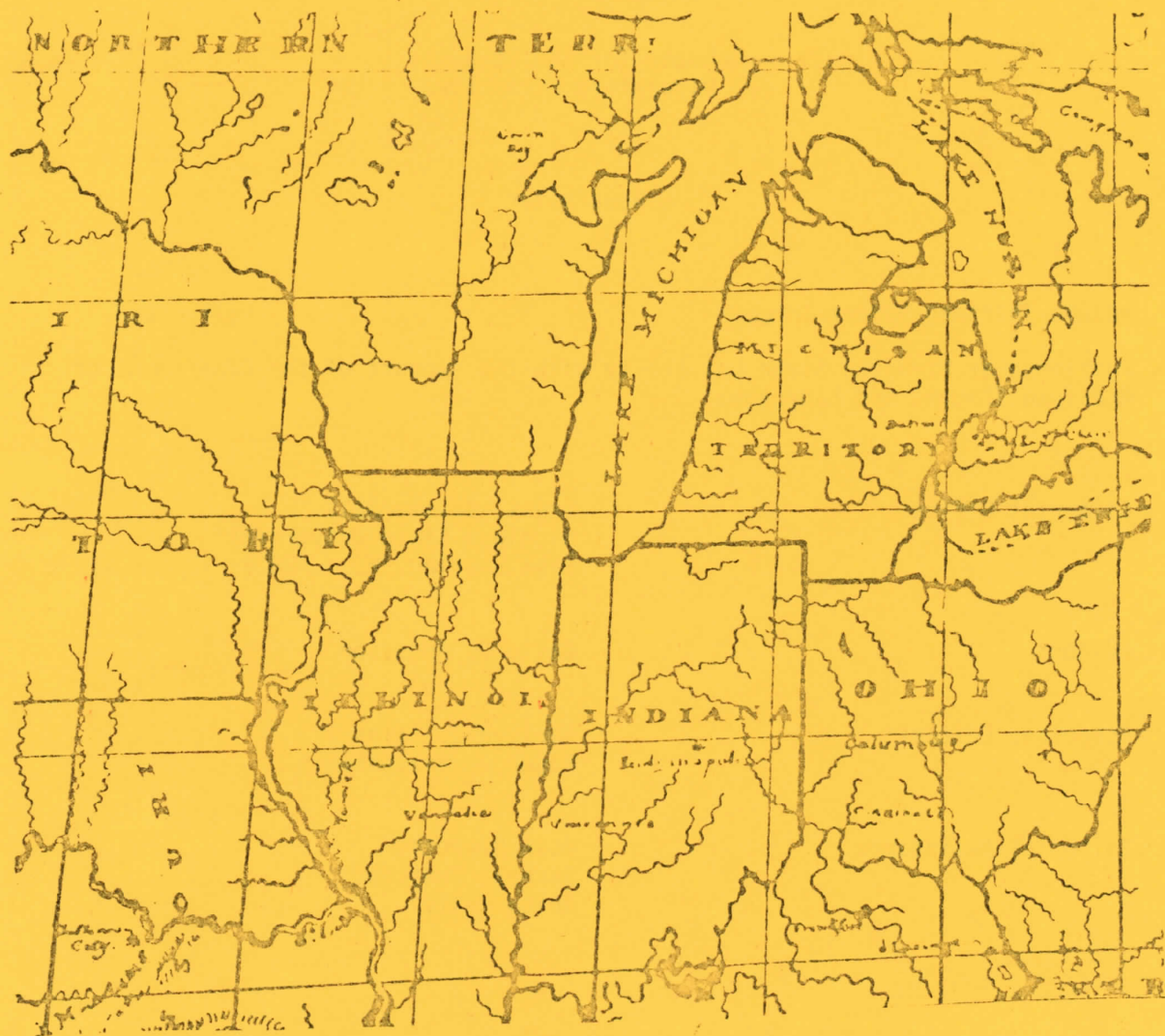


# SML Newsletter



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Ernst Bessey Hall  
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Editor:

David D. Anderson

Associate Editors:

Marilyn J. Atlas  
Roger J. Bresnahan

Editorial Assistants:

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The Social Morality of  
The Massacre at Fall Creek

by

Kay Kinsella Rout

John Gardner, in his essay collection On Moral Fiction, insisted repeatedly that the only valid goal for art was the transmission of truth. "In a democratic society," he said, "art's incomparable ability to instruct, to make alternatives intellectually and emotionally clear, to spotlight falsehood, insincerity, [and] foolishness,...ought to be a force bringing people together, breaking down barriers of prejudice and ignorance, and holding up ideals worth pursuing."<sup>1</sup> In this way, he pointed out, art would be aiding the reader in resolving the "conflict...inside every one of us," the conflict "between the impulse toward social order and the impulse toward personal liberty."<sup>2</sup> In order to do this, the artist must him or herself possess standards according to which models of goodness can be set up and examples of moral behavior offered.

Jessamyn West's standards manifest themselves clearly in her 1975 novel, The Massacre at Fall Creek. This work, set in the Indiana of 1824, dramatizes an actual series of events that centered around the settlement of Pendleton. Five white men, unprovoked by anything but the presence of some Senecas at a sugar camp nearby and by their own histories of Indian hating, killed unarmed men, women and children in an attack disguised as a social visit. Fearing repercussions from the Indians further North, the Indian agent pressed for indictments and trials for the accused whites. Everyone knew the Indians expected executions, not merely guilt decisions and short prison terms, if they were to feel justice had been done.

The primary emphasis in the novel is the carrying-out of the work of the state in obtaining confessions, conducting the trials, and in hanging the guilty. The varying moral attitudes of the murderers are clearly presented, however, and simultaneously we learn of the various moods and opinions of the townspeople.

The central character, seventeen year old Hannah Cape, serves as an excellent focus for the novel's moral issues. Much of the action is observed from her point of view, providing the reader with an interpreter of the events surrounding the murder, trial and executions, but beyond that, her youthfulness and her awkward indecisiveness about her sexuality serve as analogues for a new country's attempts to reconcile its opposing values of Christianity and Indian hating. On the one hand, both for the virginal Hannah and for the new land, there is moral rectitude; on the other, there is self indulgence, in one case in love and in the other in hate. Each violates one of the commandments; each has its pleasures and rationalizations.

The most important personality in the novel may be young Charlie Fort, the lawyer for the defense from down state, where things are a great deal more civilized than they are in the settlements. As Hannah's lover, Charlie is able to keep the reader informed about the trial and keep us in touch with the central character as she is seen by admiring others, both in his thoughts and in his frequent reports to Enoch Leverett's newspaper back home. Further, though, Charlie is a sympathetic character who stands, nonetheless, for the seduction of innocence and for getting the killers off with their lives. In spite of the fact that Miss West clearly approves of the trials and recognizes their significance in white-Indian affairs, making it clear that the Indians would be satisfied with nothing less than executions, she nonetheless favors Charlie

and his activities in court. Similarly, though she does not generally lean toward men who attempt to debauch females below the legal age of consent, and is sympathetic to Hannah's desire not to produce an illegitimate child, or "woods colt," she approves of Charlie's efforts on the grounds of his sincerity and good intentions.

On both of these issues, Charlie is diametrically opposed to Jud Clasby, a bachelor trapper and Indian hater who is easily the least sympathetic character in the book. The other killers are family men with positive qualities whose acceptance of Indian killing as a way of life merely reflects their unquestioning adherence to prevailing social norms. The exception is the emotionally disturbed boy, Johnny Wood, who is held blameless by the author and Hannah, if not by the court. Clasby, on the other hand, not only kills but largely initiated the massacre, stealing from the Indians after it was over. His sexual advances toward Hannah are simply aggressive and opportunistic, as is his approach to life in general. For these reasons, while the defense is favored over the prosecution and while the executions of the three family men are painfully described, it is almost with relish that we are told, immediately after the executions, that the fugitive Clasby has been hunted down by an Indian search party and is even now at bay. The manner of his death will certainly be unpleasant and might even end in cannibalism, if he dies bravely enough. The Osage messengers are delighted to inform the Iroquois of their success and to tell them that the feast is being held off until they can arrive to enjoy it and the attendant tortures.

Since the hanged men are never seen as truly evil, Clasby can function as a scapegoat, dying as a willfully evil and unsympathetic figure who, unlike the reformed Indian fighter he roped into the massacre, Luther Bemis, had tried to avoid paying for his crimes.



Charlie Fort is also set against O. A. Dilk, attorney for the prosecution; Dilk is not only his opponent in court but his rival for the affections of Hannah. Oscar Dilk is a model of propriety and reserve to such an extent that he becomes almost as unsympathetic a figure as Clasby. He has all of Charlie's sincerity, but no lascivious designs on Hannah, who has already been to bed with Charlie, and only associates with Dilk when she and Charlie have a fight. Dilk functions as the necessary third figure in the triangle, but is not pitied by the reader for his rejection because he is drawn from the ranks of those who represent the state; the reader is made to feel that although murder took place, and convictions and death were politically necessary, only an undesirable person would actually go so far as to prosecute, to serve as the actual instrument of revenge. In both sexual and criminological terms, then, Dilk represents the unpopular alternative of uncompromising correctness.

Twenty-four year old Charlie Fort of Harvard is able to win the sympathy of the reader and the love of Hannah in spite of his standing, in absolute moral terms at least, on the side of a potentially suicidal leniency toward killers and of the potentially unrespectable fathering of a child upon an admittedly willing "jail bait." The attractiveness of these two stances, each the less strict, the less demanding and austere alternative, is what pulls us toward the pole of tolerance and understanding in the novel, and Charlie serves as its embodiment. Standing more or less with him is the Indian Black Antler, pacifist apostle of the Quaker-like prophet Handsome Lake and teacher of the murdered Folded Leaf, twelve, and Hannah's brother Ben, age fourteen.

The opposite pole, of revenge and rectitude, is represented by prosecuting attorney Dilk and by most of the other Indians, whose traditional methods of



vengeance make hanging seem merciful and even soft hearted. Black Antler is respected by many but followed by few, as is Caleb Cape, Hannah's father, the self-ordained minister of the settlement at Fall Creek. The Cape patriarch occupies an interesting position more or less between the two poles represented by Fort and Dilk. As a preacher and a fervent lover of mankind, he is early to condemn the massacre and the first one to call it murder. It is he who goes with his children to bury the Indian dead and he who takes it upon himself to ride 200 miles to Piqua to tell the Indian agent what has happened, a wasted trip because he fell sick and arrived many weeks later, after Black Antler had already delivered the news. Nonetheless, he feels guilt for having had a hand in precipitating the trials:

The man who killed a man ought to be hanged. He had never doubted that. But wispy old John Wood, henpecked in life and hung up by his chicken neck to die? The Wood boy, who had no notion of right or wrong outside a book? Benson, big ox of a fellow who needed somebody saying gee-haw and whoa to him if he was to be kept on any straight path? Hang them? Praying churchgoers? And he the one, no matter who got there first, who went to<sup>3</sup> Piqua to carry the news to Johnston. What was he? Some kind of a Judas?

In spite of this reluctance, when he finds that Luther Bemis is also guilty he encourages him to confess and risk a certain hanging, leaving a nineteen year old wife nine months pregnant to bear her child alone, because it is "right," because it is the truth. Luther himself feels that such is his duty to God, although he'd been an Indian fighter before he was saved by Cape and never reported any guilt after the fact for those activities. The author's position seems to coincide with that of Cape and Bemis on this point; a calm conscience can only be achieved by paying a price for one's deeds. Only an evil man like Jud Clasby would disapprove on principle as well as in practice, even though a nice guy like Charlie can disapprove in actual practice and only a stiff-necked authoritarian personality like Dilk would approve of both principle and practice so relentlessly and grimly.

What saves Cape as a sympathetic figure is his feeling of ambivalence and even guilt, whereas Dilk's insensitivity, rather than his actual moral attitudes or role in the courtroom, is what makes him distasteful.

So, The executions are regrettable and painful, as well as immoral according to the author's own Quaker background and the teachings of Handsome Lake and Black Antler. Further, as Miss West remarked in her Bookbeat interview with Robert Cromie, they were ineffective as a deterrent to whites from then until the end of the Indian wars at Wounded Knee in 1890. The "pitiful thing," as she noted, about capital punishment is that it never solves anything.<sup>4</sup> In spite of that, however, a just man must submit to execution, and his preacher must counsel him to pay the price in order to assuage or erase his guilt. In this particular case, there is also the practical reality of the fact that the Indians expect a blood sacrifice and refusal would be not only selfish but possibly futile, if a raid occurred and one and all one's family were killed. The consideration affects the moral decision heavily except, it seems, in the case of Bemis, who could have allowed the others to die without him. It is hard not to see his death as a waste, in spite of the emphasis on duty on the novel. His sacrifice makes sense, however, as a statement of his integrity and as an example of his concern for justice.

Equally unappealing, though of lesser magnitude morally, is the option of sexual abstinence for Hannah and Charlie as opposed to guilt-free indulgence. After Hannah's half-hearted decision to avoid intercourse for both moral and practical reasons, they end up making love under a sycamore tree. Her rationalization is that, in spite of the prohibitions of her parents and of society, and of the Bible, everything is justified by the fact that they will be married.



Hannah and Charlie's decision manages to preserve both values, if not simultaneously then in an acceptable order: personal indulgence first, respectable observance of the social order in the long run. It is a pleasanter variation of what happens in court.

Miss West makes clear the interrelatedness among various influences, social and moral, that created the situation in which the murders took place over 150 years before the book was published, and provides the contemporary reader with an awareness of the Indian perspective in the matter of lost land. The words are not spoken by an Indian, but by the eldest of the hanged men, John Wood, who finally acknowledges his guilt before he dies. Coming from a society in which "preachers spoke of the West as the Promised Land," Wood nonetheless sees the error of the mentality of Manifest Destiny and the deeds it generated:

I been heading for that noose for some time. I can see it now. I started that direction when I bought that land in York state the developers had cheated the Indians out of. Land that wasn't good to anybody but an Indian. Useless except for trapping and hunting, and we was farmers. Why did we buy it? Because we could get it for next to nothing. We didn't give a passing thought to the Indians we drove out. Some of them like as not died just as sure as the ones at the sugar camp. I was asking for the noose then, but I didn't see the warning. Or didn't heed it.

Next I headed west. I'd lost about all I had when I bought into that venture, anyway. Why west? More easy money. Free land, nothing to do but clear it and kill Indians...Marrying Reba was another step toward the noose. Though I sure didn't see it at the time. She was just more free land, I reckon, and at seventy-two I wasn't the man to handle acreage like that...

I've trod a misery path rightstraight toward the gallows from the minute I bought that tainted land in York state. It's no quick ending, the way people think.<sup>5</sup>

The old man does not excuse himself or the others because of their environmental conditioning, nor does the author. The one person who does get off in her and Hannah's eyes is young Johnny Wood, the quiet and somewhat sissified son of John Wood, convicted along with him. Hannah, who has had a one-sided romance with Johnny before Charlie Fort arrived, understands finally that it was his stepmother, Reba, who unbalanced the boy by seducing him, and that he was not merely quiet but

psychotic as well. His fervent religiosity is his shield against his vulnerability to women, as was his indifference to all reality outside the cover of a book.

Johnny's admission of guilt is chilling; he denies having killed an Indian woman because he considered the one he shot, a half-breed, to be white. She pleaded for mercy from him on the grounds that she was not a heathen, she loved "the Lord Jesus Christ," and that she was a white woman, tearing open her dress to reveal her white skin. Unwittingly, she aroused Johnny's sexual hysteria by this act, and he shot her to death, once in each breast. "If you love the Lord Jesus Christ," he informed the court, "you shouldn't do that." The jury returned the necessary verdict of murder, "and it had to be remembered that this was a young man who might murder again, the very first time he saw a white woman do something he believed wrong."<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, the governor intends to reprieve Johnny, although there was at the time no such thing as a psychiatric hospital to cut down on the odds that he would turn out to be a menace to feminine society, and Hannah goes to astounding lengths to save him. After the other executions are over, and George Benson, Lute Benis and Johnny's father are lined up in their coffins, an hour-long wait ensues. The governor's reprieve is expected at any moment, and it comes, but not before the hangman has finally given up and begun to place the hood over Johnny's head, provoking Hannah to fill a pot with hot coals and hold her own hand over the flames in expiation of Johnny's guilt. "Spare the boy, spare the boy," she begs the Indians assembled on the rise, and the Indians accept the offering. Miss West seems to regard this action as simply an act of mercy; further, it precipitates Dilk's disgusted departure, brings the estranged Charlie to her aid, and cements their union.



Johnny is no more appreciative of her gesture than of the governor's break-neck arrival with the pardon in his hand. He seems to consider himself blameless, asking "What is my sin?" and "How can I sin no more if nobody'll tell me what my sin is?" When Sheriff Brady remarks to the puzzled governor that the boy is not in his right mind, Johnny responds, "I know the difference between right and wrong. I resisted, didn't I, sheriff?"<sup>7</sup>

The last we see of Johnny he is on his way home in the wagon to Pendleton, clearly the beneficiary of a then non-existent "insanity defense." His future is unclear, since a term of imprisonment was not provided by the court. Practicality seemed to be the main reason for the other executions, but here, with the Indians satisfied and the future victim or victims vague and uncertain as to person, time, and place, no one seems to feel threatened by Johnny Wood as a free man.

Perhaps the important moral point is that he did not deserve to hang because he was unfree, a victim himself of his stepmother's lust, whereas the family men, Benson, Bemis and Wood, died more justly because they acted more freely, although their deaths were pointless. Miss West disapproves of capital punishment even as she understands that on some occasions, as this one, it is unavoidable. The fate of Johnny Wood, on the other hand, reveals the flaw in a code of justice based primarily on compassion; in order for Johnny to be spared, the self-protective interests of society must be ignored. In his case alone, then, personal liberty wins over the demands of social order, but the end result is no more satisfying to contemplate than are the three dead bodies. In our own day, of course, Johnny Wood could be sent to a mental hospital, treated and released, but he still might kill again; the potential threat to feminine safety would not necessarily be eliminated by Johnny's being brought more closely into contact with reality.

Miss West has made the alternatives "intellectually and emotionally clear," as Gardner has demanded. In an extreme situation such as murder both choices are unpalatable, and the novel must end leaving the reader dissatisfied with both life and death for the killers; in this fact she makes an important point about our inability to make completely equitable and satisfying choices in every situation. Simultaneously, she has demonstrated the futility of the deaths on both sides and the moral ambiguity that often characterizes our response toward both crime and punishment.

Michigan State University

Notes

<sup>1</sup>(New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Jessamyn West, The Massacre at Fall Creek (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>26 May, 1975.

<sup>5</sup>West, pp. 281-282.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

The Lost Dauphin and the Myth and Literature  
of the Midwestern frontier

by

David D. Anderson

On January 21, 1793, as revolution became terror, Louis XVI, King of France, was guillotined, and his eight-year-old son, Louis Charles Capet, born in 1785 and the Dauphin since the death of his older brother four years earlier, became titular King of France. But the Dauphin was never crowned. His mother, Marie Antoinette, was executed on October 16, 1793, while the young prince remained imprisoned in the Temple in Paris. Cruelly treated by his jailors, especially one Antoine Simon, he was reported dead on June 8, 1795, and buried in a nameless grave. But there were those who insisted that the Dauphin had been spirited away by Royalist physicians and a peasant boy buried in his place. Significantly or not, after Louis XVIII acceded to the throne in 1814, he ordered the Bourbon dead memorialized in a Mass, but the Dauphin's name was omitted from the list, and claimants began to appear, each insisting that he was the rightful King of France.

Ninety years later, consequently, it was perhaps not surprising that the Dauphin, admittedly and aggressively lost, emerged as one of the most memorable characters in the finest American novel and the first Midwestern novel of the nineteenth century. This was Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, published in 1884. In it, the scene is the Mississippi River, south of the junction with the Ohio, some forty to fifty years before the novel's publication. Having unfortunately missed Cairo in the fog, survived a collision with a steamboat, and witnessed



the tragic irrationality of the Grangerford feud, Huck and Jim agree that "there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."

But this idyllic existence, floating South by night with neither plan nor goal, tying up, hiding and sleeping by day, is interrupted by the intrusion of two of Mark Twain's most memorable characters, both of them rescued by Huck from a pursuing mob of men, boys, and dogs. Secure on the raft in the bushes, the two men, after catching their breath, exchange professional biographies, as recounted by Huck:

One of these fellows was about seventy, or upwards, and had a bald head and very gray whiskers. He had an old battered-up slouch hat on, and a greasy blue woolen shirt, and ragged old blue jeans britches stuffed into his boot tops, and home-knit galluses--no, he only had one. He had an old long-tailed blue jeans coat with slick brass buttons, flung over his arm, and both of them had big fat ratty-looking carpet-bags.

The other fellow was about thirty and dressed about as ornery. After breakfast we all laid off and talked, and the first thing that come out was that these chaps didn't know one another.

"What got you into trouble?" says the baldhead to t'other chap.

"Well, I'd been selling an article to take the tartar off the teeth--and it does take it off, too, and generally the enamel along with it--but I staid about one night longer than I ought to, and was just in the act of sliding out when I ran across you on the trail this side of town, and you told me they were coming, and begged me to help you to get off. So I told you I was expecting trouble myself and would scatter out with you. That's the whole yarn--what's yourn?"

"Well, I'd ben a-runnin' a little temperance revival thar, 'bout a week, and was the pet of the women-folks, big and little, for I was making' it mighty warm for the rummies, I tell you, and takin' as much as five or six dollars a night--ten cents a head, children and niggers free--and business a growin' all the time; when somehow or another a little report got around, last night, that I had a way of puttin' in my time with a private jug, on the sly. A nigger roused me out this mornin', and told me the people was gatherin' on the quiet, with their dogs and horses, and they'd be along pretty soon and give me 'bout half an hour's start, and then run me down, if they could; and if they got me they'd tar and feather me and a ride me on a rail, sure. I didn't wait for no breakfast--I warn't hungry."

"Old man," says the young one, "I reckon we might double-team it together; what do you think?"

"I ain't undisposed. What's your line--mainly?"

"Jour printer, by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theatre-actor --tragedy, you know; take a turn at mesmerism and phrenology when there's a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture, sometimes--oh, I do lots of things--most anything that comes handy, so it ain't work. What's your lay?"

"I've done considerable in the doctoring way in my time. Layin' on o' hands is my best holt--for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k'n tell a fortune pretty good, when I've got somebody along to find out the facts for me. Preachin's my line, too; and workin' camp-meeting's; and missionaryin' around."

Nobody never said anything for a while; then the young man hove a sigh and says--

"Alas!"

"What're you alassin' about?" says the baldhead.

"To think I should have lived to be leading such a life, and be degraded down into such company." And he begun to wipe the corner of his eye with a rag.

"Dern your skin, ain't the company good enough for you?" says the baldhead, pretty pert and uppish.

"Yes, it is good enough for me; it's as good as I deserve; for who fetched me so low, when I was so high? I did myself. I don't blame you, gentlemen--far from it; I don't blame anybody. I deserve it all. Let the cold world do its worst; one thing I know--there's a good grave somewhere for me. The world may go on just as its always done, and take everything from me--loved ones, property, everything--but it can't take that. Some day I'll lie down in it and forget it all, and my poor broken heart will be at rest." He went on a-wiping.

"Drot your pore broken heart," says the baldhead; "what are you heaving your pore broken heart at us f'r? We hain't done nothing."

"No, I know you haven't. I ain't blaming you, gentlemen. I brought myself down--yes, I did it myself. It's right I should suffer--perfectly right--I don't make any moan."

"Brought you down from what? What was you brought down from?"

"Ah, you would not believe me; the world never believes--let it pass--'tis no matter. The secret of my birth--"

"The secret of your birth? Do you mean to say--"

"Gentlemen," says the young man, very solemn, "I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am a duke!"

Jim's eyes bugged out when he heart that; and I reckon mine did, too. Then the baldhead says: "No! you can't mean it?"

"Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the title and estates--the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant--I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, forlorn, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft!"



Jim pitied him ever so much, and so did I. We tried to comfort him, but he said it warn't much use, he couldn't be much comforted; said if we was a mind to acknowledge him, that would do him more good than most anything else; so we said we would, if he would tell us how. He said we ought to bow, when we spoke to him, and say "Your Grace," or "My Lord," or "Your Lordship"--and he wouldn't mind it if we called him plain "Bilgewater," which he said was a title, anyway, and not a name; and one of us ought to wait on him at dinner, and do any little thing for him he wanted done.

Well, that was all easy, so we done it. All through dinner Jim stood around and waited on him, and says, "Will yo' Grace have some o' dis, or some o' dat?" and so on, and a body could see it was mighty pleasing to him.

But the old man got pretty silent, by-and-by--didn't have much to say, and didn't look pretty comfortable over all that petting that was going on around that duke. He seemed to have something on his mind. So, along in the afternoon, he says:

"Looky here, Bilgewater," he says, "I'm nation sorry for you, but you ain't the only person that's had troubles like that."

"No?"

"No, you ain't. You ain't the only person that's ben snaked down wrongfully out'n a high place."

"Alas!"

"No, you ain't the only person that's had a secret of his birth." And by jings, he begins to cry.

"Hold! What do you mean?"

"Bilgewater, kin I trust you?" says the old man, still sort of sobbing.

"To the bitter death!" He took the old man by the hand and squeezed it, and says, "The secret of your being: speak!"

"Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!"

You bet you Jim and me stared, this time. Then the duke says:

"You are what?"

"Yes, my friend, it is too true--your eyes is looking at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette."

"You! At your age! No! You mean you're the late Charlemagne; you must be six or seven hundred years old, at the very least."

"Trouble has done it, Bilgewater, trouble has done it; trouble has brung these gray hairs and this premature balditude. Yes, gentlemen, you see before you, in blue jeans and misery, the wanderin', exiled, trampled-on and suffering' rightful King of France."

Well, he cried and took on so, that me and Jim didn't know hardly what to do, we was so sorry--and so glad and proud we'd got him with us, too. So we set in, like we done before with the duke, and tried to comfort him. But he said it warn't no use, nothing but to be dead and done with it all could do him any good: though he said it often made him feel easier and better for a while if people treated him according to his rights, and got down on one knee to speak to him, and always called him "Your Majesty," and waited on him first at meals, and didn't set down in his presence till he asked them. So

Jim and me set to majestyng him, and doing this and that and t'other for him, and standing up till he told us we might set down. This done him heaps of good, and so he got cheerful and comfortable. But the duke kind of soured on him, and didn't look a bit satisfied with the way things was going; still, the king acted real friendly towards him, and said the duke's great-grandfather and all the other Dukes of Bilgewater was a good deal thought of by his father and was allowed to come to the palace considerable; but the duke staïd huffy a good while, till by-and-by the king says:

"Like as not we got to be together a blamed long time, on this h-yer raft, Bilgewater, and so what's the use o' your bein' sour? It'll only make things oncomfortable. It ain't my fault I warn't born a duke, it ain't your fault you warn't born a king--so what's the use to worry? Make the best o' things the way you find 'em, says I--that's my motto. This ain't no bad thing that we've stuck here--plenty grub and an easy life--come, give us your hand, Duke, and less all be friends."

The duke done it, and Jim and me was pretty glad to see it. It took away all the uncomfotableness, and we felt might good over it, because it would a been a miserable business to have any unfriendliness on the raft; for what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others.

It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it's the best way; then you don't have no quarrels, and don't get into no trouble. If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family; and it warn't no use to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him. If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.

Huck's scepticism and Jim's involuntary submission carry them through the king's working of a camp meeting as a reformed pirate, one of Twain's most sharply-reproduced vignettes of frontier life, through the confused failure of the "Shakespearean Revival," with the Duke as Romeo and the King as Juliet, the magnificently hilarious fraud of the "Royal Nonesuch," and the near tragedy and criminal fraud, foiled by Huck, which the two nearly carry off against the orphaned Wilks girls. As they float farther South, there are failing lectures on temperance, unsuccessful dancing schools, "yelloction, missionarying, mesmerizing, doctoring, and fortune-telling," until finally, while the king and the duke are delayed in a saloon squabble, Huck returns to the raft, confident that he and him can make their escape.



But Jim is gone, sold back into slavery by the king for part of the fake reward--enough to lead to the tavern squabble--and Huck's search leads to his struggle with his conscience and to the denouement of the book. It leads, too, after a failed performance of the "Royal Nonesuch" in the town, to Huck's last sight of the two frontier frauds:

---here comes a raging rush of people, with torches, and an awful whooping and yelling, and banging tin pans and blowing horns; and we jumped to one side to let them go by; and as they went by, I see they had the king and the duke astraddle of a rail--that is, I knowed it was the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human---

Huck, with Twain, concludes that "Human being can be awful cruel to one another," and the king and the duke pass into frontier myth and literary history as two of Mark Twain's most memorable portraits of life on a rapidly vanishing frontier.

But the king, as magnificently as Twain portray him, may be neither a resurrected memory of Twain's boyhood on the river nor the product of his vivid imagination; the king's origin, rather, is more likely America's only authentic claimant to the Bourbon throne of France, one who remains to this day either the dispossessed and tormented prince that he claimed to be or an outrageous fraud wandering the American frontier, as his critics insisted that he was.

This man was Eleazer or Eleazar Williams, also known as Lazarre. Williams was raised on a St. Regis Indian reservation in the St. Lawrence Valley in the late eighteenth century by Thomas Williams, an Indian grandson of the white Eunice Williams, captured by the Indians in 1704 in an Indian raid on Deerfield, Massachusetts, who married into the tribe. Thomas's wife, Marry Ann Kenewatsenri, may also have had some white ancestry. The couple, living much of the time in a reservation

town dominated by a French Catholic mission, were Catholics, and they had eleven children, whose births and baptisms, at reasonably regular intervals between 1780 and 1807, are duly registered at the church. In the record, the longest gap is five years, between 1786 and 1791.

But, although the Williamses raised twelve children, there is no record of either the birth or baptism of Eleazer or Lazarre, a fact that later supported his claim to royal birth. It also led his critics to insist that he had been born in either 1788 or 1789, and his birth, for various reasons, was left unrecorded, a circumstance unacceptable to Williams and those who later supported his claim.

Other facts of Eleazer's early life are easily determined. In late 1799 or early 1800 he was taken to Longmeadow, Massachusetts, to be educated by Deacon Nathaniel Ely, whose wife was a Williams. Eleazer's brother John probably accompanied him, but if so he was soon sent or returned home. Eleazer remained with the whites, at school in Longmeadow, Mansfield, and Hartford, Connecticut; Dartmouth, New Hampshire, where he may have briefly attended the college; and finally at West Hampton, Massachusetts, where he studied with the Reverend Enoch Hale. In 1809 he met and was strongly influenced by Bishop Hobart of the Protestant Episcopal Church of New York. In 1811 he returned to the tribe as a teacher sponsored by the American Board of Missions, educated as a Congregationalist, attracted to Episcopalianism, and accepted by the Jesuits. Early in his education Eleazer had become a devoted journal-keeper, and he was to remain one throughout the controversial years ahead of him. His education, rare for any boy at the time and under the circumstances and rarer still for a reservation boy, had been paid for either by a mysterious Frenchman, as his supporters later insisted, or, according

to his critics, by Thomas Williams and by various unnamed mission board benefactors.

In 1813, while serving as teacher and agent to the Indians, he published two works, "A Tract on Man's Primitive Rectitude, His Fall and His Recovery through Jesus Christ," published at Burlington, Vermont, and "A Spelling Book in the Language of the Seven Iroquois Nations," published at Plattsburg, New York. As agent for the Caugnawagos, he was empowered to draw annually, from 1812 to 1820, from the state of New York, a payment of \$266.00 for land transfers, a sum which his later critics insisted was never given to the Indians. In the War of 1812 he served as a scout for the American Army, receiving wounds at the Battle of Plattsburg. These wounds may or may not have been severe, depending on the source of their interpretation. Much later, in 1851, he applied for a pension, a claim that was rejected as controversy began to surround him.

In 1815, he visited Bishop Hobart in New York, was confirmed in the Episcopal Church, and then returned to the Indians with Hobart's support to serve as a religious teacher. In 1816 he published an adaptation of The Book of Common Prayer and in 1820 another speller, adding in the process to a growing reputation among churchmen for his acumen and knowledge of the Indians. In 1821, with the approval of Lewis Cass, Governor of Michigan Territory, and the support of the Episcopal Church, he went to Green Bay M. T. (now Wisconsin) to establish either a mission settlement to which Iroquois Indians could emigrate, as he insisted, or a vast Indian empire over which he would rule, as his critics later maintained. At Green Bay, on March 3, 1832, he married Madeleine Jourdain, one of his pupils, who was either the half-breed daughter of a French trader or the daughter of an exiled French aristocrat. They had two daughters and a son, only the latter surviving to maturity.



and ending his days as a lake-boat captain. After numerous trips East seeking support for his venture, Williams apparently fell into difficulties, being superseded as Episcopal missionary in Gree Bay in 1824, although he was apparently ordained in 1826. Nevertheless, he continued to preach to his Oneidas in the area until about 1832, when he was apparently repudiated by his flock, according to his critics because he had defrauded them.

The next decade--during which he may or may not have become the "lost dauphin" of Twain's boyhood past--is obscure. During much of the time he apparently wandered from West to East and back again, seeking support he could no longer find. In 1835 he was at St. Regis, in 1838 in Buffalo, where he reportedly confided for the first time to a Buffalo editor, George H. Haskins of the Buffalo Express, that he was the Dauphin--although no evidence exists to refute or support the incident. In 1841 he returned to Green Bay from New York to observe the eighth triennial observance of the conversion of the Oneidas to Christianity.

It was during that visit that whatever claims Williams may or may not have made to his royal origins began to take on substance. During that year, the Prince de Joinville, third son of Louis Phillipe, then King of the French, was touring America, following in the footsteps of his father, who, during his long exile in England and America as the duc d'Orleans after the French Revolution, had toured the North American frontier. Louis Philippe had attained the Bourbon throne with Lafayette's support after the July Revolution of 1830 had deposed Charles X. The Prince, as he stated in his Memoirs, had determined to go "via the Great Lakes to Green Bay on Lake Michigan." At some point in the journey, he had either heard or himself had mentioned the name Eleazer Williams and determined to seek him out. The two met on board the ship Columbus, en route from

Mackinac to Green Bay, and Williams described the meeting at length in his journal:

I was sitting at the time on a barrel. The prince not only started with evident and involuntary surprise when he saw me but there was a great agitation in his face and manner--a slight paleness and a quivering of the lip--which I could not help remarking at the time, but which struck me more forcibly afterwards, in connection with the whole train of circumstances, and by contrast with his usual self-possessed manner. He then shook me earnestly and respectfully by the hand and drew me immediately into conversation.

We shall never know whether the conversation, both on board the ship and the next day at Williams's father-in-law's house in Green Bay was, as Williams later revealed, first a discussion of his background and then, at Green Bay, the revelation of the secret of his royal birth, or whether it was merely a recounting of Williams's experiences with the Indians, as his critics insisted, supported by a later letter from the Prince's secretary. But according to Williams the vague memories and fears that had plagued him since, as a boy of ten, he had dived into Lake George, struck his head, and was rendered unconscious began to make sense. According to Williams, the Prince attempted to persuade him to sign an elaborate "abdication of the crown of France in favor of Louis Phillipe by Charles Louis who was styled Louis XVII, king of France and Navarre with all accompnaying names and titles of honor," promising in return "a princely establishment either in France or America." To this, Williams insisted he refused indignantly, saying "Though I am in poverty and exile I will not sacrifice my honor." The Prince responded angrily, but on his departure, reconciled, he told Williams, "Though we part I hope we remain friends." They never met again.



Both critics and supporters of Williams agree that the two did meet and did converse at length, although they differ about de Joinville's stay in Green Bay, Williams insisting he stayed overnight and the critics saying he did not, using as evidence the Prince's Memoirs, written some twelve years after the fact. Evidence suggests, however, that later correspondence, in impressive envelopes certain to be remembered in Green Bay, passed between the Prince and the pretender, but the letters, Williams later said, were lost in a fire.

With the departure of the Prince, Williams passed the rest of that decade in obscurity, part of the time in Green Bay, part at St. Regis, much of it purposeful wandering. In 1846 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Indians appropriated money for his support as a missionary, but in 1848 the stipend was withheld, presumably because results did not justify its continuance. In 1850 his offer to assist in the removal of the Senecas from Indian Territory to the Upper Mississippi was declined; in that year he started a school at St. Regis, gathering some support from the Episcopal Diocese of New York and the Boston Unitarian Society, but in 1853 the support was withdrawn. By that time, however, Williams had become a celebrity.

In 1849 two notices appeared in the public press, a brief item in the Albany Knickerbocker and a longer piece in the United States Magazine and Democratic Review. The latter, published in New York, attested to Williams's royal birth and subsequent misfortunes. It appears to be a review of a book, History of the Dauphin, Son of Louis the Sixteenth of France, by either N. B. Ely (in the index) or H. B. Ely (in the text), the existence of which is doubtful, leading Williams's critics to insist that he had written the fraudulent review himself. The piece recounts, purportedly in summary, the facts of the book: the fate of the royal family;



the spiriting away of the Dauphin, badly abused and nearly insane, by two Royalist surgeons; the testimony of one M. Belsager, recently deceased in New Orleans, that he had taken the boy by way of Holland and England to the United States and entrusted him to the care of Thomas Williams. It asserts, too, that Royalists had watched over the boy, visiting him occasionally, and financing his education. For four years, from 1795, the time of his rescue, to 1799, the time of his accident, according to the account, he was deranged, but he did not know the secret of his birth until the visit of the prince. The account cites the names of witnesses, including a Dutch American trader, Jacob Vanderheyden, who was present when the boy was brought to Williams, and the Royalists and priests who kept the secret. Today, the account states, he is sixty-three to sixty-five years old in appearance; he speaks English and Iroquois fluently, French with an accent; his mannerisms are French; he has no trace of Indian blood, his features are unmistakably Bourbon; he prefers private life in America to a foreign throne. His name is Eleazar Williams.

This account--or review, if it was--received modest attention, inspiring brief news items by curious editors. One such account appeared in the New York Courier and Enquirer in 1853. That account was seen by the Reverend John H. Hanson, "a clergyman of worth and ability;" Hanson sought Williams out at St. Regis, and, according to Williams's critics, made him a king, converting him, as one critic writes, "from a secret, surreptitious pretender into an open declarator of his royal position. Under Mr. Hanson's tuition," the account continues, "he became a genuine monarch, issued manifestos, signed L. C. to his documents, received notes phrased Your Gracious Majesty and promised his friends passage to France in a national ship when he should obtain his own." But the evidence is that Williams continued to live quietly at St. Regis.

Hanson's first public espousal of Williams's cause appeared in the second issue of Putnam's Monthly Magazine, for February, 1853. In a long, carefully developed essay entitled "Have We a Bourbon Among Us?" Hanson marshals the evidence in detail: twenty-seven items of proof, ranging from the absence of the record of his birth, through confirming evidence from the woman who raised him (the poor old woman, nearly a hundred years old, who spoke no English or French was later hounded by supporters and detractors, each of whom extracted a purportedly favorable statement), scars on Williams's body corresponding to injuries suffered by the Dauphin, Williams's memories, items purportedly left with him, his appearance, and the visit of the Prince.

The article asserts conclusively that "1st. That Louis XVII did not die in 1795. 2d. That he was carried to the region in which Mr. Williams spent his youth. 3d. That Mr. Williams is not an Indian. 4th. That Mr. Williams is Louis XVII." It created a sensation, reportedly adding twenty thousand subscribers to the struggling magazine and beginning a controversy that continued for the rest of the century. The next year Hanson published the first book on the matter, The Lost Prince (1854), but William Gilmore Simms had already ridiculed the claim in impeccable condescending prose by literary analogy in an essay "The Iroquois Bourbon" in the Southern Literary Messenger, for July, 1853. Putnam's published letters, pro, con; some reported real or imagined memories supporting or refuting the claim, and others were from relatives of those named in Hanson's essay. Investigators, most of them hostile, began to search at St. Regis, in Canada, in Green Bay. In the meanwhile Williams lived quietly at Hogansville, New York, where he preached to the Indians. In 1858 he published a life of Thomas Williams, and on August 28 of that year he died quietly. His widow lived on at Little Rapids, Wisconsin, apparently without doubting him, until her death in 1886.



But the controversy lived on. Putnam's resurrected it in 1868 with Francis Vinton's "Louis XVII and Eleazer Williams," a more balanced account than Hanson's but favorable to Williams. Four years later a major attack began in the Wisconsin Historical Collections. In Vol. VI, 1872, there appeared a memoir by John Y. Smith, "Eleazar Williams and the Lost Prince." Smith had known Williams at Green Bay and had apparently spent a great deal of time gathering affidavits, which he asserts were collected by an unnamed "gentleman in Montreal" in the 1850s and given to the New York World to refute Hanson. But they had not been published until they were dug out of the World's file in 1868 after the appearance of Vinton's article. Among them are sworn affidavits by two Indians who knew Williams as a boy and one by Mary Ann Williams herself testifying that she was his natural mother. None of the Indians spoke English, nor did the "gentleman" speak French, but these are the documents that provide the substance of evidence against Williams.

Perhaps more telling, however, is Smith's own evidence from the years between 1828 and 1837, when Smith knew Williams. He writes,

He was a fat, lazy, good-for-nothing Indian; but cunning, crafty, fruitful in expedients to raise the wind and unscrupulous about the means of accomplishing it. During the last four or five years of my acquaintance with him, I doubt whether there was a man at Green Bay whose word commanded less confidence than that of Williams. His character for dishonesty, trickery, and falsehood became so notorious and scandalous that respectable Episcopalians preferred charges against him...

Other critics of Williams abound in the pages of the Wisconsin Historical Collections during the next few years, including letters from Colonel H. E. Eastman, who claimed that Williams had stolen his manuscript of a fictive romance, "The Lost Prince," from him, had based his claim to be the Dauphin on it, and had then furnished it to Hanson as the basis for his book. Supporting Eastman is a letter from Wisconsin State Senator T. O. Howe, who claimed to remember Eastman showing the manuscript to Williams. In 1879 in an essay in the collection, General



Albert G. Ellis, who had once been Williams's pupil and assistant in New York, claimed that, although Williams had done a remarkable job in providing a workable alphabet for the Mohawk language, he was nearly illiterate, knew neither Latin or Greek, although he was supposed to instruct Ellis in both, and kept no journals, thereby suggesting that he was a fraud. In 1883 Judge Morgan L. Martin also denounced Williams as a fraud in the Wisconsin Historical Collections, concluding, however, in magnanimous charity, that

A man reared amid savage surroundings, as he was, should be judged by a different standard than we set up for one who has spent his life entirely among white people. No one can from childhood fraternize with Indians without absorbing their characteristics to some extent, --and becoming vain, deceitful and boastful. He was a remarkable man in many respects, but was deeply imbued with false notions of life, and his career was a failure. He was neither better nor worse than his life-long companions and was what one might have expected from one who has been sent into the world with certain racial vices and whose training and associations were not calculated to better him.

To Williams's supporters, these descriptions of a man whose formative years were spent in Congregational homes in still-Puritan New England were slander, and the controversey continued. Four more books were to appear at regular intervals, all supporting Williams, and a long monograph refuted them. In the meantime, however, Mark Twain had published Innocents Abroad in 1869, and in 1870 he married his beloved Libby and, ensconced in Elmira, began to transmute his remarkable memory into art. Then, in Hartford, he wrote The Gilded Age (1872), Sketches, Old and New (1875), and in succession, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1875), Life on the Mississippi (1883), and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884). He had begun the latter in 1876 as "another boy's book," carried it through Huck and Jim's missing the mouth of the Ohio and had then abandoned it; in 1879 and 1880, in two spurts, he carried it through the Grangerford episode and the Sherburn-Boggs incident and

abandoned it again. Then after a summer visit to the old scenes in 1882, it took on a life of its own, and he finished it in eighteen months of sustained work.

Whether or not Twain had heard of the Eleazer Williams case during this long period is, of course, impossible to determine now, but given the amount of publicity surrounding it, it seems likely that he had. Too, it was the kind of tale that his sharp wit and his innate skepticism would enjoy, and certainly his version of the king sounds suspiciously like John V. Smith's portrayal with the racism omitted. Surely, anyway, whether coincidence, adaptation, or influence, Twain's King and Williams's Dauphin are big enough to share a large place, perhaps the same place, in our frontier past.

Two footnotes remain: in 1901, Mary Catherwood used the Williams story, almost literally transcribed into fiction, for her last novel Lazarre. In it there is no doubt: Williams and the Dauphin are one; blanks in the record are imaginatively filled--with an early trip to France, where he meets the girl who would become his wife, with his service on the Ohio frontier, including the Battle of Fort Shephenson, and the novel includes final recognition by an old abbe and by Williams's wife that he is indeed the king. In the novel, however, there is no Eleazer Williams growing into lonely, perhaps fitful, old age in pursuit of a dream or a fraud, and the novel ends with the promise of happiness.

The second footnote belongs to Louis Bron<sup>m</sup>field. In The Farm, published in 1933, the novel he wrote so that his children in France might claim their heritage, he has his fictional counterpart, Johnny Willingdon, remember the stories ancient Great-Aunt Esther told about two half-crazed, eloquent prophets who roamed the Ohio wilderness when she was a child. One was Johnny Appleseed; the other was



his friend, the Lost Dauphin.

Later, in Pleasant Valley, published in 1945 after he had come home to claim his own heritage, Bromfield retells the story, indentifying the Dauphin of his great aunt's (in reality, Great Aunt Mattie's) youth as Williams. He recounts, too, an Ohio legend that the then Duc de Chatres, later Louis Philippe, had himself, while in exile, come to Ohio in search of his lost cousin and then had repudiated him.

Bromfield concludes with a story worthy of the controversy itself; when The Farm was published in France in 1933 the controversy was reopened, and learned articles pro, con, skeptical, and intense appeared, discussing the issue at great length.

The question, however, remains: was Williams the Lost Dauphin or was he the frontier conman of Huckleberry Finn and his critics? As Bromfield concluded, no one can answer with certainty. But there is one thing we can say with certainty, in the face of the thirty-seven or more competing European claimants, some of whom became notorious if not persuasive, and in spite of a voluminous European literature that led, in 1905, to the establishment of a short-lived, typically French learned journal, Revue Historique de la Question Louis XVII.

We can say, as the controversy and the myth and fiction of the Midwestern frontier unite to make clear, that Eleazer Williams, lost dauphin or not, conman or king, or something of both, was uniquely our own, a part of our memorable, useable past.



Sydney Lea's The Floating Candles

by

Bernard F. Engel

Since big-name commercial publishers will rarely produce a book of poems, the university press, once dismissed as "academic," becomes an important vehicle for verse writers. One of the better series of books by contemporary poets is issued by the University of Illinois. A recent addition to the Illinois Poets series is Sydney Lea's The Floating Candles. The paperback edition before me has ample margins, a clean typeface, and a blue cover carrying a stylized representation of the constellation Orion--an attractive production.

Lea writes in the prevailing twentieth century manner, frequently using traditional iambic tetrameter or pentameter but with so much variation that a poet of earlier generations might have difficulty accepting the lines as legitimate. Like his contemporaries, Lea wants to suggest something of tradition without being tied to an absolute stress count.

It's good to have attractive appearance and great flexibility in poetic form. What matters, of course, is the poetry. Lea's book is a report, presumably autobiographical, of discovery, the record of a speaker who begins with focus on his own observations and feelings but finds as he works through these that there is also "a subject outside / the self that engages more than the self." He learns the lesson argued two generations ago by Bertrand Russell, but often overlooked in the last several decades: as long as there is a human community outside the self, self-realization cannot be the supreme principle of ethics.

The realization comes finally to him in "Bellatrix Visible: Orion in the East, October" as his family sits down to feast on the ducks, grouse, and woodcock of the new season. The rising of Orion the Hunter in the fall sky, the

blood of the prey, and the thought of the fear, lust, sin, and love of the human mind contribute to the communion of the heart, that "dark meat" that is "composed of earth and air."

The whiteness of the stars and of a cleanly gnawed bone represent an ideal of pure attainment not possible for the complex living heart. It stands for values that the self can arrive at only in concert with the other selves of home and friendships.

Others are so important to the self, indeed, that the next poem in the sequence, "The New Year: 1980," begins with a list of names of 21 family members and friends (several of whom are mentioned in other poems). Citation of their names is a spell to hold in affection for a moment the existences of these other selves who contribute essential warmth and grace to the speaker's own existence, qualities he could not obtain in isolation.

Love for the poet's dead brother Mahlon causes him to recall in the title poem a childhood evening when together they set candles afloat on a creek, a playful action that is showing how "the splendid can flare / despite the flow / of the common. . . ." demonstrates the admixture of the crude and the profound, of fact and sublimity, that characterizes human life.

Mahlon is also apparently the subject of "Dirge for My Brother: Dawn to Dawn," presented as the opening poem in the book, perhaps because it implies by its intimation of sloghtly hysterical effort the speaker's inability at the moment to put into words his sense of loss. Other selves also are the concern in "A Natural Shame." The speaker here is a parent who, hearing a noise at night, worries that "wreck, gun, epidemic" may be coming to his children.

Among other topics are boyhood acquaintances, family relationships, the temptation of nature's beauties but the reality of obligations, and the surgeon's

confrontation with the "body / and lumpish brain / and untrue dream" that compose a self. "Bernie's Quick-shave (1968)" asks whether going about routines despite the blankness of existence is courage, or mere inability to do anything about the conditions of living.

The poems are skillful, not at all imitations despite occasional echoes of Frost and Lowell. The most unusual are several that deal with hunting. The reader expects the twentieth century poet to have views proper to the liberal humanist--to recoil from blood sports and to honor those super-environmentalists, the "hippies" (Lea's word for them) who seek to escape from urban society by acting out the life of the hard-scrabble New England farmer.

But Lea holds to a mystique of the chase, and consequently speaks in impatience and often in anger of the hippie who in attempting to conserve wildlife posts "No Trespassing" signs on his land while cutting away the brush the deer feed on.

Hunting is not for Lea the macho exercise in courage and physical effort that Hemingway exalts. It is rather a means of communing with nature, a path to ingesting the "blood" that, so he seems to feel, is a mystical link between human and animal life forms, the world of this earth, and even the universe of astronomy.

I cannot follow Lea in all of this. Courage comes in only when what one chases can shoot back, and we would be better off without rituals that require killing. Since this paragraph has the role of nay-sayer, I will add an objection to Richard Eberhart's perfunctory compliment, quoted on the back cover, declaring that in Lea's work "hunting becomes a metaphor for poetry itself." Eberhart is too good a poet and critic to disregard the fact that when Lea talk of hunting, he talks of hunting.



Lea is a fine poet, one who turns out what Eberhart rightly calls poems of "muscularity and vision." Disagree here and there though one may, it's rewarding to find work that moves away from the common places of "liberal" thought and intense concern with the writer's self. The verse is worth reading and rereading, and Illinois is to be congratulated both for recognizing its esthetic quality and for giving it the handsome format of his volume.

Michigan State University