. This, interestingly, is also evident in the male characters. Emerson was a self-sufficient farmer who also built Cora's house. Ned, of the next generation, is only a carpenter. Others we hear of are professionals, specialists who have totally lost their connection with the land (or anything else outside of their profession).
5. For more complete information, see Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, n.d.: originally pub. 1931), Chap. IX, "New Laws for Land and Water," pp. 385-431.
6. David Madden, in *Wright Morris* (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 80, has noted that "Constant reference to the past enables the characters to define their identities." True, but it makes of them inhabitants of the past as well. By the time we reach *Plains Song*, it is the characters' acceptance of the present that takes priority and determines what we are to think of them.
7. The suggestion of pastness in Morris' "ponderable cosmos," harking back, as it does, to Fitzgerald's image at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, refers not to the philosophy articulated in any particular character, but rather to Morris' own philosophy, or technique of composition. The fictional Jay Gatsby, that is, would live in the past; the real Wright Morris would use the raw materials it has provided him with to make the fiction.

THE "POPULIST" POLITICS OF GWENDOLYN BROOKS'S POETRY

FREDERICK C. STERN

At least since her famous 1967 "conversion" Gwendolyn Brooks's politics have been primarily the politics of Blackness. That can hardly be doubted. In 1967, at a reading at Fisk University, Brooks was "awakened" because others who read with her—among them John Oliver Killens, David Llorens, Hoyt Fuller, Ron Milner, John Henrik Clarke, Lerone Bennett, Imamu Amiri Baraka,—"protested so vehemently that Miss Brooks was truly shocked. Fervor was not all the young people showed Miss Brooks. They showed her own naiveté . . . These young 'tall walkers,' as she calls them, spoke, sang, and read poetry about black power, black revolution, black nationhood with such an unwavering self-righteous zeal and utter disdain for conventional decorum and thought that Miss Brooks's reaction in her own terms was 'agapeness,' 'almost hysterical,' 'blood-boiling surprise'."¹

No one would suggest that Brooks's subsequent output was entirely different from her earlier work after this experience. Although she was to make a number of dramatic changes, including the well-known shift from Harper & Row as her major publisher to Dudley Randall's Black-owned and edited Broadside Press in Detroit as her most-favored outlet, she had always been a poet of Blackness.

She had thought of herself as "negro" before, not as black, but had always been aware of the atrocities visited on blacks by whites. She had always been aware of the toleration, the condescension, patronizing kindness, segregation, humiliation, and while the American social climate was trying to tell her she was inferior, she had always the secret belief that it is good to be black.

After 1967 she became aware that other blacks felt that way and are not hesitant about saying it. She is now more conscious of her people and appeals to them for understanding rather than to white people. Her new awareness also prompts her to denounce integration in which she had before placed so much hope. She emphasizes, however, that blacks must be for black and not against white.²

Others, and Black critics in particular, are much more competent than I am to assess and evaluate this change in Brooks's poetry, and many have done so.³ I wish here, however, to examine another, if related, aspect of Brooks's politics. I want to ask if we can place Brooks's political views somewhere within the spectrum of a more generalized American political ideology. Can we say of Brooks that her poetry indicates a view of society which will reflect a political ideology that includes her relatively recently expanded views about Blackness, but which also speaks to the general polity of the nation-state in which she makes her home?

The example of another Black writer whose views in this regard, at least at one point in his career, are quite clear can elucidate my question in regard to Brooks. Amiri Baraka leaves us in little doubt as to his general political views. Especially relevant in this regard is his 1976 play *S-I*. The play takes its title from a bill before the Congress which proposed a radical revision of the United States criminal code. The play can readily be identified as Maoist in approach. Its premise is essentially that the bill has passed. Many civil libertarians saw in Senate Bill S-1 a serious threat to the provisions of the first, fourth and fourteenth amendments to the Constitution of the United States, and in fact see such threats in the various attempts since then to change the criminal code, which have come to be known as "sons of S-1." Thus, Baraka's premise is that with the passage of the bill something akin to fascism has become the law of the land. The play's major opposing forces are, on the one hand, a group of Black leaders of working people, and, on the other rather stereotypic police officials, business leaders and politicians. The play's script provides a glossary of terms which reflect its Maoist ideology,⁴ and a set of notes, partly entitled

"S-1, the FBI, Capitalism in Crisis, Fascism in the USA!," which clearly echo the then prevailing views of the Chinese Communist Party under the Leadership of Mao and those of his successors, now fallen from power, who have been called "the Gang of Four."⁵

I do not mean to imply that Brooks's view is like Baraka's in 1975, nor do I mean to assert that Baraka holds the same views today, nine years after the play's original production as he did then. Rather, I use this example as an instance of the kind of political philosophy I wish to examine in Brooks's poetry. Is there, in Brooks's work, a politics analagous in function to, though surely different in perspective, than that which we find in this work of Baraka's?

The answer to the question is in no way as clear or as easily ascertained as in Baraka's case. Brooks has not offered the kind of explicit political statement that Baraka makes in *S-I*. Rather, we must extrapolate a political view from her poetry. I think it can be done, and I will call the view which I believe emerges "populist." What I mean by "populist" needs explaining, of course. I do not mean the often demagogic view we associate with such American political figures as Huey Long, the later William Jennings Bryan, or the racist populist Congressman Tom Watson. Rather, I use the term to identify a kind of belief in and caring about ordinary human beings, "the people," which one can most readily associate with Brooks's predecessor as Poet Laureate of Illinois, Carl Sandburg. In poem after poem, from his "Chicago," to the volume, *The People*. Yes, to such late poems as "Waiting for the Chariot," Sandburg asserts, from sources in his socialist and liberal convictions, a kind of faith in people, a belief in the possibilities and the beauty of "ordinary" men and women which, for lack of a better term, I am here calling populist.

I don't think Brooks's faith is as relatively simple as is Sandburg's. She is much more willing to articulate than is the older poet the possibility of evil in the individual which, whether socially caused or not, is terribly destructive of community. In this sense, her views are closer to those of another Chicago writer, Brooks's near contemporary, the novelist Nelson Algren. Algren's sympathies are all for the grifters, grafters,

low-lives and gamblers, from Frankie Machine to the killer who is the protagonist of "A Bottle of Milk for Mother." But Algren knows them to be dangerous. He also believes, however, that the source of their evil is not in themselves, but in the social conditions which determine their lives, and that the greatest evil lies in those who control the society—the "well-to-do" living in the suburbs mentioned in *The Man With The Golden Arm*, for instance. Brooks's social awareness, what I have called here her "populism," is much more like that of Algren then, than like the Maoism of Baraka in the 1970's, or than like Sandburg's less acerbic version of "populism."

A few instances of Brooks's verse which demonstrate this kind of populism may make the point clearer. "The Blackstone Rangers," a three part poem in the volume *In the Mecca*, provides an interesting instance. The poem itself is startling, since it celebrates "the Rangers," usually thought of as a dangerous street gang. But Brooks sees in them precisely a form of proud, Black opposition to the powers that be, to "the downtown thing." The second part of the poem, sub-titled "The Leaders," reads, in part:

Jeff. Gene. Geronimo. And Bop.
They cancel, cure and curry.
Hardly dupes of the downtown thing
the cold bonbon,
the rhinestone thing. And hardly
in a hurry.
Hardly Belafonte, King,
Black Jesus, Stokely, Malcolm X or Rap.
Bungled trophies.
Their country is a Nation on no map.⁶

The pride in the Black self sufficiency of the leadership of the Rangers is evident here. Their independence from downtown Chicago, that is, from the then-white power structure, is equally clear. They are, however, these self-possessed and powerful young men, quite different from other symbols of Black independence, like the activist-singer Harry Belafonte, or the Muslim leader Malcolm X, or the leaders of a new, anti-integration, renascent SNCC, Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown, or the "Black Jesus," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. No Chicago street

will be re-named after them. They are a "bungled trophy," not to be seen as evidence of the control of Black leadership potential which, no matter how militant, still somehow remains tied to the existing power structure. Their Nation, in a gang which was to call itself in time "The Black P Stone Nation," is on no map. They are so disconnected from the existing power structures of the United States that they are entirely separate. The populism here is quite powerful, an appreciation for those outside the system, which comes quite close to being revolutionary.

In the longest poem in the same volume, the title poem "In the Mecca," the populism isn't quite so revolutionary. The conception of this poem is dramatic. Its narrative tells the story of an old apartment house in Chicago, in which a mother, Mrs. Sallie Smith, returns from work in the white woman's kitchen to find her little daughter Pepita missing. As the narrative of the poem develops we are introduced to the various inhabitants of this huge apartment building. Soon the alarm spreads, as no sign of Pepita is found, and dreadful consequences begin to be suspected. The police are called; the inhabitants are questioned, by Sallie Smith looking for her daughter, by the police. What emerges is a kaleidoscope of poor Black people, sometimes, foolish, sometimes venal, sometimes wise and knowing. This poem does indeed echo a Sandburgian celebration of "the people, yes," but even more, though clearly in a different milieu, Algren's exploration of the lives of the characters of Division Street, the Polish and other ethnic Americans for whom Algren feels both love and pity.

In a brief paper one cannot explore the variety of Black humanity Brooks places before her readers. However, the very organizing principle of the poem indicates its "populist" thrust. As Mrs. Smith, her other children, and then the police, search for the missing child, the reader is taken to meet the various inhabitants of *The Mecca*, a panoply of Black ghetto inhabitants, individuals but also types. Like the tradition of, say, "the ship of fools," as in Melville's *The Confidence Man*, the apartment house and the search for the child serve as devices through which we can get to know that community which Brooks has described in all her poetry—the Beaneaters, the residents of

Bronzeville, which, even long before *In the Mecca*, have been her most pervasive subject. Like the tavern in Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, The Mecca becomes a means through which we can know a community for whom Brooks has enormous sympathy. Every member of the community is observed with a caring, loving, even pitying eye, the eye of an unnamed narrator who most clearly seems to express Brooks' feelings about the community.

In the set-piece "The Ballad of Edie Barrow," for instance we read, in something approaching ballad form, of a young Black woman in love with a white boy ("a Gentile boy,") who will marry, however, a white woman "the Gentle Gentile," while the Black woman will at best be his mistress, "the queen of his summerhouse storms." Another character, Alfred, is a writer manque, steeped in Western poetry, longing for Negritude and the power of a Senghor. However, "... Alfred is un-/ talented. Knows. Marks time and themes at Phillips,/" has love-affairs, drinks, thinks, "... until Everything/ is vaguely a part of One thing and the One thing/ delightfully anonymous/ and undiscoverable. So he is weak,/ is weak, is no good. Never mind./ It is a decent enough no-goodness..../"⁷

There are many characters in "In the Mecca," and discussion of more of them, and of the poem's narrator's loving concern for them, be they possessed of a "decent enough no-goodness" or not, will add little to the point here. The tradition in which Brooks's poem is written, and its posture, reflect her "populism," in the sense in which I have used the term.

Her earlier poetry reflects similar concerns, though not as steeped in the pride in Blackness which resulted from her "conversion," as such titles as *A Street in Bronzeville* and *The Bean Eaters* make clear. Later Brooks poetry, published since *In The Mecca*, is rather scant, but can be seen in the same populist light as the earlier volume. *Family Pictures*, is a case in point. Perhaps the clearest instance of Brooks's populism in the volume can be found in the tributary poem "Paul Robeson." Robeson, long assigned by both blacks and whites to Coventry because of his radical political views, and, in 1970, already seized by the debilitating illness that was to keep him from public forums for the rest of his life, is here celebrated less as a

spokesman for Blackness, than as one speaking for the concerns of all human beings for one another:

That time
we all heard it,
cool and clear,
cutting across the hot grit of the day.
The major Voice.
The adult Voice
forgoing Rolling River,
forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge
and other symptoms of old despond.
Warning, in music-words
devout and large,
that we are each other's
harvest;
we are each other's
business:
we are each other's
magnitude and bond.⁸

Notable here is the accent on all humanity—if one can, as would be true for Robeson, read the "we" of the last four lines this way. Furthermore, the poem seems to speak of the later Robeson, the one increasingly concerned with international peace and friendship, as the phrase "forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge," a reference to Robeson's famous rendition of "Old Man River," in which he changed the words "you get a little drunk/ and you land in jail" to "you get a little snunk/ and you land in jail," seem to suggest.

In an interview with Paul M. Angle, Brooks describes the concluding poems of *In The Mecca*, "The Sermon on the Warpland" and "The Second Sermon on the Warpland" as "little addresses to black people."⁹ These addresses, however, articulate a vision which, I believe, informs all of Brooks's poetry, and especially her poetry since the "conversion." Though addressed specifically to Black people, they call it seems to me, on all human beings to become what they can become, to share, to know one another while retaining each our own individuality. They articulate what I have called Brooks's "populist" vision, especially so in the "Second Sermon." The poem is too long to quote in full, but a few excerpts will make the point clear:

1.
This is the urgency: live!
and have your blooming in the noise of the whirlwind.
2.
Salve salvage in the spin.
Endorse the splendor splashes;
stylize the flawed utility;
prop a malign or failing light—
but know the whirlwind is our commonwealth.
Not the easy man, who rides above them all,
not the jumbo brigand,
not the pet birds of poets, that sweetest sonnet,
shall straddle the whirlwind.
Nevertheless, live.¹⁰

Though the demand to live, and indeed to live in the whirlwind may be specifically addressed to Black people, it is a demand which could as well be articulated by the "populists" to whom I have compared Brooks, by Sandburg, but more especially by Algren. Brooks's populism, though primarily directed at her own community, can well be applied to the entire polity in which she lives. The very forms of her poetry, and especially so in *In The Mecca*, relate her inevitably to the tradition in American letters which shows the whole of the community in action with both pity and caring. The form as well as the content of the poetry is, in that sense, populist. Like Baraka's Maoism in 1975, like Algren's left-influenced special awareness, like Sandburg's mildly Socialist-based concern, Brooks has a social philosophy which can be found in her poetry, and which, seen in connection with her emphasis on Blackness, by tradition and outlook can properly be called "populist."

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NOTES

1. Harry G. Shaw, *Gwendolyn Brooks* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., Twayne Publishers, 1980), pp. 30-31.
2. Shaw. p. 31
3. See, e.g. Shaw (n. 1); William Hansell, "Gwendolyn Brooks' 'In the Mecca': A Rebirth Into Blackness," *Negro (Black) American Literature Forum*, 8 (no. 3), Summer, 1974, 199-207; et. al.

4. Amiri Baraka (Leroy Jones), *S-I*, in *The Motion of History and Other Plays* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1978), pp. 213-25.
5. Baraka, pp. 207-211. I had the opportunity to see this rarely produced play in New York in the summer of 1976, in a converted space off Washington Square. The Play, which uses Chinese "agit-prop" forms, I found rather ineffective, though interesting. One of the ironies in seeing this production came from the fact that the U. S. Senate had just defeated S-1, the bill.
6. Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Blackstone Rangers," in *In the Mecca* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). p. 45.
7. Gwendolyn Brooks, "In the Mecca," in *In the Mecca*, p. 7.
8. Gwendolyn Brooks, *Family Pictures* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1971), p. 19.
9. "March 28, 1969 in Madison Wisconsin with editor George Stavros (*Contemporary Literature* interview)," In Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report From Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), p. 152.
10. Brooks, *In the Mecca*, pp. 51-52.

LIVING "OPENLY AND WITH DIGNITY"—SARA PARETSKY'S NEW-BOILED FEMINIST FICTION

JANE S. BAKERMAN

Gumshoe. Shamus. Hawkshaw. Dick. Peeper. Snooper. Sleuth. No matter what he is called, the hard-boiled detective, or private eye, is an American institution, as native as jazz, as recognizable as Mickey Mouse, as appealing as apple pie, as durable as the game of baseball. Cloaked in many disguises . . . he has become one of the most familiar figures in American cultural mythology. (Geherin 1)

Twenty dollars per hour—sixteen if you're a family member (*Orders* 17)—hires one of the best private investigators in the business: V. I. Warshawski, the hard-boiled hero created by Sara Paretsky. Warshawski, prime example of an important new guise for the private-eye, is a woman who discusses feminist issues and lives by feminist principles while engaging in a profession which, like the larger society she inhabits, is dominated by men. Her cases to date have been detailed in three superior crime novels, *Indemnity Only* (1982), *Deadlock* (1984), *Killing Orders* (1985), and a short story, "Three-Dot Po."

With more and more female authors seeking to define new roles for women, it is, perhaps, not surprising that Sara Paretsky is but one of a number (such as Sue Grafton, Marcia Biederman, Marcia Muller and Martha G. Webb in the United States; P. D. James and Liza Cody in England) who embrace the hard-boiled detective novel as a means of making useful statements about contemporary women's lives. Because Paretsky stands well forward among this distinguished company of innovative women

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writers, an examination of her work, which reveals both traditional and nontraditional elements, is useful in gaining new perspective upon an old literary formula.

In keeping with the hard-boiled tradition, Paretsky employs an urban setting, grounding V. I.'s fictional world in present-day Chicago, covering the South Loop, Lake Shore Drive, various suburbs, the waterfront, and current politics with equal perceptiveness. She acknowledges the blight which affects Chicago as it does most American cities:

The Eisenhower Expressway . . . looks like a prison exercise yard for most of its length. Run-down houses and faceless projects line the tops of the canyons on either side of its eight lanes. L. stations are planted along the median. The Eisenhower is always choked with traffic, even at three in the morning. At nine on a wet workday it was impossible (*Orders* 22).

But V.I. also expresses appreciation for her home town and its efforts at civic improvement, frequently combining it with characterization. She notes, for instance, that,

We pride ourselves in Chicago on our outdoor sculptures by famous artists. My favorite is the bronze wind chimes in front of the Standard Oil Building, but I have a secret fondness for Chagall's mosaics in front of the First National Bank. My artist friends tell me they are banal (*Orders* 52).

Like her contemporary, Robert B. Parker, whose Spenser series substitutes Boston for Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler's California, Paretsky exploits a geographic setting she knows thoroughly, and the City of the Big Shoulders serves her very well; the intricacies of city life (coping with rush-hour traffic, juggling relationships with antagonistic police officers, wondering when upwardly mobile hordes will invade her neighborhood) affords complication to her plots as it deepens the characterization of her protagonist. Above all, the city provides Paretsky's work, as it does that of most private-eye creators, with a useful metaphor for the debilitating tensions of twentieth-century life. In urban areas, these writers, "find empty modernity, corruption, and death. A gleaming and deceptive facade hides a world of exploitation and criminality

... enchantment and significance must usually be sought elsewhere" (Cawelti 141).

Though Warshawski maintains that her specialty, financial crime, "doesn't often lead to violence" (*Orders* 19), her Chicago streets and expressways are plenty mean: business chicanery lends itself all too readily to murder and mayhem—beatings, arson, shootouts—and it also allows Paretsky to add a useful subsetting to her stories. The commercial misdealings which incite each plot—insurance fraud (*Indemnity*), sabotage and fee skimming among Great Lakes shippers (*Deadlock*), a counterfeit securities scam involving a dominican priory (*Orders*), and a photographer's assignment gone awry ("Po")—are slightly reminiscent of Emma Lathen's amateur-detective series which mixes high finance with comedy and crime. But there is little humor in Paretsky's work which emphasises very fast pace and action: she never allows the complexities of the criminal schemes to retard the flow of her story. Instead, she reveals the financial machinations with the same type of relatively brief but telling strokes as she portrays her locale, usually dramatizing them in conversations between dynamic, interesting experts in their fields.

Both geographical setting and illegal business manipulations enhance the sophisticated aura of Paretsky's gritty realism. Subordinating locale and scheme to action lends authority to V.I.'s first-person account of each adventure. Every character and every event are seen through Warschawski's eyes and measured by Warshawski's standards, a well-established, valuable technique of the hard-boiled subgenre:

The notionally 'objective' style creates an illusion. It suggests the material presented has absolute value, but at the same time the persona's viewpoint is insistently stressed; his own evaluation of the material is . . . given a quasi-objective status, made valid by association. (Knight 140)

Though many of Warshawski's observations and evaluations are atypical, others are very typical; for instance, concentration on miscreants who seek enormous financial gain enables Paretsky and her protagonist to denounce those who worship money and the things money can buy or who covet the power that money allows its possessors (e.g., Cawelti 144). The corruptive force of such greed is often symbolized by the disintegration of families

and by emotional neglect of children, devices which are also conventions of the hard-boiled school. However, as David Geherin has pointed out, innovation is also essential:

fourth-generation [hard-boiled] writers [among whom Paretsky numbers] well understand that the key to success is developing a unique approach, one that combines respectful adherence to the conventions of the genre with their own individual talents and fictional concerns. (2-3)

One of the updating methods shared by Sara Paretsky and Robert B. Parker is the attention they pay to trends of the 80's; both their protagonists jog, dwell upon their tastes in clothing, and seem preoccupied with food. These simple but effective devices work equally well for both writers, demonstrating that the formula can be modernized without being violated.

Not many formulaic subgenres have been studied and analyzed so closely as has hard-boiled detective fiction. Most critics agree that the form began in the pages of *Black Mask* magazine, and that the hard-boiled dick traces his ancestry back through American cowboys and Natty Bumppo of Cooper's *Leather-Stocking Tales*, past Sir Walter Scott's heroes, and finally to the knights of medieval romance (e.g., Geherin 1; Margolies 84). The atmospheric elements of the formula "seems constant": the shabbiness of the investigator's office, the references to alcohol, the city streets, the sleuth's willingness to risk police harassment, his suspiciousness, the necessity to absorb considerable physical punishment, the constant "sense of imminent violence" pervading his life, and the "tired beds" which offer little, if any, promise of long term sexual satisfaction (Sandoe 112-114).

Balancing such a detailed pattern with genuine innovation is no mean feat, and Paretsky is one of the best writers who manage this fictive juggling act. It is, perhaps, to her very great advantage in doing so that some of the qualities of the private eye—the tension which informs his life, continuing fear of being afraid, disjunction with the establishment as represented by conflict with the police, for example—recall factors in the lives of members of American minority groups as they have reported them. For actually, the traditional fictional private investigator is a member of a minority, one of the last surviving honorable

folk in an increasingly corrupt and corruptive society. They engage in,

the solitary quest for justice, truth, individual integrity . . . noble activities which emerge time and again as the heroic theme of myth when civilizations begin to disintegrate and the existing social body no longer appears to nourish spiritual needs. (Margolies 84)

V.I. Warshawski belongs to this seedily distinguished, stubborn minority who stalk dangerous city streets and who prowls decadent suburbs, attempting to defeat criminals who attack society from outside its borders and to thwart corrupt, lazy, or incompetent lawmen who leech from within.

Even more importantly, Paretsky's hero understands minority thinking in yet another way, for as a liberated woman, V.I. Warshawski is well aware that she must constantly defend her independence. Thus, the traditional private investigator's disenchantment with the establishment, the P.I.'s insistence upon his concept of integrity, the gumshoe's distrust of all who reflect her professional attitude. Elements of this mystery subgenre and matching patterns in fiction written by women indicate that the hard-boiled subgenre and feminist fiction are amazingly well suited for one another.

Margolies says of hardboiled detectives:

given their distrust of organized society and given the absence of social institutions to guide their behavior outside of organized society, the protagonists . . . have had to create for themselves in little godlike ways their own code of ethics, their own morality. This may in part account for the reasons . . . the hardboiled dicks . . . blithely ignore society's laws about the sanctity of property, due process, assault and battery and other forms of violence. (85)

This comment compares closely with Annis Pratt's assessment of the status of many female heroes:

The greater the personal development of a hero, the more true she is to herself and the more eccentric her relationship to the patriarchy. A quality of consciousness that is essentially antisocial characterizes the most admirable heroes. (169)

To a remarkably great degree, in fact, the situation of the male hard-boiled hero resembles the situations of many, many female protagonists who appear throughout the whole range of fiction. By simply changing the pronouns, for instance, this description of the female hero could readily fit most hard-boiled male private-eyes:

Every element of her desired world—freedom to come and go, allegiance to nature, meaningful work, exercise of the intellect, and use of her own erotic capabilities—inevitably clashes with the patriarchal norms. Attempts to develop independence are met with limitation and immurement, training in menial and frustrating tasks, restrictions of the intellect . . . limitation of erotic activity. The collision between the hero's evolving self and society's imposed identity appears consistently throughout the history of women's fiction (Pratt 29)—

almost exactly as it appears in the "male" fiction of the hard-boiled school.

No one is called such belittling names as "Peeper" or "Snooper" if he or his work is truly valued by society, and the traditional private-eye is keenly aware that no matter how nobly he clings to his code of honor, he is all too often perceived as a cheap shamus spying on one marital partner at the behest of the other, an image which is as dated as it is unsavory. It's more comfortable for society to perceive Lew Archer, Spenser—and V.I. Warshawski, for that matter—in this way; to accept them as exemplary figures would force a reevaluation of personal and social codes, would call for nobler behavior from individual and system alike, and the investigators understand this reaction very well. In an attempt to evade the social responsibility adherence to the private investigator's code would require, society refuses to acknowledge that these characters have dignity. Male hard-boiled protagonists seem to accept that fact as one of the trials they must undergo, reflecting society's assessment in their uncomfortable apartments, dingy offices, and arid personal lives.

Female operatives are aware of the disapprobation directed toward their calling and further understand that "Patriarchy requires that any conceptualization of the world in which men

and their power are a central problem should become invisible" (Spender 7). Hence, it is no surprise to Vic Warshawski that members of her family seek her out only in moments of crisis (*Deadlock* 1-7, *Orders* 11-17) or that some clients doubt her capability (*Indemnity* 4); in her situation, society's distrust is simply carried to a more pronounced extreme.

Clearly, then, the traditional male private-eye shares a number of characteristics with female heroes, despite the widely accepted dogma that the hard-boiled formula is distasteful to women. Stephen Knight suggests that Chandler's lack of female audience may stem from, "The nervous masculinity woven deeply into the persona's feelings" (163) and, indeed, this pattern, which often reveals itself through profoundly bitter misogyny, dis-affects some female readers. Certainly, Paretsky intended from the outset to give close attention to her protagonist's confidence in her own femaleness:

'I was determined to write a hard-boiled sleuth who was both a woman and a complete professional, someone who could operate successfully in a tough milieu and not lose her femininity.' (Stasio 39)

Other women, for instance feminist critic Kathi Maio, who raised the question during the 1984 Bouchercon (an annual meeting of mystery writers, fans, and critics), may object equally to the extreme violence inherent to hard-boiled fiction. Paretsky is aware of this criticism and reports that,

she felt compelled to follow all the standard genre conventions in her first novel, allowing V.I. to engage in more physical violence than the author felt comfortable with. 'I've now developed enough self-confidence to see that I can do it my own way . . . Women are not interested in homoerotic sadism in the way that men are. I don't feel that my readers need to learn how to fight any more than they need to learn how to have intercourse. So I just don't go in for detailed descriptions of sex and violence anymore. V.I. sometimes beats up people, but now I make it a point that she never kills anyone.' (Stasio 39)

But Margaret Millar, dean of American women crime writers, does not perceive violence as either surprising or, possibly, inappropriate in women's fiction; she says it reflects women's accumulated anger:

'I think that women are actually more violent than men. . . when people are oppressed—and let's face it, women have been oppressed for years—and then suddenly express their feelings, they tend to do so in a much more explosive fashion. It's like a pressure cooker going off.' (Stasio 40)

Following Millar's line of thought, it is fairly easy to discover that the violence which occurs in hard-boiled novels functions not only as an indication of social decay but also as a warning—even decent people will resort to abusive behavior if their frustrations with the dominant society become too acute.

Intermittently, V. I. Warshawsky's behavior illustrates both these usages. Early on, she reports that, "My fingers itched to bring out the Smith & Wesson and pistol-whip" an arrogant, bullying man who assumes that wealth and position grant him dominance over women and children. (*Indemnity* 115). Even in Paretsky's third novel, *Killing Orders*, wherein violence has supposedly been diluted, V.I. comes very close to losing control, though here, her motivations are even stronger, perhaps more understandable. After facing down and intimidating an assassin, she reports,

I stood back to let the officials take over. I was dizzy and close to fainting myself. Fatigue. Nausea at the depths of my own rage. How like a mobster I had behaved—torture, threats. I don't believe the end justifies the means. I'd just been plain raving angry. (250)

Yet, despite her disgust with her own behavior, only a couple of days later, Vic is again at the mercy of "red rage swirling through my head. . . . 'He tried to blind me. . . . He tried to burn me to death. He probably killed Agnes. You should have let me kill him'" (265). Obviously, the stuff of hard-boiled fiction is brutality, no matter by whose hand it's written. The debatable point is the worth of that material.

Unquestionably, the violence endemic to mean-streets fiction is repellent, but nevertheless, it is effective because readers respond to its value as a symbol and also as an assessment. They recognize it as a part of the modern scene as Raymond Chandler long since pointed out:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities . . . where no man

can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing.

...
It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting . . . patterns out of it. (397-98)

To the traditional male private sleuth, each important case is a means of proving that he adheres to his principles despite the prevalent decay of standards. He believes passionately (if also often sardonically) that a valid code of honor is the only antidote to evil. In defending society, then, he also defends his spiritual well-being and reaffirms his manhood. To do this, he must suffer; to do this, he must punish—the violence offers a means of doing both. By surviving that violence, he proves his code and his cause to be just. Because the male private eye sees himself as the last hope of decency in a declining civilization, his sense of isolation (dramatized by his lack of much trustworthy support, his single state—he is usually divorced—and his everlasting battle to force both criminal and establishment to conform to his code of honor) is intense. His rebellion against society crystallizes into efforts to make society reflect its better rather than its more horrific self.

By the fact of their maleness, however, the isolation of typical hard-boiled male heroes is mitigated to a significant degree. Though they are not widely respected members of "the system," they are obviously members of the male power structure. Their toughness, emotional control, stubbornness, endurance, sexual prowess (implied or detailed), imperviousness to derision, even their misogyny, are all traits of the macho figure so widely accepted as a model of American male behavior. Would they but dress for success and stop pondering civil decay, they could slip into the mainstream.

Furthermore, hard-boiled protagonists enact patriarchal roles. As they ferret out misdeeds and miscreants, they correct error and chastise wrongdoers who are evil because they willfully decline to behave as genuine adults. Refusing to accept and discharge social responsibility, criminals engage instead in disas-

trously childish behavior; they take what they want simply because they want it, no matter who gets hurt.

The investigator behaves as a stern father who temporarily replaces social disorder with propriety by punishing these criminally disobedient and dangerous perpetual children. Other members of society both welcome and dread this paternal behavior—they recognize its necessity, are glad for the relief it affords, but perceive and are discomforted by the implication that truly mature people should be able to associate without the intervention of a father figure. Moreover, they fear, perhaps unreasonably, perhaps not, that a punishing parental hand might fall—by accident or by design—upon them. Society's mixed feelings toward the investigator, then, closely parallel children's feelings toward a strict parent.

This emotional response also works in favor of the male hard-boiled private-eye. Simply because of his sex, he benefits from society's acceptance of the patriarchy—stern, punitive roles are acceptable male roles, according to the received wisdom—so that he seems to be of the patriarchy even though he operates in isolation, well outside the system.

How much greater is the potential for isolation of female fictional private detectives who fight the establishment not only as representatives of decency but also as rebels against its patriarchal norms. No matter how well experience teaches that mothers as well as fathers must be disciplinarians, leftover myths of the 1950s continue to form society's perceptions of motherhood in which smiling faces and soft, cajolling voices still predominate. V.I. Warshawski runs counter to that presumed model; like Spenser, Marlowe, and Spade, she persists in imposing social order by identifying and punishing criminals, and her sex offers her no patriarchal ratification for her professional activity. Like the other trends of the 80s which Paretsky so faithfully records, this one also, regrettably, rings true, and V.I. Warshawski can expect even less approval of her efforts than her male colleagues anticipate. If V.I. wishes to serve society, it is thought, she should remarry, move to the suburbs, and produce children (*Deadlock* 194); her sex supposedly bars her from actively parenting society at large.

Because she resists the patriarchy, the violence in her stories serves the female hard-boiled operative on even more symbolic levels than it serves her male counterparts; taking risks allows her to reaffirm her equality and independence as she reaffirms her code and her right to act according to her code. By absorbing and by meting out punishment, V.I. Warshawski does not prove that she is "one of the boys," but she does prove that despite the almost overwhelming frustration inherent in her life, she is a functioning, capable, assertive adult; she remains visible. That she is able to do so, even in an aura of violence, is found by many readers to be much to her credit.

Paretsky moves readers toward acceptance of violence by inverting some traditional techniques. Vic is openly scornful of herself when she slips into stereotypical P.I. behavior—"Why be so full of female-chismo and yell challenges into the phone? I ought to write 'Think before acting' a hundred times on the blackboard" (*Indemnity* 97). Also, Paretsky allows Vic ample awareness of her own vulnerability, often coupling it with ironic comments about other fictional private-eyes' attitudes: "Of cours, a hard-boiled detective is never scared. So what I was feeling couldn't be fear. Perhaps nervous excitement at the treats in store for me" (*Orders* 226). V.I. is sensible enough to be afraid, mature enough to admit it to herself, but too wiley to reveal it to her opponents—

I have always feared death by drowning more than any other end—the dark water sucking me down into itself. My hands were trembling slightly. I pressed them to the sides of my legs so that Grafalk couldn't see: (*Deadlock* 242)

These moments create a realism in Paretsky's fiction that the conventional, adolescent bravado of most male investigators precludes, no matter how vividly their authors portray the littered pavements, glittering-eyed addicts, or gun-toting hoods of the mean streets they roam.

In Paretsky's fiction, then, the formulaic anger and consequent violence basic to the subgenre augments the realistic tone, extends to permit open expression of women's fury as opposed to the encoded belligerence characteristic of other fictional women, and dramatizes the protagonist's full adulthood. Un-

savory though they be, these are very workable devices. Moreover, this treatment allows Paretsky to set violence in a different light; it is no longer a given, the right of the rebellious, isolated, angry hero, but rather sometimes a necessity into which V.I. is forced, sometimes a reflexive response triggered by danger and abuse.

This rather altered view toward violence unites with other qualities in Paretsky's work to identify it as part of a new wave of hard-boiled fiction. Geherin suggests that during the last decade, a softer strain appears in some male hard-boiled sleuths, who are

distinguished by such traits as compassion, pity, empathy, ethical sensitivity, and self-reflection. . . . the hard-boiled hero has undergone a significant transformation, and when one reviews the half century of his existence . . . he becomes more complex, more humanized, and more vulnerable. (4)

Paretsky, however, extends the boundaries of this variation just as she redefines older conventions of the subgenre. To do so, she uses one of its most well-established devices, the voice of the first-person narrator. V.I. not only freely admits fear and measures the various levels of rage to which she succumbs but also discusses the attractions and costs of her chosen life-style and of her profession much more openly than other fictional operatives, who if they address these questions at all, generally address them obliquely. Most male private-eyes, for example, suggest by implication and attitude that women's inability to understand the arduous demands of their work limits their chances for viable relationships. Vic believes, on the other hand, that she, once married and now divorced, remains single because she's "too independent . . . with men, it always seems, or often seems, as though I'm having to fight to maintain who I am" (*Indemnity* 141). Warshawski numbers herself among "grown women. We make our own mistakes. No one else has to take responsibility for them" (*Orders* 102-3).

In the same self-assessing vein, V.I. says about her work, "I guess the payoff is you get to be your own boss," but she goes on to explain that her keen sense of social responsibility enhances

the value of investigation for her, just as it forced the abandonment of an earlier job with,

'the Chicago public defender's office. Either we had to defend maniacs who ought to have been behind bars . . . or we had poor chumps who were caught in the system and couldn't buy their way out. You'd leave court every day feeling as though you'd just helped worsen the situation. As a detective, if I can get at the truth of a problem, I feel as though I've made some contribution.' (*Orders* 87)

Certainly, getting "at the truth of the problem" suggests worthwhile gain, but nevertheless, Warshawski sometimes needs reassurance that the price of truth is not too high. Near the conclusion of *Killing Orders*, for instance, Vic has not only solved the immediate crime but has also discovered several painful secrets buried in her family history and endangered a relationship she cherishes. Seeing herself as Iphigenia, doomed to faulty, tragic choices, she cries out:

'Lotty. Lotty, I have been so alone this winter. Do you know the torment I have been through? Agnes died because I involved her in my machinations. Her mother had a stroke. My aunt has gone mad. And all because I chose to be narrow-minded, pigheaded, bullying my way down a road the FBI and the SEC couldn't travel.' (287)

Though other investigators recognize that their work hurts even as it helps individuals and society, few are so forthright in saying so, and almost *none* ever says so directly to another character. In allowing Vic Warshawski to voice her doubts and to seek reassurance from another, Paretsky departs markedly but very enrichingly from the macho code of silent suffering to which most private-eyes subscribe and which substitutes in their value systems for recognition by society. Vic neither has nor needs a stereotypical masculine image to uphold as do *all* male and even most female private eyes. Instead, she has a fairly clear knowledge of who Vic Warshawski is and of what kind of person she wishes to become; readers share that knowledge.

Emancipating Warshawski from the code of silence deepens Paretsky's novels considerably. Readers know how Vic perceives herself as fully as they know the process of deduction she

follows, so that Paretsky achieves empathy between protagonist and readers, a fairly rare development in crime fiction where sympathy or identification-by-fantasy is usually the most one can hope for. Thus, Vic's occasional self-doubt seems not only acceptable but also proper—if she is going to parent society, she had better evaluate her methods and achievements lest she become an autocratic parent-figure, repeating the same lessons and punishments until they become hollow and meaningless.

This is a danger, of course, in series fiction which closely follows a formula—too often, neither the pattern nor the protagonist alters much. As a rule, male private-eyes age but don't change significantly. For example, Lew Archer grows older and wearier, but never solves many of his own problems, and Spenser *talks* a lot about modifying his macho behavior but also recognizes that modeling himself upon the Hemingway hero is the only way of life that he knows or trusts. Willing to suffer, but steadfastly denying themselves the counsel of others, they are essentially static.

In contrast, Vic Warshawski regularly invokes three separate branches of her extended family against whom she measures both her professional and personal humanity—her surviving relatives, memories of her parents (now deceased), and her constructed family of friends and lovers. These are the associations which most clearly reveal V.I. as a developing character who, though she suffers as do all hard-boiled knights, grows and changes as a consequence.

Some of that growth is accomplished by rejection. Vic believes that her surviving relatives' disapproval of her career and life-style is a sure sign that she is making proper choices, and readers, sharing her glimpses of repressive Warshawski-Wojcik-Vignelli lives, agree; these characters symbolize the establishment. As a functioning adult, V.I., one of the very few private investigators who mentions her childhood, is steadfast in her regard for her parents. She continues to love them despite their faults and errors, heeds their sound advice, and progresses beyond their unviable or outmoded strictures. Gabriella and Tony Warshawski represent the past which feminists must reevaluate and then assimilate or let go.

Warshawski strives for balance in relationships with her constructed family. Most of her lovers are also her good friends with whom she long sustains mutually satisfying alliances, behavior which is antithetical to that of most male private investigators. But her most powerful friendships are with women. Chief among them is Lotty Herschel, M.D., a Viennese refugee who runs "one of the cheapest clinics in the city . . . I often wondered what she lived on" (*Indemnity* 72). Without fanfare, Lotty, like Vic, makes her own choices and discharges the social responsibilities expected of genuinely mature people. Even more importantly, she offers Vic support and counsel unmarred by interference, and, when necessary, as in *Killing Orders*, Lotty is willing to reassess their friendship in order to strengthen it.

In *Orders*, Lotty and Vic imperil their relationship when each demands that the other violate her code. The resultant anger, symbolized by a cold Chicago winter, cannot be resolved until they confront—and discuss—the situation, a process almost unthinkable in most hard-boiled fiction. When Vic admits to guilt-laden grief about the suffering her investigation has uncovered, it is Lotty who helps restore perspective. Suffering is often the price of truth, the burden of the knight-detective—"They named you well, Victoria Iphigenia. For don't you know that in Greek legend Iphigenia is also Artemis the huntress?" (288; see also Graves 74, 48, 82; Walker 58, 378).

Rarely has the private investigator's role as sacrifice, servant, and stalker been so succinctly codified as by merging her identities as some myths merge the identity of Iphigenia into that of the goddess. And perhaps never has the hard-boiled formula been so sharply altered. In this scene (286-88) dramatically, in a host of others quietly but firmly, Paretsky banishes isolation from the life of her hero. Though, in keeping with tradition, V.I. Warshawski will continue to hunt alone, she need not be lonely: the viability of her constructed family ensures union, comfort, and support. These friends and lovers represent society as it should be, offering readers as much hope as they offer Vic.

In turn, Warshawski offers hope and promise to others by helping them to liberate themselves. V.I. insists that both she

and the people she aids be allowed to live honorable, self-defined lives "'openly and with dignity'" (*Indemnity* 178), a healthful form of nurture which demands independence rather than dependence of the nurtured. As she explains to a very young female client,

'you have to have your own sense of what's right built inside you. . . . Lots of things happen to you no matter what you do, or through no fault of your own. . . . But how you make those events part of your life is under your control. You can get bitter . . . or you can learn and grow from it.' (*Indemnity* 118)

This attitude, which stresses the importance of the future and the opportunity for growth and maturation, implies a far more genuine reinstatement of personal and social well-being than that suggested in the traditional, "male" P.I. novels, wherein truth is uncovered but little social health is restored, yet another significant, progressive departure from hard-boiled conventions.

Throughout her work, then, Sara Paretsky has reformulated and reenergized an old literary pattern by recognizing the value of combining the hard-boiled detective novel with feminist fiction. She depicts her hero, V.I. Warshawski, as a fully adult woman conducting a balanced, self-defined life and succeeding in a profession thought of as a male domain. Paretsky's most sophisticated exploitation of the first-person narrator persuasively conveys the "absolute value" of V.I. Warshawski's life-choices and convictions "made valid by association" with her cadre of admirable friends and lovers.

By redefining that stereotypical "American institution," the hard-boiled private-eye, Paretsky expands an important sub-genre of popular fiction to include autonomous women. That alone is a major achievement—and she's only just begun.

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THE DEAN'S CHICAGO

DAVID D. ANDERSON

Late December in Bucharest is very much like late December in Chicago. In *The Dean's December*, Saul Bellow's ninth novel and first since receiving the Nobel Prize, Bucharest days are short and gloomy characterized by low clouds, icy drizzle, driving snow flurries, wind; and the slate gray of the Dambovita, a tributary of the Danube, is like that of Lake Michigan before the ice begins to move toward the horizon. In describing the moment when day becomes night, Bellow sets the mood of the novel:

December brown set in at about three in the afternoon. By four it had climbed down the stucco of old walls, the gray of Communist residential blocks: brown darkness took over the pavements, and then came back again from the pavements more thickly and isolated the street lamps. These were feebly yellow in the impure melancholy winter effluence. Air sadness, Corde called this. In the final stage of dusk, a brown sediment seemed to encircle the lamps. Then there was a livid death moment. Night began.

Corde, the dean of the title, is Albert Corde, formed in Chicago and in Paris, where he had spent two decades as a journalist, and now Professor of Journalism and Dean of Students at an unnamed Chicago college. Conscious of his origins as a Chicagoan, of Huguenot-Irish ancestry, and of his past as a journalist, he is aware, too, that he is neither a real professor, with the usual qualifying degrees and apprenticeship, nor a real dean in his capacity as supervisor of the non-academic life of the school's students.

Like almost all of Bellow's protagonists, the Dean is a

sojourner, suspended in time and place, his life and his concomitant identity temporarily interrupted by external forces over which he has no control. He has accompanied his wife, Minna, born Rares in Roumania, to Bucharest to visit her dying mother. Minna is a world-calibre astrophysicist of dual Roumanian and American citizenship—an oversight rather than a sentimental or practical decision; she had been shielded from the realities of a socialist society by her widowed mother, Valeria, a physician, a psychiatrist, and an idealistic Communist, who was formerly Minister of Health, now fallen from grace and reluctantly and imperfectly rehabilitated. Valeria had turned Minna's attention simultaneously inward and cosmically outward through science; after her defection, encouraged by Valeria, Minna had married her spurious dean, in spite of her mother's doubts, and had remained shielded from the equally grim realities of the Dean's Chicago. "She did boundless space," the Dean ruminates; "his beat was terra firma . . ."

In Roumania during their brief visit, the Dean has become, by default, the man of the family. Minna, because of her ambiguous status, her mother's background and incapacity—her stroke had rendered her speechless and sightless but not unconscious—and her science, is almost as helpless as Tanti Gigi, in her seventies Valeria's younger sister and companion, and the prisoner of her position, her age, and a long-gone well-mannered past. The Dean, of Chicago, learns quickly to bend the socialist system by using Valeria's fading family and bureaucratic contacts, the magic medium of King-Size Kents, bought at the hard-currency shop in the Hilton, the influence of the friendly black American Ambassador, and his ambiguous ties with a visiting American journalist, once a boyhood friend and rival, now an internationally-known columnist. But none of his manipulations is effective against the iron-willed colonel who had come out of the secret police to command the hospital in which Valeria, tied to life by wire and tubes, is a patient, and who limits their visits to two.

Consequently, always cold, his communication limited to reluctant French, the Dean has little to do except await his delayed mail, read an old collection of Oscar Wilde, tend the cyclamens that flourish in the cold apartment, and remember his

own African Violets, now undoubtedly dead in Chicago. But always the Dean thinks, too, about the reality he had left behind him in Chicago.

The Dean's meditations, unrelievedly solemn, are the substance of the novel, a tale of two cities, two deaths, two families, two perceptions, two returns, two metaphors, two realities, all tied irretrievably together. Corde, suspended in an orderly, inhuman, uncomfortable present, aware that he is "the image of the inappropriate American—in all circumstances inappropriate, incapable of learning the lessons of the twentieth century; spared, or scorned, by the forces of history or fate or whatever a European might want to call them," knows that the world of ideas, of serenity, of art that he had returned to Chicago to find will forever elude him. He remembers, too, from the grab, impersonal, orderly Bucharest the reality of the drab, violent Chicago he had returned to; he contemplates the political complexities of the college of which he had become an uncertain part; and beyond the inevitable institutionalized death of Valeria, he is drawn to the sudden, violent death in which he had become involved in Chicago.

Minna had left behind a delayed holiday-break trip to Mr. Palomar to contemplate the cosmos; Corde had left behind both the reaction, public and institutional, to two articles on Chicago he had published in *Harper's* and his determined attempt to find the truth that lay behind the violent death of a white student, partly tied, partly gagged, in a fall from his third-story apartment window. And somehow, from the perspective of December in Bucharest, he must find his place: in the college, its identity and role as confused, as ambiguous, as are all American universities in a society increasingly disorderly and uncertain, and in Chicago, infinitely more complex, marked by magnificent glass and steel boxes and decrepit public-housing high-rise tenements, Michigan Avenue and South of the Yards; makers and manipulators of money, power brokers, whores, pimps, pushers, junkies. And he remembers, too, those few he had met who tried to bring a human order to it all, not in the manner of the secret police colonel turned hospital administrator but in the persons of two men, Chicago blacks, one a lawman, the other a convicted criminal.

In the articles in *Harper's*—actually installments of a long journalistic essay—Corde had practiced one of the two things he knew he did well—what he saw as "his ability to describe a scene for the common reader." The other thing he knew he did well was to deal with students. But in writing the articles and in dealing with the student's death he had become involved in the Chicago reality to a degree he had never anticipated.

In the articles—and the novel contains sizable quotes from the alleged articles—he had contrasted two Chicagos, that of his youth, the Chicago of immigrants and neighborhoods and the manageable, human corruption of Big Bill Thompson and Ed Kelley, with the Chicago of his middle age, that of Mayors Daley and Byrne and the unmanageable, inhuman corruption of the 1960's and '70's. In the new Chicago of depersonalized, grimy institutions, in the "whirling lives" of the courtrooms at Harrison and Kedzie and in the Robert Taylor Homes he finds moments of meaning: in the County Hospital, as grim as that in Bucharest, the nurses and attendants, Filipino and Chinese, "manifest . . . a powerful but somehow indiscriminate love" for those living dead men and women whose lives are linked to the kidney machine; in Cook County Jail, the black director, Rufus Ridpath breaks the "barn boss" system of prisoner rule, only to be himself broken by the political system; in Operation Contact, in an old warehouse on the South Side, Toby Winthrop, black ex-hit man, ex-heroin addict, puts young blacks through cold-turkey cures and gives old people meaningful roles in teaching skills and respect to the young, in the process saving those whom he can from sinking and drowning "in the shit."

These are the people whom Corde sees practicing "moral initiative," those who refuse to write off Chicago's underclass as superfluous and doomed, unlike others whom he describes in the articles: the public defender, Sam Varennes, Doctor of Jurisprudence and political appointee, who, defending a black perpetrator of kidnap, rape, and murder, sees not the anguish and horror of the white suburban housewife victim but the ambiguities of legalism, a "nice man" who sees Corde as "trouble," as somewhat less than contemporary; Corde's fellow club members, Nick, the fixer, who "knows every con there is and . . . is keen to protect the dignity of the members;" and the

young lawyer, also a fixer, who must protect his client's interest against a screw-up in a closing and in arrangements with a crazy new police captain on Chicago Avenue who "has a special hard-on" for the client's liquor violations and popularity with tourists.

In the articles Corde is involved first as a journalist and increasingly as an indignant human being; he departs for Bucharest as the reaction to the articles begins: the provost withholds cool judgement while implying dissatisfaction; the editors report "a flood of mail," liberals finding him reactionary, conservatives crazy, urbanologists hasty, all of them dubious of his premise that "perhaps only poetry had the strength 'to rival the attractions of narcotics, the magnetism of TV, the excitements of sex, or the ecstasies of destruction'."

Seeking to exercise his own moral initiative, Corde, whose official role in the young man's death was limited to the identification of the body, had become himself involved. Convinced that it was murder, he sought justice. He persuaded the provost to offer a reward, conferred with police detectives, befriended the young man's widow. When two people were arrested, Lucus Ebry, a young black dishwasher—derelict, and a young black whore, Ebry's accomplice and accuser, he rejected the legalistic and moral ambiguities that emerged, insisting on simple justice. Consequently, he is attacked by his sister's son, his nephew Mason, rich, spoiled, a veteran of the street clashes during the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1968, and friend and champion of the dishwasher and of those whom he saw as victims of the corrupt white values of his uncle.

Radical students led by Mason protested the Dean's and the College's actions; Mason attempted to threaten witnesses with a pistol; Ebry's defense lawyer, recommended by Mason to Ebry and appointed by the court, is Corde's cousin, Maxie Detillion, an opportunist down on his luck.

And then, with the case in court, Corde and Minna were called to Bucharest, where, while Minna talks with Tanti Gigi and the other relics of her past and of Roumania's, Corde alternately sits and lies in the cold of Minna's old room, caught up in the cyclamens and Chicago, waiting for judgements of the court and the provost, his pondering interrupted by social demands, the hospital, attempts to penetrate the bureaucracy in

order to visit Valeria, her death, the complications of notices in the papers, of services and cremation, of burial. Corde wonders, too, if his sudden announcement, in the third and last visit to Valeria, that he loves her and the sudden visible agitation that results has precipitated her death.

Corde's ruminations are interrupted, too, by two Chicago friends, Vlada Voynich, Roumanian-Chicagoan ecologist, and by Dewey Spangler, boyhood friend and celebrated columnist, and by a phone call from the provost. The call is inconclusively apprehensive; Vlada, like her mentor, Sam Beech, mistaking Corde's indignant involvement for a reformer's zeal, tries to persuade him to write articles publicizing Beech's conviction that lead poisoning is pushing Chicago, America, and the world into mindless, violent chaos. But the Dean demurs, unwilling to accept such a simple if not simplistic solution to or explanation of what seems to him inexplicable and incurable.

With Spangler, in spite of the pretensions of his VIP status, Corde talks freely about the past of their youth and the Chicago of today as he had attempted to define it in the articles, and he describes his attempt to find justice in the trial. Then, a day later, with Valeria cremated, awaiting entombment when the crumbling concrete behind the stone veneer of the gravestone is repaired, and with Minna ill, attempting to sort out her mother's effects, Spangler calls: his contacts have told him that Ebry has been convicted, receiving a sixteen-year sentence; the whore, plea-bargaining, will get eight. The Dean, it appears, has somehow obscurely been exonerated, and a rough justice has been done.

Minna's illness continues, and another date has been made for her at Mt. Palomar. Corde determines to leave, although Valeria's affairs are still unsettled and Tanti Gigi's future uncertain. His last conversation with Vlada emphasizes the ambiguity with which he anticipates his return:

"...Are you so eager to get home, yourself?" [She asks.]

"It's not as if we were going back to order, beauty, calm and peace."

She said, "Still, you'll be glad to see Lake Michigan from your window again, I'm sure of that."

With Minna ill and silent, Corde, holding her hand through

the long flight, feels a strange equilibrium that continues through her hospitalization and treatment for anemia and potassium deficiency. In the hospital, "Irritable, she found fault with him, and sometimes he was wounded—that is," Bellow writes, "the old self would have been wounded." Corde's involvement has become not journalistic detachment but human acceptance.

His equilibrium continues during his drives back and forth along the lake to the hospital, and in the apartment he continued the lonely habits had acquired in Bucharest. Nevertheless, he was glad to be back, "to see the lake from his window and have the freshwater ocean for company. At his back the city, unquiet, the slum and its armies just over the way: blacks, Koreans, East Indians, Chippewas, Thais and hillbillies, squad cars, ambulances, firefighters, thrift shops, drug hustlers, lousy bars, alley filth"—the Chicago of which he had written, of violence in the neighborhood and obscene graffiti in the building. Again, in his curious detachment, he ruminates:

... at home he usually sat with his back to the decayed city view. From his corner window he could see the Loop and its famous towers, but he looked directly downward at the working of the water, on bright days a clear green, easing its masses onto the beaches, white. The waters bathing the waters in sun, and every drop having its own corpuscle of light, the light meantime resembling the splash of heavy raindrops on paved surfaces—the whole sky clear, clear but tense. On days of heavy weather you felt the shock of the waves and heard their concussion through the building. Under the low clouds you might have been looking at Hudson's Bay and when the flows came close you wouldn't have been surprised to see a polar bear. Only you didn't smell brine, you smelled pungent ozone, the inland-water raw-potato odor. But there was plenty of emptiness, as much as you needed to define yourself against, as American souls seem to do. Cities (this had been impressed on Corde when he pored over Blake—Spangler had not stopped him by kidding him about it—) cities were moods, emotional states, for the most part collective distortions, where human beings thrived and suffered, where they invested their souls in pains and pleasures, taking these pleasures and pains as proof of reality. Thus "Cain's city built with murder,"

and other cities built with Mystery, or Pride, all of them emotional conditions and great centers of delusion and bondage, death. It seemed to Corde that he had made an effort to find out what Chicago, U.S.A., was built with.

His motive—to follow this through—came out of what was eternal in man. What mood was this city? The experience, puzzle, torment of a life time demanded interpretation. At least he was beginning to understand why he had written those articles. Nobody was much affected by them, unless it was himself. So here was the emptiness before him, water; and there was the filling of emptiness behind him, the slums.

Had the novel ended at this point, Corde's equilibrium, his self-knowledge, his acceptance of time, place, and circumstance intact, the tale of two cities enslaved, perceived by a sensitive, sometimes cranky academic, refined into metaphor, would have been complete. But the reality of conflict, of personal and psychological antagonisms, indeed the reality of competing perceptions of the traditional virtues of duty, honor, loyalty demand resolution, and the Dean's new equilibrium must carry him through his uncomfortable role into that in which he is almost sure.

In three brief, rapid chapters evoking the frenzy of American life, in the midst of which Corde maintains his equilibrium, Minna recovers, they make arrangements for the delayed trip to Mt. Palomar, and return to the life of Chicago. In the only significantly jarring scene in the novel—jarring because of the heavy-handed monstrosity of the contrast with the fading, quiet, impoverished genteelness of similar gatherings in Bucharest—the Cordes attend a posh Lakeshore Drive party, given by the brother and sister-in-law of Corde's sister's new husband. There they learn that the party is in honor of the family dog's birthday, that others are there through the relationship of their pets. Yet Corde's equilibrium survives this insensitivity as it had learned to survive violent reality.

Yet Bellow may be forgiven the heavy-handedness of this incident because there Corde learns two things. First, he learns that his sister's new husband, a politically-powerful judge, will take care of Mason, who had fled to a sanctuary with the

Sandanistas in Nicaragua, where, ironically, his great uncle had fought as a Marine fifty years before. For Corde, the myth of virtuous youth perpetrated in the 1960's, in which Mason beligerantly believed, is once more quietly exposed as a fraud.

He learns too, that Spangler had written a column, "A Tale of Two Cities," in which his conversations with Corde in Bucharest have become an interview and an opportunity for Spangler to celebrate, in psuedo-poetic Walter Lippmanesque prose, Corde's failure as an academic, a journalist, a man. In words distorted, taken out of context, or misappropriated, he has Corde emotionally denounce the media, the city, and the academy for their blindness and failures, and he points out what he insists is Corde's ultimate failure to see, to understand, to communicate. The viciousness of Spangler's hatchet job, the clearness of his inuendos, the resurrection of the articles and trial that had been temporarily laid to rest and their reinterpretation in crystal-clear nuances disturb Corde's equilibrium only momentarily, and he sees Spangler in terms he had been unwilling to admit to himself. But it is clear he must resign; he will continue to write, perhaps help Beech communicate his scientific vision, concluding that the simple answer, that ingested lead has poisoned a city, a people, a time, is perhaps better than no answer at all.

Bellow may be forgiven, too, the last transcendental scene, although it is more difficult to do so. In the observatory at Mt. Palomar, Minna is going about her astrophysical business, and Corde, the observer, is taken by an attendant to the top of the dome where Minna will work. The dome is open to the freezing heavens:

And because there was a dome, and the cold was so absolute, he come inevitably back to the crematorium, *That* rounded top and its huge circular floor, the feet of stiffes sticking through the curtains, the blasting heat underneath where they were disposed of, the killing cold when you returned and your head was being split by an ax. But that dome never opened. You could pass through only as smoke.

And here, exposed to the living heavens, distorted as they were by the atmosphere, Corde learns the meaning of what Bellow had insisted nearly two decades before that we must

learn: "what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls . . ." And Corde learns momentarily to feel beneath the distortions of perception, to find reality in himself and to be free. In the final lines, however, he returns reluctantly to another reality:

The young man pressed the switch for the descent.

"Never saw the sky like this, did you?"

"No. I was told how cold it would be. It is damn cold."

"Does that really get you, do you mind it all that much?"

They were traveling slowly in the hooked path of their beam towards the big circle of the floor.

"The cold? Yes. But I almost think I mind coming down more."

Corde—cord, heart, reconciler, man—returns to earth, the ties that bound him to Bucharest severed by mortality, those to his false profession broken by circumstance, yet those to Chicago, to time and place and the human predicament, to love and Minna, still strong. But the metaphor as well as the reality of his deanship and his December are at an end. Like Valeria, he has fallen from a mechanistic grace, and whatever public rehabilitation takes place will be grudging and imperfect.

Although Bellow ties up the loose plots of psychological conflicts between Corde and his family, his friend, his peers, those are almost irrelevant to the novel and certainly less significant than in most of Bellow's other novels. But the mood, the tension, the psychological involvement, the ironies of East and West, the strength of Corde's love—sentimental and touching for his sister, tender for his wife, fused with hate for his city—the rapid movement between East and West, between inner and outer Corde, give the novel depth and breadth that need neither complexity and acceptability of plot nor resolution of conflict. If Bellow, like his early mentor Sherwood Anderson, has difficulty ending his novels satisfactorily—and this ending is perhaps his weakest—it is not because of the failure of vision but because of the profundities, the imponderables, that he, like Anderson, sees beyond, of the questions raised rather than the answers that, glibly or thoughtfully, cynically or not, are so often

given, by governments and foundations, academics and professionals, scientists and fictionalists, answers that prove instead, like the revolutions of the past—proletarian, green, student, whatever—, to compound the problems they purport to solve.

Given the complexities of the novel, the dimensions of Bellow's perception of the modern world, the inevitable inadequacy of the transcendental moment at the end, critical appraisals will undoubtedly remain as mixed as the book's reviews, which ranged from ecstatic to condescending, neither extreme of which is justified. In such a work imperfections inevitably occur, ranging in significance from Bellow's consistently inadequate female characterizations—only Valeria, speechless and dying, emerges as complex, believable, even admirable—to his occasional crankiness. But Bellow's Chicago is sure, and his Corde, if not everyman, is certainly a man, and the failure of systems, whether of the insitutionalized East or the well-meaning free-enterprise, contradictorily democratic West, is clear; the aura of Calvin remains in the atmosphere of Bellow's Chicago as certainly as does Stalin's in Bellow's Bucharest, in what is perhaps the December of both.

Bellow has talked publicly on several occasions about the novel, its origins, what he attempted to do, where he thinks it is taking him. *The Dean's December* began, he says, in a similar trip for a similar reason to Bucharest with his wife Alexandra, a mathematician, and in an unfinished, unpublished non-fiction book about Chicago, perhaps a companion work to *To Jerusalem and Back*. He expresses concern about what the critics, especially the academics, will make of it in whatever critical approach is fashionable. But most of all he fears that the Chicago sections will be distorted, misunderstood, like Corde's articles criticized by liberal and conservative alike, for all the wrong reasons. His Chicago, he comments is less than Viet Nam as Bucharest is less than the gulag and both are less than the Holocaust, but his portrayal of it is a beginning, a protest against the dehumanization of Chicago's people, especially its blacks, not only by crime, by violence, perhaps even by lead poisoning, but by the welfare state and the failure of "the social organizations, educators, psychologists, bureaucracies" who have contributed "nothing—just zilch" to its improvement.

Whether Chicago, with all its imperfections, with its "democracy in its rudest form, struggling to survive," can do so is uncertain, but the city is still alive if seriously, grossly unwell. Bellow insists, however, that its danger, America's danger, the world's danger, is real. He says,

Our humanity is at risk. It's too powerful a thing to just lie down and give up the ghost. But we have to face the fact it is in danger. It is at risk because the feeling that life is sacred has died away in this century.

Then, like Albert Corde, he says that:

Writers are part of this whole dismal picture that is dominated by an evasion and unwillingness to come to grips with the profoundest human facts. Writers have not served American society well, but they have been representative of what the society is. I include myself in this. I seem to have been overtaken by a kind of fit in my old age in which I want to say things definitely and firmly—and hit hard.

The Dean's December, with its imperfections, does indeed say what Bellow believes about Chicago and about life in the last decades of the twentieth century; it says them definitely and firmly, and it does hit hard; as it emphasizes Bellow's growing indignation at what we and our society have become.

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