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## Aftermath of a Novelist

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## AFTERMATH OF A NOVELIST

*by John Pilkington*

The history of literature contains many examples of writers who quickly rise to the peak of their art, burn out their creative energies within a few years, and thereafter produce mediocre works for the remainder of their lives. Seldom does a once successful writer abandon his craft from deliberate choice; even less frequently does an artist silence himself because of the tension aroused by the opposition within him between his knowledge of what he should write and his emotional commitment to what he wishes to write. Of this comparatively rare phenomenon, the later career of Henry Blake Fuller provides a partial example. After a decade of success as a novelist, Fuller wrote no novels for fifteen years; then he resumed, for the most part unsuccessfully even if at times with great brilliance, the writing of fiction, and in it he often alluded to the personal conflict that had prompted his silence.

Fuller's rise to fame as the leading Chicago writer of the 1890's should be called spectacular. He began the decade with the publication of two romantic, European travel idylls, *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani* (1890) and *The Chatelaine of La Trinité* (1892). Almost immediately he wrote *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893) and *With the Procession* (1895), two thoroughly realistic, some said naturalistic, novels about the industrial life of Chicago. The four volumes, which constitute his major contribution to American letters, represent at the same time both the height of his literary achievement and the dilemma in which he found himself as an artist. Convinced that the American artist must write of things and subjects American, Fuller yet knew that his own allegiance was to the postroads of Italy and to the creation of beauty by the exercise of the imagination. With William Dean Howells, Fuller foresaw that the immediate future of the American novel lay with the naturalist-reporter; but, with

Henry James, Fuller clung emotionally to the belief that form and perception are the essence of literature.

Throughout the decade, Fuller struggled to align himself with one side or the other. In 1895, after he had published his two Chicago novels, he could scarcely wait to get back to Italy. The literary result of his travels abroad in 1896-97 was *From the Other Side*, a volume of stories dealing with Europe. Back in Chicago he watched with growing distaste the events that moved the country into the Spanish-American War. His criticism of American conduct appeared in *The New Flag* (1899), verse satires as vitriolic and bitterly polemic as any ever directed by a writer towards his own country. In 1899, he concluded a decade of writing with another European book, *The Last Refuge: A Sicilian Romance*.

Fuller's work for the decade was about evenly divided between American realism and European romance. To the former, his commitment was that of a practical writer who knew that in this vein lay the future of the American novel. To the latter, his allegiance was that of a romantic worshipper of beauty and lover of art who saw no future for estheticism in American fiction. Under a very thin veneer of satire, he discussed his own problem and defended his artistic creed in *Under the Skylights* (1900).<sup>1</sup> The failure of his book to find a receptive audience convinced Fuller of the soundness of his estimate of the prospect ahead for the American novel. On the basis of what he considered the losing battle for romance, idealism, and imagination in art, Fuller decided to withdraw from competition.

## II

In the fifteen years following the publication of *Under the Skylights*, Henry Blake Fuller made no effort to write novels. Writing to William Dean Howells in 1909, Fuller declared that "repugnance toward writing fiction is now my normal state."<sup>2</sup> During these years Hamlin Garland's diaries furnish abundant,

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<sup>1</sup> See John Pilkington, "Henry Blake Fuller's Satire on Hamlin Garland," *University of Mississippi Studies in English*, VIII (1967), 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Fuller to William Dean Howells, April 16, 1909, by permission of the Houghton Library of Harvard University.

first-hand evidence of Fuller's lack of motive for writing, his abandonment of the novel form, and his pessimistic outlook. On one occasion, when Fuller arrived to spend the summer, Garland wrote: "Fuller came in and brought his trunks. . . . He gets more and more eccentric. I heard him talking to himself as he worked about his room. Just a pleasant running commentary on what he was doing and thinking. He has nothing to do now but trip from one friend to the next—a sheer waste of genius."<sup>3</sup>

At intervals, Fuller engaged in writing short pieces suitable for editorials and newspaper columns. For this kind of writing, he was eminently qualified by virtue of his wide reading, his expert knowledge of Chicago, and his vast fund of general information about architecture, sculpture, and literature. During 1900, a series of his editorials appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*;<sup>4</sup> and beginning with an article about Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* on June 9, followed on July 14 by an essay entitled "Civic Federation and Literature," Fuller became a contributor to the *Chicago Post*. During the following year, Fuller contributed to the paper, now known as the *Chicago Evening Post*, on a regular basis, writing a column for each Saturday's issue during the months of April through September. Generally, Fuller wrote about Chicago, American and European literature, and, less frequently, opera, sculpture, and painting.

From April 19, 1902, to March 28, 1903, Fuller actually took charge of the weekly literary supplement to the *Chicago Evening Post*. For each issue, he contributed a review-article or a column of general interest. In the forty-six articles which he wrote, Fuller discussed the work of such writers as Henry James, F. Marion Crawford, Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, William Dean Howells, Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and the leading contemporary Italian and Russian novelists. His articles about general literary subjects included such titles as "Erroneous Ideas about Prospects for the

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<sup>3</sup>Entry in Hamlin Garland's Diary, July 1, 1912; passages from Garland's diary are published by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>4</sup>Fuller's editorials include "Why Is the Anglo-Saxon Disliked?" January 6; "The Modern Man and Nature," January 20; "How to Make Good Aldermen," April 14; "A National Park at Lake Itasca," April 21; and "When in Doubt—Send Flowers," August 11.

'Great American Novel,' " "Is Great Literature of the Future to Come from American Continent?" "Increase in American Fiction of Aristocratic Social Ideals," and "Are Publishers Unjust to Young and Unknown Authors?"<sup>5</sup>

Again, in 1910, Fuller resorted to literary journalism. This time he contributed short pieces, most of them editorials, to the *Chicago Record Herald*. Shortly after he began, Garland noted in his diary that Fuller's outlook was improving and that the routine demanded by the work had proved particularly beneficial to him. In a spurt of activity, Fuller wrote fifteen hundred editorials in 1910-11 and about four hundred in 1913-14.<sup>6</sup> Although most of them are unsigned, the few pieces which bear his name and may be regarded as typical of the others deal with general subjects only tangentially related to literature.

Upon the seventy-odd pieces that he wrote between 1900 and 1903 for the *Chicago Evening Post* and the huge number that he produced between 1910 and 1914 for the *Chicago Record Herald*, Fuller lavished the same meticulous care in preparation and writing that in the past he had devoted to the composition of his novels; yet, except for a very small monetary reward and the slight advantage of regular publication, he gained little benefit from his hackwork. More than anything else, these ventures into literary journalism furnish additional evidence of his retreat from the center to the peripheral areas of literature and his compelling need to keep himself occupied.

From time to time, during these years, Fuller wrote short stories, though his average rate of production was less than one story each year. In 1908, he gathered together four of his stories which had already appeared in *Scribner's* and *The Century*, added to the group three new stories, and published the collection as *Waldo Trench and Others: Stories of Americans in Italy*.

As the sub-title implies, the seven stories were linked by the general theme of the American sojourner in such Italian cities as

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<sup>5</sup> The articles appeared, respectively, May 17, 1902; June 14, 1902; November 8, 1902; and February 7, 1903.

<sup>6</sup> See Constance M. Griffin, *Henry Blake Fuller: A Critical Biography* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), p. 63.

Rome, Florence, Venice, and Palermo. Immediately, reviewers called attention to the similarity between Fuller's work and that of Henry James. Because of the subject matter, the style, and, in several instances, the plot, Fuller's volume invited the comparison with James. "Eliza Hepburn's *Deliverance*," for example, was described as a "Fullerized 'Europe,'" while "A Coal from the Embers" was considered reminiscent of James's "The Aspern Papers."<sup>7</sup> No one, however, regarded Fuller as either an imitator or a follower of James.

While praising Fuller's technical skill in story-telling, his subtle stylistic effects, and his delicate humor, critics generally failed to notice the undercurrent of anti-American criticism in Fuller's work. He had taken a mildly critical attitude in his earlier European fiction; but in these pieces, written after the Spanish-American War, there was an edge to his remarks that was sharper than it had been in his previous work.

In "New Wine," for example, Fuller underscored his habitual distrust of American superiority and American willingness to meddle in other people's affairs. In this piece, an Italian nobleman, attracted to a young American girl, meets disaster when he applies American precepts to the Italian peasants on his estate. Fuller's criticism of the War with Spain lies behind the remark made to the Italian by Bannister Grayle, a wealthy young American tourist: "If the Americans admire a man who can humbug, how much more do they admire a man who can plunder!"<sup>8</sup> Even more pointedly, Miss Sibyl McChesney affirms that the Italian's peasants "merely ask that the car of Juggernaut shall roll over them. . . . Well, gratify them. Roll."<sup>9</sup>

American snobbery, crudity, and naivete appear throughout the stories. In "For the Faith," Philippa, a young instructor at a Connecticut academy, endeavors to absorb European culture in a few weeks' tour. Asked what she was trying to accomplish, Philippa replies: "I was trying to help America become the greatest ever. We need culture, and I was doing my best to

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<sup>7</sup> Clipping file, Henry Blake Fuller Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, *Waldo Trench and Others: Stories of Americans in Italy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), pp. 80-81.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

cultivate myself, and to aid those who depend on me for instruction and guidance."<sup>10</sup> In "Addolorata's Intervention," Fuller satirizes young Miss Addie Matthews, who is "more cultivated than Culture in Culture's most cultivated moments."<sup>11</sup> Although Miss Matthews has become "so completely Italianate as to call herself 'Addolorata,'"<sup>12</sup> she admits that "with every passing day I come to feel surer that, after all, I still view the great fundamentals through the atmosphere of my native Poughkeepsie."<sup>13</sup> Similar examples of Americans searching for culture in a Europe that they cannot, or will not, understand because American values oppose the fundamentals of humanistic culture may be found in the other stories in the volume.

The deep undercurrent of satire on the American tourist, however, is perhaps best seen in the title story, "Waldo Trench Regains His Youth." On board the *Macedonia*, a ship filled with Americans taking "guided tours" of Italy, Waldo Trench, a young man originally from Stapleville, Nebraska, but lately from Oklahoma, meets three other Americans also bound for Italy: Aurelius Gilmore, the narrator; Elizabeth Payne, a young woman in search of Culture; and Mrs. Madeline K. Pritchard, her aunt. All of the characters, except Mrs. Pritchard, a middle-aged woman from "near Cleveland," are going to Italy for "improvement." Having been around the world twice and spent the years of her youth in the mad pursuit of culture, Mrs. Pritchard has now "accomplished the grand circle" and reached the point "where culture, as a moving force, was genially ignored."<sup>14</sup> She is "reverting" to the present. She prefers her own "dialect" to correct grammar, the hand organ to a symphony, a French automobile show to an Italian painting gallery, and her own taste in contemporary furniture to that approved by *House Beautiful*. In sum, Mrs. Pritchard now lives in the present and enjoys her anti-cultural sentiments. She is one of Fuller's most lively and humorous characters.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The emphasis of Fuller's story, however, falls on Waldo Trench. In contrast to Mrs. Pritchard's attitude, Waldo Trench values the past. For him, antiquity is the only criterion of artistic merit; and as he hastens from period to period, backward in time, he finally reaches the Etruscans. He becomes excited about old Etruscan foundations (the walls have long since crumbled) until he encounters an Englishman who superciliously dismisses the Etruscans with the retort, "I'm after the Pelasgians."<sup>15</sup> When Trench learns that the Pelasgians are older than the Etruscans, he declares, "Then I've got to take them up right away."<sup>16</sup> Before Waldo can completely lose himself in the prehistoric past, he discovers his love for Miss Payne and they resolve to "remain modern."

In view of the admiration for the monuments of Etruscan culture that Fuller had voiced at the outset of his career in *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani*, his faintly contemptuous attitude in "Waldo Trench Regains His Youth" must be understood as a reflection of Fuller's changed attitude towards Europe. At fifty, as he conceived the character of Waldo Trench, Fuller may have felt that his own veneration for the past had restricted his full participation in life around him. Speaking through Mrs. Pritchard, Fuller's advice to young Waldo Trench was to forget the mysteries of prehistoric antiquities and instead to use his vigor, energy, and singleness of purpose in Oklahoma. At any event, Fuller was certain that—regardless of his own case—this course was the best one for Americans to pursue.

Literary journalism and the occasional composition of short stories were not the only literary activities which engaged Fuller's time during the years before America entered World War I. In 1912, Harriet Monroe, then about to found her remarkable and influential *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, invited Fuller to become the first member of its advisory committee. As a writer respected everywhere for his high standards of craftsmanship and his profound grasp of artistic principles, Fuller's name was an asset. Aware he had written no poetry, Miss Monroe believed, as she later wrote, that "he had a poet's

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



imagination and keen feeling for rhythm, and beauty of style."<sup>17</sup> Although Fuller helped her to discover new talent and to establish the progressive, even revolutionary, reputation of the magazine, his most sustained contribution lay in his editorial abilities. As Hamlin Garland, Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, Lorado Taft, and many others could affirm, Fuller was an editor and proof-reader without equal. Much of the excellence of *Poetry* was due to Fuller's high standards of writing and printing.

### III

In 1916, after ten years of silence, Fuller's interest in writing suddenly revived. "I am doing a set of 20-25 *vers libre* biographies for a book—each piece about 160-170 lines; many of them condensed short stories, in pseudo-poetic guise," he announced to an astonished Hamlin Garland.<sup>18</sup> "They touch miscellaneously on art, literature, stage, politics, society, sociology, psychics, morals, et cetera," continued Fuller; "I feel that I am escaping the multifarious deadening detail of the conventional short story."

As his comments implied, Fuller was trying to adapt the free verse form used by Edgar Lee Masters in *Spoon River Anthology* to the writing of short stories. Fuller believed, as he wrote in *The Dial*, that the contemporary American short story had become a "mass of deadwood," written by formula and hamstrung by conventions of description, characterization, and action. In its place, Fuller wished to substitute "the short story written in free verse," which he argued could be biographical, episodic, or semi-lyrical. Balancing "on the fence between poetry and prose," asserted Fuller, the free verse short story "can give in a single epithet the essence of a prose sentence, and in a single phrase the spirit of a prose paragraph."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Henry B. Fuller," *Poetry*, XXXV (October, 1929), 39; see also Harriet Monroe, *A Poet's Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 286; and Anna Morgan, ed., *Tributes to Henry B.* ([Chicago] Ralph Fletcher Seymour Publisher, 1929), p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Hamlin Garland, January 14, 1916; letters from Fuller to Garland are used by permission of the University of Southern California Library.

<sup>19</sup> "A New Field for Free Verse," *The Dial*, LXI (December 14, 1916), 515.

Within three months, Fuller had written twenty-five verse stories, most of them biographies, and was trying to place them for publication. Harriet Monroe accepted two for *Poetry*, Francis Hackett took two for *The New Republic*, and Houghton Mifflin Company agreed to publish all of them in a single volume. Edgar Lee Masters encouraged Fuller's experiment and helped to read the page proof of the book.

Early in February, 1917, Fuller's twenty-five free verse experiments were published as *Lines Long and Short*. Virtually all of the pieces were biographies, Fuller's preference, numerically at least, being slightly in favor of men over women. Although Fuller's tone was friendly, informal, even conversational, his customary playfulness and humor were lacking; instead, he sounded a pervasive note of sadness and futility. Almost invariably, youth appears as a time for activity, optimism, and adventure; middle-age follows as a cooling off period in which youthful hopes fade, disappointments multiply, and marriages crumble; and by sixty, the subject has either died in the knowledge of his failure or faces an empty, lonely old age. The monotony which results from this uniform pattern of ideas constitutes one of the principal weaknesses of Fuller's biographies.

The general content of Fuller's verse biographies, as well as their frequently close relationship to his own life, may be seen from the selections entitled "Tobias Holt, Bachelor" (the first piece in the volume) and "Postponement." At twenty, Tobias Holt displays the same interest in young ladies as the other men of his circle. At twenty-eight, he is still single. In his thirties, he often dines with his married friends and sends presents to their children; but as he approaches fifty, he finds that "Uncle Toby" must send more presents, learn more humorous stories, and lend more books than ever before to insure his continued welcome. At sixty-five, he is keeping busy but finding his life "rather bleak" as he lies ill in a boarding-house. Holt's vicarious living and his partial participation in life suggest Fuller himself. Significantly, Fuller refuses to write the ending, but affirms that "it's sad to be old, and alone."

Fuller's use of his own life for his verse biographies becomes almost painfully apparent in "Postponement." Except for the fact that the subject of this piece never visits Europe, the re-

relationship between Albert F. McComb and Henry B. Fuller appears remarkably close. At seventeen, after reading about Dickens' London, Ruskin's Venice, and the Italy of Raphael, Albert dedicates himself to the romance of the past in far-away places. At twenty-one, he takes a "position," but his heart is never in the business. At twenty-five, he refuses a share in the business for fear entanglements may prevent him from "crossing over" once he has saved enough money; and for the same reason, at twenty-six, he refuses marriage. While others make fortunes in the West, Albert lives mainly in the Italy of his imagination. At fifty-two, he finds he must help his grand-nieces with the grocery bills. Finally, "past sixty," when he suddenly inherits the money to cross over, the war prevents him from going. Albert retires, his eyes now "too dim to see the Here and Now, / Or to divine the local glories Just About to Be." Thus, the events of Albert's life seem to justify the comment of the few persons who remark upon his death at "sixty-odd," the comment with which Fuller prefaces the verse biography:

That he had lived a futile life,  
And that Europe was to blame:  
His continual hankering after the Old World  
Had made him a failure in the New.

Incidents from Fuller's own life, as well as many of his characteristic attitudes, may be found throughout the verse biographies. His antagonism to marriage, for example, appears in "Rigmarole," "Victory," "The Statue," "The Outsider," and "Chameleon." His views on single life provide materials for "Polly Greene," "Death of Aunt Juliana," and "Tobias Holt, Bachelor." His criticism of the emptiness of business life finds expression in "Aridity," "Toward Childhood," "Manners," and "The Day of Danger." Other sketches, such as "The Two Apprentices," "Alonzo Grout," "The Art of Life," and "Deliquescence," reflect the unhappiness and frustrations of the artist in America. Consistently, in *Lines Long and Short*, the characters are defeated men and women who have failed either to realize their potential or to achieve happiness in the field of their choice.

Both the merit and the weakness of Fuller's volume lie in his compression of material for a lengthy story into the space of a

few hundred lines of verse. At his best in sketches like "Tobias Holt, Bachelor" and "Postponement," Fuller develops convincingly a single aspect of a subject's life within remarkably few lines. On the whole, however, Fuller's free verse biographies suffer more than they gain from the compression necessitated by the form. For brevity, Fuller sacrifices the details of character and incident that would carry intellectual and emotional conviction to the reader. Probably, Fuller demanded too much from the form. Had he related his individual pieces, as Masters had done in *Spoon River Anthology*, or as Sherwood Anderson was to do in *Winesburg, Ohio*, Fuller might have been more successful. As it is, *Lines Long and Short* remains a collection of separate, free verse biographies possessing no essential organic unity.

In July, 1917, only six months after *Lines Long and Short* was published, Fuller completed *On the Stairs*, his first novel in eighteen years. The two books were related both in theory and in content. *Lines Long and Short* had been an effort to compress the short story form; in *On the Stairs*, Fuller attempted to compress the novel. Explaining his theory in an article entitled "A Plea for Shorter Novels," which appeared in *The Dial*, Fuller declared that "compressed form is itself one of the manifestations of force—an evidence of vigor."<sup>20</sup> The novelist, asserted Fuller, should be able to express himself adequately in 50,000 words instead of 90,000 which were required by the novel usually considered of "moderate length." Fuller intended *On the Stairs* to be an illustration of this principle.

The relationship between *Lines Long and Short* and *On the Stairs* extends beyond the form to the content. Despite the separate identities of the verse biographies, the lives of Fuller's characters fall into two distinct patterns: the subject whose career, in his alienation from Chicago, suggests that of Fuller himself; and the person who without serious questioning conforms to what the community expects of him. In *Lines Long and Short*, both avenues of development result in unhappiness. In many respects, *On the Stairs* is a longer, more poignant exposition of a similar theme.

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<sup>20</sup> "A Plea for Shorter Novels," *The Dial*, LXIII (August 30, 1917), 139.

With respect to construction and the symmetry of its design, *On the Stairs* approaches artistic perfection more nearly than any other novel by Fuller. The action takes place within an envelope of two incidents, both recounted in the opening pages. In 1873, Johnny McComas stands aside as Raymond Prince descends the main stairs of Grant's Private Academy. In 1916, Raymond Prince stands aside as Johnny McComas descends the marble stairway of the Mid-Continent National Bank. On both occasions, they exchange the same words of greeting. Fuller's objective in the remainder of the novel is to account for the reversal of their roles.

Raymond Prince, whose life resembles that of Fuller himself, represents the third generation of the family. His grandfather, Jehiel Prince, of New England ancestry, had founded the family fortunes; but in the hands of his son, James Prince, they had diminished rather than increased. Of the three men, Raymond is least capable, either by inclination or by temperament, of restoring the position of the Prince family in society. Raymond, in fact, develops a settled repugnance to business; rather, he devotes his life to music, literature, painting, and foreign travel. At fifty, having divorced his wife, he abandons his esthetic concerns and tries to recoup his financial affairs, only to recognize how totally unfit he is to compete in business enterprises. Forced to sell his house at a loss, Raymond moves into a bachelor's den in a private hotel. A lonely figure, no longer participating actively in life, he lives mainly in his memories of his European experiences, subscribes to a branch of the public library, and occasionally visits picture-exhibitions or attends musical concerts.

In almost every respect a sharp contrast to Raymond's ineffectual participation in the life of the city, the career of Johnny McComas seems remarkably successful. As Raymond moves downhill, Johnny rises from rags to riches. Beginning life in the stable behind the Prince mansion, Johnny becomes a crude but gregarious American "go-getter." He cares nothing for books or art; he lacks taste, refinement, and sensibility; but he possesses both the ability and the ambition to make money. After marrying a rich man's daughter, Johnny takes advantage of his father-in-law's capital to strengthen the financial position

of his bank, shrewdly concludes several lucrative "deals," and obtains private "tips" before investing his money in stocks. In every respect, Johnny conforms to the money-based standards of Chicago. Eventually, Johnny marries Raymond's former wife and adopts his son Albert. When Albert, in the final scene of the novel, marries Johnny's daughter by his first marriage, Raymond Prince has become "an unregarded and negligible spectator"<sup>21</sup> in one of the back pews of the church.

Outwardly at least, Johnny McComas, the crude, raw, vigorous force, wins everything, while Raymond Prince, the sensitive, cultured intellectual, declines, without even making a fight, to the level of vicarious participation, a passive "onlooker in life."<sup>22</sup> Though Fuller has refined his characterization, made Johnny hard but attractive through his activity, Johnny's affinities are yet with the cliff-dwellers and the money-makers. For all his gregariousness, Johnny has no real perception of the values of life, no worthwhile goal for his activity, and no desire to resist the pressures for conformity. His material prosperity and his ceaseless activity are achieved at the cost of the human spirit.

The major weakness of Fuller's novel, however, lies in the fact that instead of opposing the market-place values of Johnny with a positive assertion of the worth of humanistic pursuits, Fuller deliberately makes them lead to a life equally as futile as that of Johnny McComas. Raymond's lifelong interest in all of the arts leads eventually to the negation of the very humanistic spirit which culture is supposed to foster. In place of a "paradise within," Raymond creates his own private hell of loneliness, futility, and hopelessness. In the end, Fuller has stacked the cards against his own case and written his own sense of failure into his fictional character. Reading *On the Stairs*, Hamlin Garland recognized what Fuller had done. "Henry B.'s book came in today," wrote Garland in his diary (March 30, 1918), "and I read it at a sitting but it left a gray desolation in my spirit. What's the use?"

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<sup>21</sup> Fuller, *On the Stairs* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 265.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

In writing *On the Stairs*, Fuller had broken his long silence primarily to restate his case against Chicago and, beyond Chicago, America; but in the thirty-five years separating *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *On the Stairs*, Fuller's attitude had not changed greatly. In 1917, he still believed that the values of the marketplace were essentially false values and that the individual could best realize his potential as a human being through travel and an understanding of the several arts. The fact remains, however, that there was virtually nothing in *On the Stairs* that Fuller had not already written and written more forcefully during the decade of the nineties.

In both *Lines Long and Short* and *On the Stairs*, Fuller had been experimenting with new fictional techniques. In *Bertram Cope's Year*, his next novel, Fuller's choice of homosexuality as his subject matter was an experiment that amounted almost to a sensation. Despite the comparative freedom to deal with sexual relationships which had recently been won for the novel by such writers as Dreiser, Crane, and Norris, homosexuality as primary subject matter for a novel occurred so rarely in American fiction as to be virtually unknown. Moreover, in view of Fuller's long-standing aversion to the slightest hint of indelicacy in fiction—an aversion which colored his distaste for naturalistic fiction—his choice of the homosexual theme becomes very remarkable.

The plot of *Bertram Cope's Year* is developed with Fuller's usual care for the architectonics of fiction. As the novel opens, Bertram Cope, a young instructor at a small college in Wisconsin, has left behind his intimate friend, Arthur Lemoyne, to return to the university at Churchton for graduate study. Cope quickly enters the social circle of Mrs. Medora Phillips, a widow, whose house shelters, in addition to herself and her late husband's half-brother, Joseph Foster, three artistically minded young women—Amy Leffingwell, Hortense Dunton, and Carolyn Thorpe. Mrs. Phillips also includes among her select friends Basil Randolph, described by Fuller as a graying “scholar *manqué*,” who, though not an alumnus himself, likes to participate vicariously in academic life and who “would have

enjoyed knowing, and knowing intimately,"<sup>23</sup> a few select young men at the institution.

Bertram Cope rapidly becomes the object of the attentions of all the leading characters. For a time, Amy Leffingwell traps him into an engagement from which he scarcely escapes before he becomes entangled, successively, by Hortense Dunton and Carolyn Thorpe. Although Cope remains cold and indifferent to the advances of all the women, he responds warmly to both Arthur Lemoyne and to Basil Randolph. To obtain room to entertain Cope on weekends, Randolph moves to a larger apartment, but Randolph proves no match for his younger rival, Arthur Lemoyne. At Cope's insistence, Lemoyne comes to the university and immediately asserts his claim to Cope's affections. Unfortunately, Lemoyne, after playing the part of a girl in a campus play, makes suggestive gestures toward another male student, an act which brings about his dismissal. Cope leaves the university with him; and after the two young men spend several days together, Cope implies in a letter to Mrs. Phillips that they have gone their separate ways.

*Bertram Cope's Year* is an unsuccessful novel. Its fatal weakness lies not so much in Fuller's choice of homosexuality for his subject matter as in his failure to deal adequately with the impact of sexual abnormality upon the lives of his characters. Although he supplies abundant evidence of the homosexual tendencies of all the major male characters, he never once indicates the tension or the emotional conflicts which accompany or result from their sexual deviations. To have probed the inner psychological problems of his characters would, of course, have violated Fuller's sense of delicacy; but his failure to deal with this aspect of his subject makes the introduction of the material rather pointless and the novel more sensational than meaningful.

After finishing *Bertram Cope's Year* in May, 1918, Fuller negotiated with several New York firms for publishing it; but, probably because of its subject matter, he could not reach agreement with any of them. Eventually, his friend, Ralph Sey-

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<sup>23</sup> Fuller, *Bertram Cope's Year* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1919), p. 13.



mour, who printed *Poetry*, brought out the novel more than anything else as a favor to Fuller. When it appeared in October, 1919, very few copies were sold, and it was generally ignored in the periodical press. Sometime later, Fuller collected the unbound sheets from Seymour and destroyed them.

## IV

Between 1917 and 1919, Fuller had published three books, none of which, from his point of view, had been successful. Friendly critics had praised his experiments in *Lines Long and Short* and *On the Stairs*, but *Bertram Cope's Year* had encountered either mild hostility or silence. Once again, Fuller retired from the field. "My disrelish for the writing-and-publishing game," wrote Fuller to Garland (May 22, 1920), "is now absolute. There seems to be no way for one to get read or paid, so—Shutters up."

So far as writing novels was concerned, Fuller kept the shutters up until the last few months before his death in 1929; yet, even though he was aware that his major work had been completed with the publication of *Bertram Cope's Year*, Fuller by no means withdrew from literary affairs. His knowledge of the history of artistic movements in Illinois, particularly Chicago, brought him in 1920 an invitation to write two chapters in *The Centennial History of Illinois*; and Fuller's contributions to the multi-volume historical survey, "Development of Arts and Letters" and "The Growth of Education, Art, and Letters," were widely acknowledged as authoritative.<sup>24</sup>

In the years following, Fuller read first manuscript and then page proof for the still publishing Hobart Chatfield-Taylor, Lorado Taft, and Hamlin Garland, in whose literary autobiographies Fuller's name appears repeatedly. He limited his own writing to the composition of literary articles for a number of prominent journals. A list of the periodicals for which Fuller wrote would include *The Freeman*, *The New Republic*, *The*

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<sup>24</sup> Respectively, Chap. IX, Vol. IV, *The Industrial State, 1870-1893*, by Ernest Ludlow Bogart and Charles Manfred Thompson, and Chap. II, Vol. V., *The Modern Commonwealth, 1893-1918*, by Ernest Ludlow Bogart and John Mabry Matthews; both volumes in *Centennial History of Illinois*, ed. Ernest Ludlow Bogart and Charles Manfred Thompson (Springfield, Illinois: The Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920).

*Nation*, *The Bookman*, *Commonweal*, *Poetry*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, and *Literary Digest International Book Review*. In addition, Fuller contributed articles for the literary sections of the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Evening Post*, and the *New York Herald-Tribune*.

The majority of Fuller's articles for these periodicals may scarcely be called hackwork. Beginning with his review-articles for *The Dial*, which he wrote between 1917 and 1919, Fuller's incisive analysis and thoughtful criticism of literature and art, mostly non-fiction, generally determined the editorial attitude of the journal for which he was writing. Particularly in *The Freeman* was Fuller's commentary influential. His articles on James Branch Cabell, Giles Lytton Strachey, Preserved Smith, Percy Lubbock, Henry James, and Hamlin Garland were widely admired and acknowledged as authoritative expressions of conservative literary opinion.<sup>25</sup> His prominence as a nationally-known reviewer brought his own work to the attention of such men as Carl Van Vechten, Van Wyck Brooks, Francis Hackett, H. L. Mencken, and Carl Van Doren. To his amusement and immense satisfaction, Fuller found himself in the position of being almost "revived" as a novelist at the very time that he had abandoned the writing of novels.

In the spring of 1924, Fuller proudly noted that in the past year he had written sixty articles, reviews, and short stories. Financed in part by this writing and in part by the maturing of a thousand-dollar bond, Fuller, now sixty-seven and not in the best of health, determined to make one more visit to Europe before settling down, as he wrote Garland late in March, "for the finish." In a fashion reminiscent of the Freiherr's journey through Italy with young Bruno in *The Last Refuge*, Fuller planned to make the trip with William Emery Shepherd, a senior at the University of Illinois. At twenty-two, Shepherd was, as Fuller pointed out, the same age as he had been when he made his first European tour. Through March and April, as Fuller mapped their itinerary with his usual thoroughness, there were moments when he felt he really did not wish to make the

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<sup>25</sup>See Susan J. Turner, *A History of the Freeman* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 112-115.

journey. So late as May 1, replying to Garland's own doubts about wanting to visit London, Fuller noted that "off and on, I feel that way myself—sort of wishing, every few days, that I wasn't going, after all."

Early in June, after several days' sightseeing in New York, Fuller and Shepherd sailed for England. In London, they met Hamlin Garland, a solitary sightseer, eager for Fuller's companionship. Garland thought his old friend looked tired and ready to "quit and go home if he could decently do so."<sup>26</sup> After spending several weeks in England, Fuller and Shepherd remained in Paris for ten days, then traveled through Switzerland down into Italy. "My boy is not learning travel," wrote Fuller, August 9, from Venice. "Travel is a chore," he continued, "a job, almost a cross; and you were well advised to keep to the comforts and conveniences of London."

After his European tour in 1924, Fuller's output of articles declined. Much of his time was occupied with visits to the Garlands and other friends, the proof-reading of his friends' manuscripts, and discussions of literary matters. In the evenings, he liked to play dominoes or "hearts" with the Garland family. In the summer of 1926, Garland doubted that Fuller would ever write much more, but he affirmed that Fuller, whose hair and beard had long since turned white, was still the most satisfactory companion of his old age.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Garland, January 1, 1927, from Chicago, Fuller wrote that he was "beginning New Year's at a new address—no damn Kitchenettters swarming on all hands." Fuller's reference was to a roominghouse on Harper Avenue, the last of a long succession of rooming houses in which he had lived during the past three decades. Here, by himself, as he wished, Fuller lived the remaining two years of his life; and, here, to the vast astonishment of his friends, he wrote two more novels and even began a third before the heart attack that ended his life.

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<sup>26</sup> Garland's Diary, June 28, 1924; in successive revisions to his diaries, Garland added emphasis to the passages referring to Fuller's disappointment over the trip with Shepherd; and in *Afternoon Neighbors* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), pp. 182-183, Garland phrased the matter very bluntly.

<sup>27</sup> See Garland, *Afternoon Neighbors*, pp. 130, 139.

On his seventy-second birthday, January 9, 1929, after a silence of ten years, Fuller was once more writing a novel. On January 14, he wrote Garland:

Did I mention a book? Well, there is one; so far along now, that I feel quite sure of it. Wheeled in on Dec. 30, and have written 27,000 words (twice over—well typewritten) in sixteen days; fourteen chaps.—there may be 20-22. I'm sorry to say, however, that the book is of a type you won't care for: a travel-fiction *de fantaisie*, centering about the Mediterranean, and taking in everything from the Alps to the Sahara. I have taken some of the Characters from my early Italian books for the "stock" of the soup and have added new, present-day types for every spoonful—folks of all varieties and of all nationalities. It all seems to come very easily, as you may judge—right of the air; but whether it will find a publisher is another *question*—and I can't afford to print another book at my own expense.

Before the end of January, Fuller had finished his novel, entitled *Gardens of This World*, sent the manuscript to a publisher, and begun a second novel.

At intervals, Fuller kept Garland informed of his progress. By the beginning of April, Fuller had written two-thirds of the new volume which he was to call *Not on the Screen*; and by the end of May, Alfred A. Knopf had issued contracts for both books. "Life for Henry, you see," he wrote Garland on May 25, "is getting down to a matter of credit: he wants to finish up not only emphatically but *well*. To add to the emphasis, if not to the well-ness, he is now in his third book, having written the first chapter." In the same letter, he added, "I've never felt more write—y nor had a better run of ideas (am just *ailing enough* to make them come!)."

The theme of *Gardens of This World* arises from Fuller's belief that there are places where for a moment at least the sensitive individual may effectively shut out of his life "the

ugly, the banal, the wide wastes of horror."<sup>28</sup> To discover these gardens, the Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani and the Seigneur of Hors-Concours, now old men, begin a journey in Paris. Their quest leads them through France, Spain, Morocco, along the shores of the Mediterranean, Italy, and back again to Paris. Each of the twenty-four chapters of the novel contains a separate episode which may conceivably relate to the principal theme; but, as the novel progresses, the gardens motif becomes secondary to the individual incidents. Indeed, after the early chapters, only the reappearance of the same characters provides the book with a semblance of unity.

Fuller enjoyed bringing back to fictional life the characters who had been admired in his early "idealistic travel-fiction." His readers, who remembered *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani*, *The Chatelaine of La Trinité*, and *The Last Refuge*, encountered all the important figures, and many of the minor characters, in *Gardens of This World*. In addition to the Chevalier and Hors-Concours, those whom Fuller revived included the Chatelaine of La Trinité, now the head of a Protestant sisterhood in Lausanne; Aurelia West, now Madame la Comtesse Aurélia de Feuillevolante, of Paris; Tempo-Rubato, now the Duke of Largo; and the Freiherr von Kaltenau. The Prorege of Arcopia, the Duke of Avon and Severn, and George W. Occident have died; but, in part, at least, their places have been taken by the Duke's nephew, who has succeeded to the title, and by Occident's son, an aviator.

Although Fuller tried once again to evoke the charm of Europe that he had conveyed effectively to American readers in his early work, he was only partly successful. In the Freiherr's farewell to Italy, the reader finds a trace of Fuller's earlier, romantic mood: "Never had cypresses seemed deeper, denser, more heavily burdened with the centuries. Never had closer shadows been thrown; never had a white town, an azure lake, a purpling headland behind it, shown through aged trunks with a

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<sup>28</sup> Fuller, *Gardens of This World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), p. 3.

greater intensity of charm.”<sup>29</sup> Such passages as this one are exceptional. On the whole, Fuller did not succeed in conveying the charm of these gardens, because they no longer held a charm for him. Instead of the romantic glow of the Italian countryside that he had rendered convincingly in *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani*, Fuller constructed in *Gardens of This World* a novel whose characters move across a bright, gleaming surface that is polished but unconvincing.

In one of his last letters to Garland (June 10, 1929), Fuller remarked that he had written *Gardens of This World* to please himself but that *Not on the Screen* was very much a different matter. “It’s Chicago to-day,” declared Fuller. “Clubs, opera, football, teas, prize-fights, art-exhibits, kept women, private fisticuffs, police, bathing parties, ‘orgies,’ etc. etc. That is to say, it’s a *rihthanded* version of a lefthanded ‘film’ society-story. Fun to do—and it means something. It’s got sense.”

As his comments about the work implied, Fuller intended *Not on the Screen* to show how a novelist using the technique of realism would develop a plot which in the motion pictures had been melodrama. As the novel opens, a young couple, Embert Howell and Evelyn Trent, are watching a motion picture. On the screen they see a melodrama in which a mother opposes a young man’s courtship of her daughter because the family fortunes may be saved by the marriage of the daughter to a wealthy, middle-aged, immoral businessman. Just as the businessman’s mistress is about to entrap him and the young suitor is about to be arrested by the police, Embert reminds Evelyn that “this is about where we came in,” and the couple leave the theatre. In the novel which follows, Fuller narrates these same events, “not on the screen,” but as they take place in the ordinary lives of Embert and Evelyn. Fuller gives the plot a happy ending in which true love defeats the scheming mother and middle-aged suitor.

As a novel of social realism, Fuller’s work has serious shortcomings. Despite his objection to the motion picture plot as melodramatic, Fuller’s own work suffers from the same weak-

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

ness, since the story develops out of incidents rather than from character. None of the characters comes alive; most of them, particularly the bond-salesman hero, Embert Howell, seem wooden figures which Fuller manipulates like the counters on a checkerboard. The strength of *Not on the Screen* lies in its general architectural outline, but Fuller's failure to work out the details in a credible manner almost overwhelms the excellence of his original design. This same weakness had been apparent earlier both in *The Last Refuge* and *On the Stairs*. Neither *Gardens of This World* nor *Not on the Screen* added greatly to Fuller's reputation, and very likely the same comment would have been valid for the novel which he left unfinished at his death in 1929.

## V

More than anything else, Fuller's career after 1900 demonstrates the strength and persistence of the emotional and intellectual conflicts in his personality. Probably no one knew better than Fuller what had happened in the last thirty years of his life. As he had written in *Lines Long and Short*, "his continual hankering after the Old World/Had made him a failure in the New." Fuller knew that in the first half of the 1890's he had made his point about the issues between Europe and America. By 1900 he also realized that he had really no more to say about these issues. Wisely, it seems now, he abandoned fiction and turned to criticism; but as the years passed, he could not resist the temptation to return to the novel form, even when he must have known that he had nothing new to add to his old themes and little to offer for new themes. Probably what overpowered his critical judgment was his desire to finish strong, to add to his place in American letters, to make a comeback. The aftermath was not successful.

Possibly Fuller made one serious error in his self-criticism. He overlooked his capacity for satire. He possessed a profoundly analytical mind and a remarkable sense of humor. The former provided him with penetrating insight and incisive comment upon men and issues, while the latter gave him the detachment essential to the satirist's art. His volume of satirical novelettes, *Under the Skylights*, provides an excellent example of his talent

in this field. Had Fuller worked this vein, his career would have taken a different turn after 1900, and he might have turned his inner conflicts into new and artistically significant channels. Had he continued to write satire, the aftermath might have been different.

Fuller's case remains one of the most interesting facets of American literature. Not strong enough to rank with William Dean Howells and not imaginative enough to challenge Henry James, Fuller yet provides an outstanding example of the American writer caught between the romantic notions of the past, far away places, and Old World beauty and the solid realities of New World materialism. Very likely, he is not the last sensitive American whose career will be shaped by the conflict of these forces.