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observing the fiftieth anniversary
of Ross Lockridge, Jr.'s
Raintree County
by members of

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In honor of
Toni Morrison

PREFACE

The appearance of *Midwestern Miscellany* XXVI (Spring 1998) marks an important new milestone in the continued evolution of the Society's publication history. With the publication of *SSML Newsletter* 27, Number Three (Fall 1997), the *Newsletter,* as we've known it for more than a quarter-century since its first issue in March 1971 announced the formation of the Society as an organization dedicated to encouraging and promoting the study of the literature of what Sherwood Anderson called his "Mid-America," has ceased publication. In its stead, *Midwestern Miscellany* will appear twice yearly, in the Spring and Fall; it will contain other features in addition to the customary essays; and it will be supplemented by information conveyed by electronic media as well as by special mailed bulletins as we carry on that founding purpose of the Society.

Fittingly, this new direction in the publications of the Society is inaugurated by this issue, in which six members of the Society discuss Ross Lockridge, Jr.'s *Raintree County,* a magnificent interpretation of the Midwest and its people, on the novel's fiftieth anniversary.

Suitably, this issue is dedicated to Toni Morrison, Ohioan, Midwesterner, novelist, Nobel Laureate, and recipient of the Society's Mark Twain Award for 1997.

June, 1998

DAVID D. ANDERSON

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THE SOUTHERN MYTH IN ROSS LOCKRIDGE, JR.'S *RAINTREE COUNTY*

PATRICIA WARD JULIUS

In the mid-nineteenth century, as we all know, the nature of the South and the institution of slavery impinged on the consciousness of the United States as no other issue has, before or since. However, most fictional treatments of this traumatic period in our history examine one side or the other and virtually none acknowledge the myths that surround and define that period. In his vast and panoramic novel, *Raintree County,* however, Ross Lockridge addresses that issue and dissects the myths that, in many ways, perpetuated it. Nearly 45% of the novel is concerned directly with the South and the effects of its mythology. Lockridge spends 225 pages on the story of Johnny Shawnessy and Susanna Drake and on the South's dark responsibility for the events which befell them and their son. He devotes 200 pages to Johnny's experiences in the Civil War. And the consequences of that traumatic event indirectly shape the stuff of the rest of the novel as well. The flesh of Lockridge's story is hung on the skeletal form of one day—a celebration of the 4th of July in 1892 in Raintree County, Indiana. But much of that day—the speeches, the conversations, the memories—centers around acknowledging, reliving, and debating the effects of the war. Johnny, with the rest of the County, dates events by "before the war" and "after the war." And certainly these facts constitute "Southernness" with a vengeance. However *Raintree County* is essentially a story of myths, of which the Southern myth, the subject of this examination, is only a part.

According to historian Nicholas Cords, "a myth becomes reality precisely when people base their beliefs upon it and act as if the myth were true. In fact," he writes, "the making of myths is a two-fold process by which a culture structures its world and by which it perpetu-

ates its grandest dreams" (*Myth and the American Experience.* New York: Harper Collins, 1991, xi.) Therefore, to understand the nature of the myths upon which societies and individuals build their worlds and define themselves is at least to begin understand those societies and those individuals.

There are two myths about the South which operate in *Raintree County.* We are introduced to the first, which might be called the Northern myth about the South, in the early pages of the novel. This myth, which governed the thinking of the North, and most especially of Lockridge's idealistic protagonist Johnny Shawnessy, had its source in Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimental and popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* After the boy Johnny read this novel, "he was no longer confused: he knew slavery was bad and must be destroyed." And much of Raintree County (and the North) shared his conviction. However, "the legend of Uncle Tom's Cabin was a legend of the South but not the South which was below the Ohio River, a hundred and fifty miles from Johnny's home" (57). Rather, it was an abolitionist's vision of a South in which all slaves and a few, usually powerless, whites, good, poor, humble, and helpless, patiently awaited deliverance, presumably by some hero from the North—or even, from Raintree County. It is no accident that, in the paragraph following Johnny's discovery of Uncle Tom and his unswervingly villainous master, Simon Legree, we are told of his fascination with the Greek myths, no less—and no more—real to him than the sufferings and nobility of Stowe's characters. This oversimplified hence false vision of the slave South was less perfidious than the myth by which the South defined itself, but its effect was to paint the South and the slavery by which it was identified, in terms of absolutes. This was one weakness, in fact, of many Abolitionists' position: they too often argued that slaves deserved freedom because they were good, intelligent, worthy, a race of Frederick Douglasses. The truth, of course, was that freedom should not have to be earned. Negroes were not a separate species but part of the human race, with all that implies. The institution of slavery was evil by its very nature and should be abolished because the ownership of person by person is immoral, a fundamental wrong.

The second myth is that created and embraced desperately by the white South because their need to believe it was so great. It was the myth that slaves were content in their enslavement, that Africans were placed on earth by their Creator to serve the clearly superior

whites, and, most dangerous of all, that one race could own another and remain sane, as a society or as an individual. The maintenance of this myth brutalized and dehumanized all its people, slave and free, and made them victims of the madness that was the peculiar institution. It split the nation in a Civil War whose cost is still being counted but whose first casualty was our innocence.

Lockridge spends a large part of his novel uncovering the layers of that myth, exposing its inevitable consequences for all those who strove so passionately to sustain it. Susanna Drake, "beautiful and alien," is the vehicle through which Lockridge explicates for Johnny—and for us—the scope of the corruption inevitable to a culture built "over the sinking marsh of human slavery" (439). Susanna, determined to bury the scandal of her birth in the safety of a marriage to Johnny, claims to be carrying their child. Johnny, of course, caught in his own myth of proper heroic behavior, proposes, though he knows the claim is a lie. Susanna, provocatively unclothed, strangely surrounded by her 116 dolls whom she calls her 'children,' accepts, and they are married. Lockridge's use of the events of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, his capture, trial, and execution as counterpoint to the betrothal, wedding, and consummation emphasizes the increasingly insistent Southern presence in Raintree County and foreshadows the inevitability of the conflict to come.

As the honeymooners traveled south: "Down the Mississippi, the oldest highway in the Republic, these pilgrims traveled toward a sensual Canterbury. And always this name meant sinful, dangerous, much desired" (430). They arrived in New Orleans to lights and activity and music but, most of all, to a stench which nearly choked Johnny. And this introduction to New Orleans becomes a metaphor for the South: the lights, gaiety, activity and beauty cannot hide the stench of rot which underlays it and corrupts its every stone and soul. One can only, like Johnny, get used to the smell. "Later he had to remind himself that this great human stink was there, always there, and that it would envelop everything he saw and did during the next few months" (431). The stink, of course, is slavery, "the oldest darkest crime in the world" (354) and all the beauty and seductive appeal of the South cannot change it or make it go away. But there was much to admire in the South in that year before the war. The land was beautiful, the horses and houses of the aristocracy magnificent, and the planters gracious and witty and hospitable. Most appealing of all to

Johnny, was the leisure which allowed dancing and drinking and whoring and talk—the occupations of Southern Gentlemen.

Shortly after the two had met, Johnny had been shocked by Susanna's attitude toward slaves and slavery. Secure in his male-dominated 19th century world, he had dismissed her irrational claims as inconsequential opinion which would change under his enlightened tutelage. Less easily dismissed however, was the gusto with which Susanna related tales of sexual atrocities committed by slaves against white women. But Susanna is not alone in her fascination with the mythical sensuality and sexual prowess of Negroes. In New Orleans, the slave, always male, was universally described as shiftless, ignorant, dishonest, immoral, and incapable of taking care of himself. In fact, of course, such "atrocities" are more often committed by masters against black women. It is the sexual prowess and appeal of the Negroes which is the subject of the most erotic and brutal detail among the male cousins. Johnny's Southern education includes a visit to a brothel in which the madam was the only white woman. Here, "it seemed to Johnny that the whole paradox of the South had come to detestable flower ... Here, in a Black Mass of sensuality, the white master acknowledged his forbidden secret—his equality with the slave. But this acknowledgment ... was a baser indignity than the whip and served more than the blood hound to keep a race in subjection" (443-4).

The thin veneer of etiquette barely disguised the stream of eroticism and lust which characterized the aristocracy of New Orleans. Johnny felt the same pervasive sexual tension, a kind of covert sexual license lurking beneath the mask of propriety he had earlier sensed in Susanna. The open sexuality which, in part, had separated Susanna from the young women of Raintree County is taken for granted here. Susanna's favorite cousin Barbara pursues Johnny, makes an assignation with him, and hints at Susanna's unworthiness and her own availability. On a private steamboat excursion, Johnny is greeted in his stateroom by the embrace of a woman who "had always seemed very sedate in his presence" (436). Cousin Dody, his hostess, appears in his bed in a silk night dress. During the day, these women wrapped themselves in the most rigorous propriety. For these people, in this culture, sex is a game played in the dark with rules of its own, rules Johnny does not know. But apparently Susanna does. The hypocrisy which attends slavery marks all of the society that slavery made possible.

To one whose Bible of the South was *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* there was astonishment in the lack of overt cruelty by master against slave. Only once, Johnny recalls, did he see a slave struck. But that instance is significant. At the Drake Plantation, as Susanna bent to retrieve a dropped bonnet, exposing the scar on her breast, a young groom, "watched in fascination" and Cousin Bobby Drake hit him, then raised a broadax against the unmoving slave. Johnny leapt for the handle but only Susanna's command stopped their struggle. "A man had almost lost his life for looking at a scar on the breast of this girl," Johnny realized. "He stood appalled at himself and the black moment that had sprung upon him from ambush in this genial place, among the hospitable people who had been so good to him" (446). To Bobby, of course, the groom was no man at all. He was a slave, and that made all the difference. With this incident, the moralist in Johnny took over from the poet who had gloried in the seductive loveliness of that gay sick South.

Ironically, the "grandest dream" of the South was, taken in itself, enchanting. It was to build a "Greek Republic in the soil of America," populated by the "most beautiful women and the most distinguished men in the world," a "culture of power, wealth and democratic tradition" (441). But the myth upon which this dream was founded was the belief that such a culture could be "erected on the toil of ten million slaves." So fervent was that belief that no argument was brooked, no compromise possible. Slavery, the South believed, was right and meet and just and theirs. And before they would see their myth threatened, they would invoke their "sacred right to form a government of their own" (441). The words were spoken, the idea of separation made tangible. Johnny remembered the great stink, even though he couldn't smell it any more. It was time to go back to Raintree County. It was time to go home.

But even in Raintree County, the South follows them. Lincoln had proclaimed that "A house divided against itself cannot stand," whether that house is the union or a dwelling in Raintree County. Susanna owns slaves, a practice Johnny finds despicable and unacceptable. Johnny supports Lincoln, a man, to Susanna, kin to the devil himself and, even worse, she insists, a man tainted by Negro blood. The spectre of miscegenation which has haunted the South and Susanna is raised again.

As one would expect at this time, Susanna accedes to Johnny's demand and frees her two slaves. But Susanna's violent mood shifts

foreshadow a more serious disturbance, rooted in the mystery of her childhood and exacerbated by her pregnancy. Her late night reminiscences, her increasing strangeness signal her weakening grip on sanity. As Susanna's health grows more fragile, so do hopes of preserving the Union. Lincoln's election is followed by Secession. Again a momentous private occasion is echoed by an equally momentous public event. Their son was born as Fort Sumter surrendered. War was inevitable. In the two years after Little Jim's birth, as the war between Union and Confederacy intensified, so did the estrangement between Johnny and Susanna. And so did Susanna's illness. Excessive energy preceded depression; insomnia preceded sleep walking as her hold on reality waned. And through it all, Johnny kept up the pretense of normalcy, loyal to his own myth of propriety, as promulgated by Raintree County.

However, the dark horrors which grew out of the Southern myth could not be denied. The "broad waters" of the Ohio River separated slave land from free (878). But no water was broad enough to protect Susanna and Johnny from the consequences of that myth. As Little Jim's birth coincided with the fall of Fort Sumter, Susanna's penultimate act of madness—her flight with the child to Indianapolis—was echoed by the onset of the Battle of Gettysburg. The growing pessimism of the headlines reporting the battle keeps time with Johnny's progressively fruitless search. Lockridge writes, "It began to seem to Johnny that the battle and his own search were enduring things, lasting for centuries, perhaps forever" (530). On July 4th, with the bells ringing in victory at Gettysburg, Johnny returns to Raintree County to find the house burning, his son dead, and Susanna vanished.

With her disappearance into an asylum in New Orleans, the bits and pieces of Susanna's life come together in a terrible and final indictment of the Southern myth. Susanna had struggled all her life to bury and deny the memories of her childhood, her suspicion that she was the daughter of her father's mulatto concubine, Henrietta Courtney. But, during her pregnancy, she talked of seeing the two of them together in Henrietta's cabin. She remembered her father sending Henrietta away and bringing her back to live in the "big house" with them. She remembered loving Henrietta and fearing the woman she called "Mother." She remembered the fire which killed them, the fire which scarred her breast and which only she survived. These memories, and the rumors and gossip that followed her in New

Orleans, were the "They" who threatened her and sent her fleeing to Indianapolis. But of course there was no escape. So, in the end, she exorcised her demons and her memories and the continuation of herself in the only way she knew—by fire. And escaped finally into the safe shadows of insanity. Susanna, her father caught in the throes of illicit love for his mulatto mistress, his wife driven mad by her husband's betrayal and the necessity of claiming Susanna as her own, and Henrietta, trapped by race and convention, were as much victim of the Southern myth as the slaves themselves. Susanna's madness had its source in a greater madness—the madness of the belief that a society built on slavery could ever be sane.

In terms of Johnny Shawnessy's "Southern Education," if his sojourn in New Orleans was his baccalaureate, the war was his Ph.D. Interestingly, in the nearly 200 pages spent on Johnny's war years, little mention is made of the South itself. It has become a geography, marked only by the names of battles and memorable only for body counts. The cliché—cliché because it is true—that in war one must make the enemy a thing, a "they" different in kind from the "us," functions here. Apparently wars have no individual identity. All share the same character. Only the weapons and the slogans change. That being said, the Civil War remains the single greatest national trauma in our history, the most profligate in lives, the most inclusive in effect.

Johnny Shawnessy joined the Grand Army of the Republic a week after the destruction of his family. He matriculated at Chickamauga and marched to his graduation through Georgia with Sherman. In between, he feared, hungered, killed, looted, grieved, hated, and, at last, exchanged that hatred for understanding. He was wounded and survived. He watched Lincoln die and survived. He was declare dead and still he survived. But the war changed him as no other experience had. Johnny Shawnessy, "that innocent and happy youth was really dead (though it took his successor a little while to become aware of that fact)" (743). In a very real sense, the South had killed the mythical Johnny Shawnessy as surely as the war had shattered the foundations of the Southern myth.

The 19th century South, no less than Raintree County itself, was a myth, a place "without boundaries in time and space," a creation of its "mythical and lost peoples." Sustained during two and a half centuries of slavery by the myth that one human being could own another [and remain sane,] that myth was perpetuated after the Civil War by

the irrational dream that the South would rise again. The irony, of course, is that that South had never really existed in the first place. The "glorious dream" that Johnny had found so alluring was built not only on the bones of ten million slaves but on almost 90% of the white population as well. Most studies of slavery conclude that only about 10% of white citizens owned any slaves at all and no more that 2% owned more than twenty. These statistics do not, of course, in any way diminish the horrors of slavery nor the degree of its brutalization of everyone it touched. They do, however, indicate the scope of its lie. Even today, we watch *Gone With the Wind* and read *Jubilee* and believe that is the way things were. How much more easily could white sharecroppers or wanderers identify with Mistah Charley and Miz Anne up in the Big House, and dream that someday. ... The iniquity and prejudice engendered by this apparently immortal myth is with us still. Were it not, there would have been no riots in Los Angeles and Miami, no inequality to haunt us even now, one hundred and thirty years after Emancipation.

Ross Lockridge, Jr. has an interesting mind. And *Raintree County* is an interesting novel, huge and layered and unexpected. Perhaps the most unexpected thing about it is that Lockridge wrote it in 1947. That was, in many ways, a very bad year. Lynchings were not quaint anachronisms. Not until 1955 would a year pass with no reported lynchings. And even then, the key lay in "reported." The Klan was alive and arrogant and powerful, in the Midwest as well as the South. Segregation was the law in the North as well as the South. But a new myth was alive in the land—in 1947 and in 1892 in Raintree County, and the adherents of that myth—politicians and preachers alike—argued that the Civil War had indeed succeeded, that all was well in the Republic, and the millennium was just around the corner.

Everyone, of course, did not swallow this new myth, either in Raintree County or in Ross Lockridge's world. The failure of the War and the Emancipation Proclamation to truly free Blacks or to inculcate them into the society as equals was the subject of much of the comment on the Fourth of July in 1892, particularly in the conversations between John Shawnessy and his cynical and intellectual mentor, Professor Jerusalem Webster Stiles. But some did. And to warn us against accepting myths of other people's making, without examination or question is, I suspect, at the core of Lockridge's novel. Listening to the speeches, John Shawnessy concluded that "Penetrating

into the reality of the past was an impossible undertaking ... There was ... only one reality—the reality of someone's experience ... And even the world of the present was sustained by the same omnipotent creative fictions. His own life was a myth to himself and other ... And if he was a myth, others were even more so" (802). Each of us creates ourself according to our values and beliefs. But we must be sure, Lockridge implies, that myth is truly our own, not the generalized creative fictions of a society or a political party or a religious leader or anything that demands that we shape ourselves blindly to standards invented by others. *Raintree County* is not a topical book, speaking of long past events and long dead ideas. Rather, it offers lessons from which we can benefit today or anytime. John Shawnessy sought wisdom and greatness, we are told. Certainly, in *Raintree County,* Ross Lockridge demonstrates that he has found both. And certainly that is enough.

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RAINTREE COUNTY LINES

DEAN REHBERGER

The original cover for the novel *Raintree County* shows the lay of the land. Depicted in the county map is the outline of a nude female figure, "laid down like a mask on something formless, warm, recumbent, convolved with rivers, undulous with flowering hills, blurred with motion, green with life" (Lockridge, *Raintree* 7). As such it is the standard colonial commonplace: virgin land, ripe and ready for penetration and rape. Firm breasts jut upward as mounds, hills to be surveyed and named, perhaps burial grounds for some mysterious native culture. The female genitalia form the branch of the river bed, both source and course, an open invitation to explore deeper the enigma of the navel. On the one hand, the cover can be read as an advertising ploy, a titillating lure that promises grander and more revealing sexual exploits to be found inside, turning the novel itself into an object of desire. It functions not unlike the *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Raintree County,* a book that figures prominently inside the novel. One character, Senator Garwood B. Jones, longs for the original copy of the first edition of the atlas because it is said to contain many high quality illustrations of "stark naked" women and "romping" and "surprised" lovers (Lockridge, *Raintree* 28).

On the other hand, the landscape of the cover announces the intentions of the work, to be the great American novel. The novel is the metonymy for the virgin land, a vast vacant continent, full of the promise of democracy. As Ross Lockridge explained in "Raintree County: a Critical Estimate," "'at the outset of the Atomic Age … [the novel] is a nostalgic farewell to the America in which so much began that is sublime and tragic in the democratic tradition.' It is 'one of the longest novels ever published,' 'aspires to be the greatest of the sentimental novels,' and treats 'erotic love' with a 'candor perhaps

unequalled by any other American book'" (Lockridge, *Shade* 267). His father's "hope for his own novel," Larry Lockridge observes "is that in evoking the old names and singing the myth of the Republic, he can move Americans to return to origins, to revere the nourishing earth and democratic vistas" (Lockridge, *Shade* 297).

We can read the novel, in other words, as a detailed search of Raintree County for the raintree, a symbol that stands in for the phallic origins of the nation, penetrating and nourishing the once virginal landscape, but as the narrator explains in the opening dream sequence, this search is continually doomed to failure. In the dream, Shawnessy is studying a map of the county and "[h]e was certain that in the pattern of its lines and letters this map contained the answer to the old conundrum of his life in Raintree county. It was all warm and glowing with the secret he had sought for half a century. The words inscribed on the deep paper were dawnwords, each one disclosing the origin and essence of the thing named. But as he sought to read them, they dissolved into the substance of the map" (Lockridge, *Raintree* 5). No trope is more pervasive in the novel than the arousal of "memory and desire" that is always thwarted and denied. As the narrator explains of the main character, John Wickliff Shawnessy, "No sooner did he appear to be caught in a definition than he somehow turned inside out to include the includer. He was always pressing beyond the confines of himself; yet could never go anywhere that wasn't himself' (Lockridge, *Raintree* 18). The narrator concludes, "for America was always an education in self-denial. And Raintree County was itself the barrier of form imposed upon the stuff of longing, lifejet of the river" (Lockridge, *Raintree* 116). This failure of desire not only appears constantly in the tropes of the novel but is played out thematically in Shawnessy's doomed love affair with Nell Gaither and likewise in Shawnessy's failed attempt to write an American epic.

What I want to argue is not to focus on how *Raintree County* writes the impossibilities of its desire—to be the great American novel—but to focus on a smaller piece of the argument: how Lockridge's choice of genre, historical fiction, while making gestures toward American literary tradition, ultimately defines the work against the grain of the American literary theory of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, dooming its hopes of being included within the canon of American literature.

In 1926, Lewis Mumford defined the scope of American literary theory for the next generation: he called the age of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Poe, and Hawthorne, the "Golden Day" of American literature. For Mumford, these writers defined American literature because of the peculiar and exceptional history of America. These writers stood on the "verge" where modernity and tradition collided. While most Americans were caught up in the pursuit of land and wealth that would lead to the Gilded Age, these writers succeeded in defining American culture and its democratic promise by remaining within their region and plumbing the depth of the new American landscape. In so doing, they cut themselves off from the past and turned inward to the landscapes of the mind and spirit. Mumford's "Golden Day" would be taken up by many critics and transformed into the "American Renaissance," becoming the commonplace of American literary theory in the 1940s and 50s. F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance,* Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land,* R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam,* Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel,* Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition,* and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*—to name but a few of the more influential works—defined the Golden Day as the great moment in American literature. The founding of the Golden Day was a strange mixture of erotic violence and calm intellectual labor. As Amy Kaplan notes of Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956), while it outwardly rejected Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis in theory, it tacitly accepted the thesis in theme: "the rejuvenation of the lone white male in the wilderness, who submits to the power of the feminized and racialized landscape only to wrest control and separate himself from it, substituting in this case intellectual work for regeneration through violence" (9-10).

The turn inward toward intellectual work moved critics of the 1940s and 50s away from the analysis of local and specific cultural practices and historical events toward a more rarified vision of literary language. In *A World Elsewhere* (1966), Richard Poirier, for example, observes that the novels of "Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, James ... are often written as if historical forces cannot possibly provide such an environment, as if history can give no life to 'freedom,' and as if only language can create the liberated place" (5). Because of the perpetual lack of history,

sources outside of history. In *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957), Richard Chase not only differentiates the American novel from the British tradition, but bases the distinction on the apparent uniqueness and newness of the American experience (5). In *Symbolism and American Literature,* Charles Feidelson argues that this uniqueness of American literature is to be found in literary form:

> the problem is still before us today: and their solution—offered with diffidence of Hawthorne or the assurance of Emerson and Whitman, in Melvillian perplexity or the desperation of Poe—is closer to modern notions of symbolic reality than to romantic egoism. Considered as pure romantics, they are minor disciples of European masters. Their symbolic method is their title to literary independence. Whether romantic or symbolistic, they wrote no masterpieces: the relative immaturity of the American literary tradition cannot be denied. But as symbolists they look forward to one of the most sophisticated movements in literary history: however inexpert, they broaden the possibilities of literature (4).

What emerged from these critics was a portrait of the American novelist as a figure ambiguously caught between regional naivete and cosmopolitan sophistication, failed imitator and great artist, American democracy and European imperialism. What saves the writer from these contradictions is their displacement from their historical period and cultural context, a displacement that imagines their perspective as more modernist than romantic.

Donald Pease, in *Visionary Compacts,* argues that the critics of the 1940s and 50s formed a "Cold War consensus" in American literary criticism:

> in the twentieth-century commentary on American Renaissance literature, these divisive political questions, as well as the pre-Civil War cultural context, tend to drop out of sight. They are supplanted by more rarified struggles: what Richard Chase has designated the artist's quest for an open form in defiance of constricting structures, what R. W. B. Lewis has called the American's need to sustain radical Adamic innocence in the face of familial and social responsibilities, what Charles Feidelson has described as the American's effort to return all things—facts, characters, places—to unity in the organicist activity of language (10-11).

He concludes that the move away from local social and political concerns continues as the defining trope of American literature: a "Cold

War consensus on the question of liberty opposes the freedom of an open-ended process to the totalitarianism of closed systems. ... So does modernism. Like the mythos of the Revolution, modernism is definable out of its denial of historical continuity" (12). In the works of the Cold War literary critics, what becomes valued is the depiction of the individual hero, the "American Adam," who as R. W. B. Lewis writes, was "the authentic American ... a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (1).

In *Raintree County*, Ross Lockridge's main character, Shawnessy, could easily be read as a composite portrait of the Cold War critics' Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Ishmael, Arthur Gorden Pym, Goodman Brown, Huckleberry Finn, and Henry Fleming. He is the American innocent, caught up in the tumult and press of history, a tragic figure who remains hopelessly optimistic. He is ambiguously caught between naivete and sophistication, failure and greatness, sin and purity. Yet the portrait is not complete. Lewis's American Adam is "an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by usual inheritances of family and race; and individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources" (5). Shawnessy is anything but free of local politics and culture, family and history. Great historical events from John Brown's hanging to the Civil War to the assassination of Lincoln haunt his life. Family holds, support, and thwarts his desires. History becomes the backbone of the novel, weighing it down with events and retellings, creating the massive bulk of pages. It is this weight of history that most dooms the novel's survival in the canon.

The emphasis during the 1940s and 50s that defined an American literary tradition based on an escape from the demands of history maintained itself by avoiding works and interpretations that directly confronted political, social, and historical concerns as those depicted in *Raintree County*. As Mumford writes, while

> Nietzche went back to preSocratic Greece, Carlyle to Abbot Samson, Tolstoi and Dostoevsky to primitive Christianity, and Wagner to the early Germanic fables, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman went forward leaning on the experiences about them, using the past as the logger uses the corduroy road, to push further into the wilderness and still have sound bottom under him. They fathomed the possibilities, these Americans, of a modern basis for culture, and fathoming it, were nearer to the sources of culture, nearer to the formative thinkers and poets of the past, than those who sought to restore the past (93).

For Mumford and the critics to follow, to return to history, a storied past, is to negate the potential of American literature.

In the end, what I am arguing is that *Raintree County* should not be read only as a work of fiction, but must be read as a work of literary criticism. Or more to the point, an exploration of what the literary criticism of the mid-twentieth-century America meant for the contemporary artist. As Mumford writes of the Golden Day, "what precedes led up to it; what followed, dwindled away from it; and we who think and write today are either continuing the first exploration, or we are disheartened, and relapse into some stale formula, or console ourselves with empty gestures of frivolity" (91-92). Lockridge's choice was to return to the "first exploration" and examine the mind of a writer who comes of age at the end of the American Renaissance, a writer who fails, producing only fragments and pieces of the great American epic, a writer who shows us that what is important is not the object of desire but desire itself. That is, Lockridge ends up rewriting the commonplaces of American literary theory. To make such a claim for the novel, of course, should not seem so far afield when we recall that Ross Lockridge gave up working on his Ph.D. dissertation on Whitman to write his novel.

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CHRONOLOGY, TIME, EPIC MYTHOLOGY, AND AMERICAN HISTORY IN RAINTREE COUNTY

DOUGLAS A. NOVERR

As a novel, *Raintree County* is framed in chronologies and history or "Historical Events." The first chronology is that of "A GREAT DAY for Raintree County July 4, 1892" starting at dawn in Waycross and ending at midnight when John Wycliff Shawnessy sees Professor Jerusalem Webster Stiles off at the Waycross train station, located south and west of the Shawnessy home on the National Road. This running time chronology of the day's events is divided into morning, afternoon, and evening.

The second chronology provides the "Chronological Order of Flashbacks," starting with Election Day, 1844 (when Johnny Shawnessy was a five year old boy) and ending with a section dated 1890-92 with the Shawnessy family now located in the house on the National Road with Eva Alice Shawnessy growing from age 10 to 12. The 52 flashbacks capture various periods of time within their individual narrative frames, ranging from one day (with 26 of the flashbacks taking place on a single dated day) to a period of the eleven years (1865-1876) following the Civil War. Seven of the flashbacks are set on July 4ths (1854, 1859, 1863, 1876, 1878) with the critical July 4, 1859 having two flashbacks and July 4, 1863 having two flashbacks, one of which is dated July 2-4, 1863. Only one of the 52 flashbacks is not specifically dated, and although designated "Pre-Historic," it can be dated as 1883.

Ross Lockridge, Jr. indicates in "FOR THE READER" that "The chronologies printed here may assist the reader in understanding the structure of the novel." He also notes in his "FOR THE READER" that "At the back of the book may be found a chronology of historical events with bearing on the story." This four-page

chronology begins with Indiana becoming a state in 1816 and ends with the Populist Party convening on July 4, 1892 in Omaha, Nebraska, which is the same day as the day of the "Glorious Fourth" in Waycross, Indiana.

While these three chronologies provide the context for the narrative and locate the situations and developments of the novel in sequence (and thus are helpful to the reader), they also stand as a statement of a theory of American History as of well as of personal and individual history that are developed in the novel.

The novel's first reference to American History occurs as Mr. Shawnessy is driving his wife and three children to Freehaven.

> In a world convulsed with war, famine, industrial unrest, and public and private vice, Mr. Shawnessy was a citizen of the American Republic, living quietly on the National Road of life where it intersected with Raintree County, and tacitly involved in a confused course of human events that the newspapers and people in general agreed to call American History. (18)

In the flashback dated 1848-1852, which deals with Johnny's childhood and the early formation of his mind, sensibility, and unique traits, we find a second reference to American History.

> More satisfying to Johnny's yearning for definite answers was the little schoolhouse at Danwebster where he learned to read and write and cipher. Here he studied a legend called American History, bloody, irrational, and exciting like the Bible, and was told that he lived in the greatest republic since the beginning of time, a place where all men were created equal and where they were all entitled to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. (56)

Young Johnny is described as developing his phenomenal memory, gaining a love of oratory and rhetoric, establishing youthful convictions and certainties about great men, and acquiring "a holy faith in the printed word." This faith in the printed word is still evident in the summer of 1859, after his sexual relations with Susanna Drake at Paradise Lake on the Fourth of July and after she has left and he has not heard from her.

> After a wobbly start, he took up again the unfinished work of becoming life's American, the completely affirmative man, and plunged headlong into plans for composing an epic poem based on American History. (270)

Johnny Shawnessy grew up in an era where the nation's nineteenth century history was defined by, shaped by, and directed by the words in the founding documents, by great men who came forward in the form of military men or great political orators, by new major political parties (the Whigs and later the Republicans), by reform movements and moral causes like abolitionism, and by explosive issues of sectional interest focused around the continuation and extension of slavery into the new territories and states of an expanding nation. He tells Professor Stiles (on July 4, 1892) that the great issues then were "the Union and Human Slavery" and that "down underneath, the great issues wait to be recognized again" and that "They are still what they've always been in human affairs—Union and Human Slavery." (426)

July 4, 1892 is a day where history forms an unexpectedly powerful intersection on John W. Shawnessy's life of relative calm and routine from 1878 onward with his marriage that year to Esther Root and the subsequent births of their three children: Wesley, Eva Alice, and Will. On this day three individuals come briefly but powerfully back into Shawnessy's life in Raintree County: 62 year old Professor Jersalem Webster Stiles, who taught Johnny Shawnessy at the Pedee Academy and who was forced to leave the county in 1859 because of an involvement with a local minister's wife; Senator Garwood B. Jones, a local friend and rival who has fashioned a successful national political career out of inflated but effective rhetoric and vote-getting glad-handing and posturing; and Cassius P. Carney, a local businessman who has become a successful but precariously positioned financier in the East. All three of these men have become successful in the East. Professor Stiles has come to Waycross in pursuit of Mrs. Evelina Brown; Senator Jones has come to further his political career on the 4th of July; Cassius Carney is passing through on his way East to arrange for the forceful suppression of labor unrest by locking out the Homestead workers who are protesting wages at the Carnegie and Company. All three men bring a hardened realism, cynicism, and world weariness that come from living in the capitals of the East. General Jacob J. Jackson, Civil War general, is in Waycross for the Grand Patriotic Program and thus pulls Shawnessy back to his service in the Civil War with the Army of the Cumberland from July of 1863 to May of 1865.

Both General Jackson and Senator Jones present Mr. Shawnessy with manuscripts of autobiographical histories or memoirs they are

writing and ask him to read them as a newspaper writer and a local historical writer. The General's book is another in a series of books he has written on the Civil War and on his military career. Jones's manuscript is pompously titled "Memoirs of the Republic in War and Peace" and is a shameless piece of self-promotion and political positioning for a possible Presidential nomination in 1896. Of course, John is reminded of his still unfinished ambitious epic national work that was to make him famous and to bring fame to his town and county. He is also asked how he can continue to live in such an uninteresting and dull place.

July 4, 1892 proves not to be for John W. Shawnessy another ordinary national holiday. The recognizable local ritual of the day is present but the undercurrents of memory pulling him back to the past are swift and powerful. Shawnessy has to confront his tragic and painful past, which haunts him with a sense of guilt and helplessness as well as unrealized potential and promise after tasting and experiencing possible joy and happiness. He is also pulled toward an attraction to (and perhaps a desire for) Mrs. Evelina Brown, a woman of literary interests, independence, and political commitments focused around women's rights and equality. But this mutual attraction has its dangers, and Mr. Gideon Root, the father of Esther Root Shawnessy (John's wife of fourteen years now in 1892), plans to use the Rev. Lloyd G. Jarvey to expose John Shawnessy as an adulterer and an atheist in a desperate attempt on Mr. Root's part to pull his daughter back to him and away from the man who took her away.

The 4th of July is, of course, a ritualistic intersection of American past, present, and future by celebrating and honoring the past as the inspiration for the present and the guide for the future. The "Grand Patriotic Program, put together by Shawnessy and Mrs. Brown, includes ritualistic readings of sacred texts, inspirational patriotic songs of the Civil War period, and tributes to Abraham Lincoln. For Shawnessy, these words (not including Garwood B. Jones's "Address of the Day") of the Declaration of Independence, read by General Jackson, engendered the "Republic, Raintree County, a rectangular dream," "America and Americans, Lincoln at Gettysburg," (655-656).

On this particular July 4th in 1892 John W. Shawnessy engages in an extended debate with Professor J.W. Stiles over the condition of the Republic and its people as well as a debate over its material reality and its history. Shawnessy asserts that American History is

made up of Events. When asked "What is this Event?" by the Professor, Shawnessy replies:

> The Event is something that never happened. It's a convenient myth abstracted from the welter of human fact. Events happen only in the newspapers and history books. But life goes on being one human being at a time, who is trying to find that mythical republic in which he can live with honor and happiness. (427)

The Professor pushes this to the conclusion that all is a lie and that with these lies we divert and deceive ourselves while our life-stuff goes through its little fury of growth, orgasm, and decay." He tries to get Shawnessy to confess "that there's nothing real but the nature of Nature." This is, of course, the argument and assumption of Darwinism and Social Darwinism, which Shawnessy calls "just the most primitive of all the lies." Shawnessy is able to live within a "chamber of mirrors" (a world of shifting, changing, conflicting individual images), preferring it to the Professor's "chamber of horrors."

Later in the day Shawnessy, in answer to another direct question from the Professor ("And what is the Republic?"), states:

> The Republic is the world of shared human meanings-ideas. A man voluntarily votes himself a citizen of the Republic, this great fruitful fiction where men and women exist in time and space, desire each other, perceive beauty, beget children, create institutions, share words. In a very real sense we live in Humanity, that being the only place where we can live. (944)

When the Professor asks "Does American History have a meaning?" Shawnessy replies that one can only become a self (one from many becoming the many) by entering into the "vast dream" and "clever fictions" of Historical Events.

> But we become citizens of that world so slowly that we forget the miracle of the process in which we participate. It's perhaps well that we do, for otherwise life would be unbearably exciting. As it is, we every now and then are touched with the feeling of historic participation. We are with crowds. We feel beyond ourselves. We partake festively in the old communion of Humanity. We do it in moments of intense love and great national crisis, on festive days like this. (945)

Johnny Shawnessy's life had taken certain turns of intense love and crisis (his union with Susanna Drake on July 4, 1859, the loss of his

and Susanna's son on July 4, 1863, and his marriage to Esther Root on July 4, 1878). There were personal myths, legends, crises in one's life (such as searching desperately in Indianapolis for the lost wife and son during the last days of the Battle at Gettysburg) known only to the individuals involved and never recorded in words or formed into a Historical Event but nonetheless real and material, although transitory and fleeting. No one else was there when Flash Perkins died in Johnny's arms just outside of Columbia, South Carolina, on February 17, 1865 or when Johnny toppled the tombstone in the cemetery commemorating his assumed death in the Civil War.

But as Shawnessy believes, human life is "Oneself, a simple, separate person. But Oneself exists by virtue in a world shared with other selves. Our life is the intersection of the Self with an Other. In the intense personal form this interection is love, and in the ideal general form it's the Republic. Jesus gave us the moral shape of this Republic—the Sign of the Cross." (929) What Shawnessy has to come to terms with are the "lost souls" and "lost voices" of his own personal history, ones with whom his own guilt, conscience, and responsibility were connected. This can, of course, never fully be done, and the intersections of the self with the others are conditional, momentary, fractional, and problematic. Shawnessy's attraction to Mrs. Brown and their intellectual union and shared excitement over the "Grand Patriotic Program" pulls her in the direction of erotic and sexual need but leaves both of them vulnerable to a charge that fortunately cannot be made credible by a blindly lustful Reverend Jarvey and the Widow Passifee, who are exposed by the children as the fornicators and hypocrites.

At some points and in some Events, however, the single human life does connect with the Republic of Christ's Cross, which is to accept individual sin and guilt and to punish oneself by the laws or imperatives of one's own conscience or to find some way to atone, and to connect with the Great Republic of the nation of America, which is not an Event but which, like Raintree County, exists beyond myth and legend. Abraham Lincoln's personal and spiritual sacrifices and those of the Civil War casualties were made in the service of the "unseen grail of the Republic" (695) These sacrifices were done out of love and hope with no knowledge or absolute certainty of an outcome, much in the same way that the sinner seeks to be justified and renewed by sacred knowledge or seeks to live according to principles of justice, charity, and forgiveness.

With the speeded up history from 1865 to the early 1890s with industrialization, immigration, political corruption, the growing gap between the wealthy and the poor, materialism, and direction of critical political issues to economic and monetary policies and the closing of the frontier, many Americans felt adrift and valueless or had lost any sense of connection with such issues as equality, human slavery, or the Union. All seemed glossed over or negated by political compromise, expediency, and vote-getting. In 1892 John Shawnessy's interest in politics is revived (twenty years after he ran against Garwood Jones for the House of Representatives in 1872) by the news of the founding of the People's or Populist Party and their July 1892 convention in Omaha to nominate a presidential candidate (who was James B. Weaver of Iowa). When he learns how much Garwood Jones and Cassius Carney fear the Populist movement, he is encouraged and he has already adopted some of the Populist platform on government ownership of railroads and communications, a position he is not afraid to voice.

His long day with the Professor and part of a day with Senator Jones and a brief meeting with Carney have given voice to his words and affirmations and to his desire to "build again—and better than before—the valorous dream" and to go out from himself and to connect with those Others in the "Valley of Humanity [that] was turbulent with changing forms" and to join the "vast unrest [that] was in the earth." (1058) Professor Stiles and Garwood Jones have most of the words and can speak voluminously and extemporaneously with easy facility as well as facileness. Their words, sentiments, and opinions also seem to be in tune with what is the current direction (circa 1892) and sense of things. But even under their barrage and challenge, John W. Shawnessy is able to hold his own and to assert his views on American History, human nature, the true American Republic, which is the "Republic of Mankind." The simple Hoosier schoolmaster is, by the incredible and commonplace events of this 4th of July, invigorated and awakened to the possibilities of his remaining life. His is once again Johnny Appleseed, wandering planter and engenderer of life. He goes home to sleep and dream of tomorrow, and the golden bough writes a universal hieroglyph that is the river as well as his own initials.

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RAINTREE COUNTY AND THE CYCLE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

DAVID D. ANDERSON

In an otherwise remarkable study of the impact of Southern history on the social and cultural evolution of the region, appropriately called *The Burden of Southern History,* C. Van Woodward attempts an unfortunate comparison between the literature of the Midwest, that by Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Edgar Lee Masters, and others, that came to dominate and direct American literature in the 1920s and 1930s, and that of the newer Southern literature of Robert Penn Warren and the other Agrarians, Katherine Ann Porter, Thomas Wolfe, and others of the same period. The difference, Woodward insists, is clear: the Southern writers and their characters carry with them the burden of history—the ante-bellum slave-based culture, the Civil War, the myth of the Lost Cause, the ghosts of three centuries of the Southern past. Midwestern writers and their people, conversely, "appear on the scene from nowhere, trailing no clouds of history, dissociated from the past." (30); indeed, many of them, epitomized by Hemingway's people, "live completely in the present" (31).

Unfortunately, Woodward's comments are too frequently echoed by other historians and critics, whether they are avowedly regional as is Woodward, or those who consider themselves national or universal, often ensconced as they are in that most provincial of American cities. Refutation is easy; one need look only at the opening lines of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920): "On a hill by the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the cornflower blue of Northern sky. She saw no Indians now; she saw flour-mills and the blinking windows of skyscrapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul..." (1).

Or the paragraph near the end of the revised (1922) edition of Sherwood Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son:*

> In our father's day, at night in the forests of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and on the wide prairies, wolves howled. There was fear in our fathers and mothers, pushing their way foreward, making the new land. When the land was conquered fear remained, the fear of failure. Deep in our American souls the wolves still howl (325).

Or from Louis Bromfield's *The Green Bay Tree* (1924):

> Besides, life is hard for our children, Hattie. It isn't as simple as it was for us. Their grandfathers were pioneers and the same blood runs in their veins, only they haven't a frontier any longer. They stand...with their backs toward this rough-hewn middle west and their faces set toward Europe and the East. And they belong to neither. They are lost somewhere between (107).

Or the last lines of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925): "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (182).

Or even more succinctly, in the last lines of Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915):

> Infinite Law,
> Infinite Life. (316)

Certainly the past—American past, Midwestern past, personal past, the past characterized, perhaps, as much by psychosis or neurosis as it is by the creation of a myth by which one lives and an identity by which one knows himself or herself—is clearly as much a part of the Midwestern identity, whether regional or personal, as it is of the South, New England, the Great Plains, Texas, or the several Wests. What each of the cited writers who carried their Midwestern origins and experiences with them knew intuitively and make clear in their works is that time—the past—is with them, but that for the writers and their people the past is neither burden nor regional obsession; it simply is, as part of the vast continuity of which they, too, are parts. They know, as did George Willard and Sherwood Anderson and Jay Gatsby and F. Scott Fitzgerald, that they carry with them out of their individual Winesburgs into the larger world the memories of place, people, and experience with which they will paint the dreams of their maturity and out of which they will extract the secrets of themselves. The past as present, as future, as continuity in a nation,

a region, and a literature that knows neither endings nor beginnings, as Ihab Hassan wisely points out in *Radical Innocence,* is a resource for today and all the tomorrows, driven as we are by what Hassan incisively calls "The curse of Columbus..." (336).

The past, personal, regional, national, tied to us by what Abraham Lincoln called "The mystic chords of memory..." (216) that bind us together as a people even as they direct and define our individual American Midwestern culturally diverse selves, is at once a crucial element in our Midwestern lives and in those of the writers and works that define them. It is this past, historical, geographical, spacial, temporal, personal, individual, and collective, that remains with us as we come to the end of this century and the beginning of another, that provides the source and substance of what we can and must know about our time, our place, and ourselves. It is this past out of which we extract the works and themes in which we attempt to define ourselves to others and ultimately to ourselves,

When C. Van Woodward looked about him, in the South as well as elsewhere in the nation during the decades of the 1950s, the years in which the essays that make up *The Burden of Southern History* were written, he must have heard of, read reviews and news accounts of, or perhaps even read or read at what is certainly, if nothing else, the most celebrated novel of the postwar decade, a novel that, had it been published a generation later, would have propelled its young author to instant if fleeting fame on the Today Show, Inside Edition, or Oprah; in its own time it earned their postwar equivalent, the MGM Prize. The novel is *Raintree County* by Ross Lockridge, Jr. It was published on January 5, 1948; it became an immediate best-seller as well as the most talked-of novel of its time, and, if it lost the Pulitzer Prize for 1949 to James Gould Cozzen's *Guard of Honor* (1948), it effectively dominated the literary mind and imagination in its time. Like *Guard of Honor,* it passed quickly from the popular consciousness, but unlike its rival it lives to haunt the secret place of our literary, cultural, and regional past after half a century

Woodward should have seen that *Raintree County* is a novel of all our pasts, national, regional, local, the pasts of our fears, frustrations, hopes, and ambitions; it is the past of our psyches and our myths, of the rituals of our lives and of the curious dichotomy between what we profess and what we do. More importantly, like the nation and region out of which it comes and the literature—American Midwestern literature—out of which it comes, it is a novel of the

past, chronologically the past of John Wickliff Shawnessy of Waycross, Raintree County, Indiana, as it stretched forty-eight years into the past that preceded the great day of July 4, 1892. It is a novel of the passage of time and its intricate interrelationships with place and circumstance, a novel of continuity that stretches endlessly from the knowable past that can and must become a usable past for John Shawnessy and the nation and it extends through a fleeting present into a future as unknown as it is inevitable.

When the events of July 4, 1892, have run their course, distinguished visitors who had gone out of Raintree County to direct the course of the nation in the East have blessed the rustics of their origins with their presence, their wisdom, and their sure sense of national purpose. They have spent the day and then returned to the nation's centers of power. John Shawnessy, man of action, lover, epic poet, soldier, schoolmaster, has explored the days of his years and those of the nation; he knows that the parameters of his life are the county lines of Raintree County, that his Mississippi is the Shawmucky, that the mythical raintree will remain a name on the land. Yet he knows, too, that walls of time and space can and will be transcended, that the limits of Raintree County are the ends of the earth, that the dreamer, the poet, the seeker will endure, and that there are no endings, no periods at the ends of sentences that come out of the knowable past and go endlessly into the unknowable future.

In *Raintree County* Ross Lockridge, Jr. has constructed an intricate amalgam of time, place, experience, and conviction that presents, in microcosm, the America of the nation's optimistic beginnings, its enduring present, and its unknowable future, all linked together not only by Lincoln's "mystic cords of memory" but by the rutted National Road that transcends the county as it leads forever to the West and by the shiny rails of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the powerful locomotives that leave echoes of lonely whistles behind them as they link the Old West with the new economic and political American West in the East.

The structure and the substance of *Raintree County* manifest two of the great themes of Midwestern literature that, through *Huckleberry Finn,* have become basic to the literature of the other regions as well, thus indelibly marking the national whole. These are the themes of movement, perhaps a reflection of Hassan's "curse of Columbus" and of place, of the particular or the local become the universal, as Emerson insisted that it was. In *Raintree County* as in

Huckleberry Finn the two become one; the river, whether the Shawmucky or the Mississippi is at once movement—unconscious, eternal—and place—momentarily providing stability, whether on the raft or in the shade of the raintree. As movement and place fuse in Raintree County, perhaps supporting Archibold MacLeish's assertion that West—the American mythical place, the goal, the secret of fulfillment, perhaps the end of Columbus's curse—is not geographic but psychic, an eternal place in the American mind, that it *is,* as John Shawnessy learns at the end of the novel,that "His victory is not in consummations but in quests" (1059).

If John Shawnessy's search is the story of the county out of which he came and to which he returned in his maturity, it is a search on which he travels lightly, carrying little but personal baggage, even as he carries the continuum of nineteenth century America with him, reflecting the oneness of place and movement that has marked American literature from its beginnings. As an organic work, beginning at some misty point in pre-history, coming into clear focus as John Shawnessy examines his experience and that of the county and the nation, the microcosm-macrocosm of American life, and then drifts off into a not yet knowable future, as he creates a usable past for himself and for America, *Raintree County* reflects the cyclical rhythms of American Midwestern life and the literature to which American experience has given rise.

As Robert W. Spiller pointed out rightly just a few years after the publication of *Raintree County,* American literature, in its totality and in many of its individual works and genres reflects the history out of which it came, to which it contributes, and of which it is an intrinsic part. While the organic whole of American life and literature continue their cyclical flow, rhythms change, vary, manifest themselves in new or renewed patterns of art in structure, language, and idea. Firmly rooted in the cycle, *Raintree County* manifests itself as a work of art that looms so large in the literature of its time that to too many it is an aberration, to be treated seriously or not as the critic-teacher- literary historian chooses, and, of course, it is easier and perhaps safer to ignore it, hoping, perhaps, that it and the critical problems it poses will go away, or that, as Millard Kaufman, the writer of the 1957 MGM production, learned, it is perhaps safer to simplify, to make of it something less than it is, to ignore the critical questions that Lockridge poses and to which he—and the novel—deserve our reasoned answers.

That *Raintree County* is a carefully constructed work of literary art that grows out of the literature of its time and place seems to have eluded the New Critics of its age, then falling slowly into disarray, and the literary historians have chosen to ignore its existence. In an age in which the literary work is no longer art but is seen as document or as text, the Freudians, Neo-Freudians, Marxists, old and new, Feminists, Ecologists, Historicists, Deconstructionists, post-modernists, and others have little to say about *Raintree County* and anything that any of them might have to say about the novel would treat it not as art but as artifact. Perhaps the only way in which *Raintree County* can be accurately assessed in our time is to bring together all the critical fads of our day, mix them up, and, after the dust settles and the blood dries, turn to the novel with everything we can bring to it. I once commented in print, not entirely facetiously, that a proper critic must possess all knowledge; only then can he or she approach a work of art with the reverence that it deserves and the seriousness that it demands.

As the train roars to the East, leaving John Shawnessy behind, the lonesome whistle echoing in his ears, the moon setting in the West as had the sun a few hours before, he alone is awake to ponder the meaning of the day and all the days that had marked his time and the time of the Republic as nightfall brought the limits of experience from the ends of the earth and the County to a reality barely perceived in the dark. As he remembers the faces on his long road, the "Great Road of the Republic," as he "muses upon the strange dream called Raintree County," as he ponders the meaning of time, place, and experience as past becomes present in the face of the future, he, like Walt Whitman before him, knows who he is and what he is, and he knows, like Whitman, that he is a creator, a planter of dreams, and he knows, too, with Whitman, that his art is not only to teach and delight the young people of Raintree County, but to transport them into realms of fantastic delight as he continues the unending search:

> So dreaming, he held the golden bough still in his hand. So dreaming, he neared the shrine where the tree was and the stones and the letters upon them. And the branch quivered alive in his hands, unrolling its bark, became a map covered with lines and letters, a poem of mute but lovely meanings, a page torn from the first book printed by man, the legend of a life upon the earth and of a river running through the land, a signature of father and preserver, of some young hero and endlessly courageous dreamer (1060).

With neither a period to end the flow of his poetic musing nor a structural end of the novel, but with a clear understanding of the oneness of the past, present, and future in life if not in grammar, John Wickliff Shawnessy stands at a new beginning at the crossroads of the National Road and the County Road, and he knows that for him and for America they have become one.

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RAINTREE COUNTY 50 YEARS LATER

THEODORE R. KENNEDY

I requested the last position on this panel in the tradition of the old vaudeville shows, which usually consisted of eight or ten acts. Since the shows went on serially through the afternoon and evening, the main purpose of the closing act was to clear the audience out of the house. So you have been warned.

In 1947 I had a subscription to *Life* magazine, which ordinarily did not print fiction, but a September issue contained a story excerpted from a forthcoming novel, called *Raintree County*. I enjoyed the story hugely and was especially delighted with its setting in Indiana, my native state. When *Raintree County* became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, I promptly ordered it. I recall being surprised at how uninteresting the opening was. Had I not known that it contained the story I had read of the great footrace between the hero, Johnny Shawnessy, and one Flash Perkins, I probably would have given up on the book.

Some months later my wife complained one Friday evening of having nothing to read in the apartment. She had begun *Raintree County* but rather quickly gave up on it. I finally said, "Look, we have the best novel of the past ten years here, if you will only stay with it for a while." She picked the book up and I hardly got a word out of her for the next few days. So my standard advice about *Raintree County* has always been: read at least 50 pages before you decide about the book.

Last March I read it again, for the second time. This may have been a unique—or what the local television announcers would call it, "a very unique"—experience, to read a book a second time exactly 50 years later. I had thought of the book countless times in that interval but never opened it. Now that I have re-read it, I will state categorically that the book has held up through this half-century much

better than I have. Yet, my response to the novel on the second reading was more measured than it was after the first. This is not surprising. A few years ago I met a seventh grade classmate of whom I had been much enamored, and my response then too was measured.

The first thing I noted was what particulars had lodged in my memory over that gap in time? To be frank, relatively few details: the footrace, of course; the Raintree and the interesting events which occurred thereunder; the fact that Johnny did not marry Nell; some secondary characters, Garwood Jones, Cash Carney, Flash Perkins; some Civil War scenes; and of course the irrepressible Professor Jerusalem Webster Stiles. Most vividly of all, I remembered the last scene in the book where the Professor, standing on the receding railroad car, wrote his, and Johnny's, initials in the air with his cane—backwards! (That was—and is—almost too clever for me.)

Apart from these details, one other major element stayed fresh in my mind through all those years. As a lad I grew up with the feeling—shared by many of my schoolmates, I believe—that Indiana was a very special place, that we were lucky to be living there. We felt a bit sorry for those in Ohio because they stopped too soon, and we couldn't understand why those in Illinois went too far. I don't know how this deeply-felt loyalty was engendered. It was not caused by raising the state flag each morning and singing the state song, as was done in Texas. It may have been from the teacher reading aloud to us Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolmaster,* or the Gene Stratton Porter's Limberlost stories, or hearing the Hoosier dialect poems of James Whitcomb Riley. Whatever the cause, I had learned to love the State, and I loved *Raintree County* for it seemed to explain that loyalty, elevating it to a philosophical plain.

Now when it comes to literary analysis, I think of Winston Churchill's comment when someone said his political opponent Clement Atlee was a very modest man. "Yes," said Churchill, "and he has a great deal to be modest about." I would have you know that I am quite modest about my talent for literary criticism. What I have to offer are merely some reactions to the book from two widely separated readings of it.

One question perplexed me after both readings of *Raintree County:* why was John Shawnessy held in such high esteem both by his old friends and by the community generally? [I am not forgetting that a few people were prepared to lynch him at one point in the story.] He was, in the world's eyes, a failure. His play never got its

fifth act. His great poem was never completed. The only explanation I can offer comes from memory of my mother's high respect for her high school teachers. An uncle of mine once observed that everyone born in Indiana inherited a deep-seated desire either to write a book or run for public office. If this comment was true, perhaps it springs from a general respect for literacy and learning. In 1890, of those who completed the sixth grade in school, probably less than 1% had any education beyond high school, and a great many not even that much. So at that time, anyone with some learning, who was not obviously an ass, was probably granted a measure of respect. And if such a person was also known to be honest, and good, he might well have been respectfully, even proudly, regarded by his neighbors.

Ross Lockridge, Jr. obviously loved language and loved using it. He was fluent in three or four modern languages and had studied the classical languages. On my second reading, during a winter vacation, I did not have a dictionary available and so made a list of words that were strangers to me. Among these were: "myriapod" (having paired legs like a centipede), "rinded" (having a thick coat, as with cheese), "tenebrous" (gloomy, obscure), "marmoreal" (like marble), and my favorite, "funambulist" (a tight-rope walker). Lockridge was also not above bending words to his inclination, as in describing a character with "rakethin legs," or another's "long blue eyes." Some readers resent use of strange or technical words but most appreciate being introduced to useful tools for expressing exact thought.

I hesitate to mention a detail which caught my attention during the second reading of the book. John was in Sherman's army as it marched through Georgia, arriving at Savannah just before Christmas 1864. There it rested and refitted before turning into the Carolinas. Surely Johnny wrote more than one letter home during that layover. It seems highly unlikely that the false report of his death would have gone out before Sherman's army headed north in January 1865. Johnny was wounded and spent several months in the hospital. Most probably that is when a false death report would have gone out. In June John returned to Raintree County and promptly discovered that his sweetheart had married Garwood and died in childbirth. All this in less than six months! I am not going to cast aspersions on Nell, but simply just suggest a structural plot flaw that got overlooked.

Again to refer to Winston Churchill, when he was given a Navy report of some two hundred pages, he ran his thumb up the edge and observed, "Its bulk insures against its ever being read." I'm afraid the

same fact of life will prevent *Raintree County* from winning its deserved place in American literature. Can you imagine the expressions on the faces of a class of average high school students or college underclassmen on being told that their outside reading will consist of a book of 1,060 pages?

If I were converted overnight into autocrat of this society, one of my first ukase would be to forbid the binding of more than 600 pages in any single volume. One thousand and sixty pages are just too many. The author would probably never have agreed to a sharp limitation, but the question arises for us, would *Raintree County* have been hurt by some radical pruning? I'm inclined to think not. I wish Mr. Lockridge had never read a word written by Sigmund Freud, especially his *Interpretation of Dreams.* These days even my own dreams bore me. To read repeated accounts of the fictional dreams of fictional characters is simply too much. In my opinion, every one could have been deleted and taken nearly 200 pages with them. And I am thankful the publishers insisted on cutting an additional 50-page dream sequence.

Also *Raintree County* contains many philosophical passages which remind me of an experience one summer afternoon perhaps twenty years ago. I was reclining in a lounge chair in the back yard of my home here in East Lansing when I happened to look directly overhead. There, a thousand feet up or thereabouts, a glider was silently circling. The pilot had found an updraft and was using it to gain altitude. The circling continued for about a minute while the craft gained at least another thousand feet and then headed eastward. The philosophical passages in *Raintree County* often seemed to me to interrupt the narrative while the author metaphorically gained altitude.

It is my conviction that the true meanings to be found in any narrative emerge from the actions and words of characters, and sometimes from the settings. This allows the reader the pleasure of discovery, much preferable to being lectured. Having said this, I must confess that philosophical writing has generally had an effect on my mind similar to that of a 17th Century sermon. Others, I am sure, may feel differently.

I would like to refer again to the closing scene in the book where the great character Jerusalem Webster Stiles uses his cane to write his and John Wickliff Shawnessy's initials in the air. Reading this in 1948, I for the first time noticed the similarity of names and concluded that this implied a symbolic identity. Were they two sides of a coin? Which was the obverse—surely John—and which the

reverse, clearly the professor? And what about the other characters, Garwood Jones, Cassius P. Carney, and General Jackson? Each was born in Raintree County and each left. Each won his personal goal: Garwood won his senatorial seat, Cassius accumulated a great fortune, the General won his glory; and the Professor's newspaper readers numbered in the thousands. Yet Johnny, who stayed in Raintree County and became a simple school teacher was the hero, the one person the others respected, perhaps envied at times. By this was Lockridge telling us that here, in our Midwestern homeland, is where true glory lies.? Here true heroism abides? I would like to think so.

I cannot conclude without expressing my admiration of Lockridge's great descriptive skill, both of characters and situations. He seems to be writing of people all of us have known: the self-promoting flamboyant politician Garwood Jones who is candid with his friends but a mere actor to the public; the materialistic Cassius Carney, always with his secret plans; and the brash, boastful Flash Perkins who never really grew up. Even very minor characters, such as the Confederate officer compelled to surrender on Missionary Ridge, we see in full dimension.

And on my second reading, I noticed how masterfully Lockridge created the crowd scenes—as when people were waiting for news of John Brown's hanging, or of the firing on Fort Sumter. With an astonishing economy of words he makes us feel almost as if we are a part of the crowd.

I sent my daughter a copy of the new paperback edition of *Raintree County* and when we talked to her recently—even though she had read only about a hundred pages—she said, "You feel like you are right there."

Is *Raintree County* the "Great American Novel"? No, because I don't think there is, or every will be, any such animal. This nation is too large, too dynamic and the lives of its people too diverse and too fluid to be encompassed, once and for all, in a single work of writing. Instead of a single great work, there will continue to be—as there has been now for more than a century—a succession of great, powerful American stories. We can each make our own list of candidates, surely agreeing on *The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn, Moby Dick*—and in my opinion *Raintree County,* despite some flaws here mentioned, is well entitled to its place in such a pantheon.

Michigan State University

LARRY LOCKRIDGE'S INFORMAL RESPONSES TO PAPERS ON *RAINTREE COUNTY*

delivered in East Lansing and San Diego and by Dean Rehberger, Douglas Noverr, David Anderson, and Theodore Kennedy. Larry Lockridge, Professor of English at New York University, is a son of Ross Lockridge, Jr.

Response to Dean Rehberger:

You've given a reading of the novel seemingly unavailable to the critics of 1948. James Baldwin, for instance, got his own career underway with a pan of *Raintree County.* He read it as a very sunny narrative—an affirmation of the American dream, an optimistic fiction that didn't acknowledge the dark underbelly of America. You've argued that another reading is available to us, that the novel contains its own dark or at least problematic reading of American history and politics. Elsewhere you've written that the novel is a critique of the "ideology of nationalism." Certainly it is very critical of race relations in America, and I've always been surprised that Baldwin wouldn't have perceived that racism is portrayed in the novel as what Ross Lockridge called "the mental illness of America."

And, yes, I'd agree that the novel is political in such a way as to have made it an outsider to the canon—though as a partisan I'm always eager to uncover motives for its exclusion that do not pertain to aesthetic judgment. John Shawnessy attempts to "look inward," but social reality, history, and politics always impinge. Shawnessy is the "rememberer"who cannot get on with his own epic poem. He's weighed down by the history and social reality and familial ties of which Dean Rehberger has been speaking. In some notes on his novel, my father said that his protagonist Shawnessy is such a debtor to his own past that he cannot write his way out of it. At the end we don't really know if Shawnessy is going to write that epic. Probably not, in any literal sense.

Certainly when Lockridge began his novel, he thought of it as affirmative. It would be a novel "that Americans need, goddam

them," he said. It would be a spiritual testament. But there's a strong undertow of something else, of nostalgia and currents of the past. You say that the novel emphasizes barriers to desire, for all its contrary hope that barriers can be "burned away" in erotic fever and mythic invention. I agree.

In a real sense, though, Lockridge himself tried to write the epic that his character Shawnessy couldn't write. In that sense he was trying to outdo his own hero, to write a transcendent novel, if one grounded in history. With his death by suicide at age thirty-three only two months following publication of *Raintree County,* it's clear that the author himself felt that he too had failed.

I make the argument in my biography that the novel was conceived in "anticipatory grief," in a strong awareness of all that might be lost. His mother's mortality was weighing on him at the very moment in 1941 that he began work in earnest. In the novel his mother is Eva, Shawnessy's daughter, who will forever be twelve years old—forever young. Lockridge's personal preoccupations were projected onto a very large screen.

And speaking of screens, *Raintree County* is still known mostly as a bad movie starring Liz Taylor and Monty Clift. It was scripted by Millard Kaufman, who was the creator of the cartoon character Mr. Magoo. To the extent that it's registered in the popular mind at all, it's read through the lens of the movie, which was, in turn, a northern version of the movie *Gone with the Wind.* One reason I wrote a biography of my father [*Shade of the Raintree: The Life and Death of Ross Lockridge, Jr.,* Viking Penguin, 1994, Penguin Books, 1995] was to try to get the novel back on the literary map. I managed to get it republished at Penguin simultaneously with the publication of my biography on what would have been my father's eightieth birthday.

Ross Lockridge obviously tried to write the Great American Novel. Two critics have said recently that at least he wrote the Great American *Studies* Novel. I'd settle for that, since at least it'd guarantee a readership. The value judgments of literary offspring are worthless, so I myself try to avoid them with respect to *Raintree County.* The novel has a great many fans among reviewers and common readers, and even in academe, but it has uncertain status within the American canon.

L.L.

Response to Douglas Noverr:

Douglas Noverr gives a somewhat brighter reading of the novel than Dean Rehberger. I'm sympathetic to both readings, for I think the novel provides for both.

Your emphasis on American history puts me in mind of my father's relationship with his father, Ross Lockridge, Senior, who was an Indiana historian. He took groups of people all over the state, performing what he called Historic Site Recitals. He'd try to evoke the great names associated with cow pastures and other featureless parts of Indiana. His conception of history was based on heroes, on giants in the earth, who can be evoked through memory and especially memorials. So Ross Senior was responsible for historical roadside markers throughout the state. He was known as "Mr. Indiana."

Ross Junior's version of history emphasized instead the irony of memorialization, the difficulty of historical retrieval. Certainly he had a greater sense of loss.

At the same time I think of *Raintree County* as an incorporative novel—not so much an allusive novel. It attempts to retrieve and shore up the great texts of the past through its own version of recitation. It incorporates the great texts of American history, often in counterpoint to elements that might seem to subvert them. For example, the Gettysburg Address is recited in a Chattanooga whorehouse while the hometown sprinter and braggart Flash Perkins dances a jig with a whore. This isn't exactly the context that Ross *Senior* had in mind for these great words of history.

The question that Shawnessy and the Perfessor pose, as constant antagonists, is whether American history is progressive or in decline. The cynical Perfessor intones that all beautiful things are old things. Douglas Noverr cites the phrase "valorous dream." And the novel ends with the phrase, "endlessly courageous dreamer." The Dreamer for Lockridge is not someone who evades history, rather someone who courageously imagines new possibilities within history. This is straight out of Schiller's notion of aesthetic culture. We see it also in Wilde's *Decay of Lying* and Northrop Frye's "myth of freedom." Certainly Shawnessy believes with them that we invent our institutions—they're not here by nature. The bright implication of this is that we could imagine *better* institutions, a more aesthetic human culture; this requires a mythic imagination, an awareness of the old

myths and a reanimation of the spirit that created the possibility of a true human "Republic." This is Shawnessy's great hope.

So at the very end John Shawnessy is the courageous dreamer, and in that sense he has prevailed over and against the Perfessor. But we might remember that it was the Perfessor who first dubbed Shawnessy a "courageous dreamer." In that sense the Perfessor might be said to have the last word.

It's interesting to me that Ross Lockridge was writing this novel in the midst of World War II and that *Raintree County* was published in 1948, a period of disillusionment loosely comparable to the years after the Civil War. The great response to the novel as a best seller in 1948 had something to do with a collective hunger for meaning in American history. Meaning, of course, can be both bright and dark. Lockridge tried to write an affirmative book, but one that confronted the implications of slavery, racism, the exploitation of the land and of workers, and the darker side of American capitalism that led to the Gilded Age.

L.L.

Response to David Anderson:

All three talks so far have dealt, in different ways, with the place of history in *Raintree County*. It's surprising that so little attention has been paid this aspect of the novel over the years.

You mentioned Whitman in passing. *Raintree County* was originally billed as the novel Walt Whitman might have written of his America. The plot is based on Hawthorne, however—"The Great Stone Face." One could undertake a Whitmanian reading on the one hand and a Hawthornian on the other. That is, a visionary reading emphasizing the possibility of emancipation from the past, and a darker one where history is a form of entrapment.

History is one form of narrative, novelistic plotting another. In *Raintree County* the one owes much to the other, since the events of Shawnessy's life parallel the growth of the Republic. But one interesting aspect of the novel's plot is that it violates chronology. The climactic moments in Shawnessy's life converge at the very end and have been suppressed from the readership, if not from Shawnessy himself. The crises of his own earlier life, its major upheavals and reversals, are reserved to the end, in a series of epiphanies. His own

past becomes luminous and usable by the time he says goodbye to the Perfessor at the train station and meditates on his own life and that of the American republic. Perhaps one implication is that America must become more aware of its own history, however late in the day, to make that history a usable past. But not in its chronological ordering—rather, in its immanent meaning, its pivotal and horrific but sometimes luminous moments.

You mention that the neo-Freudians, the formalists, the Marxists, the deconstructors and postmodernists, and what have you, have largely ignored the novel. It seems to me that they would all have a field day. You note that it has great formal integrity. But it's bursting at the seams in other ways—the violation of chronology, the openendedness, not even a period at the end. We're in a post-formalist era now when such things are valued. *Raintree County* has some frayed edges that might appeal to such critics. We hear much, too, about intertextuality. This is a novel deliberately constructed out of other literary texts as well as the texts of American history. Also, feminist criticism: three of the four narrative perspectives are female—besides Shawnessy, we are put into the minds of his daughter Eva, his second spouse Esther, and the feminist Evelina. Another critic has called this an "ecological novel," for its passionate evocation of the American landscape and its scorn of industrial blight. So where are the ecocritics when we need them?

I hope Jim Morrison proves a true prophet: he said that *Raintree County* was the novel for the new millennium. We'll just have to wait and see what kind of audience turns out for the centennial celebration of *Raintree County* in the year 2048.

L.L.

Response to Theodore Kennedy:

I hope your daughter finishes the novel.

1,060 pages: the length does work against *Raintree County.* I write about it in terms of what Northrop Frye calls "encyclopedic form." My father thought of it as a compendium of sorts, making use of a large variety of subgenres. For instance, it makes use of philosophical dialogue, conspicuously of Plato's *Republic.* Most contemporary editors would probably request him to kick such dialogue out. But he thought that it belonged there, feeding also on the Ameri-

can tradition of debate. So it's crammed with all sorts of subgenres. Also many different kinds of language that I discuss in terms of Bakhtinian theory of discourse. And all this makes for a long book.

It was originally much longer. The Dream Sequence that his editor insisted be cut was 351 pages at the very end. He snuck some 40-50 pages back in, here and there. Perhaps they just seemed like 200 pages to you.

I'll have to consider the time line question you raise, but will say for now simply that Ross Lockridge was a fanatic about that sort of thing. He wanted to have everything plausible with respect to time and sequence. For instance, he checked the almanac to make sure the moon was out and setting at such and such a time on July 4, 1892. He wanted to get that right. So I'm sure that if he committed an improbability of this sort, he's squirming as we speak.

Larry Lockridge
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