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To

John Pilkington
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THE ARCHITECTURE OF SOCIETY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SOUL: Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* and Melville's *Pierre*
Curtis Dahl
Wheaton College

I

By now it is a cliché that American authors have been wont to express deep and searching ideas through architectural symbols. In many American authors, however, the symbolism goes beyond mere house images and becomes inherent in an architectural style or in the contrasts between several architectural styles. Thus the Gothic style of Poe's *House of Usher* ("Gothic" in both architectural and literary sense), the Dutch Colonial style of Irving's *Van Tassel* farmhouse, and the French architecture of Faulkner's *Sutpen Hundred* all have connotative significance. In *Walden* Thoreau compares his simple hut with "a house in the Grecian or the Gothic style" and even with the Neoclassical United States Bank in Philadelphia and Gothic Trinity Church. Fitzgerald sets Gatsby's Châteauésque nouvelle-riche monstrosity against the traditional American Colonial Revival style of the Buchanans' seaside "cottage" and against Nick's modest bungalow with its Midwestern connotations. Similarly, no one can read Howells' great novel of Boston, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, without being struck by the finesse with which Howells uses buildings and styles—South End row house, speculative Back Bay brownstone, red-roofed Nantasket cottage, Brookline stone residence, traditional Beacon Hill Georgian, and new Beacon Street Colonial Revival—to objectify the cultural nuances of the city's neighborhoods and the novel's differing characters.

Both Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville stand firmly within this peculiarly American tradition of architectural imagery and symbolism, and both are sensitive not only to the significance of buildings but to the connotations of specific styles. Indeed, anyone who thinks over the buildings in Hawthorne's novels cannot fail to be struck with his meaningful use of them. One need only name them: in *The Scarlet Letter* the prison house, the governor's mansion, Hester's cottage outside the village, the scaffold (if indeed a scaffold is a building); in *The Blithedale Romance* the dormitory and farm at Blithedale, the hotel in Boston, Hollingsworth's imaginary house for criminals; in *The Marble Faun*, the catacombs, the church of the
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Capuchins, the Cenci palace, Hilda's tower in Rome with its white doves and statue of the Virgin subtly contrasted with Donatello's ivy-grown "pagan" tower at Monte Beni. His stories and sketches, too, are rich in significant buildings: the Old Manse, a quiet hermitage beside the barely moving river; the dark, gloomy old mansion in Padua whose window opens upon Dr. Rappacini's poisonous garden; the lime kiln in "Ethan Brand" with its fiery door an entrance, like that in Pilgrim's Progress, into Hell; Peter Goldthwaite's ruinous house; the shabby Province House, still with its grand, ghost-trodden staircase; the Hall of Fantasy, a strange admixture of Grecian, Gothic, Oriental, and Moorish styles—more different styles, Hawthorne satirically remarks, than even an American architect would be apt to combine. Think too of Melville's many significant buildings. The Spouter Inn, the Whalenmen's Chapel, Hosea Hussey's boarding-house the Try Pots, Captain Peleg's wigwam on the deck of the Pequod, the bower in the Arsacides in Moby-Dick; the vine-covered cottages of Staten Island, the old ruined fort by the Narrows with green pastures in its heart, the areaway in the Liverpool slums, the charming cottage outside the city, the ornate gambling den in London in Redburn; the plan of the narrator's walled-in office, Gothic Trinity Church, the Egyptian Revival Tombs prison in "Bartleby"; the Bunker Hill Monument, the Templars' ancient secret cell of penance in Squire Woodcock's Elizabethan Country house, the London sewers in Israel Potter; the Renaissance campanile in "The Bell Tower"—all these and many other examples testify to Melville's lifelong fascination with architectural imagery. Indeed, even the patterns of construction of his ships—particularly of the Neversink in White Jacket and the Bellipotent in Billy Budd—have obvious meanings: the hold and the foretop are two different worlds, the one hinting at the Pit, the other of Heaven.

Instead of entering on an exhaustive analysis of the connotations of specific buildings and architectural styles in the fiction of the two authors, I should like in this essay to suggest that the uses of buildings and architectural style in the two may indicate something about the basic concerns of each. My thesis is that Hawthorne's buildings reflect a primary concern with men and women in society while Melville's, in contrast, are more often representative of the individual soul or psyche. Hawthorne's architectural symbolism generally looks outward, Melville's generally inward. For such a study the best texts by far are Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables (1851) and Mel-
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Melville's *Pierre* (1852) and "I and My Chimney" (1856). *The House of the Seven Gables* is not only centered in a house image but also intricately plays against the architectural style of that central image a rich variety of other styles in order to make primarily social comment. In contrast, as Vicki Halper Litman has indicated in her excellent article on Melville's use of the stereotypical connotations various kinds of buildings held for early-nineteenth-century Americans, Melville most fully exploits architectural symbolism in the novel *Pierre* and the short story "I and My Chimney." The buildings, as Litman shows, through their conventional symbolic "language" of architectural shape, materials, and color reveal traits of character. Even more importantly, I suggest, they themselves stand as externalizations—what Melville terms "shrines"—of the inner psyches of the men and women whom Melville has created. They type the soul.

II

Though *The House of the Seven Gables* centers in the decaying old Pyncheon mansion itself, it juxtaposes around that central image buildings in other architectural styles, each of which has telling and indeed sometimes witty or satirical significance in relation to the others. Too many critics have analyzed the symbolism of the House itself2 for me to need to do so at any length. Its lovingly sketched but not entirely authentically Elizabethan or Jacobean architecture has meaning on several levels. It is the "Gothic" of the romances of horror and blood, of portraits that live, ghostly music, and secret cupboards. Its ancient style, now old-fashioned and decayed, suggests the Pyncheons' aristocratic heritage. The Gothic house is not only a house in the physical sense but also a family or "house" in the same sense as Poe's House of Usher. In a more pedestrian way its dark, somber, age-stained rooms, its dusty little shop, its dry rot and damp rot, its high arched window looking out on the street, its barred doors, and its cloistered garden represent the tarnished pride, isolation, and decayed fortunes of its inhabitants. Hawthorne is never tired of insisting on these meanings.

But other buildings less overlaid with symbolic meaning also play vital roles in the significance of the romance. They too are based on actual Salem prototypes, some of them indeed more closely than the House itself. They too are carefully chosen, and their styles also have implicit symbolic values all the more effective, perhaps, because
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less insisted upon.

The most clearly symbolic of the buildings other than the House itself is probably the Judge’s “elegant-country-seat” a few miles outside of Salem to which at the end of the novel all the main characters remove. From the darkness and gloom of the past, from the shadow of the Judge and his ancestor the Colonel, the now united Pyncheons and Maules, reconciled by love, come to what Hawthorne calls an “excellent piece of domestic architecture.”3 Hawthorne does not specifically identify its architectural style, but since he is writing in 1851 and sets his story “at an epoch not very remote from the present day” (p. 6), it is not unreasonable to imagine the Judge’s elegant new-style country retreat as being built in the Italianate villa style popularized by the landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing in his influential book The Architecture of Country Houses, published in 1850, only a year before The House of the Seven Gables. Modern, light, cheerful, set among landscaped grounds, it is the antithesis of the gloomy old House squeezed on its narrow city lot and embodies a typical 1850’s architectural reaction against both the dark sternness of Puritan Gothic and the chilly rationality of Salem’s eighteenth-century Federal style. It has a scent of gardens about it; Alice Pyncheon would have loved it. It combines luxuriousness and foreign sophistication with naturalness and grace. In it, though he does not precisely specify architectural style and no particular house near Salem can be definitely identified as its model, Hawthorne as effectively uses nineteenth-century architectural idiom as he more explicitly uses seventeenth-century in the old House. The villa has meaning not only as counterpoint to the ancient House but in its own stylistic right too.

Though there is no actual model for the villa, there is for the railroad station through which Hepzibah and Clifford pass in their pathetic abortive flight from the old House and its blood-smeared corpse. The “large structure of gray stone” with “arched entrance,” “a spacious breadth,” and “an airy height from floor to roof” (p. 255) is emphatically the Salem railroad station, a few still extant parts of which are visible in Salem today. Built in 1847 to designs by the well known Gridley Bryant, architect of the old Boston City Hall, it was practically brand new when Hawthorne was writing.5 Though today its two high crenelated towers of polygonal granite masonry flanking a flattened arch over the tracks would seem odd and old-fashioned, in 1851 to Hawthorne and his first readers its impressive, monumental facade must have appeared the acme of modern progress and indus
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try. With its hints of Norman and even ecclesiastical Gothic, it was a Temple of Modern Progress. Through its mighty arch, Hepzibah and poor Clifford embark upon the swift and pointless railroad journey in which, echoing the earlier radicalism of Holgrave, Clifford descants crazily yet meaningfully on the need to give up the idea of settled hearth and home and return to man’s early nomadic state. Modern technological progress, however, symbolized by train and station, takes the two old people nowhere. Giving up radical ideas of flight from the burden of the past, they must return to the old House and come to terms with the past which it represents before they can escape to the charming new country house. Not by modern progress, however grand its Temple, but by a return to love through Phoebe and Holgrave can life become again natural and good. Impressive though it be, the modern railroad station is not (as Hawthorne indicates in “The Celestial Railroad” also) the entrance to the Heavenly Kingdom. Though it seems to represent movement and swift change, its heavy granite battlemented towers also symbolize that immovable permanence of stone or brick to which in his radical days Holgrave objects. Even the radical Fourierist phalanx, built at Brook Farm after Hawthorne’s departure and obliquely referred to in the description of Holgrave (p. 176), unfused with spirit can, as The Blithedale Romance shows, become a prison rather than a heavenly mansion.

In addition to the obviously symbolic small ruined “wasteland” church which confronts the two elderly fugitives when they alight at the isolated way-station (p. 266), there are three other buildings whose styles are skilfully given meaning. The first is old Matthew Maule’s hut. Situated on the site which grasping Colonel Pyncheon covets for his mansion, it is variously called a “hut,” “rude hovel,” and “cottage.” It is built of logs and roofed with thatch (pp. 6-7). Though later research has shown that real log cabins were not generally built in early New England and that the first settlers’ houses were more apt to be dug-outs excavated in hillsides and roofed over with branches and sod, Hawthorne’s description is basically not an inaccurate one. It is certainly a symbolic one. Matthew Maule merely swept away the forest leaves, cut his logs, and when his hut was finished wove the thatch as a roof. Nature under it, nature around it, nature over it, this unsophisticated hut was indeed an early settler’s first dwelling, but it was also, set beside a crystal stream of pure water, a bower in Eden. Alas, greed destroys the Edenic cottage, embitters the spring,
builds a cursed house on the spot. Again the architectural elements have meaning.

Against this hut encountered at the very beginning of the novel are set two other buildings, both of them homes, or possible homes, of old Uncle Venner, another wise and prophetic old man whose age and innocent insight also at first seem to have brought him only poverty and hardship. The first of these is that building which Uncle Venner affectionately yet pathetically talks about as his “farm.” He will have to go to his “farm” when he no longer can care for himself. He looks forward, he frequently says, to joining his friends at his “farm.” In reality, of course, he means the Salem poor farm, workhouse, or Almshouse. Any New Englander of Hawthorne’s day would have known what the town “farm” meant. But, like the Salem railroad station, the Salem Almshouse of Hawthorne’s time was unusual. It had been built in 1816 to designs by the famous architect Charles Bulfinch, designer of many of the finest and most aristocratic buildings of Boston. Though modern architectural historians have disparaged it as ungainly and Bulfinch himself decried it, it was long considered one of the sights of the city, and when President Monroe visited Salem in 1817, he was taken to see it. A “great brick house” vaguely Georgian colonial in style, in many respects it ironically resembled the great mansions by McIntire on magnificent Chestnut Street. Thus had he gone to his “farm,” Uncle Venner would ironically have risen to the most aristocratic of architectural styles and lived in a building designed not by a mere local McIntire but by the premier architect of Boston, the builder of the State House itself. Hawthorne is thus half-seriously, half-satirically, playing with the cold Georgian “grandeur” of the poor house. At the same time he may be making fun of his wealthy Salem neighbors whose mansions resemble—the almshouse! Are they too not in some sense mendicant Uncle Venners wheeling their gilded wheelbarrows through the streets to beg table scraps for their hogs? There are many satiric changes one may ring on these themes.

But old Uncle Venner, a thoroughly Dickensian character in a thoroughly Romantic novel, of course does not go to the Almshouse, Bulfinch Georgian though it may be. Instead he gladly gives up his great “mansion” to take up his abode in “the prettiest little, yellowish-brown cottage you ever saw; and the sweetest-looking place, for it looks just as if it were made of gingerbread” (p. 317). This cottage is situated in Holgrave’s and Phoebe’s garden and is a picturesque
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outbuilding, characteristic of the time, of their new estate, the Judge's country house. The typical Victorian yellowish-brown color, the mention of “gingerbread” (which also recalls the voracious little urchin at the beginning of the novel), and the emphasis on its “prettiness” and “sweetness” establish almost certainly Uncle Venner’s new home as one of those delightfully fantastically curlicued garden carpenter Gothic “cottages” pictured in Downing and so highly favored by builders of country estates in the 1840’s and 1850’s. Everyone built them. But here in the last chapter of Hawthorne’s novel the style of this Gothic garden cottage has great significance. On one level, especially in its being called a “cottage” and in its setting in a garden where the water is not bitter and the once stunted chickens grow large, it harks back to Matthew Maule’s thatched hut. Indeed, some nineteenth-century garden houses actually were thatched. But though close to nature, this is no “rude novel.” It is a conscious, sophisticated return to simplicity—not to the simplicity of primal Eden but to the ornamented, “gingerbread,” picturesque simplicity of a nineteenth-century garden. This, as Phoebe says, is “our new garden” (p. 317; my italics). It is Eden Regained in a cultivated, partly humorous, partly sentimental, self-conscious Romanticism that is aptly symbolized by the playful Gothic Revival style. The architecture, ultimately based partly on Ruskinian theories of a conscious return to natural form, fits effectively.

On another level, moreover, its Gothic plays against the somber seventeenth-century Jacobean American Gothic of the House of the Seven Gables. It is cheerful, fanciful, amusing, light, comfortable. There is indeed the seriousness of Greek tragedy standing behind the frequent sentimentalism of Hawthorne’s novel: Uncle Venner will soon die. But the exterior of the rest of his life will be cheerful. From the deep gloom (as Hawthorne feels it) of the early colonial Gothic, with its Gothic-novel overtones of supernatural horror, inherited curses, strange death, and beauty-killing imprisonment, the novel has advanced through early-nineteenth-century Georgian, Italian villa style, and the new, partly Romanesque granite railroad style to a new Gothic of picturesqueness, sentiment, and half-humor, a Gothic largely disburdened of its sad old overtones yet keeping enough true feeling and seriousness to be more than mere dancing around a may-pole in Merrymount. We have thus made a full circle but have arrived at a different place. “All human progress,” Clifford has said on the train,
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is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal. The past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and the future. (pp. 259-260)

Whitman or Yeats could not have said it better: we “perne in a gyre.” Uncle Venner has a new Gothic cottage in a new Eden; Holgrave and Phoebe have a new Italianate villa not in the old fields of Etruria but in a now more cultivated, more cultured, and sunnier America.

Though it is not embodied in an actual building playing a role in the story, one more use of architectural style in the novel should be noticed. It occurs in Chapter 15 when the Judge, hearing that old Clifford has returned, with malignant purpose comes to confront him and is met by Hepzibah. Hawthorne there describes in architectural terms the whitened sepulcher, the “sculptured and ornamented pile of ostentatious deeds,” the “tall and stately edifice” of good “done in the public eye,” that the Judge has hypocritically reared over the “half-decayed, and still decaying” corpse of his secret guilt. This metaphorical palace of pride, with its “splendid halls and suites of spacious apartments… floored with a mosaic-work of costly marbles,” its windows of “the most transparent of plate-glass” “the whole height of each room,” its high gilded cornices, “ceilings gorgeously painted,” and “lofty dome” (p. 230) is obviously in the Renaissance or Baroque style so harshly attacked by implication in The Stones of Venice for its coldness and flamboyant dishonesty. Hawthorne, though perhaps also influenced by the Oriental horror-novel such as Beckford’s Vathek or by Tennyson’s “The Palace of Art,” had clearly been reading Ruskin. Again architectural style takes on unspoken significance.

In this last passage the architecture does indeed have a personal and individual bearing: the baroque palace is an extended metaphor for the hypocritical soul of Judge Pyncheon. But it is only a metaphor in the mind of the author: it does not exist as an actual building in terms of the story. The other buildings of the story—those that do play actual parts in the fictional reality of the novel—reveal for the most part not their inhabitants’ inner states but their inhabitants’ relation or lack of relation to the society around them. It is true that Hawthorne paints the House of the Seven Gables itself with a human countenance (p. 5) and even as having “a great human heart, with a life of its own,
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and full of rich and somber reminiscences” (p. 27). It is true also that in many respects, for instance in its massively heavy framework yet secret recesses, it represents, in much the same way as the baroque palace, its owners Jaffrey Pyncheon and his ancestor Colonel Pyncheon. But even it, though it is also (like Poe’s House of Usher) a figure for the psychic decay of an old family and the ruined lives of Clifford and Hepzibah, basically expresses social values. The barred doors between the parts of the old mansion represent social isolation; its bloody portrait represents corrupt family pride; the bitter well and stunted chickens represent a fall from nature; its darkness and decay represent the passing of an aristocratic social system and the ultimate catastrophe that may come from an attempt to found a family line in America. Even its ghosts—embodied in the music of Alice Pyncheon’s harpsichord and the wan figure of Clifford—have been torn from life not so much by moral as by social wrong, the one by her own class pride, the other by the Judge’s greed for wealth and power.

The other buildings in the novel are even more outward-looking. Matthew Maule’s rude thatched hovel built beside a pure spring in the virgin forest is a bower in Eden, a house in a Saturnian age, that innocent era before greed and perverted law had embittered the clear rills of the Garden. Colonel Pyncheon’s seizure of Maule’s land, judicial murder of Maule himself, and destruction of the hut is a social rather than an individual or moral crime. The gray granite railroad station with its great swallowing and disgorging arch and billowing smoke and steam is clearly the devouring dragon of the hectic new industrial age that has superseded the aristocratic past. The workhouse (if we can assume that Hawthorne was thinking of Bulfinch’s Salem Almshouse) is in part the ironically grand and impassive face behind which society hides poverty and old age. Judge Pyncheon’s fine new country mansion suggests, on the one hand (like Gatsby’s beer-baron château), a conspicuous flaunting of corruptly gained wealth; on the other, when Phoebe and Holgrave move into it after the Judge’s death, it seems to type the rejuvenation of a family by its return to nature and loving concern for others—a concept that Phoebe herself also represents. Uncle Venner’s delightful Gothic cottage in the new Eden of the villa’s garden both harks back to Matthew Maule’s forest hut and also suggests by contrast with the Almshouse a better way of caring for the aged and poor. Even the perhaps subtly ironic hint that the now rich Holgrave is already coming to believe—just what when poor he had inveighed against—that the Pyncheon
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Villa should have been built of stone rather than wood is, though ironic, a distinctly social comment. We can build for the future on the past: we need not always be nomads in time or in place.

III

In contrast, let us look at Melville buildings in Pierre and "I and My Chimney" and compare them with those in Hawthorne's novel. In its technique of juxtaposing various buildings and building styles to create an intricately related group of symbols, Pierre closely resembles The House of the Seven Gables, which had been published only the year before. But here the primary stress of the symbolism is not social but personal. Though social elements such as pride of family and the plight of poor authors and (as also in The House) the general absurdity of too dogmatic reformers do enter and enter largely, the primary function of the buildings is to represent the characters' inner states. The buildings are, to use Melville's expressive term, "shrines" or inner sanctums of the characters' psyches.

Saddle Meadows, the ancient high-gabled manorial seat of the Glendinnings, has elements both of Judge Pyncheon's country villa and of the House of the Seven Gables. Embowered in blooming foliage, surrounded by landscaped grounds, approached by a linden walk, with its comfortable southfacing piazzas, its large windows, its open courtyard, and its stately stone portico, it clearly represents the Glendinning's family's proud heritage; on the surface it seems anything but secretive. More particularly, it stands as a "shrine," Melville intimates, to the outwardly noble and generous character of Pierre's gentlemanly father, who is perhaps typed by the great central chimney with its huge, hospitable fireplaces. Yet in it, as in Judge Pyncheon's villa, despite its noble appearance, there is a touch of mystery, of corruption—here, however, not so much of an inherited family guilt as of a personal duplicity, a hint that the god behind the shrine may have feet of clay. For like the ancient Pyncheon house, this house, too has its secrets, its enigmatical portraits hinting of concealed sin, its memory of a dying voice not gurgling blood but crying out in the night the anguish of its secret guilt. Saddle Meadows is indeed Pierre's handsome but strangely imprisoning father—a father who is both a high, guiding ideal whom Pierre must follow and a whitened sepulchre from whom he must flee.

Similarly, Mrs. Llanylyln's pretty white, sunlit, clapboarded cot-
tage on the friendly village street, its casement windows gracefully arboried by carefully cultivated, brightly flowered honeysuckle vines, is Lucy. Its innocence, its brightness, its modesty, its charm, even the slight touch of passionate crimson in its adorning flowers perfectly type her, whose name itself is light. It too is a shrine. When Pierre goes upstairs to Lucy’s bedroom to fetch her portfolio, he pauses at the door “with feelings of a wonderful reventialness”: “the carpet seemed as holy ground. Every chair seemed sanctified.” His “rubric” of love bids him bow down in “piety” in this “secret inner shrine,” particularly when he looks at the white bed itself and the white nightgown rolled up on it (p. 39).

In contrast, the small, low dark Ulver farmhouse three miles from the village, whither Isabel summons Pierre, is covered with far different vines, with wild, uncultivated vines trailing untaught up the old chimney. It is dark and wild and sad—as Isabel, her dark hair falling unconfined around her head and shoulders, is herself dark and wild and mysteriously melancholy. Moss covers its north-facing front; three gigantic lindens shadow it. Its gloomy red color hints of passion and perhaps guilt and suggests “the strange reddish hue” of Isabel’s letter to Pierre—a color “as if blood and not tears had [prophetically] dropped upon the sheet, . . . the fit scroll for a torn, as well as bleeding heart” (pp. 64-65). Whereas in Saddle Meadows bright chandeliers illuminate the grand shrine to Pierre’s father and in Mrs. Llanyllyn’s cottage the bright sun shines into Lucy’s white bedchamber, here only miserable rushlights struggle vainly against the gloom of the oaken recess of the double-casement window where Pierre sees Isabel kneeling, prostrate in the “vestibule of some awful shrine, mysteriously revealed through the obscurely open window” (p. 149). Illuminated only by flashes of heat lightning in the dark night sky and by sparks of electricity from her own dark hair, she is a mysterious witchlike creature weaving in this dark house a haunting and fateful spell. Overhead in the room above, the ceaseless rhythm of “fallen” and “imprisoned” Delly’s mournful footsteps hint of irremediable passion, sin, and despair. How different these houses of the heart, these “shrines” of the soul, from Uncle Venner’s charming Carpenter-Gothic garden cottage with its playful social implications!

But the Ulver cottage is not the only building representative of Isabel. Two houses she tells of in her fragmentary, dreamlike account of her past life also symbolize elements in her. One is the ruinous château which is the earliest home Isabel can remember; the other is
the strange great house in which she lived later, after she had come to America. Both are strange, menacing, terrifying. But they are far more than mere Gothic houses of mood: they are architectural objectifications of Isabel’s mind, and as such they are closer to Poe’s House of Usher than to Hawthorne’s House of the Seven Gables. The wild, dark château, half-ruinous, set in a clearing in a ghostly forest of stunted pines, shadeless in summer, with many windows boarded up, echoing corridors, empty rooms, great shattered fireplaces, cracked hearthstones, a splintered threshold, and a mysterious, never-entered haunted chamber, forms a marvellously expressive metaphor both for Isabel’s childish feelings of abandonment and loneliness, and for her present mental and emotional state. The exact architecture—clearly French with its high, steep, hipped roof pierced by two rows of small dormers—is probably less important than the “Gothic” connotations and the Poe-like psychological intonations.

The other house of Isabel’s past—the weird, sad, large house full of odd people—also is shadowy. Obviously a madhouse, it is peopled by a great number of persons of various ages who live separately (in cells) but at times gather together in a large room. Some laugh wildly, some shriek, some are so violent that they must be dragged off to dungeons. Most leave only after death, in their coffins. Isabel lives upstairs in a cheerless, furniture-less room or cell into which she is frequently locked. But again the weird building, with its aura of madness and confinement, is more than an outward habitation; it is also the mind in which she lives. Of the buildings in Pierre it can best be compared to Hawthorne’s Almshouse, which must in actuality have been not much different. But how different the two authors’ basic intentions: Hawthorne is making in the Almshouse, Uncle Venner’s “farm,” a social comment on society’s treatment of old age and on Uncle Venner’s cheerful acceptance of what will be for him a necessity—going to the poorhouse; Melville’s madhouse, however, is not a real building playing a social role but a psychic edifice. Its twisted minds, sense of imprisonment, and hidden dungeons not only are elements of Isabel but also foreshadow symbolic patterns of madness and confinement which Melville develops later in the novel.

As the action of the novel moves to New York City, the buildings continue this inward-looking symbolism. Whereas Hawthorne’s Salem Railway Station symbolizes the clutter, confusion, and bustle of the modern Age of Steam (an image of society), the first significant building that Pierre encounters in New York—the Watch House of the
ward—embodies elements of his own state of mind. Though in part, of course, it represents city as opposed to country, yet in its identification with violence, lawlessness, and particularly with sexual sin—prostitution—only barely restrained by ineffectual law, it even more forcefully externalizes the lawless sexual desire and eventual desires of Pierre himself. The doubtful conflict between his animal sexual desires and his moral standards is seen in metaphor in the chaotic incursion into the police station of the unruly mob of harlots and their patrons from the brothels—a mob which threatens, as on one level Pierre himself does, sexual assault on Isabel. This demonic confusion, of course, was not what he had foreseen. He had expected to be greeted hospitably by Glen, a Glen represented by the “Cooery,” a little old-fashioned country cottage secluded in a quiet part of the city, full of quaint old woodwork yet with the convenience of city water. Glen in former times had indeed offered this urban rustic cottage to Pierre for his honeymoon. But now Pierre finds that Glen has abandoned and locked up that part of his personality; and when in desperation Pierre hurries frantically to Glen’s present abode, he finds that the building succinctly portrays the owner. For “large and handsome” though it is, Glen’s fine, probably Georgian, New York row house, like the Salem Almshouse, is coldly conventional and deceptive. Its doorway, only one step up from the street, appears to offer hospitality; but hidden inside is a long straight flight of stairs which one must ascend to reach the profusely lighted drawingrooms where Glen, careless of his cousin’s plight, is dancing with his fashionable friends.

Two other important buildings appear in the novel. Both bring together images and ideas that Melville has earlier introduced in his architecture. The first is the hundred-year-old gray stone Church of the Apostles. With its two “rows of arched and stately windows” and its high, sturdy tower pierced by narrow lancet lights, this is clearly Gothic—a style which to the early nineteenth-century Ecclesiologists and other architectural theorists represented religious faith, though here it also has tinge of literary “Gothic.” But, symbolically, the old congregation has departed, and the sanctuary has been debased by having been divided up into offices peopled by shady lawyers. Pierre’s faith has also gone. On the dead past of the former Christian burying ground an ungainly seven-story addition has been erected, not, like the old church, of stone but symbolically of brick. The ironically denominated “Apostles” who now inhabit the cloister-like courtyard and top floors of this annex are “miscellaneous, bread-and-cheese
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adventurers, and ambiguously professional nondescripts in very genteel but shabby black, and unaccountable foreign-looking fellows in blue spectacles, . . . painters, or sculptors, or indigent students, or teachers of languages, or poets, or fugitive French politicians, or German philosophers—. . . Teleological Theorists, and Social Reformers, and political propagandists of all manner of heterodoxical tenets” (pp. 267-268). Among these believers in mad and revolutionary new creeds lives Pierre, sleeping on the cut-down bedstead of his heroic old warrior grandfather, still standing stubbornly amid changed fortunes for the Eternal and the True and the Right. Though it has strong social implications too, the defiled sanctuary is thus another “shrine,” a fit fane indeed for Pierre’s fatal and hopeless worship of Truth and Virtue; and its gray old stone tower, “an emblem to Pierre [Melville says] of an unshakable fortitude” (p. 271), is related closely to Mount Greylock, both the actual Greylock to which the novel is dedicated and that stark, ruinous, merciless, and chill Titanic Greylock of Pierre’s terrifying nightmare vision. Pierre, the rock, is himself Greylock and is himself figured in the dingy but still stubbornly strong church tower.

But the Church embodies more than Pierre’s eccentric and fatal dedication to impossible chronometric truth. It is also (as the House of the Seven Gables also is to a much slighter extent) a prison and madhouse, figuring forth both Pierre’s Bartleby-like sense of imprisonment and isolation and the world’s vision of him as insane. As such it alludes both backward and forward in the novel. Its unusually thick, strong, gray stone walls and its donjon-like tower hark back to the ruinous old French chateau in which the lonely child Isabel was kept secluded. Like Saddle Meadows, it imprisons Pierre—but in how different a way! How different these “stone walls” that Pierre summons to close in and crush him and his bare, cold room from which “there is nothing to see but a wilderness of tiles, slate, shingles, and tin” from the great hearths and “delectable alcoves of the old manorial mansion” (p. 271)! Indeed, the narrow slits of the old tower that houses the ambiguously honest lawyers and the cell-like rooms rather look forward to the prison at the book’s end. The “long wards, corridors, and multitudinous chambers” of the church’s annex, thronged with eccentrics urging crackbrained philosophies, reproduce almost exactly the separate cells, the “much larger and very long room” and mad population of Isabel’s lunatic asylum; and Pierre’s bare, unfurnished room, into which he locks himself to write what his publishers
angrily term an insane book, is a close replica of Isabel’s old cell. To “sane” and worldly observers such as Glen Stanley and Lucy’s brother, how utterly mad Pierre, Lucy, and Isabel all seem! Even Pierre himself thinks of the insanity that killed his mother and of the sin-grief madness of his dying father and ponders on his own “hereditary liability to madness.” And as the novel draws to its tragic and corpse-strewed end, by his use of language drawn from Jacobean dramas of blood and insanity Melville further emphasizes the hectic lunacy into which Pierre’s granitic ideals have brought him. Both in its ineffaceable dignity and its hints of imprisonment and madness, a building or “shrine” (here ironically an actual church edifice) once again represents the inner state of a character or characters.

So too the final prison, which is clearly the old Egyptian-style Tombs prison Melville uses so effectively at the end of “Bartleby,” also draws together past threads of the novel and, more importantly, figures forth Pierre’s final psychic situation. In Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* Clifford’s imprisonment through the machinations of Jaffrey Pyncheon is primarily a social act. It grows out of a suppression of evidence which results in the unjust conviction of Clifford and the consequent transfer of the family estate to Jaffrey. The actual legal imprisonment we never see at all: we see only its blighting effect on Clifford. But in Melville’s novel it is essentially not an outside force but Pierre’s own character and ideals and his own maddened state—the ambiguous mingled virtue and vice that led to his “rescue” of his supposed sister Isabel and the final frantic quality of his doubt of his own real motives—that in the end imprison and destroy him. His prison is himself; its walls are built from the stone of his own mind and soul and name. All the mystery, ambiguous meaning, spiritual imprisonment, and madness that have gone into making Pierre what he now at last is are summed up in the building. The barred slits (which also figure so forcefully in “Bartleby”) through which the dim light filters into his cell recall the lancet windows of the old church tower. The wet stone summons up from Isabel’s experience (which has been subsumed into Pierre’s) the “low foundations of greenish stone” and “yellow mouldering sills” of the French chateau. The “dim-lit,” “long tiers of cell-galleries,” and the “long honey-combed rows of cells” suggest both the lunatic asylum and the annex to the Church of the Apostles. The “stone cheeks of the walls” are weeping the grief of Pierre’s despair. But this prison, we must remember, is the Tombs, and its Egyptian style summons up the dark
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hermetic mysteries and ambiguities that Melville's age found in the pyramids and ancient temples of Egypt, mysteries particularly of death, as the fictional use of Egyptian decor in Poe's "Ligeia" and the actual use of Egyptian Revival architectural style principally for tombs and cemetery gates clearly indicate. And the Tombs is indeed, as the pun in "Bartleby" enforces, a tomb. Its low, stone ceiling seems to be resting on Pierre's brow, the weight of its stone galleries to be crushing him. It represents the "stony" fate and the stonily cruel heavens that have destroyed him, but that fate and those heavens are within him. The prison is his inmost spirit (his "shrine"), from the dungeon of which only his death can release him and on the "altar" of which he sacrifices Isabel and Lucy. The social theme of family that looms so large in The House of the Seven Gables and to a lesser extent in "The Fall of the House of Usher"—the fact that in slaughtering his cousin Pierre has "extinguished his house"—is only a side issue here. The tragedy of this prison, although it involves the deaths of Lucy and Isabel, essentially is Pierre's alone. In the prison-madhouse-tomb of Pierre, Pierre has buried Pierre.

IV

The artistic strategy which Melville employs in "I and My Chimney" differs radically from that which he employs in Pierre and Hawthorne uses in The House of the Seven Gables. The two novels attain their effects by juxtaposing against one another a number of symbolic buildings of differing architectural styles. "I and My Chimney," in contrast, brilliantly suggests its meanings by concentrating with minute historical accuracy on a single building in a single style. Furthermore, the imagery in the novels is fundamentally static, the "motion" of the significance lying only in the developing juxtapositions of the buildings. That in the story is dynamic. The building itself has changed and may change.

This is not to say that there are not meaningful juxtapositions in "I and My Chimney." Even though all of the outward action of the story takes place in the narrator's old New England farm house, Melville works by allusion: the narrator tells us of other buildings; we do not actually "see" them. Thus the narrator contrasts his central-chimney house with the equally common end-chimney ("double-house") farmhouse; he compares the single flue of his old chimney with the many separate flues honeycombed through the walls of
newer buildings; he contrasts his comfortably low and wide rural house with the tall, narrow city houses that stand in each other’s light. Through his amusing description of Mr. Scribe’s pretentious modern mansion, with its chimney tops absurdly constructed to look like griffins, he makes a satiric comment on the architect and a favorable one on his own simpler dwelling. He wittily balances his American farm house against Madame de Maintenon’s Grand Trianon in Versailles, the ancient Elephant and Castle inn in London, and jolly old ivy-clad Elizabethan manor houses with musicians’ galleries, the styles of all of which thus take on meaning. The chimney itself—that premier image in the story—is compared with even deeper symbolic intonations to such “shrines” as the Pyramids of Egypt (which, as *Moby-Dick* abundantly illustrates, held so many mystic connotations for the nineteenth century),11 Joshua’s stones at Gilgash, Druidical Stonehenge (another favorite nineteenth-century metaphor), the Cretan labyrinth, the Bunker Hill monument (which figures so importantly in *Israel Potter*), and the Grand High Altar of St. Peter’s in Rome.

But it is not these comparative allusions that give primary substance and power to the story’s symbolism. Rather it is Melville’s superb symbolic treatment of precise, detailed, and historically accurate delineation of one specific architectural style. More than anywhere else in his work he here skillfully combines the roles of allegorist and architectural historian. Though Litman (pp. 631-632) notes that it is in some respects the stereotypical cottage of the “language” of architecture and that several of its aspects have meaning in that language—its pyramidal chimney representing love, its width and lowness indicating absence of pride and depth of vision—the house of the story is fundamentally an accurate rendering of a typical eighteenth-century New England farm house. Melville knew his architecture. Based on Melville’s own “Arrowhead,” which was built in 1780, the narrator’s house is a wide, low, two-story, central-chimney rather than end-chimney, clapboarded, framed house with attic and cellar. The wide, centrally placed front door leads into a small square landing place from which the principal staircase “by three abrupt turns, and three minor landing-places, mounts [against the face of the chimney] to the second floor, where, over the front door, runs a sort of narrow gallery, leading to chambers on either hand.” Thus the tiny entrance-place is two stories in height. “At the second landing, midway up the chimney, is a mysterious door, entering to a mysterious
"closet" cut into the chimney itself. Neither on first or second floor are there any passageways or halls; every room must be entered through another room. In the dining room in the rear—what would have been the original kitchen—are nine doors obviously opening into the other chambers, the pantry, and back stairs, both up and down. The chimney itself, though humorously exaggerated to emphasize its symbolism, is also historically correct. Built of large, flat bricks, it rises from a partially vaulted twelve-foot-square base in pyramidal form to emerge through or directly against the ridgepole, where it has decreased to four feet square. All the fireplaces on both floors are in it. In addition to numerous little cupboards and shelves, it contains a supposedly secret room—something that many of the great chimneys of the time contained though usually not for hiding valuables but for drying clothes. Throughout the house, as the wife protests, the mantels are very high. Every detail of Melville's description of house and chimney could have come out of a textbook on architecture.

Melville's greatest artistic triumph in the story, however, does not lie in this superbly apt embodiment of his meaning in a highly exact and vivid but static delineation of an architectural style. Rather, it is inherent in his compelling use of architectural change and alteration, of past remodeling and plans for future remodeling. He here injects a dynamic quality rarely hinted at either in Hawthorne's or his own other architectural imagery.

In The House of the Seven Gables, it is true, Hawthorne makes cogent use of Hepzibah's opening up once again the long-closed shutters of the little cent shop that some hard-pressed Pyncheon of long before had built into the old mansion. The change in the house represents the Pyncheons' effort to reach out of their proud isolation to make contact with common mankind. Particularly in "Old Esther Dudley," Hawthorne contrasts the past grandeur of the Province House with its present decay and in "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" makes the piece-by-piece destruction of Peter's house a parable of the disaster that can fall upon the foolish speculator. Melville more often uses dynamic architectural imagery and uses it in general with less social but more personal reference. The collapse of Bannadonna's bell tower is an example, as is also, in one respect, the sinking of the Pequod. Litman (p. 634) also points out that Melville in Pierre introduces another form of change in a building: the building itself may not change, but a character's perception of it may. Thus after his disillusionment with his father, Pierre sees Saddle Meadows no longer as genially pastoral
but as bitterly aristocratic. A more concrete form of alteration in that novel is the change in the Church of the Apostles from its original conventional Christian state to its present debased state—its sanctuary divided into offices, its churchyard trampled down by the ungainly annex, its old faith transformed into strange and revolutionary heterodoxies. But on the whole these treatments are only incidental.

In “I and My Chimney,” to the contrary, change is central to both action and symbolism. In imagining both the past changes in the house and the present plans to remodel it, Melville again closely follows architectural history. Many years before the narrative begins, we are told, a temporary proprietor had “hired a band of woodmen, with their huge, crosscut saws” to saw “clean off” “the old gable roof” along “with all its birds nests, and old dormer windows.” He then replaced “the original gable roof” “with a modern roof, more fit for a railway woodhouse than an old country gentleman’s abode.” Such a change actually was made, probably at the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century, to a number of old seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century houses such as the Whipple house in Ipswich. The steep old gambrel roofs were lowered and the gables and dormers removed to make the ancient houses conform to the newer Georgian style. Furthermore, if one assumes that the narrator is relating the story in 1856, his objection to the new, flatter, simpler roof as inappropriate to a gentleman’s country seat and suitable only to a railway shed is also historically valid. The designs in such books as Downing’s The Architecture of Country Houses (1850) and Calvert Vaux’s Villas and Cottages (1863) clearly demonstrate that by the mid-nineteenth century taste had swung back from low, simple roofs to higher, steeper, and more picturesquely elaborate ones. Similarly, the plan of the narrator’s wife to cut through or wholly remove the great central chimney is also exactly in line with the taste of Melville’s day. Alteration of old farmhouses into gentlemen’s residences was then very much in the wind, and contemporary architectural handbooks showed how it should be done.

But though the artistic strategies differ sharply, the thrust of the symbolism in “I and My Chimney” is the same as that in Pierre. Whereas Hawthorne in two of his tales involving single buildings—“Sights from a Steeple” and “Peter Goldthwaite’s Treasure”—expresses himself on general topics—in the first musing on the stance of the artist, in the second reciting a parable on the foolishness of
speculation—Melville once again makes a building stand for an individual psyche. In the tale he addresses, it is true, the problem of marriage (as he does also in “The Paradise of Bachelors” and “The Tartarus of Maids,” two other architectural tales). But even if one does not read autobiography or Freudian psychology into the tale, it is clearly concerned principally with the psychic assault by the narrator’s wife on the narrator’s individuality, his manhood. Litman has persuasively argued (pp. 635-638) that the whole house is symbolic. Indeed, it is so closely related to the narrator and his inner world that for seven years he has not left it. But the key symbol is, of course, the great central chimney. This is the narrator’s innermost self, his High Altar, his “shrine.” Already the chimney has been “razed” fifteen feet; unsatisfied by that “surgical operation,” the wife is determined to take it out entirely so that she can walk without impediment right through the house and, one might say, right over new husband’s conquered soul. In whatever special way one wishes to interpret the details, it is the wife’s struggle to remodel, alter, or destroy the chimney and the narrator’s struggles to defend and preserve it that give life, dynamic, and meaning to the story. The struggle is not a social one but a battle for a man’s very identity. Every aspect of house and chimney bears on the character, values, and personality of the narrator. As Dillingham rightly observes, we have here “the architecture of...[a] mind,” “a revelatory unfolding of the mind of a single character”; and all events take place “within a single mind, symbolized by the house.” Every architectural detail has psychic meaning. This is not Hawthorne’s architecture of society but the very finest of Melville’s architecture of the soul.

NOTES


Curtis Dahl


3 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables [Centenary Edition] (Columbus, O., 1965), p. 314. Subsequent references to this edition will be placed in parentheses in the text.


5 For the Salem railroad station see Carroll L. V. Meeks, The Railroad Station (New Haven, 1956), p. 54 and plate 39, and Visitors' Guide to Salem (Salem, Mass., 1902), pp. 76-77. The Guide attributes the design to Captain D. A. Neal, the president of the railroad, but Meeks holds that Neal merely made suggestions to Bryant. Meeks, the Guide, and Davidson all reproduce pictures of the depot.


10 Compare in Ch. 41 of Moby-Dick the likening of the inner recesses of Ahab's soul to the Halls of Thermes lying far below the Hotel de Cluny.

11 For comments on pyramids and "I and My Chimney," see Finkelstein, pp. 141-144.

12 For lowering of roofs of old New England houses, see J. Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut [Tercentenary Pamphlet Series, Vol. 12] (New Haven, 1933) p.13. If one takes the liberty of changing in Melville's text the phrase "original gable roof" to "original gambrel roof," the passage makes even more historical sense and is even supported by the cutting and splicing of the rafters of Melville's own house "Arrowhead," an unusual construction that may possibly indicate the "Arrowhead's" roof may once have been gambrel and only later changed to its present low-pitched gable form.
For instance, Designs 2, 8, and 18 in Henry Hudson Holly's well-known volume _Country Seats_ (New York, 1863) all show before-and-after pictures of remodeled rural houses, all, by the way, showing alteration of roofs and chimneys. See also Design 32 in George E. Woodward, _Woodward’s Country Homes_ (New York, 1865). In 1863 the then famous "Ilk Marvell" (Donald G. Mitchell) published in _My Farm of Edgewood_ his account of his remodeling of an old farmhouse outside New Haven. Even today, everywhere one goes in rural New England one sees in old farmhouses the pair of small chimneys set near together in the middle of the ridge that indicate the removal of an original large central chimney.

The most thorough treatment is that by the William B. Dillingham in _Melville’s Short Fiction, 1853-1866_ (Athens, Ga., 1977), pp. 271-295. For well selected bibliography see Dillingham’s footnotes. Merton M. Seate’s stimulating treatment — “Herman Melville’s ‘I and My Chimney,’” _AL_, 13 (1941), 142-154 — is biographical. For Litman, see n. 1 above.

Compare in _Pierre_ Melville's use of the great chimney and hearth of Saddle Meadows to represent one aspect of Pierre’s father.

I quote respectively from pp. 281, 278, 294.
PYNCHON'S CUNNING LINGUAL NOVEL:
COMMUNICATION IN LOT 49

PETER L. HAYS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

For a work published only twenty years ago, Thomas Pynchon's
_The Crying of Lot 49_ has received considerable attention. There are
already fourteen books of criticism devoted to Pynchon's work, chap-
ters of many other works, a Pynchon journal, and articles proli-
ferating at an entropic rate.1 Certainly the complexities of Pynchon's texts,
their density and intriguingly varied allusiveness invite such atten-
tion. _Lot 49_ has already generated more pages of criticism than its
own 138 pages. Critics have discussed its typical Pynchonesque involve-
ment with plots, paranoia, and entropy; its description of our mod-
ern world, mechanized, loveless, and chaotic. They have discussed its
language, but inadequately, for in focussing usually on explication
alone, they have ignored how language is involved as a major element
in the novel, almost as a character, certainly as a plot device.2 Pyn-
chon writes of isolated people, individual enclaves of despair, and he
shows how both language and his protagonist Oedipa act to connect
these separate entities.

As executor of the will of her former lover, on Pierce Inverarity, a
Southern California conglomerate mogul and late-night telephon-
ner somewhat like Howard Hughes, Oedipa Maas discovers the Tristero,
an alternate postal system that originated in opposition to the Thurn
and Taxis postal monopoly during the Holy Roman Empire and con-
tinued in this country in opposition to the U. S. Mail (whether deliv-
ered by Pony Express, Wells Fargo, or modern government carriers).
The founder of the Tristero, one Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y
Calavera, styled himself The Disinherited,3 and his mail system, in
both the historical past and present of the novel, is used primarily by
the disinherited of society, the poor, alienated, and disenfranchised:

She remembered now old Pullman cars, left where the money'd
run out or the customers vanished, amid green farm flatnesses
where clothes hung, smoke lazed out of jointed pipes.... Surely
they'd forgotten by now what it was the Tristero were to have
inherited; as perhaps Oedipa one day might have. What was left to
inherit? That America coded in Inverarity's testament, whose was
that? She thought of other squatters who stretched canvas for
lean-tos behind smiling billboards along all the highways, or slept
in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even,
daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman’s tent like
caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the
very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication,
utroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night
long, in the thousands of unheard messages. She remembered...
voices before and after the dead man’s that had phoned at
random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless
among the dial’s ten million possibilities for that magical Other
who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone
litanyes of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must
someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the
recognition, the Word. (pp. 105-136)

Note how, in the preceding, the description of those in need is threaded
through with means both of transportation (trains, highways, cars,
pipelines) and communication (billboards, wills, telephones, the
Word).

The key to deciphering Inverarity’s will, Oedipa believes, lies in
understanding the Tristero (also known as Tryster, and symbolised
by a muted post horn or the initials W.A.S.T.E.). Her concrete proof of
the organization’s existence is limited: forged stamps, lines from rare
texts bought from San Narciso’s Zapf books, explanations by a San
Narciso professor — and Pierce Inverarity owned them or nearly
owned their place of employment. Thus, she concludes:

*Either* you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other
indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of
dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly
communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine,
and betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government
delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness,
the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of
everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. *Or* you are
hallucinating it. *Or* a plot has been mounted against you, so
expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of
stamps and ancient books, constant surveillance of your move-
ments, planting of post horn images all over San Francisco, brib-
ing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce
Inverarity only knows what-all besides, all financed out of the
estate in a way *either* too secret *or* too involved for your non-legal
mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinth-
thine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. *Or*
you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut,
Oedipa, out of your skull. (p. 128, I have italicized the words
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“either” and “or.”)

Pynchon presents a system of communication, while his vocabulary, either/or, insists on mutually exclusive possibilities, a disjunctive syllogism (either a or b; not b; therefore a). This limited choice suggests separate and closed systems, never touching, a suggestion widely adumbrated by Pynchon: the already mentioned telephone lines that cannot touch lest they short; the haves and the have-nots, those who inherit and the disinherited; or parallel but never crossing steel rails which Oedipa walks along (p. 133 ff). Pynchon emphasizes the seeming gap between these categories both by extending his examples and by his choice of connectors:

She had heard all about excluded middles; they were bad shit, to be avoided; and how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was not like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth. In the songs Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard sang was either some fraction of the truth’s numinous beauty (as Mucho now believed) or only a power spectrum. Tremaine the Swastika Salesman’s reprieve from holocaust was either an injustice, or the absence of a wind; the bones of the GI’s at the bottom of Lake Inverarity were there either for a reason that mattered to the world, or for skin divers and cigarette smokers. Ones and zeroes. So did the couples arrange themselves. At Vesperhaven House either an accommodation reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, or only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. (pp. 136-137, my italics)

“Undistributed middle,” the binary number system of digital computers, zeroes and ones only, followed by a series of either/or’s — these all emphasize separation. But as Pynchon also insists on our noticing, “how had it ever happened here, with the chances so good for diversity?” Logic insists that either/or is often fallacious and the situation in question is one of both/and; certainly human experience is diverse, our choices are frequently not limited, and our language, especially as Pynchon uses it, insists on multiple uses.

After the most moving scene in the novel, the one in which Oedipa comforts an ex-sailor near death, the narrator makes these statements:
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"...The dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetsid shafts and tunnels of truth...." (p. 95)

"The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie." (p. 95)

"There was...high magic to low puns." (p. 96)

"Metaphor" literally means a carrying beyond, beyond the closed system. A pun imposes another meaning in place of an expected one; it superimposes one layer of meaning, one system, upon another. Both act as links, joining, as Oedipa in her search links the rich world of Inverarity to the disenchanted world of dying winos. Thus, her first view of San Narciso links sight to real estate development, agriculture, hearing, and electronics:

She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she’d opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. (p. 13)

The road she drives on provokes another metaphor:

What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L. A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. (p. 14)

Moreover, the names in the novel are jokes or puns, names like Stanley Kotecks, Mike Fallopian, Emory Bortz, and Manny di Presso. Oedipa, of course, suggests that other questor after truth and, unknowingly, himself, Oedipus. But there is still more to the names. Pynchon has used T. S. Eliot liberally in his work, from early writings such as "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" and "Lowlands," at least through Lot 49. The tower Oedipa sees herself locked in suggests Ugolino’s tower in The Waste Land, and "Thurn" of Thurn and Taxila sounds like the German Turm, tower; certainly Pynchon’s devastating descriptions of San Narciso’s landscape and tristano symbol W.A.S.T.E. also remind us of The Waste Land. Oedipa’s husband shortens her name and calls her “Oed” (pp. 3, 6, 105, 107, 108); “Oed,” “the German word meaning “waste,” occurs in line 42 of The Waste Land.
In another example of perceived wordplay, Joseph Slade sees Inverarity as a pun on Sherlock Holmes’s Professor Moriarity; Richard Poirier sees the name as incorporating a rare stamp, an inverse rarity.⁶ But this attention to his name obscures more useful puns connected with his legacy. What no one has stressed is the several senses of “will.” Oedipa investigates Inverarity’s will, his testament, which states the disposition of property he accumulated, in part at least, through strength of will; Oedipa determines not to take drugs and wills herself “to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind” (p. 134). Interestingly, we never learn who Inverarity’s beneficiary is. Nor, unlike Fitzgerald on Gatsby, do we ever learn about Inverarity’s house — not where it is, what it looks like, nor what it contains (beyond a bust of Jay Gould over the bed). Certainly the private property, the house and its contents, are part of the material legacy. Neither Oedipa nor her co-executor, Metzger,⁷ ever mentions it. Oedipa and we would seem to be the inheritors; and through that bequest, that transferral of matter, including the contents of the novel to us, there is a hint that systems can touch and no longer be set apart one from another.

Thus, throughout the novel, Pynchon has been at pains to describe what appear to be closed and separate systems and then to puncture their hermetic state. “You know what a miracle is,” a Mexican anarchist comments, “another world’s intrusion into this one” (p. 88). (Similarly, his anarchist organization’s initials, CIA for Conjuración de los Insurgentes Anarquistas, pun on and intrude into the highly regulated world of another CIA.) The central example of different worlds connecting is figured in Maxwell’s Demon, a creation of Scottish physicist James Clark Maxwell in his study of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that heat will not flow spontaneously from colder to warmer bodies. Rather, warm bodies tend to give up their energy, and this is entropy — the dissipation of all heat energy and the cessation of all work based on heat exchange.⁸ In her meeting with John Nefastis, Oedipa encounters Nefastis’ invention of a piston engine based on Maxwell’s hypothesis of positing a sorting demon that could limit entropy:

He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy...But it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation for one, back in the ‘30’s, had looked very like the equation for the
other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said to lose entropy... 

"Communication is the key," cried Nefastis. "The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind...

"Entropy is a figure of speech, then," sighed Nefastis, "a metaphor. It connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only verbally gracefully, but also objectively true." (p. 77) 

The metaphor of the Demon, that is, links the worlds of thermodynamics and communications, much as Oedipa, whom critics like Poirier and Leland have also seen as a sorting demon, strives to link together disparate parts of Inverarity's world.

She also recognizes "another world's intrusion into this one" when she becomes aware that her dying sailor's DT's ties in another universe:

She knew, because she had held him, that he suffered DT's. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself.

..."dt," God help this old tattooed man, meant also a time differential, a vanishingly small instant in which change had to be confronted at last for what it was.... She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen if only because there was that high magic to low puns, because DT's must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of Antarctic loneliness and fright. (pp. 95-96)

"The saint whose water can light lamps," mentioned above, is another pervasive link between novel's many levels, its seemingly disparate worlds. Although not named, he is St. Narcissus. In Richard Wharfinger's The Courier's Tragedy (and it should be noted that, in her role linking information and worlds, Oedipa acts as go-between or courier), "Angelo...evil Duke of Squamuglia, has perhaps ten years before the play's opening murdered the good Duke of adjoining Faggio, by poisoning the feet on an image of Saint Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, in the court chapel, which feet the Duke was in the habit of kissing every Sunday at Mass" (p. 45). Mucho Maas, on the day
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Oedipa left home, whistled a song by Sick Dick and the Volkswagens, “I Want to Kiss Your Feet” (p. 12), and Inverarity’s base of operations is, of course, named for the dangerous bishop, San Narciso. Eusebius records Saint Narcissus’ *miracle* of converting water into oil for the lamps of the church at Easter time, also the Bishop’s participation in two Church councils to set the date of Easter.\(^9\) Appropriate to a figure in a Pynchon novel, Narcissus becomes the victim of a cabal: three witnesses accuse him of a heinous crime. And although the charges are not believed, Narcissus resigns his see and retires to the desert, only emerging years later to reclaim his episcopacy and die of superannuation at 126 years of age.\(^10\)

Beyond Pynchon’s love of the arcane, three further points should be made here. I agree with W. T. Lhamon, Jr., Mendelson, and Slade that religion figures prominently in the novel,\(^11\) and with the first two critics that the 49 of the title alludes to Pentecost, celebrated forty-nine days after Easter, which Bishop Narcissus helped fix in the Church’s calendar. (More on Pentecost subsequently.) “Narcissus” also refers us to the Greek mythical character and to a cognate, “narcotic.” The euhemeristic account of the naming of the flower after the figure conceals the fact that the narcissus bulb contains alkaloids capable, like peyote, of inducing both hallucinations and stomach pains. The “waves of nausea, ...headaches, nightmares, menstrual pains” (p. 129) Oedipa experiences could be caused by narcissus poisoning (narcissism?) as described in texts on herb and plant medicines.\(^12\) Certainly Mucho is a victim of both hallucinatory alkaloids and narcissism: “my husband,” thinks Oedipa, “on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself...” (p. 114). Her psychiatrist distributes “LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs” as part of his experiment. Rather than help the withdrawn come out of themselves, instead of helping the maladjusted reach out to the community, Hilarious insists on building his own bridge: “The bridge inward” (p. 7).

Finally, after noting that Oedipa stays at nymph-decorated Echo Courts and a few other perfunctory allusions to the myth, let me conclude these references to Narcissus along lines of inquiry which Pynchon invites through both the presence of Freudian Dr. Hilarious and the behavior of his characters: narcissism. I have already mentioned Mucho’s regression. As a used-car salesman, he could face neither the sale of cars, each of which was “a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just as futureless, automotive projec-
tion of somebody else’s life” (p. 5), nor the sign of the National Automobile Dealer’s Association, “N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky” (p. 107), which is still another bilingual link. In avoiding adulthood, besides taking LSD, Mucho responds to Oedipa’s absence by picking up teenagers at KCUF record hops, something he has done in the past. Oedipa had wondered whether his concern for statutory rape affected his performance:

Having once been seventeen and ready to laugh at almost anything, she found herself then overcome by, call it a tenderness she’d never go quite to the back of lest she get bogged. It kept her from asking him any more questions. Like all their inability to communicate, this too had a virtuous motive. (p. 29)

So, Oedipa mothers Mucho, discreetly. She comforts Baby Igor, Metzger’s identity as child actor. Metzger’s self-fascination is so extreme that he possesses a pilot film for a TV series about himself: “The film is in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, light can’t fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly” (p. 20). Like Mucho, he leaves Oedipa for a teen-aged girl — in his case, one of fifteen — and marries her in Nevada. Oedipa’s psychoanalyst, Hilarious, believing that Israeli agents are pursuing him for his less-than-healing practices at Buchenwald, goes mad. And Randolph Dribblette, the director of The Courier’s Tragedy, having projected a world onto the stage, commits suicide in the Pacific.

“If I were to dissolve in here [the shower],” speculated the voice out of the drifting steam, “be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too. You, that part of you so concerned, God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish.

“...You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touched [sic] the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That’s it.”

(p. 56)

Says Freud in his essay “On Narcissism,” the patients in question “suffer from megalomania and they have withdrawn their interest from the external world (people and things).”

Metzger’s life is sealed in a vault; after weeks with her, he leaves Oedipa without a word. Mucho travels the bridge inward; he doesn’t
miss Oedipa, replacing her with LSD, interchangeable nymphets, and the phrase “Rich, chocolaty goodness.” Driblette, before he “withdrew his interest in the world” through suicide, insisted that “the reality is in this head. Mine. I’m the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also” (p. 56). Their megalomania and retreats from reality are obvious.

Their monumental self-concern, their inability to give of themselves, underscores the novel’s concern with lovelessness. Oedipa had not loved Inverarity, but had hoped he might take her away from her self-confinement. Their relationship had an “absence of intensity”: “all that had gone on between them had never really escaped the confinement of that tower”; “the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic” (pp. 10-11). She feels little remorse in committing adultery with Metzger and loss, rather than passionate betrayal, when both men are gone from her. She is lonely, but only little less so than at the start of the novel. In a gay bar in San Francisco, she meets someone wearing the muted post horn of Tristero as a lapel pin that marks the members of Inamorati Anonymous, an organization founded by a fired Yoyodyne executive who nearly commits suicide (by fire):

“My big mistake,” [he says,] “was love. From this day I swear to stay off of love: hetero, homo, bi, dog or cat, car, every kind there is.” And he did. (p. 85)

Her informant leaves her:

...feeling as alone as she ever had, now the only woman, she saw, in a room full of drunken male homosexuals. Story of my life, she thought, Mucho won’t talk to me, Hilarius won’t listen, Clerk Maxwell didn’t even look at me, and this group, God knows. Despair came over her as it will when nobody around has any sexual relevance to you. (p. 86)

No love, no sexual relevance, no close relationships — metaphorically, the lack of contact that would be figured in a Venn diagram of a syllogism with an undistributed middle.

Freud in “On Narcissism,” an essay which does discuss homosexuality as a symptom of narcissism, says, “we must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill, and must fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we cannot love.”14 Tony Tanner, in his early discussion of
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Lot 49, speaks of the absence of love, narcissism, and the tower of self, that "the only way to escape from one's 'tower' is through an act of love," and that Oedipa "finds no love or willingness to be loved."\(^\text{15}\) Oedipa, however, is willing to be loved. She goes with Inverarity to Mexico in hope of having her isolation pierced; when that fails, she marries Mucho. She initially protects herself from Metzger's advances, wrapping herself in layers of clothing like so much conventionality, then sexually attacking him. Her behavior toward Mucho emphasizes tenderness. And she reaches out to the broken, dying wino in the novel's most moving scene:

"Can I help?" She was shaking, tired.... She was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it. Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning. She felt wetness against her breast and saw that he was crying again. He hardly breathed but tears came as if being pumped. "I can't help," she whispered, rocking him, "I can't help." (pp. 92-93)

Oedipa can't operate Nefasto's machine because she is not sensitive in the sense that she is not psychokinetic, but throughout the novel she proves herself sensitive to sights, smells, events, and—most importantly—to people: "The true sensitive is the one that can share in...man's hallucinations, that's all" (p. 79). Pynchon's skill is that he can make us share Oedipa's feelings, whether her perceptions are verifiable reality or hallucination.

The novel, then, is about communication.\(^\text{16}\) Its first paragraph mentions an odd assortment of communications systems and attempts to establish community, including a Tupperware party, Inverarity's will, television, religion, a university library (incorporating printing, books, education), music, and sculpture (the plastic arts), which leads back to religion by Pynchon's naming the sculpture an ikon (p. 2). The individuals in the novel are just that, individuals, lacking cohesive community. Members of Inamorati Anonymous are nameless; they hold no meetings, and if one is in danger of falling in love and calls for help, different members subsequently respond, never the same one twice. Members of the Peter Pinguid Society are compelled to keep in touch using Yoyodyne's interoffice mail—another postal system (the society's initials stand for post-postscript),
in rebellious antagonism to the government's, parallel but separate from the Tristero system — but their messages are devoid of content, vacuous. They have established an alternate system, but do not communicate. They lack fervor, which brings us back to the hidden metaphor of Pentecost.17

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance....And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' " (Acts 2:4 and 12). Speaking to another in his own language, whether it be a national language or technical jargon, is one way to reach between otherwise closed and separate systems. "Communication is the key" (p. 77), "the miracle of communication" (p. 135), and language is its medium. As Norbert Wiener says in his study of entropy and language, "we ourselves constitute...an island of decreasing entropy." Because we ingest food, excrete, and procreate, we are not closed systems, and neither is language, which loses words and constantly adds new ones. Says Wiener, "the coupling which unites the different parts of the system into a single larger system will in general be both energetic and informational."18 The mechanical term "coupling" has a sexual meaning, too; it was Oedipa who coupled with Metzger. It is Oedipa whom we see in the novel as most energetic, gathering and sorting information, indeed like a demon, and Inverarity as a diabolus ex machina.

Joseph Slade writes of her coming out of her solipsistic tower through her passion to know,19 another word with both cerebral and sexual referents. When Oedipa dances with the young deaf-mute at her Berkeley hotel, she expects collisions on the dance floor, but none occur, no "kiss of cosmic pool balls" (p. 92):

Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself. She followed her partner's lead, limp in the young mute's clasp, waiting for the collisions to begin. But none came. She was danced for half an hour before, by mysterious consensus, everybody took a break, without having felt any touch but the touch of her partner. (p. 96)
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Throughout the novel, we see closed and isolated systems — mechanical, mathematical, governmental, social, and private. And we see miracles connecting them. One such miracle is language. Dead men tell no tales, but their bones can become ink that conveys a message, a miraculous conversion in the fifth act of The Courier’s Tragedy; the words of dead authors still reach us and move us. Puns connect systems of meaning, and metaphor shifts us from one level to another. The binary digits of computers, each representing a separate, closed system, together do convey meaning. The very stamps that disclose the Tristero to Oedipa are objects used to link people, to help them communicate. Humans, not closed systems themselves, can bridge the gap between themselves and others through language and through love. Oedipa is tender with Mucho and the dying sailor; she makes love to Inverarity and Metzger. She reaches out to Maxwell’s Demon and San Francisco’s night world — the Greek Way, Inamorati Anonymous, dying winos, and children in Golden Gate Park. She dances with someone with whom she cannot speak, yet they communicate: “She followed her partner’s lead.” She knows that the old sailor suffers from DT’s, Pynchon insists, simply by holding him (p. 95). What Oedipa exhibits, then, is the willingness to love and be loved, and love, as Socrates defines it in “The Symposium”:

is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between them. ...He is a ...[demon], and like all that is spiritual he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal. ...This is the power which interprets and conveys [like a courier] to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of the gods; and this power spans the chasm which divides them, and in this all is bound together.20

Thomas Pynchon, in The Crying of Lot 49, describes our America, our Waste Land, each of us locked in our own tower. He cunningly weaves his tapestry of the world, and he shows us the way out. We do not know what revelation, if any, Oedipa will receive at the stamp auction, but the method has been shown to us: speaking — in tongues, puns, and metaphors — searching, caring, and reaching out to others. The emphasis on method in this open-ended novel suggests another communications expert, the late Marshall McLuhan, who insisted that the “medium is the message.”21 Pynchon, like Eliot in The Waste Land, portrays the situation perceived by emphasizing the negative, the need for change in our America, the need to link seemingly sepa-
rate systems. Both his novel and his protagonist embody the message: language and love can go beyond the logic of closed systems; they can overcome undistributed middles and connect the apparently unconnected.

NOTES


3 Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (New York, 1966), p. 119. All subsequent references to the novel in my text will be paginated parenthetically and will refer to this edition.
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4 Pynchon may well believe that he invented the symbol of the muted horn, but item number three in the official catalog of the Treasures of Tutankhamen displayed in American was a stoppered horn.

5 Cf. Slade, pp. 21-32, 135; Olderman, pp. 123-149; Plater, p. 8. The Tupperware party Oedipa attends at the novel’s opening seems to be Pynchon’s counterpart for parties with “tea and cake and ices” where “women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo.”


7 On the aesthetic principle that it’s better to clutter footnotes than text, let me here mention puns, starting with those in which Pynchon involves Metzger. Metzger mentions that his Jewish mother wanted “to kosher” him—kosher preparation of meat, requiring that all the blood be drained from it. “Metzger” is the German word for butcher, and the movie of him that Oedipa watches is Cashiered (pp. 16-17). Pynchon obviously enjoys these bilingual puns — more linking of closed systems: John Nefaste, Johnny Fastest, would seem to owe his last name to the French nefaste, unlucky, and possibly to “nefarious”; and “Maas,” besides suggesting mass and its concomitant inertia, is Dutch for “mesh,” the webbing of the net in which Oedipa finds herself, as well as Spanish for “more.” Since Pynchon insists that there is high magic even to low puns and descends to name Mucho’s radio station KCUF (please invert), the critic must also descend. The toy imprisoned in Yooyo’s name is unusual; unlike those who play with frisbees, baseballs, footballs, a yoycer can play with himself, double meaning intended. Yoyo exhibitions are extremely narcissistic, appropriate for San Narciso.


9 Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, 5: xii & xxiii; and 6: ix-xi.

10 Pynchon’s characters are paranoiacs; he creates novels in which there may actually be plots, or merely self-projections paranoiacally perceived. And Pynchon’s readers are similarly infected, as Frank Kermode indicates (see footnote 2). They strive to find patterns, order where there may or may not be any. Given Pynchon’s use of Eliot and St. Narcissus, I tried to find parallels between Lot 49 and Eliot’s poem “The Death of St. Narcissus.” The parallels are plentiful. However, Pynchon’s novel was published in 1966, and the first general publication of Eliot’s poem seems to have begun in Poems Written in Early Youth (New York, 1967), pp. 28-30; there was, however, a private edition of this collection, twelve copies printed in Stockholm in 1950. Could Pynchon have seen one? Similarly, there seemed to be a connection between Zapf Books and Robert Crumb’s Zap Comix, especially given Pynchon’s wasteland setting and this description of Crumb’s work: “Robert Crumb’s pictures of the ugliness of the environ-
ment and man in it are still the most honest [portrayals], a vulgar image of reality without the usual transfiguring of the media" (Reinhold Reiterberger and Wolfgang Fuchs, Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium [London, 1972], pp. 221). But again, the same chronological problem: the first Zap Comix were issued in 1967. (Cf. Poirier, Mindful Pleasures, p. 25). Robert Crumb (in conversation) stated that his work was not a source for Lot 49, that "zapped" was a common term during the 80's drug culture.


12 Pliny, for example, in Natural History, book 21, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 255, says the following:

[The narcissus] is injurious to the stomach, so that it acts as an emetic and purge; it is bad for the sinews and causes a dull headache, its name being derived from the word narse, torpor, and not from the youth in the myth.


16 Among the critics who say so are Mendelson, Slade, Lhamon, and Plater.

17 Literally fifty days, it is a movable feast celebrated by the Christian Church seven Sundays after Easter. Also known as Whitsunday for the white robes worn by the newly baptized, it makes for sharp and ominous contrast to the black mohair suits of those who a wait the crying of Lot 49 (p. 137). St Narcissus was instrumental in tying Easter’s celebration to Sunday rather than to the Friday following Passover, thus commemorating not so much the Crucifixion as the Resurrection. This Pentecost is presided over by Loren Passerine, suggesting the Holy Spirit as dove; unfortunately, however, doves are not passerines, which is the order of perching birds.

18 Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 25, 23. Slade and Plater also quote Wiener insisting that humans are anti-entropic, but use a different edition; I could not find the passages Slade mentions (pp. 132, 148, 252) in my text. Wiener also discusses Calvinism (the Scurvhamites in this novel, the Preterite and Elect of Gravity’s Rainbow), comic strips, deaf-mutes, and digital calculators.
19 Slade, pp. 170, 246.


EMERSON, HAWTHORNE, MELVILLE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

JEFFREY STEELE

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

In the major works of the American Renaissance, one finds that a central theme concerns the attempt to establish stable relations between the unconscious and consciousness, to explore the precarious and shifting boundary between hidden powers and the light of common day. Earlier students of American literature have addressed this issue to the extent that they have explored the tendency of romance "to plunge into the underside of consciousness"; whenever they have linked frontier consciousness and depth-psychology; or as they have studied the archetypes and myths organizing much of nineteenth-century American writing.¹ At this date, it need not be established that Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville were adepts at psychological analysis, like Roger Chillingworth able to sift the gold from the dross in their examinations of the human heart. For now we have Freudian studies of these authors, and even a small minority — like Henry Murray, Edward Edinger, and Martin Bickman — who have applied the insights of Jung.²

In The Mirror and the Lamp, M. H. Abrams documents the familiarity of nineteenth-century writers with theories of the unconscious. Indeed, Abrams observes, German writers like Schelling and Goethe were so successful in promulgating theories of unconscious processes that, by the 1830s, "The notion of an unconscious element in the inventive process had already become almost a commonplace of English literary criticism."³ We know that such theories reached Emerson, in part, through recent works by Coleridge and Carlyle. Coleridge's assertion, in Aids to Reflection (1825), that "the aids of the divine spirit" are "deeper than our consciousness can reach" would not be lost for the attentive Emerson.⁴ Nor would Carlyle's more recent observation in "Characteristics" (1831) that "underneath the region of argument and conscious discourse, lies the region of meditation; here, in its quiet mysterious depths, dwells what vital force is in us; here, if aught is to be created, must the work go on."⁵ Clearly, the concept of the unconscious, as Freud himself later admitted, had a long foreground, a foreground stretching back, in American literature, at least to Emerson's discussion in his lecture on "Literature" (5 Jan. 1837) of the
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"portion of ourselves" that "lies within the limits of the unconscious."6 That same month, we see Francis Bowen complaining in The Christian Examiner of Germanic distortions of the English language represented by words like the "unconscious": "Among other innovations in speech made by writers of the Transcendental school, we may instance the formation of a large class of abstract nouns from adjectives, — a peculiarity as consonant with the genius of the German language, as it is foreign to the nature of our own. Thus we now speak of the Infinite, the Beautiful, the Unconscious...."7

While — for many eighteenth-century writers — creative origins took on theological definition, in the nineteenth century we see the transformation of theology into an emerging depth-psychology. "God" as creative source was being replaced by the "unconscious," while principles of "divine grace" metamorphosed into concepts of "psychic energy." During the first stages of this transformation, the "unconscious" was defined in Idealist terms. Thus, for Coleridge, the unconscious is seen as divine in its provenance, rational in its structure, and beneficent in its operation. Similarly, in Emerson's early works, the "unconscious" embodies the authority of moral law. Indeed, it is seen as the source of the moral and religious sentiments. For example, we read in Nature that the individual minds of men and women "rest like fountain-pipes on the unfathomed sea of thought and virtue whereto they alone, of all organizations, are the entrances."8 Similarly, in Emerson's lecture series "The Philosophy of History" (delivered the winter following Nature), we hear how self-conscious reflection "separates for us a truth from our unconscious reason, and makes it an object of consciousness."9 The phrase "unconscious reason" is significant. We are dealing here — as throughout Emerson's early works — with a conception of the unconscious as an ideal source, indebted in part to Emerson's study of Platonism.

But as Emerson's career progresses, this "metaphysical" or "Neoplatonic unconscious" (if I may term it that) starts to darken its features. In later works, such as The Conduct of Life (1851 lectures, published 1860), Emerson's early Idealism modulates into a psychological realism. His vision of the "heart of light" moves toward what we can call the "heart of darkness" (appropriating Conrad's evocative phrase, with its self-conscious undercutting of Idealism). In the essay "Fate," the formal limitations of existence are contrasted — not to man's "Spirit" (as they had been in Nature) — but to his "Power."
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Note the shift in terminology. The unconscious does not manifest itself here as "spirit" or "light" — but as "power" (a term much closer to later dynamic concepts, such as "libido" or "psychic energy"). "Power" is a neutral term which suggests a vision of the psyche as a dynamic system in which "spiritual" qualities have been bracketed or suspended. Throughout The Conduct of Life, we find this metaphysically-neutral vocabulary. We read of the mind's "force," its "energy," of "electricity" — but not of "spiritual illumination." What I would like to suggest is that we find a corresponding shift from Idealism in the contemporaneous works of Hawthorne and Melville. By the late 1840s and early 1850s, Idealist models of the psyche were being seriously challenged by new conceptions of the unconscious.

During the middle of the century, we witness the evolution from Idealist visions of divinely-inspired "Reason" to conceptions of human being as historically grounded. The emergence of psychology as a field of study both reflects this change and furthers it. Human existence is related to unseen subjective principles, rather than to a pre-existing ideal order. The center of interest starts to reside in an individual's specific life-history as the unfolding of his unique destiny — in what Emerson terms "self-reliance." Thus, from the beginning, we find in Emerson a conflict between his sense of unique life-history (spirit revealing itself through specific actions) and an Idealist vocabulary derived from Plato and Coleridge among others. This balance shifts from Idealism toward "existential" perspectives as individual will or development is emphasized. In this way, collective ideals give way to the concrete particularity of individual existence; rational " absolutes" start to share the stage with details of personal history.

One of the most striking examples of this evolution from Idealism is that difficult passage in Nature where Emerson concludes his discussion of "Idealism" with a seemingly willful affirmation of the physical lift of the body: "I own there is something ungrateful in expanding too curiously the particulars of the general proposition, that all culture tends to imbue us with idealism. I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons." Here, Emerson attempts to preserve the phenomenal world in his thought; at the same time, he elevates it to being a symbol of spirit. I do not read this passage as a denial of Idealism, but as an attempt — not wholly successful — to conjoin Idealism and an incipient Realism. Emerson wants to lift nature up to the level of spirit, while retaining a grasp of physical qualities. As he states his
intention: “I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man...as the ground which to attain is the object of human life, that is, of man’s connexion with nature.”11 Central to Emerson’s meaning here is the assertion that the mind is neither wholly spiritually nor wholly physical in its provenance, but a mixture of both physical and spiritual energies. Emerson must bypass the “hypothesis” of “idealism” because “the demands of the spirit” include “the existence of matter.”12 Emerson gives this bypassing of Idealism a name: he speaks of his perspective as a sense of “substantive being” or “consangunuity.”13 What we see here is an attempt to put the mind “back into” the body — to avoid the spectre of a shadowy existence in which physical reality has been replaced by a set of abstractions.

One way of putting the mind back into the body is through conceiving of the unconscious as physical — as well as spiritual — energy. Emerson does this by focusing upon the expression of spiritual energy through the body — a physical form which it needs for its articulation. In this way, spiritual energy is linked with physical origins in the unconscious — a connection which is evident in Emerson’s use of the familiar terminology of Romantic organicism:

spirit does not act upon us from without,...but spiritually, or through ourselves. Therefore, that spirit...does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power.14

While the ultimate source of man’s power receives here an ideal definition, that power is invisible except through man’s concrete existence. Here, essence and existence coexist in a mutually illuminating “correspondence.” Divine pattern and personal history fit together. But what would happen if this balance were to be upset — if the divine origins of consciousness were to be called into question? We can begin to answer that question by comparing the different uses of a psychological metaphor which occurs in Emerson’s “The American Scholar,” Hawthorne’s “The Old Manse,” and Melville’s “Hawthorne and His Mosses” — the image of cognition as a ripe fruit falling from the unconscious into consciousness.

In “The American Scholar,” a divinely grounded unconscious becomes visible through interpretive distance: “The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time in our unconscious life. In some
contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought in the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured, the corruptible has put on incorruption.”15 Here, the laws of the unconscious appear incorruptible and eternal, evidence of what Emerson elsewhere in this address characterizes as “the Divine Soul which...inspires all men.”16 Faith in intuition uncovers the pathway to greater and greater illumination — while the unconscious energy motivating human existence is seen in ideal terms. The unconscious is imagined as a “heart of light.” Both Hawthorne and Melville, as we shall see, share Emerson’s Transcendentalist faith in intuition; but for each, this faith is troubled.

In Hawthorne’s “The Old Manse,” we find a similar figure comparing cognition to the ripening of fruit. During autumn afternoons, Hawthorne listens to “the thump of a great apple...falling without a breath of wind, from the mere necessity of perfect ripeness.”17 For Hawthorne, this image suggests “the idea of an infinite generosity and exhaustless bounty on the part of our Mother Nature,” a generosity which he sees carrying over into his own processes of creation. Placing himself within a rich ambiance, fertile with the vibrations of the past and cradled by a beneficent Nature, Hawthorne envisions the possibility of a perfect sublimation from unconsciousness into spiritual illumination. Flourishing out of the unconscious like that “perfect flower...springing...from the black mud over which the river sleeps,”18 artistic and spiritual fulfillment combine as the fruit of a bountiful “Providence.”19 As in Emerson’s early works, we find the familiar Transcendentalist strain — an image of inexhaustible and divine depths freely relinquishing their wealth to creative expression.

Elsewhere, this spiritual bounty is imagined as “treasure,” “gold,” “light” — in terms of traditional alchemical images of the “heart of light.” If Emerson’s Nature portrays Nature as “a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us,” here Hawthorne evokes that “sunshine” which “beams through the gates of paradise and shows us glimpses far inward.”20 Inspired by the conversation of Ellery Channing, Hawthorne imagines “the lumps of golden thought that lay glimmering in the fountain’s bed and brightened both our faces by the reflection.”21 Inside the house, he searches among the books in the library for “any living thought which should burn like a coal of fire, or glow like an inextinguishable gem.”22 Similarly, the Manse itself is projected as an image of his psyche — as a house with long-hidden, but now accessible, treasure. I “ventured to hope,” Haw-
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thorne writes, “that wisdom would descend upon me with the falling leaves of the avenue, and that I should light upon an intellectual treasure in the Old Manse well worth those hoards of long-hidden gold which people seek for in moss-grown houses.”

Clearly, part of Hawthorne’s sensibility responds to the spiritual promise of Transcendentalism, to the promise of riches and illumination within. But at the same time that Hawthorne flirts here with Transcendentalism, he also distinguishes himself from it. On the one hand, there is the overpowering presence of Emerson — a thinker whose inspiration threatens to suffocate Hawthorne’s own originality: “it was impossible to dwell in his vicinity without inhaling more or less the mountain atmosphere of his lofty thought....” Acknowledging Emerson’s influence, Hawthorne refuses to be identified with those “who crowd so closely about an original thinker as to draw in his unuttered breath and thus become imbued with a false originality.” These images of inhalation, atmosphere, breathing suggest Hawthorne’s “anxiety of influence”; Hawthorne has his own inspiration, his own “breath” to utter, and thus protests against being labeled a “Transcendentalist.” Clearing a creative space for himself, Hawthorne develops elsewhere in “The Old Manse” a vision of the unconscious radically different from that of Emerson. Hawthorne’s “Transcendentalist” vision of the creative process as fruition and illumination is complicated by a second strain not found in Emerson. Here, the image of beneficent inspiration is disrupted by the threat of taint, of blood-stain, of haunting. At this period in Hawthorne’s work, Transcendentalist and Gothic strains intermingle — but do not marry. We are lulled into a somnolence redolent with Emersonian ripeness, with visions of Nature as “Providence.” Or we are startled to alertness by a different presence appearing from the unconscious — “the ghost by whom...the Manse was haunted.”

Similarly, creativity is tainted by a sense of blood-guilt, epitomized by Hawthorne’s parable of the American Revolution. Unlike Emerson, Hawthorne breaks the present tranquillity to recall that Nature’s apparent beneficence has been nourished with blood. The window of the study where Emerson reputedly composed Nature overlooks the Concord battlefield, and yet no trace of revolutionary bloodshed entered into Emerson’s composition. Hawthorne, in contrast, does not reject the past, but broods upon it, producing a parable of the American Revolution as a “blood stain” torturing the souls of its inheritors. This guilt is rooted in Hawthorne’s historical conscious-
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ness, his awareness of personal, familial, and national transgression (so familiar to the readers of his romances and tales). There is a serpent in Hawthorne's orchard — a serpent we might characterize in terms of his sense of a personal (as opposed to a collective) unconscious. As in the later Freudian vision of the psyche, psychological exploration is obstructed by repressed guilt, by trauma.

While Emerson projects the "One Mind" — the universal psyche — as an ideal similar to Jung's "collective unconscious," Hawthorne views the personal unconscious as lying deeper:

How little have I told! and of that little, how almost nothing is even tinctured with any quality that makes it exclusively my own! Has the reader gone wandering, hand in hand with me, through the inner passages of my being? and have we groped together into all its chambers and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. We have been standing on the greenward, but just within the cavern's mouth, where the common sunshine is free to penetrate and where every footstep is therefore free to come.27

This reverses the psychic landscape of Emerson, who sees the collective (and not the personal) as residing in "the inner passages of (his) being." While, for Emerson, the collective is deeper than the personal unconscious, for Hawthorne, it is the other way around: the personal lies deeper than the collective.

We might clarify this difference through analogy to the different psychological visions of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, who imagined the unconscious as being collective and personal, respectively. If Emerson's vision of the "One Mind" or "Oversoul" has affinities with Jung's "collective unconscious" as an ideal source, Hawthorne's psychological vision is much closer to Freud's. Like Freud, he is intensely aware of the personal secrets of the heart lying beneath the threshold. In "The Old Manse," this "personalism" contends with universal images of imaginative process. On the one hand, we have familiar figures of inspiration (alchemical transformation, organic unfolding); but on the other, we encounter Hawthorne's sense of his unique psychological history — the Puritan ghosts haunting his attic.

Melville's "Hawthorne and His Mosses" serves a similar function as personal testament. Here, Hawthorne's writing has planted seeds now "germinating" in Melville's mind. His profundity has set Melville going, as Melville recognizes with a "shock of recognition" the existence of another deep thinker adept at "symbolising the secret work-
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ings in men’s souls.” Hawthorne, Melville tells us, possesses “a great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a plummet.” But these depths, for Melville, are quite distinct from Emerson’s “unconscious reason”: “it is not the brain that can test such a man; it is only the heart.” Accordingly, the center of the psyche is no longer seen as a region of illumination, but rather as a dark sphere of passion and guilt: “For spite of all the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne’s soul, the other side — like the dark half of the physical sphere — is shrouded in a blackness, ten times black....” Melville (in contrast to Emerson and Hawthorne’s “Transcendentalist” strain) finds no light at the heart, only an increasing darkness. The deeper one sinks, the farther one is from the light — the closer to some elusive, unnameable horror.

This “Puritanic gloom” (as Melville calls it) — a sense of “melancholy” — colors Melville’s reading of those ripe apples falling in “The Old Manse.” Reading Hawthorne’s image as “the visible type of the fine mind that has described it,” Melville’s vision of psychic ripening includes a “Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin.”

We have moved from Emerson’s orchard back to the garden of Eden, back to a sense of primordial transgression. Creative inspiration is seen here — not as an avenue to redemption (as in Emerson’s case), but as a reminder of the Fall. Thinking deeply, one intuits an insurmountable distance between the artist and his unconscious ground, between transcendent ideals and the emotional realities of inspiration.

Furthermore, the creative “breath” driving Melville threatens to turn into a storm. Captivated by the “enchanting landscape in the soul of this Hawthorne,” Melville also finds, “away inland,” “the far roar of his Niagara.” There was no indication in Emerson — as there is in Melville — that unconscious forces have the potential to erupt in an uncontrollable paroxysm of demonic energy. Even when Emerson (as he does in “The American Scholar”) compares the emergence of unconscious energy to volcanic eruption, there is no loss of control, no sense that consciousness is in any way threatened. But turning to Melville, we find that consciousness can become fascinated, if not possessed, by the very creative energy it tries to harness. Even in “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” Melville raises the possibility of fascination and possession:

a) A man of deep and noble nature has seized me in this seclusion.
b) The soft ravishments of the man spun me round about in a web
of dreams...
c) Now, it is that blackness in Hawthorne...that so fixes and fascinates me...³⁴

Later, in Moby-Dick and Pierre, we encounter the terrifying consequences of such fascination.

Both Ahab and Pierre are disposed by forces which have possessed their psyches. Opening the gates to the unconscious, they release pent-up energies which overwhelm them and transform their conscious beings to the shape of trans-human power. As Melville well knew, such creative release carries with it feelings of “super-human capacity” as the ego is intoxicated by the god-like power rushing through it.³⁵ Ahab and Pierre are exhilarated by quests which seem, to them, to be divinely-inspired missions. Each figure is caught up in the rush of forces that lifts him beyond the pale of ordinary humanity into a region of apparently “divine” motivation. Each is possessed by energies which he just barely keeps under control, energies which ultimately destroy him. The narrator of Pierre daily observes near the climax of Pierre’s fatal career: “But man does never give himself up thus, a doorless and shutterless house for the four loosened winds of heaven to howl through, without still additional dilapidations.”³⁶ The “additional dilapidations” for Ahab and Pierre are those of self-destruction.

In Pierre, especially, Melville confronts head-on the disturbing question of the physical, even sexual, origin of this energy. Like Byron’s Manfred, who opens himself to the destructive sexually colored powers buried in his psyche, Pierre succumbs to the seductive lure of his half-sister Isabel. This “fascination of the terrible” casts him adrift upon “appalling” depths of soul which lead not to revelation, but to unbearable moral ambiguity. Finally, Pierre suggests that the Idealist vision of the unconscious is entirely arbitrary. For Melville, the search for a transcendent ground of being within the psyche becomes an activity enmeshed in illusion, since consciousness is seen to falsify its relationship to the physical (indeed, sexual) roots of creative energy. So long as such energy was viewed as “spirit” or “reason,” there was little difficulty in assimilating intuited depths of the mind to moral order. For if “God” resides within — in the unconscious — then our most spontaneous impulses receive a divine sanction. But Melville in Pierre openly examines the self-delusion of a character who mistakes incestuous sexual attraction for spiritual illumination. The commentary upon Transcendentalist intuition is
clear. How do we know, he asks, what forces are being released by faith in the unconscious? Isn’t it all too easy to mistake the message of instinct as that of “Reason”? What if our sense of spiritual energy motivating the psyche is an illusion masking more primitive urges?

What I would like to suggest in conclusion is that we see visions of the unconscious shifting from Emerson to Hawthorne to Melville. This change represents a growing suspicion of intuitive models based upon an Idealist model of the psyche. In other words, Hawthorne and Melville self-consciously examine their relationship to creative energy in terms which undercut Emerson’s early Idealism. As the century progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to view the unconscious as the source of metaphysical certainty. Instead, the “metaphysical unconscious” slides more and more toward what Henri Ellenberger has termed the “biological unconscious” — a creative source firmly anchored within individual life-processes, but nothing more. This narrowing of the unconscious to personal history results in a corresponding “darkening” of the psyche. The body, not a pool of light, is ultimately encountered at the lowest depths. While Emerson had subordinated Nature to Spirit and envisioned the unconscious as a force embodying itself in spiritual illumination, Melville subordinates Spirit to Nature, viewing the unconscious as physical energy disguising itself in its manifestations. What both visions share — an emphasis unifying Emerson’s writings with those of Hawthorne and Melville — is the attempt to imagine the unconscious as the source of creative activity. Finally, the works of all three writers can be compared as different visions of depth-psychology.

NOTES


5 Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics,” in Critical and Miscellaneous
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*Essays* (New York, 1899), 3: 4-5.


9 Emerson, *EL*, 2:57.

10 Emerson, *CW*, 1:35.

11 Emerson, *CW*, 1:36.

12 Emerson, *CW*, 1:37.

13 Emerson, *CW*, 1:37, 38.

14 Emerson, *CW*, 1:38.

15 Emerson, *CW*, 1:60.

16 Emerson, *CW*, 1:70.


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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.


34 Melville, W, 13:123, 125, 130.


THE SUPREME MADNESS: REVENGE AND THE BELLS IN
"THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO"

KATE STEWART

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

Even the most nonchalant reader admits that Edgar Allan Poe was more than a little interested in madness; he may be less aware, however, that Poe also dabbled in the dramatic arts. Poe’s mix of madness and drama, specifically the substance of revenge tragedy in “The Cask of Amontillado,” offers yet another example of his wide-ranging mind and creative propensities. I perceive in Poe’s tale a parallel to Elizabethan revenge tragedy.1 Pointing out that Woodberry calls “Cask” “a tale of Italian revenge,” Mabbott states that such feeling embodies “an implacable demand for retribution,” which Poe accounts for in the beginning of the tale. As he works out the action and develops the character of Montresor as a revenge-tragedy hero, Poe by means of sound effects proves himself a master of dramatic technique. As Montresor falls deeper into insanity, the ringing of the bells symbolizes his descent.

Montresor’s first declaration alerts us that revenge is the central motivation underlying the story: “The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge.”2 No one will dispute the motivation, yet scholars question the exact nature of the insult. Proponents of a politico-religious interpretation of the story see the insult growing from the tensions arising between the Catholic and the Protestant, the non-member and the Freemason, respectively Montresor and Fortunato.3 Certainly these factors contribute to the conflict. The insult is, however, the more basic one found in Elizabethan revenge tragedy: revenging an insult to a family member. Noting the connection between Italian revenge and Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Shannon Burns emphasizes that avenging an insult is Montresor’s motivation since the tale focuses on family and Catholicism.4

This fact is borne out as Montresor and Fortunato wander through the catacombs. When Fortunato comments on the vaults, his companion replies: “The Montresors...were a great and numerous family.” Fortunato responds: “I forget your arms.” Although on the surface the comment appears benign, Fortunato implies that the family is hardly worth remembering. If the Montresors had at one time been prominent, then Fortunato would surely know something about
the coat of arms. Since the men also have a fairly close relationship, Fortunato should remember the arms. Gargano sees that Montresor is the “vindicator of his ancestors” for precisely this reason. He adds that the coat of arms itself signifies Montresor’s avenging his injured family.5

The ancestral bones of the Montresors offer another parallel to revenge tragedy. Although not a device always employed by revenge tragedians, ghosts frequently appeared — the spirits of family members visiting the protagonist and spurring him to action.6 Hamlet offers a good example: the apparition of the murdered father urges his son to avenge his death. The bones of the Montresors in “Cask” function as do ghosts in revenge tragedy. Piles of ancestral bones must be removed to expose the crypt; therefore, the bones of the insulted Montresors that cover the place of Fortunato’s entombment share in the death of the enemy. Later, when he finishes his brickwork, Montresor replaces the bones; consequently the “ghosts” reach out to insure the burial of Fortunato. Unlike the ghosts in Elizabethan tragedies, the apparitions in “Cask” do not appear and reappear. Instead they are ever-present, constant reminders of the family’s history. When Fortunato, drunken and proud, sarcastically toasts his friend’s ancestors, he underlines his contempt for the family, living and dead — and both the living and the dead are there to avenge that insult.

Several characteristics in “Cask” align with elements of Gothicism: gruesomeness, terror, horror, and violence. Because of their association with murder and death, the bones also contribute to Gothicism in this tale. Aside from their immediate relationship with physical suffering, they produce this effect through sound: they rattle and so reinforce terror. Noting the revival of Renaissance drama in the late 1700s, Clara F. McIntyre sees borrowings — especially in the blood and violence, revenge, madness, and ghosts — from Elizabethan tragedy in the novels of Ann Radcliffe and others.7

Added to these distinct features of revenge tragedy is the presence of the prototypical hero from such drama. Fortunato has gradually victimized Montresor. The victim allows a thousand injuries to pass, and he takes punitive action only when Fortunato insults him. To his listener Montresor emphasizes that he would “at length” be avenged. Avoiding any risks, the protagonist carefully calculates his actions because his being caught and punished could render the vengeance ineffective. The fact remains, though, that Montresor, like a revenge
hero, does delay the fulfillings of his plans. His meticulous engineering of the murder over an unspecified, but certainly not a brief, period causes Poe’s vengeance-seeker to brood upon his hatred for Fortunato. Because of his constant agonizing, Montresor’s plans become obsessive, leading him to insanity.

In their study of the revenge-tragedy motif, Charles A. and Elaine S. Hallett postulate that “the brutal act committed by the revenge is what distinguishes the act of revenge from the act of justice and makes void all of the protagonist’s claims to sanity.” This statement sheds light on Montresor’s actions; his violent act emblematizes his mental condition.

Many critics believe that the protagonist of “Cask” resembles Roderick Usher and William Wilson. Davidson views Roderick and Madeleine as the mental and physical components of one person. Another divided self, William Wilson, confronts his mirror image. He is enraged by his twin’s loathsome traits. Montresor is this same type of divided self. Thus, when Montresor kills his enemy, he commits suicide. Ridding himself of Fortunato, he destroys the hated personality traits within himself. Although in his warped mind he views Fortunato as the enemy, in particular his own, Montresor is clearly the sinister figure. He is the plotter, the murderer. Despite his malevolence, however, he is the protagonist of “Cask.” Montresor is, then, a hold-over of the Elizabethan villain-hero.

The evidence is sufficient: the protagonist is a split personality—a madman. Without exhaustive characterization of Montresor, the text proper offers ample evidence of his divided self. After he has determined vengeance, he qualifies: “It must be understood that neither by word or deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will.” Here is the classic description of a dual personality, the man who does not externalize his feelings. Showing an apparent or ironic good will, Montresor inquires after Fortunato’s health as they travel toward the latter’s death.

Beginning with the cordial meeting of the two, this journey leads Montresor into madness: “I am on my way to Luchesi.” Mabbott interprets the name as meaning “Look-crazy.” “Luchesi” recurs, yet the structure of its first appearance is highly significant. The tense of the verb is progressive. On the surface the statement is merely a decoy to lure Fortunato to his death; however, the forward-moving action expressed by the verb structure renders greater meaning. Montresor is on his way to deeper insanity. Even after fifty years of pondering his
crime, he finds no peace of mind. In his descent into madness, the murderer remembers vividly the ringing of the bells. The story of the crime might become distorted after so many years, although the haunting sound of the bells in the last scene between pursuer and victim remains with Montresor. Noting that Montresor views Fortunato as his “mirror image,” Sweet states that, when Montresor hears only the jingling of the bells after he yells “Fortunato,” those bells signify the insanity of the protagonist. This final chiming marks Montresor’s complete descent into madness. The bells sound throughout the story, and each “jingling” furthers the mental breakdown of Montresor.

Recounting his murder of Fortunato, Montresor sets the stage by describing the evening “during the supreme madness of the carnival season.” The atmosphere suggests the mental state of the murderer. Like the craziness around him, he verges upon collapse. His long brooding over the method of repaying his adversary has led him to a state of frenzy as he sets his plans in motion. Poe dresses Montresor’s enemy as a court jester with “conical cap and bells.” Critics see this garb as one of the ironies in “Cask” since Montresor and Fortunato have switched places. Fortunato is no longer the power figure; he is a fool who is now victimized by his former victim. Montresor rises to power before Fortunato the dupe. The costuming is ironic, to be sure, but it serves a dramatic function. The bells on Fortunato’s cap ring time and again. With each ringing, Montresor slips farther and farther into his own “supreme madness.”

Montresor first mentions the bells as he and Fortunato enter the catacombs: “The gait of my friend was unsteady and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.” Montresor specifically refers to the bells on three subsequent occasions, but his first remark remains significant because it demonstrates his keen awareness of this particular sound. Since they “jingled as he strode,” the bells sound more or less constantly. The faint chimes mark each drunken step taken by Fortunato. Montresor would be attuned to the incessant ringing; consequently the bells haunt him fifty years after the crime.

Constantly aware of the bells, he would notice them more on certain occasions. After one coughing spell: “Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!” (the hacking itself echoing the repeated sounding of bells), Fortunato drinks to the departed Montresors. Again the protagonist hears the bells. Montresor observes of Fortunato as the latter proposes his toast: “He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me
familiarly, while his bells jingled.” Fortunato’s actions indeed seem to be contemptuous. Once more the aristocrat goes beyond injury to insult, and Montresor more intensely desires revenge.

Shortly, Montresor again refers to the bells, after explaining his coat of arms: “The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled.” This statement marks roughly the midpoint of the story. The companions near the place of entombment; Montresor will soon realize his goal. Attaining the prize, though, he will slip into greater unreality. This halfway point signals his halfway point to insanity. When readers note Montresor’s third reference to the bells, they should look back to the first: the bells sound at each step. Because of his increasing drunkenness, evident in his glazed eyes, his walk no doubt degenerates from being “unsteady” to staggering. To signify mere unsteady steps the bells would sound with some regularity. By contrast, more halting and unsure steps create a more erratic sound. From soft regular tinkling, they would grow irregular. The bells’ more erratic sounds symbolize Montresor’s loss of mental stability. Another Poe narrator is likewise lost in “fancy,” a word closely associated with illusions and distorted mental activity. When the narrator in “The Raven” begins “linking Fancy unto fancy,” he is obviously losing control. Montresor’s situation is the same because, the closer he comes to destroying his enemy, the cloudier grows his thinking.

When the men reach their destination, Montresor chains a stunned Fortunato inside the crypt. This scene functions as the play-within-the-play motif of revenge tragedy because it portrays the culmination of the vengeance. Moreover, despite some verbalizing, the episode conveys a sense of pantomime; nowhere are actions so exaggerated. The Halletts suggest that the play-within-a-play reflects the mental state of the revealer by portraying his “mad act.” They further surmise that “this motif brings in a world distinct from that of the real world. The separation is represented visually by the creation of a sealed-off space within which the play can be staged.” Montresor sets his “dumb-show” in operation, and again the bells figure significantly. The revenge-hero’s work with the chain roughly imitates the sound of bells: metal striking metal. This “bell ringing,” however, contrasts sharply to the earlier jingles. The bells on Fortunato’s cap would emit a light, cheerful tinkling. On the other hand, the ringing of the chain might be heavy and somber. While the amateur mason goes about his work, he hears the “furious vibrations of the chain.” The rumblings of the metal prompt Montresor to cease his
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labors and sit down to enjoy the success of his plot. When the chains stop rattling, he resumes. His labors are interrupted, however, by "loud and shrill screams." Noticeably affected by these outcries, the protagonist admits that he "hesitated" and "trembled." Regaining his composure, Montresor answers the yells of anguish, returning scream for scream. Finally silence prevails. The type of ringing produced by the chains represents Montresor's going insane; the "mad act" is complete. Surely his tremblings and screamings, much on the order of the scenes in "Tarr and Fether," typify a madman.

After his final exchange with his victim, Montresor hears the bells ring for the last time. Twice calling "'Fortunato'" and receiving no response, he hears nothing save the jingling of the bells, which sickens him. He attempts to rationalize his sickness as a consequence of the dampness in the catacombs. His state results, however, from the awareness and horror of his sin. Earlier he blamed wine for his declining mental condition, but he rationalizes again. A victim of a diseased mind, he hears the ringing of the bells, emblems of his madness, fifty years after the murder. Gargano states: "Montresor fails because he cannot harmonize the disparate parts of his nature, and, consequently, cannot achieve self-knowledge." Also describing Montresor's failure, Kozikowski sees the man's revenge as "a shambles, a wreckage of the human spirit,..." Recognizing his heinous crime, Montresor cannot escape the horror of the deed. Revenge, madness, and bells echo eternally in his head.

"Cask" testifies impressively to Poe's subtle art of networking his multiform interests and knowledge into a unified work of art. In its compactness this tale offers the full range of Poe's talents: his adept characterization, his careful attention to setting, and his stunning dramatic technique.

NOTES

1 Scholars debate Poe's knowledge of Renaissance drama. Killis Campbell postulates that Poe knew little about the subject. Other scholars note otherwise. Thomas Olive Mabbott cites some fifteen allusions from Elizabethan drama in Politian; Burton Pollin lists numerous references to Renaissance tragedians and their works. N. Bryllion Fagin also credits Poe with wide knowledge of the dramatic arts.

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action in such drama. Furthermore, he states that the hero pursues retribution because of jealousy, injury or insult, or self-preservation and that, as a natural result of vengeance-seeking, he goes insane.


6 Bowers, p. 64.

7 Clara F. McIntyre, “Were the ‘Gothic Novels’ Gothic?,” *PMLA*, 36 (1921), 652-658.

8 *The Revenger’s Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (Lincoln, 1980), p. 82.


11 McIntyre, p. 665.

12 Sweet, p. 11.


14 Gargano, p. 121.

15 Hallet, pp. 90-91.


17 Gargano, pp. 125-126.

18 Kozikowski, p. 278.
REMINISCENCES ABOUT A “COMPLEAT” SCHOLAR:  
CLARENCE GOHDES  

IMA HONAKER HERRON  

EMERITA, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Memories crowd the mind when I think about the close ties which have bound in long lasting friendship certain faculty members and students associated with both Duke and Southern Methodist Universities. In this regard I have had thoughts concerning the questions with which William A. Owens begins *A Fair and Happy Land*, one of his family chronicles: “Who am I?” and “Where did we come from?” Similar queries may be asked in relation to friends and associates I have known and esteemed in Dallas and Durham.

“In my beginning is my end”; that familiar quotation from Eliot’s “East Coker” is as equally applicable to my own academic experiences, as it is to those of my friends. In late August 1926, after having been awarded the M. A., I left Southern Methodist University to assume the chairmanship of the English department at a small college in Sherman, Texas. Before my departure from Dallas, I heard from Professor Jay B. Hubbell, then head of the S.M.U. English department, an expression of pleasure about the expected arrival of a new assistant professor by the name of Clarence Gohdes, a recent graduate of Capital University, Columbus Ohio, and of the State University of Ohio. By the time of my return to Southern Methodist in the fall of 1927, as an instructor, Gohdes had resumed graduate study at Harvard, later transferring to Columbia to complete his doctoral program. It was not until 1931, when I became a Duke University doctoral candidate, that I personally met Clarence Gohdes. In the interim (1926-1931), I heard so much praise about him that I felt I had actually become acquainted with him. Thus I looked forward to meeting him in person, especially since the only friends I had known previously in Dallas were Jay and Lucinda Hubbell, by then living near the Duke campus.

Much, therefore, of what I can record about Gohdes’s S.M.U. experiences is based upon hearsay, some university catalogues, and my own knowledge of life at the university and of the Southwest in general. Certain questions come to mind. What kind of place and intellectual climate did Gohdes discover when he returned to the state where he was born, in historic San Antonio as the son of a minister?
Was he disillusioned when he first glimpsed the then but partially
developed suburb known as University Park?

During the Twenties, Southern Methodist was still “an embryo
University” or “prairie college” founded in 1915 and situated on a
sloping elevation about six miles north of downtown Dallas, itself a
burgeoning little city divided from Oak Cliff by the Trinity River. At
the time of the school’s establishment, the first buildings, of Georgian
architectural design in red brick with white stone columned entran-
ces, had been erected on a 133-acre campus in a sea of Johnson grass
and red and yellow Indian paintbrush weeds (In early years this
brilliantly-colored weed — the gallardia — was chosen as the school
flower, symbolizing, I suppose, the virgin land upon which the univer-
sity structures were built). There was little landscaping, although a
creek-side grove of trees was referred to by the ridiculous name of
Arden Forest because the first college performances of Shakespearean
plays were given there. It is no wonder that, in the Thirties when I was
first introduced to Gohdes, he teasingly inquired: “Are there any trees
in University Park now?” In a recent year on the occasion of his return
visit to Dallas, a former colleague and I conducted Clarence on “a
guided tour” of the now heavily populated suburbs of University Park
and adjacent Highland Park. Seemingly he was astonished when he
saw huge oak, hackberry, and other types of trees in landscaped yards
around spacious homes, a country club and golf course, and small
parks. The prairie landscape of the Twenties had long since vanished,
and urbanism, as Amy Lowell once poetized, had left its blight on the
land, the cowboy and his mustang.

Also during the Twenties, the intellectually-alive young staff
members and major English students (Henry Nash Smith, John
Chapman, and others) at Southern Methodist felt the influence of
Professors Hubbell and John Hathaway McGinnis, both innovative
and inspiring teachers. As Mr. Hubbell has written — in his reminis-
cent South and Southwest — the department’s faculty and best stu-
dents then formed “a small group of friends and lovers of literature
who shared with one another our ideas and our hopes....” There
existed a strong spirit of camaraderie and of shared labors, notably in
regard to co-operative work involved in the editing and publishing of
The Southwest Review, which Professor Hubbell, as the first Editor, in
1924 had revitalized from The Texas Review, then practically defunct.

Those who welcomed Clarence as a newcomer and became his
lasting friends were a remarkably alert group of young men and
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women, mostly native Texans belonging to pioneer families. A charge of "inbreeding" and of provincialism satirically made by a supercilious out-of-state professor did not dampen their enthusiasm for taking part in Professor Hubbell's plans to stimulate wide interests in the development of Southwestern writing and other native arts. As early as 1922 he challenged gifted students to develop creatively by organizing "The Makers," an informal poetry club whose members gained more than local recognition by the publication of selected poems in a small volume appropriately titled Prairie Pegasus (1927). In this same year Mr. Hubbell in his initial editorial for The Southwest Review, titled "The New Southwest," appealed to "those promising young writers whom the editor did not know but felt sure were to be found in the cities and colleges of the Southwest." With such possible newcomers in mind, he emphasized the rich unmined literary materials in the region. This early editorial appeal came to rich fulfillment in later regional studies by some of Mr. Hubbell's students of this decade, such as Henry Smith's Virgin Land, John Chapman's studies of frontier Texas forts, and Jerry Bywater's brochures about Southwestern art.

Most of Clarence's Southern Methodist friends were members of the local scholarship society, Alpha Theta Phi and in 1948, with the chartering of the Gamma Chapter of Texas, were to be elected as alumni to Phi Beta Kappa. Clarence already was a Phi Beta Kappa. Clarence's gifted roommate in Dallas during 1926-1927 had been a fellow student when both were attending Harvard in 1925. The two possessed contrasting personalities. Whereas Clarence, as described by another S.M.U. colleague, was of a rather serious, drily witty, and pleasant manner, Garland Garvey Smith was fun-loving and very lively. Also, while Clarence's interest, heightened by association with Mr. Hubbell, was primarily in the field of American studies, Garland's was in Old and Middle English. His humor made Garland a delightful teacher of Chaucer's works. According to an early catalogue, Clarence also taught a class in American literature. Both were assistant professors committed to a standard of excellence even when instructing rather provincial Southwestern freshmen and sophomores.

Prior to Clarence's arrival on "the Hilltop," the arbiters of American manners, including Southern Methodist's "conduct guardians," were being challenged throughout the country. Frederick Lewis Allen has detailed in Only Yesterday the spirit of revolt then spreading in the land. What he wrote about long-held and strict moral codes in general may be applied in limited fashion to Southern Methodist and
the strong moral consciousness determining the conduct of faculty and students alike during its formative years. Perhaps their dissatisfaction with restraint or simply their love of indulging in hoaxes provoked several of Clarence’s youthful colleagues into daring action against authority. I do not know whether Clarence on an autumn week-end accompanied Garland, John Lee Brooks (later a Harvard Ph. D. and a distinguished folklorist), and Herbert Pickens Gambrell (a future leading Texas historian) to Austin, ostensibly to attend a football game. Instead, they discovered in the University of Texas library a copy of the dissertation written by a Doctor of Education dean at Southern Methodist. According to local yarn spinners, they gleefully combed that dissertation for “blacklisted errors,” which later they recklessly used in freshman composition and history tests. The dean’s discovery of their folly nearly lost them their jobs. Assuredly at Southern Methodist, as elsewhere, an upheaval of values was taking place.

In some areas, especially in state-controlled institutions, the era of the Twenties was disparaged as “The Jazz Age” and students characterized as “Flaming Youth.” In the Southwest, except for the University of Texas, Texas A&M College, North Texas State University, and a few others, notable colleges and universities — Baylor, Texas Christian, Southern Methodist, Wesley, Texas Wesleyan, Mary Hardin Baylor, and the like — were church-related institutions upholding strict moral standards. Southern Methodist’s official motto, Veritas Liberabit Vos (“The truth will set you free”), was in keeping with the dictum that moral conduct was expected of everyone. At Baylor University, where on-campus smoking was banned, visiting Amy Lowell, at a banquet in her honor, shocked the pious Baptists by smoking her special brand of Havana cigarillos. (This violation of the code of conduct later was the subject of an amusing essay appearing in The Southwest Review.) At Southern Methodist, a similar ban made on-campus dancing verboten; consequently, sororities and fraternities tried to escape observation by entertaining with dances at downtown hotels and the Dallas Country Club (In those days there were no Greek-organization houses on campus, as today). But not long after Clarence left, authority again was threatened. One evening a group of venturesome students and some young teachers — I was one of them — secretly staged a dance in the gymnasium. Our merriment unexpectedly ended when the Dean of Men — a ministerial Malvolio — opened the doors and sternly brought the fun to an unhappy close. A
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"goody-goody" student had tattled about the "sinful doings" in the gymnasium. Following this "sinning," administrative officials actually permitted dancing at the University.

Another association central to Gohdes's Dallas period stemmed from the frequent gatherings of colleagues at the Knox Street Cafeteria, about two miles distant from the campus. This popular "eatery," at a time when the university lacked a faculty clubhouse, was more or less a regular meeting place for Clarence, Garland, Lee, and other colleagues. Here, according to reports, they enjoyed many a talkfest while eating cherry pie, Garland's favorite dessert, and other savory food. Other friends participating in these conversations included mathematician Hemphill (Hemp) Hosford, business manager for The Southwest Review and much later university provost, Herbert Gambrell, anecdote-teller par excellence, George Bond, editorial assistant to Professor Hubbell for the Review, and John Chapman, a versatile English major who became a surgeon, dean of Graduate Studies and historian of the Southwestern Medical School, as well as author of a scientific book about Lord Byron. Additional friends about whom Clarence has inquired, in notes to me, were the four lively Toomey sisters — Mary, Anne, Dorothy, and Elizabeth (deceased). According to Mr. Hubbell, artistic Anne designed the first colophon for the rust-red cover of The Southwest Review. This was a circular emblem enclosing a frontal view of Dallas Hall, the central building of the university. Later Jerry Bywaters, today a distinguished painter and art historian, drew several versions of a figure of a cowboy astride a mustang, an appropriate symbol for a Southwestern magazine (At a recent Southern Methodist alumni gathering, I talked with the three surviving Toomeys, who remembered Clarence with much pleasure).

All of the notes herein given offer but fleeting glimpses of an academic circle of friends associated with an early stage of Gohdes's ever-developing professional life. The next change began at the close of the 1927 school year when, as noted earlier, he decided to return to Harvard, later completing his doctoral program at Columbia, where Professor Ralph Rusk supervised the work on his dissertation, The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism. The 1931 publishing by the Duke University Press of this scholarly work was timed shortly after Ghodes began his long tenure as a member of the English department at Duke in 1930. Once again he became a colleague of Professor Hubbell, who had left Dallas in 1927 for a better position at Duke.

The Duke University with which I became acquainted in the
Thirties was a rapidly growing institution emerging from Trinity College and expanding into an independent university. *Veritas Liberabit Vos* could just as well have been applied to Duke, as to Southern Methodist, at this period. President William Preston Few, frail in appearance but energetic in action, was then working with vision toward the attainment of his goal, the development of a top-ranking university which “shall be a shining place where high-minded youth may catch aspirations to true character and genuine excellence,...who have been made strong by the power to know the truth and the will to live it” (*Duke Encounters*, 1977, p. 15). President Few, recognizing that no college or university was any better than its faculty, was diligent in his search for teachers of high quality, recognition, and promise.

By the time of my enrollment as a graduate student in September 1931, President Few’s search, as applied to the English department, had resulted in a scholarly staff with diversified talents. To those who had earlier tenure — Professors Paull Franklin Baum, Frank C. Brown, Allan Gilbert, Walter K. Greene, and Newman Ivey White — were added Messrs. Hubbell and Gohdes. Later the American literature group was augmented by the appointment of Charles R. Anderson, Arlin Turner, Louis Budd, Lewis Leary, Edwin Cady, and distinguished visiting professors including Edward Sculley Bradley (the University of Pennsylvania), Floyd Stovall (the University of Texas), and Ernest E. Leisy (Southern Methodist). Another early staff member interested in the American field was charming Mrs. White, who taught a native drama course — at the Woman’s College — for which I graded papers, held student conferences, and proctored tests.

During this early period, a sort of “family” relationship prevailed at Duke. English graduate majors made lasting friendships not only by means of course work, but also through the local opportunities for socializing. Generally the relationships between faculty and students were close, heightened by occasional gatherings in faculty homes and apartments. These affairs ranged from dances held at Professor Brown’s commodious home, beyond the East Campus, to informal meetings sponsored by the Whites, Hubbells, Gilberts, and others. Informal dances sponsored by the Graduate Club and held in the East Campus “Ark,” a small recreation building, as well as the after-dinner dancing in the foyer of the East Campus dining hall, helped us to meet students from other disciplines.

Also various organizations fostered a spirit of friendliness. On occasion faculty members participated in the programs offered by the
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Graduate English Club, the state clubs, and the general Graduate Club. I recall going to Chapel Hill for a combined program between the Duke English Club and a similar group at the University of North Carolina. When time permitted, Duke majors attended productions of native plays by Paul Green and other playwrights belonging to Professor Koch's North Carolina Playmakers in Chapel Hill.

Most of the English majors, during 1931-32, were enrolled in Professor Brown's Old English course and, on alternate days, in Professor Baum's Middle English class, both scheduled near the lunch hour. At the close of each session, we were accustomed to rushing toward the Commons where we gathered around a large table reserved for English graduate students. Here our departmental wits — Martin Shockley, Bill Hoole, Merrimon Cuninggim, Tom Johnston, Isabella D. Harris, David Cornel DeJong, Mary Poteat, and others — engaged in spirited repartee. Frequently the lively conversation centered upon our professors. Since American literature majors, even at this early time, outnumbered others, we exchanged ideas, always favorable, related to Professor Hubbell and Associate Professor Gohdes. Through these roundtable talks we also became more keenly aware of the variety of professional chores which these gentlemen performed, in addition to their teaching. One of the most demanding, I presume, was related to the wide subject-matter range of the theses and dissertations under their direction. Notable subjects at this time included American hymnody, the fiction of Mary Noailles Murfree ("Charles Egbert Craddock"), a history of the Richmond stage, early magazine publication in Charleston, William Gilmore Simms as a realistic romancer, and Poe and The Southern Literary Messenger. I recall, with gratitude, the assistance given me in my study of the literary treatments of the American small town. On occasion, when I chanced to meet Professor Hubbell in the halls or library, he would pull from his pockets scraps of paper on which he had jotted down titles, saying: "Here are some things which I think you will want to explore." Also, I remember that Gohdes allowed me to develop a term paper centered upon Concord and "the walkers," Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and fellow walkers (This topic reminds me that at Duke I joined the Walkers Club, whose members, led by redoubtable Professor Gilbert, used to make Sunday safaris "over hill and down dale." One of the faculty members with whom I became acquainted was the German professor who frightened doctoral candidates by the harshness of his oral German language examinations).
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The kindly assistance given by Professors Hubbell and Gohdes was in sharp contrast to the attitude of another departmental professor, outside my chosen field, who once assigned a recondite subject for my term paper. When I unwittingly questioned him about a bibliographical problem, he rather witheringly replied: "It's not my business to aid students in this way." A verbal slap which stiffened my sense of self-reliance!

Gohdes's lectures offered sharp illuminations of his many-sided mind: of his firm grasp of subject matter and his keen perceptions. I recall his fluent delivery enlivened by wit, sometimes delightfully satiric, and the arrangement of each lecture's material into a sort of patterned mosaic, skillfully combining major and minor elements. In his analyses of the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and other major writers, he occasionally introduced their family relationships and the significance of their milieu. My annotated copy of Emory Holloway's edition of Leaves of Grass offers an example of Gohdes's careful attention to textual analysis.

In his vignettes of contemporary figures, he at times added a human touch, appraising their strengths, their oddities, their "quirks and quiddities." Thus we became better acquainted with the relative significance of Jones Very, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, the Peabody sisters, Mary Moody Emerson, and Christopher Cranch, among others (Later, when I returned to Southern Methodist, I bought copies of F. DeWolfe's Christopher Pearse Cranch and His Caricatures of New England Transcendentalism for my students' enjoyment. Cranch's cartoons of "Emerson the Mystic" — "Almost I become a transparent Eyeball" — and "Emerson in Ecstasy Over Nature" — "Almost I fear to think how glad I am!" and other "scribble drawings" aroused considerable visibility among students).

My comments made here about Clarence's professional successes can do little more than verify estimates that already have been made, here and abroad. His extraordinary qualities have brought him wide recognition as a versatile man of letters and as the recipient of a long list of high honors. His position as a Guggenheim Fellow (1962), as the managing editor and then the editor of American Literature, and as James B. Duke Professor of American Literature (now emeritus) exemplify his eminence.

Among his books my favorite, which I reviewed for The Southwest Review in 1944, is American Literature in 19th-Century England, a witty history proving the interest of Victorian readers (from 1833 until
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the century’s end) in a rapidly expanding American literature. Gohdes’s revelations indicate that American literature, heretofore often ridiculed, actually was beginning to serve as an effective tool in creating cordial relationships between England and the United States. Expressive of Gohdes’s abiding interest in the field of publishing are the chapters on the Anglo-American booktrade, the rise of periodical literature, the enthusiasm of Victorians for American humor, the critical techniques then used in appealing to the British masses, and Longfellow’s amazing popularity (As Bliss Perry has wittily said, to disparage Longfellow was “like carrying a rifle into a national park”).

This monograph was a forerunner to Gohdes’s future extensive research and revelations concerning the broadening of American literary influences, notably in regard to regionalism. His Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U.S.A. (1959, 1963, 1970 — dedicated to Jay Broadus Hubbell) and Literature and Theater of the States and Regions of the U.S.A. An Historical Bibliography (1967) are indispensable handbooks for many types of readers and librarians seeking information about American culture. Gohdes’s critical acumen is also used to fine advantage in his essay, “The Later Nineteenth Century,” his contribution to The Literature of the American People (1951) and in America’s Literature (1955 and later issues), a highly-illustrated anthology edited in collaboration with James D. Hart.

A major editorial achievement is a cogent collection, a festschrift, Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell (1968). With the assistance of Charles R. Anderson, Ray M. Atchison, Lewis Leary, Henry Nash Smith, and James L. Woodress, Gohdes garnered from twenty-three scholarly men and one woman, from all sections of the country, miscellaneous critiques displaying the vitality of modern scholarship. All of these contributors share with Professors Hubbell and Gohdes, as well as with other American specialists, the rank of “professional students of the literature of the United States—‘representative men,’ in the Emersonian sense.”

Clarence’s generosity is evidenced in his many kindnesses, not only toward his colleagues and students, but also to others. His family is especially remembered in book dedications to his wife Celestine and to Eleanor and Dorothy, his daughters, one of whom is a physician in an official position at a hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Once, while his mother and sister were visiting his brother in Dallas, I had the pleasure of meeting these charming ladies. Also noteworthy was
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his concern for the welfare of Jay and Lucinda Hubbell during their last years. I am not familiar with the full details, but I like to think that Clarence was the special arranger for the party honoring Professor Hubbell on his ninetieth birthday (8 May 1975), at the home of Professor Benjamin Boyce. The photograph which Mr. Hubbell sent to me pictures the honoree with the following friends and associates: Gohdes, Leary, Bernard Duffey, Budd, Cady, Turner, and Robert Woody. Finally, I remember well a rainy day long ago — the day of one of my oral examinations — when Clarence came by my boarding house to drive me to the library on the main campus. His kindness eased my fears about going to the Tower.

In 1973, following his retirement in 1971 after thirty-six years of distinguished service at Duke, a very special honor was accorded Gohdes. Professor James Woodress, an eminent California scholar, with the assistance of Professors Townsend Ludington and Joseph Arpad, edited Essays Mostly on Periodical Publishing in America: A Collection in Honor of Clarence Gohdes. In this festschrift these authorities on American culture arranged a worthy group of unpublished essays by both established and younger scholars whose critiques of significant facets of American literary history were in keeping with some of Gohdes's chief interests. To an all too brief sketch of Gohdes's influential career, the editors added biographical sketches of the contributors, all friends of and some of them former students of Professor Gohdes. Moreover, the extremely wide range of Gohdes's interests was indicated in a lengthy bibliography recording, among other subjects, his definitive writing about American magazines. Obviously this checklist remains an important source for students, librarians, and lay readers wishing to acquaint themselves with a scholar's manifold enthusiasms, especially those relating to Lanier and Whitman.

What I once expressed in The Southwest Review (1968), about Mr. Hubbell is equally true of Clarence Gohdes. What I then wrote about Mr. Hubbell I repeat now in praise of Gohdes, an appreciated friend remembered for "his modesty about his distinguished achievements, as esteemed professor, a longtime quester for academic excellence, as honored scholar, far-sighted editor, enterprising creator of humanistic programs..., and influential shaper of American literary scholarship."

For the 15 May 1981 Phi Beta Kappa (Gamma Chapter of Texas) celebration, Professor Laurence Perrine, a gifted colleague of mine,
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composed "The Life Designed," a poetic affirmation of the organization's tradition of excellence, the same kind of excellence fostered by Clarence Gohdes:

Thousands resort
To field and court
To celebrate
The Kings of Sport.
Of other sort,
We seek to find
A different kind
Of excellence,
Uncommon sense,
The quest to find
Knowledge unmined
And undefined,
A better life
For humankind.
We celebrate
The life of mind.
Others resort
To field and court
To watch the Kings
Of Sport cavort.
We do not mind.
We are designed
To mind the mind.*

*Quoted by permission of Laurence Perrine, D. D. Frensley Professor of English Emeritus, Southern Methodist University.
A BOOK FOR THE ISLANDS

MAUREEN COBB MABBOTT

MEDFORD, NEW JERSEY

Moby-Dick is a desert island book for me. I often read passages, any passage, at odd moments and, although I have never done so, may one day use it for advice or prophecy as some have used the Bible, as Gabriel Betteredge used Robinson Crusoe in The Moonstone.

Even more than for the desert island, Moby-Dick is a book for my "insular city of the Manhattoes." I have been asked why I am so drawn to this monstrous compendium of phantasy and fact, poetry and prose which, as an early reviewer said, is "a romance, a tragedy, and a natural history, not without numerous gratuitous suggestions on psychology, ethics and theology." As is so often the case, there is no answer, only answers, and of the many reasons for my veneration of Melville's book on whaling, I would like to present two although, perhaps, they include all the others.

As a child I had an intimate sense of the presence of the earth and the air and the sky from my own masthead at the top of an apple tree on a farm in central Missouri. Up high in the tree, my arm around a slender bough, my cheek pressed against its bark, I would stand and watch the white cloud castles form and reform in the surrounding blue immensity. In the early spring I would cling to the tree and gaze so long through the young green leaves at the moving clouds above me, feel so warm in the sun brushed by the air, that I could mesmerize myself into a kind of sisterly connection with the natural world.

On this city island where I live now and have no apple tree, I cling to Moby-Dick, which has more resources even than a tree and is formed like one being untidy, branching, organic. I turn to this book not only to renew a sense of my relationship to the physical universe, beneficent or terrifying, but also to keep an edge on my awareness of

https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol5/iss1/1
the great struggles of humankind, so perceptively summed up by John Cowper Powys as "our battles with the First Cause, with Nature, with human beings, and our own insanities." In the dailiness of human life, sometimes awash with triviality, I read Moby-Dick and remember greatness.

It was fortunate, I think, that I came to the book on my own after college, never having had a course in American literature, but filled with the resonance of great poems — the work of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and company — taught by the inspired teachers of my time at the University of Chicago. Among other things, that Milton assignment to memorize the whole of "Lycidas" was, I am now convinced, no small preparation for the reading of Moby-Dick. I had been permanently touched, too, by my childhood reading of the Bible and folk tales so that I was excited by the triumphs and tolerant of the failures of literary expression, having already encountered both in these giants. And I was widely enough read to rejoice in Melville's Olympian ability to connect his scenes with "the past and the distant, the world of books and the life of experience."

Nevertheless, from the beginning, Moby-Dick was for me essentially a simple story of the humble hero of a folk tale, the young man from the provinces gone out to seek his fortune which is himself. To do that, he went whaling and even before he shipped on the Pequod, he found himself among immensities. So do we all, of course, all the time. But Ishmael was aware. It is that eloquent awareness of the immensity of his experiences, from his encounters with Queequeg and Ahab to the purely whaling routines of manning the masthead and trying out the blubber, that carries the reader into self-discovery, that makes the real more fantastic than the fantastical, and often lifts its expression into the gravest and most beautiful poetry. Indeed Moby-Dick says to the prospective reader what a poem says: "Read me, Read me again."

At each reading the searching rays of the mind's intuition play on other and different facets of this many-faceted book. In spite of its fascinations, I have never isolated the text-book on whaling imbedded in its pages, but I have made a little breviary of Moby-Dick's immensities, beginning with the description of the Nantucketer who, "out of sight of land, furls his sails, and lays him to his rest, while under his very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales." In these descriptions, fired by Ishmael's awareness, are the "vast herds of wild horses whose pastures in those days were only fenced by the Rocky Mountains and
Maureen Cobb Mabott

the Alleghanies”; the Pequod try-works flaming and roaring through the “blackness of darkness”; the gigantic calmness of the ocean viewed from the masthead and at the entrance of the Pacific — the great South Sea with its “wide-rolling watery prairies and Potter's Fields of all four continents.” Most piercing of all is the psychological immensity of the obsession of the Pequod’s captain who, driven by a force beyond himself, cries out “Is Ahab, Ahab?” as he pursues the evil he perceives in the First Cause, embodied for him in the White Whale, Moby Dick, whose “mighty mildness of repose” is “but the vesture of tornadoes.”

Again, there are readings of Moby-Dick when what the early critic called its “gratuitous suggestions on psychology, ethics and theology” pierce the understanding with particular poignancy. An old diary records one such reading for me. It was during the war and not by any means my first reading but, I judge, a very telling one:

October 19, 1944

Now, in the evening of October 19, 1944, I have finished reading Moby-Dick. It stands up and goes out like a prayer as Rilke says a poem should. I keep thinking of a poem. It is more darkly powerful than Whitman, nothing but Paradise Lost can compare with some passages. There, at the end, is one when the Pequod, sinking, takes along, fastened to the mast, a sky-hawk “and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.”

Melville is an author who can channel particulars into universal application, indeed, point a moral, without offense. In his novel, whose supreme excitement is the chase, slabs of philosophy, excursions of insight are the precious spermaceti of his whale-catch.

At the end of the chapter on The Line: “All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale boat, you would not feel at heart one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side.”

But there is also ease for the darkest tensions — “if you be a philosopher.” In The Blanket there is that discussion of the thick skin or blubber of the whale: “It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness.
A BOOK FOR THE ISLANDS

Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter’s, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own.”

In 1944, during my last stem-to-stern reading of Moby-Dick, I read and marked these passages in my little brown leatherette Modern Library edition, so portable and companionable and, even then, so worn. I have not ceased reading in this novel and, as I say in another place, the little brown book has been lovingly cremated after sixty years of use.

Now, in 1984, I launch myself on the “unshored, harborless immensities” of Moby-Dick better equipped than I have ever been. Added to a long life of reading and experience, I have the definitive text and the clear type-face of the California edition (1981) with its woodcuts of whales and vessels, implements and processes to quicken my perceptions, and no interpretations of events or representations of characters to inhibit my imagination. Not omitting the prefatory quotations, I shall begin with “Call me Ishmael” and read again this greatest of sea adventures, missing no detailed description of techniques, tiresome interlude, soaring poem or philosophic aside. It would be hard to imagine with what pleasure I look forward to this enterprise.

NOTES

1 Anonymous review ascribed to George Ripley, Harpers New Monthly Magazine, 4 (1851), 137.


4 Ripley, p. 137 [At the time of this writing, I lived on Lexington Avenue, in New York].
MILESTONES on the PATH of AMERICAN LITERATURE STUDIES

CLARENCE GOHDES
EMERITUS, DUKE UNIVERSITY

The antiquary who girds up his loins to deal with college professors rather than with their brain-children does well to turn for subjects to such as are called scholars in preference to the more numerous breed known as popularizers, categories conventionally but erroneously viewed as polar regions apart. Dullards versus showmen, pedants versus born teachers, professionals versus dabblers, specialists versus generalists — a battle is deemed to exist between the two — and spectators outside the academic ring often look upon their altercations as men of old viewed the strife of the poetic frogs and mice. By far the favorites in anecdote or alumni-reunion chatter are the eccentrics of either ilk. Surviving from the youthful epoch of Cornell, for example, are the exploits of an erstwhile actor who taught Shakespeare in the early days at Ithaca, reading the plays aloud and readily adjusting his voice to the melancholy tones of Hamlet, the sotted ruminations of Falstaff, or the pathetic pleas of Desdemona, these last in tremulous falsetto. When a certain student rendered himself obnoxious by persistently coming late to his crowded lecture-room the dear soul flipped the pages of the copy of Shakespeare from which he was reading, quickly turned to the text of King John and intoned like Stentor: “Enter the Bastard.” Among the ample store of yarns cleaving to the memories of Harvard’s “Old Copey” — Charles T. Copeland — there is a well-worn legend dealing with a Radcliffe girl who likewise proved obnoxious by repeated lateness to class. In time patience left its monument and Copey in icily ironic tones addressed her: “And how will you have your tea, young lady?” “Without the lemon, please,” she demurely replied as she calmly took her seat.

Columbia University at one time had a whole saga dealing with the feud between famed critic George E. Woodberry and Brander Matthews, a popular litterateur and anecdotist who often brought along well-known authors to enliven his classes. But more cherished was Woodberry’s involvement with the president of the institution, in the days before the busy hum of men in Bagdad on the Hudson, as O. Henry called it, had utterly depersonalized higher learning in New York City. Woodberry, it seems, was well received by the students who
attended his lectures, immediately after his arrival from Nebraska, but those sitting beyond the first few rows could not hear what he said. When minor evidences of unrest failed to engage his attention some of his auditors staged a loud disturbance the effect of which was simply that the young professor shoved his notes into his green baize bag and retreated to an office not far away. Next day President Seth Low, well acquainted with gossip beneath the local ivy, made a point of dropping by Woodberry’s office and bluntly asked, “What, pray, do you intend to do about the matter?”

“Nothing, sir,” came the measured reply, “the disturbance I consider wholly an administrative problem. And that is your business, not mine.” Taken aback, as well as more than a little exasperated, Low inquired, “And what, my dear fellow, do you propose that I do to the students?”

“Guillotine them, please,” was the answer.

While professors in the humanistic subjects have supplied a most abundant store of anecdotes, the once-upon-a-time slender platoon of instructors in American literature have thus far failed to leave much exciting material for the delectation of posterity. For reasons as yet unplumbed, the pundits of English departments cherished as heroes of anecdote have, for the most part, been, like “Old Copey” or William Lyon Phelps, who nearly made Yale a Browning Club, devotees of Dr. Johnson or Tennyson rather than of Emerson or Longfellow. Even the presently flourishing band of specialists in American humor have failed to provide grounds justifying their disciples in undertaking studies of their own prowess in mirthmaking.

Though backward-glancing at the array of the ancient or honorable academics who once dealt professionally with the national letters may not stir the well-springs of amusement, there is little doubt that even the worthiest of the small coterie of real scholars entailed have quickly passed from the memories of those who have come in their wake. Indeed, historiography treating almost any academic discipline seems, during these latter days, like glimpsing through smoked lenses faint shadows flitting swiftly by in a pea-soup fog. What the computers destined to take over from the bibliographers will do with, or to, the persons who laid down a solid stone or two on the road to present-day knowledge, or whatever is deemed as such, is impossible to speculate upon, as new epicycles in criticism beckon toward a post “post-modern” phase where super-structuralist sciolism rushes into further clouds of unknowing and the semi-idiotic proceeds more than
half way beyond the horizon of common understanding.

Perhaps fortunately, no one knows who was the first college teacher to be named officially "Professor of American Literature." Willard Thorp, who elbowed his way into the American fold at long-reluctant Princeton, once headed an investigation charged with searching out the primitive saint who deserved the honor, but the graduate student surrogated the task of leafing through old college catalogs patriotically, and perhaps thriftily, came up with a doubtful wight hailing from the New Jersey headquarters itself. But most informed bibliographers would probably agree that Moses Coit Tyler was the earliest progenitor of lucrations still ranked as valuable contributions to the knowledge of experts in literary Americana. His title in 1868 at the University of Michigan was the then not uncommon one of Professor of Rhetoric and English, and when his distinguished survey of our colonial writers moved him up the ladder in 1881 to Cornell he was denominated Professor of History and Literature. Tyler's identification with the former of these mighty fields was clinched when, three years later, the American Historical Association was planted as an offshoot of the American Social Science Association and he was one of the planters. Anecdotes about him are few and far between, though he was judged to have been of a jolly sort and readily found a place for humor both in his classroom and among his colonial worthies. The reader of his biography nowadays is perhaps more impressed by Tyler's spiritual qualities, his early career as a clergyman, and possibly even by his activities as a journalist associated with the press menage of Henry Ward Beecher. Annalists of Cornell have not done well by mentioning his extraordinary piety as a foible perhaps worthy of anecdote, for as a mystic, which certainly he was, he was no more humorously eccentric than Ralph Waldo Emerson or Jonathan Edwards. Though chipped here and there, chiefly because of newly-discovered documents, Tyler's general account of the colonials and his subsequent masterpiece dealing with figures of the Revolutionary period are monuments on the scarcely discerned path of the early historiography of American literature. Assuredly they have not been inundated in seas of rival ink.

Though the paucity of scholars subsequently working in the early field of literary Americana may have some bearing on his enduring eminence, Tyler's volume looms great in the comparison when one glances, for example, over the list of authorities cited by Barrett Wendell in his Literary History of America, published by Scribner's in
1901. Wendell, if remembered at all today, is likely to be recalled as a dyed-in-crimson Harvard teacher who spoke with a phony accent resembling that of a stage Englishman and urged his pupils to adore the Victorians as he frenetically twirled his Phi Beta Kappa key. When he undertook to pay his respects to the national letters his choices were usually bounded by Harvard Square. W. P. Trent's biography of William Gilmore Simms, he opined, would "suffice" for a treatment of all the Southern authors, and "the West" escaped his hands utterly except for a brief mention of a few humorists. Other than Tyler, Wendell mentions as the chief authorities: John Nichol, H. S. Pancoast, C. F. Richardson, E. C. Stedman, Greenough White, G. R. Carpenter, E. H. and G. L. Duyckinck, R. W. Griswold, P. K. Foley, and S. L. Whitcomb. One could dredge up a few other names to add to Wendell's selection of "general authorities," but the Harvard librarians who helped him to muster his crew did not miss very many. At any rate, Wendell clearly recognized Tyler's surveys as outstanding.

The years following the publication of the Harvard professor's book were marked by the emergence of a whole flock of new "authorities," for the study of American literature was greatly enhanced, in the public schools especially, as part of a renewed wave of nationalism propelled by the Spanish-American War of 1898, and textbooks, outlines, biographies, library sets, etc. were in demand. Consequential, too, was the first international copyright act passed in 1891, which in time opened the way for books by Americans to compete economically with reprints of works from abroad, and another factor was the steady inclusion of "dead authors," like Longfellow and Emerson, to swell the supply of "classics" judged worthy of study. Normal schools for teachers and the liberal arts divisions of the new colleges began to feel the pressure, and publishers located in Boston, New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and elsewhere found profit in providing the tools. Moreover, the ever-increasing supply of magazines and city newspapers that reviewed new publications and the sudden rise to prominence of certain periodicals especially devoted to literary criticism and chatter about new books likewise were not without effect. Native authors became popular grist for the mills of magazine "copy." But the English departments, especially in the established universities, nowhere possessed of a lengthy tradition, were slow to react. In fact, they had their hands full in coping with the assimilation of remnants of instruction in rhetoric along with the ever-increasing demands for classes in composition and the newly insistent claims of Anglo-Saxon and so-
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called philology. In most institutions of higher learning the national literature trickled into English departments by way of inclusion among the Victorians who dominated offerings in sporadic courses labeled "modern." Even William Lyon Phelps briefly took a flyer in that direction at Yale. But kudos in the eminent academic realm was usually attached to such pundits as taught Anglo-Saxon and the medieval authors. They fitted in best with the novel Ph. D. system imported from Germany. The father of comparative literature in the U.S.A., George Woodberry, started his career in 1880 at Lincoln, Nebraska, as a professor of "Anglo-Saxon and Rhetoric." It was the proud boast of Randolph-Macon Woman's College in the 1890's that its bright Virginia damsels could translate English into Anglo-Saxon. And picayune Trinity College in North Carolina even celebrated the thousandth birthday of King Alfred in 1901.

The man who may have established a second milestone in the annals of American literary studies amid such an environment was Fred Louis Pattee, offspring of sturdy New Hampshire yeomanry and a graduate of Dartmouth College, where he had been briefly instructed in the national letters by C. F. Richardson, an outstanding authority of the day. When Tyler, in 1865, conceived his "capital plan to write six or eight elaborate lectures on 'A History of American Literature' — for a purely literary audience and with a view to publication," Pattee was about two years old. Like many another aspiring poet, he perforce turned journalist and school master before being appointed in 1894 Assistant Professor of English and Rhetoric, at the fledgling Penn State College. It was not until 1920 that his title specified American literature. Refusing a tempting offer to succeed Stuart Sherman at the University of Illinois, he remained at Penn State until 1928, at which date he moved to Florida and soon became a part-time participant in the "retired professors' paradise" at Rollins College, meanwhile continuing to bring forth a bountiful crop of books and articles. Although he eventually ranged over almost the entire gamut of American literary production, his continuing reputation centers principally upon A History of American Literature since 1870, first published by the Century Company in 1915, and upon The Development of the American Short Story, issued by Harpers in 1923. The former work is the earliest substantial treatise on the belles-lettres produced in the generation that came to the fore just after the Civil War. The other study, likewise a result of pioneer plowing of tough soil, has not as yet been displaced as a comprehensive view of the most outstanding genre in
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our literary history, ranging from the tales of Washington Irving to those of O. Henry. Of subsidiary, but not negligible, consequence were Pattee's efforts as an anthologist, for his Century Readings in American Literature (first edition, 1919) set a pattern whose critical and remunerative success influenced many rival textbooks aimed at the same rising enrollments in college survey courses.

Like Tyler, Pattee was a devout Christian — indeed, quite an expert in religious pedagogy, a field in which he published and practiced both as a long-time Methodist Sunday-school teacher and as the acting chaplain of his college. His tenure in this latter post was not exactly canonical, for he struggled too many years before succeeding in getting required attendance at Penn State chapel services abolished and regularly admonished visiting clergymen that no student in the institution was known to have been converted after more than twenty minutes of exhortation. Both men were eager to write novels, though Tyler never carried out his intention to produce one, on Bacon's Rebellion. Pattee actually published three. Both briefly studied abroad in deference to the new respect for the Ph. D. but never attained one. They shared the blessings of a lively style that enabled them to command no little standing as magazine journalists. In spite of his age, Henry L. Mencken wooed Pattee as a contributor to his American Mercury, the rallying sheet of so many of the young iconoclasts of the 1920s. And when Stuart Sherman abandoned the professor's chair for the chief seat in the Herald-Tribune's book-reviewing office the New York literary satraps likewise called upon him for screeds. Tyler's surprising emergence from the then rustic seclusion of Ann Arbor was somewhat like Pattee's star rising from a remote nook in the Seven Mountains of central Pennsylvania. But the latter made more of an impress on his colleagues. Perhaps he was a bit more gregarious and liked to joke. "When I hear a student say a certain custom in the college comes down from antiquity," he observed, "I recognize that he means it is more than four years old." Writing to Jay B. Hubbell in 1931, he quipped: "There have been in the whole history of the world just four who have held the title of Professor of American Literature: Bronson of Brown, Davison of Middlebury, Cairns of Wisconsin, and Pattee of Penn State. It has killed them all except me." When in 1928 the savants of the American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association made him a member of the first editorial board of their research journal, R. L. Rusk, never given to superlatives, called Pattee "the best-known man in the field." And W. B. Cairns spoke of
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him as "the dean of us all."

No single person can be isolated as most responsible for a third monument in the historiography of the national letters, namely, the Cambridge History of American Literature, which issued its first volume in 1917 and its last in 1921. George Haven Putnam initiated the project on behalf of his family’s publishing firm, William P. Trent as editor-in-chief outlined the general plan, and Carl Van Doren served as managing editor. Acting with Trent and Van Doren was John Erskine, a third member of the Columbia English Department. They chose as another associate editor Stuart P. Sherman, a friend of Van Doren’s then at the University of Illinois in Urbana. Except for making a few suggestions, securing the cooperation of Paul Elmer More and Paul Shorey, and writing a perfunctory foreword, Sherman did little for the history beyond preparing a couple chapters. He later professed to having no antiquarian talents. Erskine early in World War I went off to France as a Y.M.C.A. representative and in time became the academic director of the A.E.F. university started at Beaune, in the midst of a noted wine region. The war not only disrupted work on the multi-authored history but almost killed it, and before the last proofs were read the services of a whole galaxy of Columbia teachers and their pupils had been levied upon.

The Columbia connection was graced with a degree of poetic justice in that the university had previously harbored more interest in the national literature than perhaps any other university in the world. The star of its teachers of belles-lettres, George E. Woodberry, had felt no condescension in turning to Poe, Emerson, and Hawthorne as subjects fit for judicious appraisal. His colleagues, until he left Columbia in 1904, George R. Carpenter and Brander Matthews had offered courses solely devoted to the subject, the former turning out books on Whittier (1903) and Whitman (1908). Matthews’s lectures, offered two hours per week throughout the academic year, were favorites in the early 1890’s. Trent’s reputation as an authority on the South was already recognized even before he was made a professor in Barnard College, in 1900. Shortly thereafter he became a mainstay of graduate instruction in which he encouraged young men like Van Doren in both British and American studies, impressing them all with his courtly manners as well as his extensive knowledge. The first regular classes in the national letters conducted in the Columbia Graduate Department came about 1914-15 when Erskine directed studies in the influence of Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Whitman abroad,
and Carl Van Doren advised neophytes in the investigation of more varied topics, especially in the area of prose fiction. The revival of Melville's reputation in the 1920s, for example, was due to Trent's interest passed on to Van Doren, who in turn encouraged Raymond Weaver to attempt a biography of that author. Columbia's warmth toward the national letters as an academic discipline, however, was chilled by the squelching of Erskine's effort to have Stuart Sherman appointed as a colleague; and not long thereafter both Erskine and Van Doren diminished activities in the university and eventually ceased teaching there altogether.

While the school market for textbooks, handbooks, and a variety of surveys or histories had induced not a few publishers to venture into the American field, G. P. Putnam's Sons, with headquarters in New York and a branch office in London, was more especially involved. It had brought out the works of several classic authors, had sponsored a magazine of considerable literary reputation, and had been identified with the subject since the paternal days when the firm was called Wiley and Putnam. George Haven Putnam, head of the company since 1872, was himself an author, a pillar of the New York Authors Club and the Copyright League, husband of the first dean of Barnard College, and brother of a foremost librarian who presided over the Library of Congress. One of the books handled by the house in 1909 was the American edition of A Manual of American Literature which Baron Tauchnitz had sponsored in recognition of the very considerable American element in his world-famous series of "British Authors." About one third of the book was a rehash of Tyler's account of colonial and Revolutionary writers prepared by T. S. Stanton, a son of the noted feminist, who free-lanced in Paris after serving as Berlin correspondent of the New York Tribune. Stanton was listed as editor, the remainder of the manual being the product of young teachers at Cornell, of which university he was an alumnus and master of arts. Tauchnitz's publication might as well have been called the Cornell Manual. Lane Cooper and Clark S. Northup were among the collaborators.

About the same time, Putnam had become involved with the Cambridge University Press in handling the many-volumed History of English Literature (1907-1916). The British university of course had nothing to do with it, but the Cambridge History of American Literature was patterned after the English counterpart. It was natural enough that Putnam should turn to Trent at the outset of his Ameri-
can project, for the Columbia professor was not only a friend and fellow stalwart of the Authors Club and an associate of Henry E. Huntington, John Quinn, Henry S. Folger, and other rich collectors of the Hobby Club but probably the most prolific academic authority on the authors of the United States, an experienced editor in both the American and British fields, and himself a contributor to the Cambridge History of English Literature. Moreover, a series of biographical studies of Americans that Trent had edited for the publisher Holt seemed to be doing especially well. Erskine and Van Doren were disciples as well as colleagues of Trent’s and, before joining him as associates, had apparently been mulling over plans for a substantial literary history. All of the editors, it appears, worked for fees rather than royalties.

When the first volume of the Cambridge History of American Literature saw the light of day in 1917 part of its impact was inevitably lost amid the turmoil of the times, and the delays in completing it rendered its contents partially out of date by the time the last volume was published four years later. With Erskine off in France, Trent almost smothered by his various projects, along with an onrush of graduate students following the war, and Sherman riding the horse of journalism as well as the kicking donkey of handling the English department at Illinois, the burden fell on Carl Van Doren. And before long he withdrew from teaching in favor of chores like editing The Nation or managing the affairs of the prosperous “book club” called the Literary Guild. All of the original editors of the cooperative history save Trent eventually abandoned teaching and scholarship for other pursuits, and Trent’s age and poor health inevitably took their toll of him. Loyal efforts on the part of Van Doren’s friends and family, along with the contributions of Columbia’s staff and graduate alumni, brought the task to a finish. Certain of its chapters are today scarcely more outmoded than are those of its chief successor; and elements in its bibliographies, once considered prodigally generous, are not without value to present-day researchers who, smothered by the prodigious clutter of critical chaff, look to the computers in vain and send out Macedonian cries for a winnowing of the grain. The Cambridge History of American Literature, coming as it did with the sanction of one of our greatest universities and the collaboration of respected scholars in various fields, helped to provide status for the new province of academic research.

Such status, however, was not evident in the early proceedings of
the Modern Language Association of America, though there was among its philological members a lively interest in the provincial speech of the States; and, shortly after its birth in 1883, a sprinkling of litterateurs joined the society. In 1889 James Russell Lowell served as president, from his presiding chair venturing to correct Professor C. H. Grandgent's statements respecting the pronunciation of the word "whole" in Massachusetts — very politely of course. In 1920 the hit-or-miss pattern of the annual programs was drastically overhauled "with a view to greater specialization, and greater stimulus to research," as John M. Manly, president that year, put it, and the English Division was segmented into ten "Groups." American literature was tacked on as English XI, after Killis Campbell, a professor in the University of Texas, reminded Manly that there were members, like himself, more interested in Poe or Whitman than in any British author. In 1923 the American Literature Group became English XII, in order to squeeze in a "Contemporary Literature" addition to the English Division.

Manly's inclusion in the annual program of the MLA of the literature of the United States as an area of specialization and research marked a major step forward in the progress of formal study of the subject. A much-needed focus was provided for the efforts of the few scattered scholars working in the field, and graduate instruction was grounded on a more substantial basis. Although English XII, like the parent organization, suffered from constantly changing leadership and the occasional manipulations of the politically-minded, it readily undertook a listing of dissertations, completed or in progress, an inventory of pertinent manuscripts, and other bibliographical aids; and before a decade passed it sponsored a successful journal concerned solely with the American field. Such ancillary activities and semi-independent organization eventually led other coteries affiliated with the MLA to follow suit. Less formally, the members of Group XII discussed such relevant matters as separation from English department control, alliance at the national level with kindred elements among the historians, and the securing of funds independently of the hierarchy of the Association. Efforts in the last-mentioned direction came to grief during the Great Depression following 1929, and the chief monetary support rested on the "Group assessment" paid by the faithful, at first one dollar per year.

As more students during the 1920s elected to write dissertations dealing with American authors, requirements for the Ph.D. degree
became a demanding concern of the leading spirits in the Group. Under the best of circumstances the problem is always one of the touchiest faced by the university world, for practical demands and the claims of conscience and standards are ever at odds and at best the conflict ends in a draw. The requirements, as was the case with most matters of consequence facing Group XII, were relegated to its elected Advisory Committee (originally called an Executive Committee with a separate chairman), whose report was presented at the meeting held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1926. Following considerable discussion and revision, this report was returned to the Committee for further revamping and in 1927 during the convention held in Louisville, Kentucky, emanated as a “statement of principles” not meant to provoke “an immediate or sweeping revision of present programs.” When, on 25 January 1928, the report was sent out to those who had paid their dollar assessment, an accompanying letter, signed by Kenneth B. Murdock as chairman of the Group, and Robert Spiller as secretary, less gingerly stated: “The importance of something like a unanimity upon this subject will be apparent. Among the problems dependent upon such agreement are those of the foundation of a national quarterly of American literature, the relationship of the study of American literature to the graduate departments of history, philosophy, and English in our universities, and ultimately the place of American literature in the curricula of our liberal arts colleges and secondary schools.” The report read as follows:

SUGGESTIONS TOWARD A PROGRAM FOR THE DOCTORATE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The present lack of uniformity in requirements for the doctorate in American literature is the result of differences of opinion as to the exact and distinguishing characteristics of our subject. Sometimes the candidate is expected to know the whole of American literature but little else, on the assumption that ours has sufficient of those unifying racial, linguistic, and other elements which make the literatures of England, France, Germany, etc. national in character. Sometimes he is expected to know the whole of both English and American literature on the assumption that our literature, as well as our language, is descended chiefly in the English tradition. When it is seen that the latter requirement is impractical, the candidate is often encouraged to do his more concentrated work in English rather than in American literature.

Neither of these extreme attitudes furnishes a satisfactory definition of American literature or establishes its relationships
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with other branches of learning. American literature is more than a reflection or derivative of English literature, and yet cannot be rigidly defined in terms of nationality. The study of comparative literature and of social and philosophical backgrounds, important to all literary study, has an increased importance in the case of American literature. Our attention should therefore be directed primarily to the consideration of the following problems: (1) In what senses is our literature distinctively American? (2) In what ways is it related to the literatures of England and of other countries? (3) What conditions of life and thought in America have produced these results?

It is obvious that, in order to be directed toward a scientific consideration of these questions, the student will need a large background of related knowledge. The following are proposed as the essential grounds for his training:

1. **American history**, with emphasis upon social and economic principles and backgrounds.

2. **Modern European history**, especially the history of England since the death of Elizabeth and of the revolutionary movement in France and elsewhere.

3. **The history of modern philosophy and religion**, notably of such movements as Puritanism and Rationalism in seventeenth and eighteenth century England and of Puritanism, Transcendentalism, etc. in America.

4. **English literature**, its content and history, at least from the Renaissance to 1880, with special attention to such movements as neo-classicism, romanticism, etc., and to forms for which parallels may be found in related periods of American literature.

5. **American literature**, its content and history, from 1607 to the present.

In view of the object and scope of this training, it would seem neither relevant nor practicable to add to the program much detailed study of Germanic and Romance philology. Such subjects are primarily for the student of language, and the study of “the American language” is obviously an aspect of English philology. The student of American literature must have, of course, a reasonable command of German and French, and, wherever possible, Latin or Greek, or both — more than this if his dissertation involves the study of foreign literatures.

A one-year Master’s degree would be rarely feasible in so broad and so exacting a field of study as this program represents. Ordinarily, prospective candidates for the doctorate should be advised either wholly to omit the Master’s degree or to take it in those fields of English literature which, by parallel or influence, have had the most direct bearing upon American thought. Students who do not propose to proceed to the doctorate should be accepted as candidates for the Master’s degree only when they have already had a sound undergraduate training in all or in most
of the fields of related subjects listed above, or when they are prepared to devote more than one year to work for the Master's degree.

January, 1928

Today, in the post-television era, these "suggestions" appear to be impossibly antediluvian. The report indicates, however, that the students of the national literature were already feeling their way, if not their oats, in the conduct of graduate studies in the English departments. It is well to remember that, at the time, an aspirant for the Ph.D. at Harvard running the gauntlet of its English department was expected to bear up through Gothic and Old French no matter if he was foolish enough to wish to write a dissertation on Hawthorne. It might be of interest also to be reminded that Manly was a Harvard-trained medieval philologist, an eminent one to boot, and Killis Campbell, who triggered his admitting American literature to the English canon of the MLA program, was likewise fully trained in medieval studies at Johns Hopkins, his own dissertation having to do with the Middle English versions of "The Seven Sages of Rome." The study of American literature in 1928 was still in its infancy, but perhaps the baby has come a long way since.
THE LITERARY HERITAGE OF MAINE

RICHARD CARY

WATERVILLE, MAINE

In any consideration of literary heritage, it is imperative to examine first the history, geography, climate, the plant and animal life of its place of origin. It is by now a matter of axiom that natural environment exerts determinant pressures upon the character and expression of human habitants, shaping them ineluctably to its own cycles and symmetries. Respecting Maine, it has the longest history, the most tortuous seacoast, the quirkiest weather, and as opulent a mélange of botanic and zoologic types as may be found throughout the spectrum of the United States. Long before Columbus set eyes on San Salvador, Maine had been settled, unsettled, and resettled several times. Historians are generally in accord that Viking freebooters probed the numberless islands and inlets on the Maine littoral as early as the ninth century, some 600 years in advance of Queen Isabella’s act of faith.

The discovery and exploration of Maine owe much to the unflattering fact that it was simply in the way. The first man of record who sighted its spectacular headlands — a Scandanavian named Bjarne — was questing for Greenland; subsequent Italian and Portuguese mariners blundered into Maine while trending for China or the fabled Indies. Within decades of Bjarne’s fortuitous landfall, Leif Ericson and his party ensconced themselves briefly, but withdrew without tears after savoring one of Maine’s ferocious winters. Sundry other Norsemen reoccupied the area, but murder, intrigue, and hostile Indians nullified their ventures. For over 500 years a haze of silence overhung the land.

The second era, launched by Columbus, swelled with explorations by John and Sebastian Cabot in 1497, a quarter-century later by Giacomo Verrazano, and then sweeping forays up the coastal rivers by a motley of French, English, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese navigators. In 1609, Henry Hudson sailed into Casco Bay; in 1614 Captain John Smith, ever restive, put up at Monhegan Island.

Two expeditions, however, outweigh all others in significance, for they planted seeds which were to flourish as the hardiest shoots of Maine culture. In 1604, Sieur de Monts erected a palisade and a chapel on St. Croix Island and there edited the first newspaper native to the New World. In 1606, from a colony founded by Ralegh Gilbert and
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George Popham at the mouth of the Kennebec River was floated the first vessel constructed by English hands in America. Both of these settlements succumbed to the familiar scourges of cold, hunger, scurvy, and the aborigines, but not before they had demonstrated that homesteading was practicable. The Pilgrim Fathers, arriving in 1620, reported a prosperous fishing and trading center at Pemaquid.

Nevertheless, it was not until after the Revolutionary War that the province became truly safe for family habitation. The earliest pioneers had come to exploit the natural resources of fish, game, and lumber; now they came primarily to establish permanent households. They cut back the forests, laid out small farms, developed boatbuilding, and engaged in lively trade for rum and molasses with the West Indies. By these predilections they foretold in stone the preeminently rural future of Maine.

Thanks to its distanced position, Maine’s belated emergence in the eighteenth century had this happy aspect: it missed the full force of Puritanism which engulfed Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. Mostly Anglicans, Maine immigrants worked hard and wished to be let alone to live as they chose. The church and the tavern were, by convention, the first community buildings to go up, the former fulfilling intellectual as well as devotional needs, the latter an outlet for such recreational impulses as might arise. They were a liberated breed with few distinctions in rank or wealth, and religious toleration was never a divisive issue. As the rough edges wore down, a more formal morality asserted itself in laws against drinking, gambling, and dancing, but these prohibitions were seldom overzealously observed.

At this juncture it is politic to pause and inquire: What was here to constitute a literary heritage, to promote a literature indigenous and unique? The answer is manifold. There was a milieu of four contrastive spheres: the ocean, the coast, the forest, the farm. The impenitent sea, beckoning, threatening, providing and killing, but always and inescapably the quintessential hymn of existence. The contorted coastline, 212 miles long as the crow flies from Kittery to Eastport, if stretched out straight is longer than the entire eastern seaboard. A terrain of limestone and granite, with mountains so high they are first on the hemisphere to greet the rising sun; over 2500 lakes and ponds, 5000 rivers; bays and salt marshes defying census.

There were red, white, pitch and jack pines, spruce, hemlock, balsam fir, sugar maple, birch, yew, aspen poplar, tamarack, wild cherry, mountain ash, white cedar and oak trees. Low-bush blueber-
ries and bog cranberries in unrepresseed supply splayed color and succulence. Ungainly moose and deer bristling with antlers roved the sheltering woodlands, wary of the cinnamon bear and gray wolves; closer to the ground prowled the weasel, lynx, chipmunk, woodchuck, porcupine, and skunk. Flowers included the bluet, buttercup, anemone, ox-eye daisy, hawkweed, aster, scarlet pimpernel, iris, devil’s paintbrush, and trailing arbutus. Fowl moved in swarms: gull, crane, penguin, partridge, sandpipers, bald eagles, jays, blue heron, loons, shrikes, and cormorants. Water creatures abounded: cusk, hake, pollock, alewives, crabs, clams, shrimp, and the ineffable lobster; as did seal, otter, and beaver. Assuredly, the words of the Psalmist applied: “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.”

Overpowering topography, fauna and flora, however, do not of themselves engender a distinctive literature. The indispensable activator is man, his vaulting heart and radiating vision. The sea and the soil made strenuous demands upon the character of those who came to Maine. It wasn’t easy. They had to discipline the wilderness and overcome the ocean’s tantrums. Willy-nilly they forged intimate affiliations with nature, discerned its eternal rhythm and attuned their lives to it. The endless vista of forests and waters instilled in them a sense of physical freedom and spiritual dilation. And Maine’s detached location in the outermost northeastern corner of the States begot aloofness and independence. In disparate contexts Mainers have been described as intrepid and discreet; optimistic, fatalistic; pious and pixilated; sound, eccentric; strait-laced, broad-minded; laconic and loquacious; naive, shrewd. Remarkably, the prototypical Down Ester engirded all these attributes, a chameleon whose wisdom was the residue of generations of compounded experience. This is the heritage he brought to literature.

This, and his gleanings from other men. First, the treasury of remembered song and story derived from forebears in Great Britain and France. Into this they folded the inexhaustible folklore of neighboring Indians. Upon both they heaped the accretions of Germans and other North Europeans who flowed into Maine on a second tide of immigration. Slowly a new tradition took form from the fusion of older cultures, altered and embellished by countless retellings at village stores and creaking wharves. Imagination enriched the stark realities; vernacular lent brighter sparkle to the old ballads and annals.

Thus, the literature of Maine may be likened to one of its own
brawling rivers — fed by many underground tributaries, taking its color, flavor, and body from the contiguous soil. With the passing of time, this interaction of man and his element nourished and molded each other, giving rise to a fruitful epoch of organic expression. After the raw recordings of explorers and pioneers, after the crabbed documents of preachers and politicians, after the unavoidable long night of foreign mimicry, a native literature of observation and inference came into being as a mirror to its image.

The first creditable anthology of Maine poetry (George Bancroft Griffith, *The Poets of Maine*, 1888) included over 430 bylines and ran to 850 pages. Kenneth Roberts eyed this “passion for writing” in his home state and declared waggishly that it was all due to iodine, the exhilarating odor of iodine released by the pounding of surf over seaweed-covered ledges and universally inhaled by the populace. Iodine or no, there has been no dearth of writing in the Pine Tree State since Sieur de Monts issued his fateful newspaper on St. Croix Island almost four centuries ago.

The first writer of consequence in the Maine stream is Sally Sayward Barrell, later Madam Wood (1759-1855). Born in York, a resident of Wiscasset and Portland, she began at the turn of the century by grinding out in rapid sequence four saccharine Continental romances. Following a lacuna of twenty-three years during which she published nothing, she overtly rebelled. “Why,” she asked, “must the amusements of our leisure hours cross the Atlantic and introduce foreign fashions and foreign manners to a people certainly capable of producing their own?” With this spunky demurral, Madam Wood reversed her bearings in 1827. * Tales of the Night* propelled an American conception, incorporating Maine scenes and characters in an unaffected manner. As art it fell short of the target, but it was an opening shot pointed unerringly in the right direction.

The first truly national impact of Maine writing was made shortly afterward by two comedians. In post-Revolutionary dramas, the once-pristine Yankee had been reduced to a hackneyed tomfool. It remained for Seba Smith (1792-1868), of Buckfield, to re-define his qualities and validate his actual identity. Smith contributed to the Portland *Courier* a series of letters which he signed “Major Jack Downing, a Down East Yankee.” He invested Downing with the nasal twang and rich lingo of the heartland around Long Lake, a Molière in homespun whose satiric bite was worse than his bark. Against a backdrop of country common sense, Jack Downing lampooned the false values of a raucous society
on the make. Seba Smith’s laughing veracity motivated a salty succession of regional American counterparts, culminating in Will Rogers.

Charles Farrar Browne (1834-67), the other Maine comic, was born in Waterford, died at age thirty-two, but in his short span managed to raise the typical Yankee to international heights. Using the pseudonym Artemus Ward, he corralled attention with his hilarious misspellings and malapropisms. In the guise of crackerbarrel philosopher, he held up to ridicule the excesses of greed and guile endemic in the spreading Republic. Three of his favorite motifs were Harvard, women’s rights, and the Mormons, all of which he skewered gleefully at any vulnerable point. Although this line of pungent comedy gradually thinned out, it is being maintained in our time by John Gould (b. 1908) through his bucolic newspaper at Lisbon Falls and in the prickly texture of his books, especially *The Farmer Takes a Wife* and *The Fastest Hound Dog in Maine*.

The first high plateau of Maine’s literary eminence was reached in the days of the flowering of New England. Oddly, only one of the writers who helped bring this about was born in the State. The others came, mined, and returned gold for gold.

The one native is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82), born in Portland. As a professor of romance languages at Harvard, he found himself necessarily dispensing European cognitions but, to his credit, he also made a case for matters substantially American in “Hiawatha,” “The Village Blacksmith,” and “The Arsenal at Springfield.” As to Maine, he left it, but could not forget it. During a visit in 1846, he walked Portland’s streets, round Munjoy Hill and down to old Fort Lawrence. There, by the drowsing lull of the sea, he recalled scenes and incidents of his boyhood: the harbor and the islands, ships and bearded sailors, tales of seafights, all recounted in “My Lost Youth.” In “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” in “Songo River,” and in “L’Envoi,” he celebrates the spirit of the place which was his birthright. In “Morituri Salutamus” he pays touching tribute to the undiminished attraction of Maine: “O ye familiar scenes, ye groves of pine...Thou river, widening through the meadows green / To the vast sea.”

As a boy, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64) came frequently from Salem, Massachusetts, to visit his uncle in Raymond, Maine, and for a year lived there with his mother. Darkness lay in his heart even then, but the somber beauty of the primeval forest around Sebago Lake gripped him as no other site in America or Europe did thereafter. In his diary he scribbled impressions of fishing all day, climbing Pulpit
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Rock, hunting duck, swapping jackknives, and sitting enthralled while grizzled men matched story for story in his uncle's store. The Pyncheon mansion in *The House of the Seven Gables* was one he saw in Waldo County; the peddler in "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" was one he encountered in Maine; the original of Reverend Hooper in "The Minister's Black Veil" was Reverend Joseph Moody of York. For four years Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College. Out of this interlude, he fashioned his first novel *Fanshawe*, in the pages of which Bowdoin and Brunswick are readily recognizable.

In 1847, in 1853, and again in 1857, Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) made extensive excursions into Maine woods, mountains, and waters, notably Katahdin, Chesuncook, Allegash and the East Branch. Both a poet and a scientist of nature, he uncovered endless sources of allurement in Maine's remoter stations. His book *The Maine Woods* attests his overriding love affair with this State. Thoreau's cryptic last words, said to be "moose" and "Indian," signify the depth of his attachment to Maine's free-ranging creatures and to Joe Polis, his redoubtable guide.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-92) never made his home in Maine, but the effects of his numerous visits and vacations burrowed into his creative consciousness. One of his most successful ballads, "The Dead Ship of Harpswell," was based on a legend linked with Orr's Island in Casco Bay. He wrote "To a Pine Tree" after a trip to Moosehead Lake. The heroine of his poem "Maud Muller" was a young girl he met in York. And his long narrative "Mogg Megone" concerns an Indian chief slain near Scarborough.

The fame of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96) abides of course in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which she wrote in Brunswick while her husband, a professor of natural and revealed religion, taught classes at Bowdoin College. In the Congregational Church there one Sunday morning, she sustained a vision which guided the construction of Uncle Tom's death scene. Mrs. Stowe is more important to Maine for *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, a saltwater tragi-comedy in which she sought to embody the setting, character, idiom, and attitudes of the rooted islanders — with only moderate success. The overarching value of this work is that Sarah Orne Jewett, reading it at thirteen, was goaded and inspired to proffer one day her own firmer version of Maine people's lives and environs. By such germinal means did Connecticut's Mrs. Stowe and her three Massachusetts confreeres Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whittier provide encouragement and promotional impetus to Maine
natives capable of engendering literature steeped in the actualities of Maine existence.

Before entering the most fertile period of Maine writing, it would be instructive to docket parenthetically half a dozen authors whose names should not be lost. Four of these turned out books for children which gained repute far beyond Maine's borders. Most prolific was Jacob Abbott (1803-79) of Hallowell, whose more than 200 titles featured the pranks and pieties of young Rollo at home and abroad. Elijah Kellogg (1813-1901), a preacher at Harpswell, tended more toward life in his own vicinity. His Elm Island and Whispering Pines series focus fondly on guileless pioneers of Maine's islands and coastways. Two women, not natives but longtime residents of the State, produced sterling juveniles with Maine substance: Laura E. Richards (1850-1943), whose Captain January still stirs childish hearts (her Yellow House in Gardiner is now a certified historic landmark); and Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923), whose Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm seems deathless. After spending most of her childhood and later summers around Hollis — her parents were Mainers — she made it her permanent home. The "Quillcote" of her stories is verisibly Hollis, while the high-steeple, square-belfry church at Buxton reappears in The Old Peabody Pew. She stipulated that her ashes be scattered over the Saco River.

Of the other two fine minor talents, Elizabeth Akers Allen (1832-1911) was born in Strong and is best known for her wistful couplet: "Backward, turn backward, O Time in your flight,/Make me a child again just for tonight." Her volume of verse, Forest Buds from the Woods of Maine, is suffused with snow and November, spring by the cherry tree, sunken rocks, winter-killed roses, giant pines, and woodbine — imagery inseparable from the profoundest meaning of Maine. Lastly, Holman Day (1865-1935), born in the boondocks between Vassalborough and Augusta, nurtured himself on the juices of his home state and released its inimitable savor in a spate of evocatively titled books: Up in Maine, King Spruce, Pine Tree Ballads, and Kin o' Ktaadn.

One other tract of Maine literature may be passed over lightly before approaching the elevated foreground. Despite the presiding stimulus of the summer theater at Lakewood — oldest in the United States — drama has had no shining exponent from Maine. There are some few crumbs of consolation. 'Way Down East, Lottie Parker's perpetual potboiler, is set in Maine, as is Shore Acres, a melodrama by
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James A. Herne (1839-1901) played out on a farm near Bar Harbor, off Frenchman’s Bay. Closer to our own time, Owen Davis (1874-1956), a native of Portland who spun out 200-odd plays, propagated *Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model*, but redeemed himself by winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 with *Icebound*, a grim exposure of hate and greed in the Penobscot County town of Veazie. It is a fact that Eugene O’Neill first met his wife Carlotta Monterey at Belgrade Lakes. Sadly, that gives the State no legitimate claim on the melancholic bard.

Looking ahead over the array of Maine’s most honored authors, one is struck by an extraordinary uniformity of attitude: their partiality to the past. With instinctual acuity they avoided the mawkishness that usually accompanies veneration of the olden, golden days. Already manifest in Longfellow’s and Elizabeth Aker Allen’s homage to the remembered ecstasies of childhood, this point of view develops uncurbed in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. After Madam Wood’s rebuff of transplanted English and French influences, the rustic culture of Maine established roots perhaps too staunch. A kind of suspended narcissism took place. Nowhere and no time appeared more desirable to Maine writers than Maine in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Its strength and simplicity, modes and ideals fastened upon their comprehension with the hug of a religion. With few exceptions this nostalgic adoration of former glories became the outstanding earmark of the finest in Maine literature.

The Maine author who first conferred a status of philosophy on the backward glance is Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) of South Berwick. Acclaimed by critics of her own generation as the foremost littérature north of Boston, she is still unsurpassed in the field of Maine prose. Her father, a country doctor, took her with him on his professional rounds. As they drove to seacoast shacks and inland farmhouses, he expatiated on the wonders of nature alongside the rutted roads. While he treated his patients, she wandered about intently noting their dwellings and activities, clothes and talk, sorrows and oddities. Alike in a way to Hawthorne, she sat in her grandfather’s general store, beguiled by the unceasing yarns of sailors and lumberjacks come to barter and relax. By the time she was twenty, she had accumulated a crowning reservoir of knowledge about the people and the place of her nativity. With a style limpid as crystal, a sympathy earnest though not obtrusive, she poured back her perceptions into twenty-one volumes of stories, sketches, and novels, the best
among them *Deephaven*, *Country By-Ways*, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, “A White Heron,” “The Dulham Ladies,” and “Miss Tempy’s Watchers.”

She matured at a moment in American history when shipping and shipbuilding slid into decline and railroads and industry rose to dominate the national economy. Like most of her peers, she viewed the change as an abomination. So, she reinstated that happier era just past, filling her pages with garrulous sea captains, winsome old spinsters, self-reliant young females, indomitable fishermen, and a tinted miscellany of eccentrics. She reproduced a locus of quiescent harbors, lighthouses, and green islands set in the encroaching sea; turning inward to dusky stands of fir and spruce, deserted farms and languishing towns; skies rippling with thrush and crow, the ground spilling over with chicory, larkspur, and whiteweed. Into this tapestry she interwove the muted dilemma of her people: clinging valiantly to their way of life, knowing it to be defunct.

Mary Ellen Chase (1887-1973), infected in childhood by Miss Jewett’s precedent, succeeded to her mantle. “I believe,” she wrote, “that Maine people have a splendid heritage, both from sea and land, that it is the business of us all to live up to.” She was as good as her word. Born and brought up in Blue Hill, she absorbed the tradition and reaffirmed the dignity of the natives in their maritime-agrarian world. In such books as *The White Gate*, *A Goodly Heritage*, and *The Lovely Ambition*, she trundles back to her girlhood days in a gusty seaport; in *Mary Peters, Silas Crockett*, and *Windswept*, she recreates several generations of Maine clipper-ship families caught in irreversible currents of change. Into these sagas she fed her memories of Boothbay Harbor, Owl’s Head, Belfast, and Searsport, her grandmother’s anecdotes, age-old hymns and aphorisms, the ribald songs of sailors — always conjuring up displaced values, days gone but never to be dissembled.

On the masculine side, Kenneth Roberts (1885-1957) is Maine’s most potent writer of prose. He too hove into the past, following however a rather different tack. A native of Kennebunk, where his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents had lived, he sought his genesis indelibly. “I’ve had a theory for a great many years,” he said, “that a writer can write more effectively about his own people than he can about people that aren’t in his blood.” And Maine was emphatically in Robert’s blood. Indeed, when Arnold Toynbee in his monumental study of world civilizations put down Maine as “a relic of
seventeenth century New England inhabited by woodmen and watermen and hunters,” Roberts roared back at the misguided pundit in a furious essay, “Don’t Say That About Maine.” As his chain of superb regional chronicles unrolled — Arundel, Rabble in Arms, Captain Caution, Northwest Passage, Oliver Wiswell — estimable critics compared facets of his work with those of Scott, Dumas, and Stevenson, not to mention Dickens and Thackeray. They were not far off the mark. What other American historical novelist ranks so close to James Fenimore Cooper and his Leatherstocking Tales? With fastidious accuracy Roberts visualized a nation very young and very bold, crackling with the myths and mores of York County; a new, dynamic race rising out of the beautiful, mysterious wilderness. He too exploited the twin salients of Maine reality — the sea and the forest — but unlike Miss Jewett, who worked in exquisite miniature, Roberts favored the epic scale. His body of work stands as an imperishable billet-doux to his beloved State.

Three out-of-State novelists to whom Maine is indebted must be recorded here, with regrettable brevity. First in time is Booth Tarkington (1869-1946), the gentlemen from Indiana, who embraced Kennebunkport as his seasonal home for many years. The opening scenes of his first novel take place in Bar Harbor, and five of his books take stock of the Maine experience. An alert observer of social skulduggery, he dealt mainly with the tensions between permanent dwellers and transient summer visitors, gliding on the lighter side of this largely invisible friction in all but one instance. He made no secret of his affinity with Maine style and spirit. And he came by this honestly. His family had its origins in New England.

Second is Ben Ames Williams (1889-1953), born in Mississippi, grown up in Ohio, but resident of Maine by choice in every possible interval. He was infatuated with the locale and adopted it as his own, later marrying into an old-line Maine sea-captain family. His first novel, All the Brothers Were Valiant, centers on a whaling dynasty. His principal accomplishment was to fabricate an entire rural Maine community which he named “Fraternity,” modeled on the Searsmont area. He wrote over a hundred short stories heralding the pastoral composure there as against the frenetic pace of urban existence. He dipped repeatedly into Maine history for such novels as The Strange Woman (about Bangor after the War of 1812) and Come Spring (about Sterlington, now Union, during the Revolution). He willed that his ashes to be buried on a knoll under the shadow of Lavenseller Moun-
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tain at Searsmont.

Third, Erskine Caldwell (b. 1903). It comes as a surprise, more often as something of a shock to most readers, that Tobacco Road and God's Little Acre were not written in a dingy purlieu of Georgia, but plumb in the heart of central Maine. Caldwell lived in that district five years, long enough for him to catch both the understated tragedy and the earthy humor of its denizens. With unfailing comic energy and occasional brutality, he objectively realized native place and character in his novel A Lamp for Nightfall and in such short fiction as "Country Full of Swedes," in "The Corduroy Pants" about Skowhegan, "Mama's Little Girl" based on an incident in Waterville, and "Ten Thousand Blueberry Crates" in Androscoggin County.

Now for the last of the categories: Maine's modern poets. Candidates for consideration are rife, of course, but circumspection restricts choice to four unassailable figures. Of highest renown are Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay, both of whom took leave of the State but could never excise the marks it had graved on their genius.

Like most prophets, Robinson (1869-1935) was not without honor except in his own village. He was discovered by Theodore Roosevelt, accorded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry three times, and extolled by Yale in 1922 as "the foremost living poet." But back in Gardiner on the Kennebec, he was remembered as a jobless, listless youth who fed on the delusion that writing poetry was a respectable occupation. In this thriving, profit-minded, suspicious rivertown, he bore without plaint the obloquy of ne'er-do-well. The cold of Maine winters pinched his marrow and permeated his poems. A prince of irony and pity, he lay bare his congealed immanence in the sonnet "New England":

Here where the wind is always north-north-east
And children learn to walk on frozen toes,...
Joy shivers in the corner where she knits
And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,
Cheerful as when she tortured into fits
The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

Robinson set his sights on the past but not, as other Maine writers, on Maine's past. He trudged down the corridors of legendry to the court of King Arthur, and for years his reputation rested on the long narratives of Lancelot, Merlin, and Tristram. Nowadays it is commonly granted that his most durable work consists in the short, tart biographies of his contemporaries in Gardiner, which he reconstituted...
as Tilbury Town. There are about seventy of these verses composed over his four decades of literary achievement. Taken together, they approximate Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*, with a Yankee tang. Robinson's dry provincial wit flickers over a gallery of tortured portraits (his own paramount among them) which uncover an abyss of hidden neuroses and waning vitality. Only now and again appears a person not at odds with himself or the world. To all alike he addressed a compassion drawn from the pain of his personal disorientation. There was Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn, who coughed and coughed and went on drinking; Cliff Klingenhenagen sipping wormwood and smiling; Reuben Bright, who tore down the slaughterhouse in a paroxysm of grief; Mr. Flood lifting his jug and seeing two moons: and the imperial, wholly-enviable Richard Cory, who, "one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head." Out of bitterness and love, Robinson distilled full measure from these incarcerate lives around him, yielding to the world an oblique glimpse at Maine's darker legacy.

To many readers Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) is known merely as a poet of despair and disaffection, a cynical Queen of the May in Greenwich Village of the Roaring Twenties. Around Rockland, Maine, they still recall her as a red-haired, green-eyed, barefoot tomboy, mercurial and vague, a sort of Down East leprechaun. In those years she evidently imbibed Maine through the pores of her naked feet. The initial lines of her adolescent masterpiece "Renascence" read:

All I could see from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood;  
I turned and looked another way,  
And saw three islands in a bay.

Anyone willing to get his feet soaked in the wet grass, as she did, can locate several such scenes in the Camden area, but whether he will derive the How and the Why of Things, as she did, is debatable.

Whenever she grew weary of the abrasive city, she would renew her psyche on Ragged Island in Casco Bay, the Elm Island of Elijah Kellogg's stories. So it follows in her poems. When the slick and the brittle lines are shaken out, what remains are fresh, flowing lyrics redolent of Maine. In her median period, candles burned at both ends while the world disintegrated, but earlier she caroled the gaunt crags, rocky beaches, sheep, catbirds and tamaracks, tumbled sheds, broken
wagons, and the salt smell that pervaded her lifeblood as a child. She too was a Pulitzer Prize laureate, and with Longfellow and Robinson comprises a towering trio among American sonneteers.

Robert P. Tristram Coffin (1892-1955), Maine’s third Pulitzer Prize poet, was reared on his father’s saltwater farm near Harpswell. With gusto matched by few local-colorists, he poked through every inch of his small kingdom and flushed out treasure after treasure, ruddy and wonderful. “I began being a poet there,” he told, “among lighthouses and barns and boats, tides and fogs and apples and hired men.” He inhaled great gobs of Kenneth Roberts’ euphoric iodine and became gloriously tipsy. “This is my country...These are my people,” he cried to the gnarled landscape and the burly virtues all around him. He revivified oral history and lore on every page of One-Horse Farm, Yankee Coast, and Christmas in Maine. He wrote a round of novels with Maine settings, a chronicle Kennebec River, Cradle of Americans, and an autobiography ruefully titled Lost Paradise. More urgently than either of the two preceding poets, Tristram Coffin regressed to an unblemished illusion of the past, his sunstruck epoch which could never be retrieved save through the imagination.

Last of the four admissible modern poets is Wilbert Snow (1884-1977), whose viewpoint hovers between contemporaneous Robinson and retrospective Coffin. Snow, born on Whitehead Island off St. George, paints with glistening vividness tableaus of January thaw, sea gardens, quarries, cornfields in winter; inbred activities such as cooting, codfishing, fox-hunting; matchless drolls like Captain George and Aunt Cal; clamdiggers, leathermen. The titles of his books are as enticing as the materials he enlists: Down East, Spruce Head, Maine Tides, and Inner Harbor. How fitting, then, to cap this discourse on Maine’s literary heritage with Snow’s poem, appositely called “Heritage”:

They made their graveyards on the hill,
Their houses just below,
And something from the tombs came down
The slope long years ago;

It fastened on the cellar walls,
It climbed the rough-hewn beams
Clear to the attic, back again,
And mildewed in the seams, —

Till those who called these dwellings home
Saw the dark spate leave behind
A tiny fringe of graveyard loam
Upon New England's mind.

Not often would one find articulated so succinctly this mystical synthesis of man and nature, soil and soul in the eventuation of Maine character and literature.

Inexorable modifications of dimension, direction, and tempo have already defiled the purity of this interchange and raised disturbing questions. What is in the future for Maine's literary heritage? Will it preserve its hard-won postulates or bow to the homogenizing pressures of all-pervasive media?

Maine is still aloofly the northernmost, easternmost sector of the Union, out of direct route to anywhere. Despite seasonal invasions by skiers, hunters, alpinists, and cute-craft admirals, no great infiltration of new modes is yet discernible. The State is still predominantly agrarian and still relies on its serrated seacoast for much of its economy. More drastic conversions may be forced upon the State to oblige the national interest, but the prospect is not alarming. Mainers still prefer life at a moderate gait, morality at a reasonable level, fun in low key. As Maine's most representative authors to date have steadfastly looked backward in ardor, it seems less than heretical to presume that Maine's current and future authors will incline appreciably toward the none-too-different ethic of this nearer tenure.

Meanwhile it is a comfort to behold that, somewhere in these harried States, the ancient verities are holding the line. In these days of racial turbulence, economic disarray, genetic legerdemain, and fear of nuclear Götterdämmerung, it is reassuring that in cleaving to its ancestral alliances the State of Maine remains persuasively a State of Mind.
WENDELL BERRY: LOVE POET

JOHN T. HIERS
VALDOSTA STATE COLLEGE

Wendell Berry — poet, novelist, essayist — has produced an impressive canon since his first novel, Nathan Coulter, appeared in 1960. In two decades he has published three novels, several volumes of verse, and five volumes of essays. Two interrelated themes unify all of his mature work: man's proper relationship with the land and, a corollary, his harmonious relationship with his neighbors. These concerns place Berry squarely in the agrarian tradition of Southern literature, a position he finds both intellectually satisfying and aesthetically essential. Unlike many of his agrarian predecessors, however, Berry actually farms as well as writes and teaches.

Although Berry is a former Guggenheim fellow, a former Rockefeller Foundation fellow, the recipient of two prizes from Poetry Magazine and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, he has not attracted widespread critical and scholarly attention. The few scholars with critical interest in Berry have concentrated on his regional agrarianism, his traditional moral values, and his direct pastoral mode, but they have failed to appreciate him as love poet of considerable distinction. One critic, John Hicks, finds marriage in Berry's novels "to be ideally a merging of the solitary selves, an act of healing, and a partial reconciliation with nature," yet Hicks limits himself to Berry's fiction and fails to find there much "passion, intensity, or personal encounter" in these novels' "farm marriages." Nevertheless, much of Berry's love poetry does reveal a moving, if understated conjugal passion and controlled intensity.

Indeed, Wendell Berry's agrarianism makes him a love poet. Other modern American poets associated with agrarian perspectives and values — Ransom, Tate, Warren, Frost, for instance — certainly have composed love poetry; yet, none can be classified so easily as a love poet in any traditional, limited sense. But Berry's brand of agrarianism — far more convincing, far less stylized and academic than in his predecessors — naturally and organically evolves into constrained paeans of love. At times as exuberant as Theodore Roethke, at times as intensely intimate as Anne Sexton, Berry both inherits and creates an agrarian ethos which sustains poetic visions of love unique among contemporary poets. That is, Berry as love poet is a celebrant of procreative marriage. His seventh generation farm near
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Port Royal, Kentucky, is both metaphorically and literally a country of marriage, the title of one of his most mature books of verse.

Berry's world picture is one of microcosmic analogies based on man's unity with the land, and, consequently, with his wife and his creator. Harmony with nature both creates and reflects a continuous harmony with others, and man is husband to the land as he is husband to his wife. In his essay, "The Likenesses of Atonement (At-onement)," Berry explains the philosophical tenets of his unifying system of metaphors and analogies:

Living in our speech, though no longer in our consciousness, is an ancient system of analogies that clarifies a series of mutually defining and sustaining unities: of farmer and field, of husband and wife, of the world and God. The language both of our literature and of our everyday speech is full of references and allusions to this expansive metaphor of farming and marriage and worship. A man planting a crop is like a man making love to his wife, and vice versa: he is a husband or a husbandman. A man praying is like a lover, or he is like a plant in a field waiting for rain. As husbandman, a man is both the steward and the likeness of God, the greater husbandman.²

This poet of agrarian harmonies and natural pieties can be no other than a love poet as well. What makes Berry's voice as love poet unique today is his complete, unabashed adherence to this ancient system of belief. Paradoxically, his voice sounds authentic and even original because it is so old-fashioned, didactic, and moralistic.

Agrarian imagery to describe sexual love, however, is hardly unique even in modern verse. Theodore Roethke, in such brilliant poems as "I Knew a Woman," gives perhaps the most striking examples:

She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
Coming behind her for her pretty sake
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).
(12-14)³

Yet, Roethke's occasional use of this kind of agrarian metaphor in his love poetry ultimately is a celebration of the self through the ephemeral harmony of one soul with another. In Whitmanesque ecstasy he announces in "Words for the Wind" that "Being myself, I sing/The soul's immediate joy" and concludes:
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I kiss her moving mouth,  
Her sweet hilarious skin;  
She breaks my breath in half;  
She frolics like a beast;  
And I dance round and round,  
A fond and foolish man,  
And see and suffer myself  
In another being at last. (105-112)

For Roethke, sexual love harmonizes individuals in their separate, doomed quests to defeat time. Berry’s celebrations of sexuality unify individual souls with the natural order, redefining the individual’s defeat by time as essentially a source of meaning and life. Death becomes a source of life metaphorically and analogously, for Berry, because it is a literal source witnessed almost daily on his farm.

Berry thus appropriates the Renaissance metaphor of death as sexuality. “What I am learning to give you is my death,” he says to his wife in “The Country of Marriage,” “to set you free of me, and me from myself/ into the dark and the new light.” Dark brings new light as death brings new life; hence, Berry presents sex primarily as procreative. But, again, his use of death as a sexual metaphor is more than merely quaint because it is, in Berry’s world, more of a physical than a metaphysical figure. As a love poet Berry has indeed schooled himself on John Donne and similar company, but he has basically schooled himself on the ways of nature on his Port Royal farm.

As Berry generalizes in “Enriching the Earth,” death is never an end in itself in the natural world: “After death, willing or not, the body serves, entering the earth. And so what was heaviest/ and most mute is at last raised up into song” (17-19). Sexual death, according to Berry’s system of analogies, yields a similar song for similar reasons. It both mirrors a natural process of procreation and is one itself. More than two people are harmonized in Berry’s hymns to marriage; a world is unified.

The unforgivable sin, for Berry, then, is to make a waste of death. He invariably associates violence and loneliness and despair with this kind of waste. In “The Morning News,” for example, he states that

It is man, the inventor of cold violence, 
death as waste, who has made himself lonely 
among creatures, and set himself aside from creation, so that he cannot labor 
in the light of the sun with hope,
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or sit at peace in the shade of any tree.

(FAH, 11-16)

Analogously, sexual death as an end in itself brings disharmony, loneliness, alienation.

The farmer-lover-narrator of “Air and Fire,” borne away from the country of marriage by jetliner, composite symbol of modern technological and mechanistic society, is at once tempted by selfish, lustful passion:

Having risen from my native land,
I find myself smiled at by beautiful women,
making me long for a whole life
to devote to each one, making love to
her in some house, in some way of sleeping
and waking I would make only for her.

(FAH, 5-10)

Here Berry presents a traditional temptation scene, replete with an angel-temptor who satanically offers complete release from individual responsibility to wife, home, and farm. But the bonds of marriage paradoxically offer truer freedom (“I give you what is unbounded,” Berry declares in “The Country of Marriage”). Meaningful love doesn’t grow in some way, in some house; it is cultivated and nourished in the mind as well as in the flesh. “Like rest after a sleepless night,” concludes the narrator, “my old love comes on me in midair” (FAH, 22-23).

But it would be erroneous to consider such a conclusion to be only the puritanical prudishness of an eastern Kentucky farm boy. His kind of love anchors his lustful mind in midair because it is also of the flesh. In “Earth and Fire,” a companion piece to “Air and Fire,” Berry sings love’s ecstasy in lyrical harmonies worthy of Roethke or Anne Sexton. Here pain and joy are unified by passion and gusto:

In this woman the earth speaks.
Her words open in me, cells of light
flashing in my body, and make a song
that I follow toward her out of my need.
The pain I have given her I wear
like another skin, tender, the air
around me flashing with thorns.
And yet such joy as I have given her
sings in me and is part of her song.
The winds of her knees shake me
Renewal of life comes because this sexuality is of the earth, not of the air. The lovers are in harmony with time because they creatively participate in the cyclical order of nature. This poet measures time not by the swaying of a woman's body, but by the rushing of wind and the flashing of light.

Berry’s ecstatic sensuality, though often as lyrical, stands outside of the modern tradition of love poetry as exemplified by the later Yeats or Roethke or Sexton. It especially contrasts to the sensuality of Sexton, who in many ways was Roethke’s heir to the Bacchanalian muse. In “Barefoot,” for instance, Sexton echoes Roethke’s trumpeting of selfhood through orgiastic release:

The surf’s a narcotic, calling out,
_I am, I am, I am_
all night long, Barefoot,
I drum up and down your back
In the morning I run from door to door
of the cabin playing _chase me._
Now you grab me by the ankles,
Now you work your way up the legs
and come to pierce me at my hunger mark.
(25-33)\(^6\)

Berry could never describe sexual union as a game, although he, too, revels in such climactic moments. For sexual union is but an extended metaphor of other Thoreauvian harmonies in his Kentucky Walden; it is, in short, a mode of participation in all of creation and, therefore, an act of joyful reverence.

But there are no more Waldens in the New England of Anne Sexton. Like her predecessor Roethke, she quickly plunges from zeniths of sensuality into labyrinths of remorse and loneliness. In “You All Know the Story of the Other Women,” she sarcastically begins by shattering the Walden myth:

_It’s a little Walden._
_She is private in her breathbed_
as his body takes off and flies,
flies straight as an arrow.
_But it’s a bad translation._
_Daylight is nobody’s friend._ (1-6)
Creative, harmonious unions of lovers reflect only the heat of momentary passions. They are not analogies of natural order and design; they only intensify the desperate need for them in a world which can no longer accept them.

Sexton often perceives and dramatizes modern marriage as an artificial sham, an illusion of self-transcendence and self-definition. As a poetic metaphor or analogy it is useless because it is dead as a conventional sacrament. Even in her series of poems "Eighteen Days Without You," one is suspicious of the selfhood attained through sexual passion. Here the narrator remembers how it once was, how

you come and take my blood cup
and link me together and take my brine.
We are bare. We are stripped to the bone
and we swim in tandem and go up and up
the river, the identical river called Mine
and we enter together. No one's alone.
("December 11th," 7-12)

The irony is that she is alone even as she recalls this climactic moment of complete union. More often than not, Sexton's theme is the unassuaged hunger of love which is only intensified by these memories.

The true Sexton, in short, may be found in such a poem as "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator." There are few poems of greater intimacy and forlorn alienation in modern American verse. Here may be the inevitable, final lamentation of the kind of Romantic solipsism which Roethke and Sexton ultimately manifest as love poets. It is a tradition, a side of Romanticism completely rejected by Berry, whose agrarian world view is often and nebulously labeled "Romantic." Paradoxically, the opening lines of Sexton's poem easily might be confused with several of Berry's: "The end of the affair is always death./She's my workshop." The similarity ends with the refrain, which closes each stanza with Euripidean pathos: "At night, alone, I marry the bed." In this instance, Sexton, like Berry, employs death as a sexual metaphor; but her irony is overwhelming and terrifying. The self-fulfillment of this affair (one recalls the Whitmanesque declarations of self in "Barefoot" and other poems) is finally masturbatory—with no affirmation of meaning, no possibility of rebirth, only introspective anguish. "All is an interminable chain of longing," writes Robert Frost. Anne Sexton would agree.

Wendell Berry, although much taken with Frost's agrarian posi-
tions in such poems as “Build Soil,” would not. If Roethke and Sexton are so far the era’s supreme strophic voices of solipsistic sensuality, Berry is emerging as an antistrophic singer of the timeless harmonies of marriage — marriage not as a social convention so much as a pantheistic sacrament. Although he is not Christian in any narrow denominational or theological sense, he nevertheless considers marriage as sacramental because it is a means to greater natural harmony and piety, a mode of creativity analogous to natural and, ultimately, to divine creativity.

Berry’s “An Anniversary” epitomizes his poetic vision of marriage and of sexual love. Along with “The Country of Marriage,” it stands as one of the modern age’s boldest poetic visions of marriage as sacramental. At a time when marriage as a social institution is becoming anachronistic, Berry dares to center a complete agrarian ethos upon it. And he succeeds, partly from refusing to be strident as he cuts across the modern American grain with affirmations from the past. “An Anniversary” is a complementary descriptive statement for all “The Country of Marriage” dramatizes. An anniversary of love and commitment, a marking of time, becomes a window on all time through the seasonal fruition, decay, and rebirth of all life in “The household/Of the woods”:

The fields and woods prepare
The burden of their seed
Out of time’s wound, the old
Richness of the fall. Their deed
Is renewal (CM, 6-10)

The love of man and woman has similar harvest, achieves definition through change that is forever orderly and predictable, at least from an agrarian vantage point.

Berry quietly, reverentially telescopes from nature in general to the particular celebrants of this anniversary:

Love binds us to this term
With its yes that is crying
In our marrow to confirm
Life that only lives by dying.
Lovers live by the moon
Whose dark and light are one,
Changing without rest.
The root struts from the seed
In the earth’s dark — harvest
And feast at the edge of sleep.
Darkened we are carried
Out of need, deep
In the country we have married. (CM, 18-30)

Because these lovers are married to a country as well as to one another, they are carried away from need. In contrast, the lovers of Anne Sexton’s poems, whose desires are confirmed only by their own voices, have their needs intensified even while they harvest the fruits of their love.

Lovers in the poetry of both Berry and Sexton live by the moon, but for different reasons. On the one hand, the narrator of Sexton’s “Moon Song, Woman Song” declares: “I am alive at night./I am dead in the morning.” On the other hand, the married couple in “An Anniversary” is unified with both the night and the day, for dark and light give definition to each other as fall and winter define spring. Speer Morgan cogently says: “The statement ‘Lovers live by the moon’ implies the conjunction of both the woman’s cycle and the farmer’s labor with that of the moon; more important, the moon symbolizes the dark and light continually at work in one perfect circle: its essence is the ‘changing without rest,’ which suggests the joy of love-making itself as well as the pang of sorrow that the lovers...may feel in the face of transience.”

This momentary regret of Berry’s lovers is quickly assuaged by the dark itself, for it carries them out of need. Sexton’s characters find no such solace. Feasting in the dark, they but hunger in the day.

Even when Sexton employs the agrarian images of planting and harvesting, she is consciously the poet of the moment rather than of the seasons. In “Us,” another of her Roethke-like ecstasies, she concludes with a veritable fury of passion:

Oh then
I stood up in my gold skin
and I beat down the psalms
and I beat down the clothes
and you undid the bridle
and you undid the reins
and I undid the buttons
the bones, the confusions,
the New England postcards,
the January ten o’clock night,
and we rose up like wheat,
acre after acre of gold,
There can be no country of marriage for Sexton because there are no meaningful traditions left on which to found such a country. The traditions of New England are only post-card mementoes; the lyrics of the Psalms are now discordant. One can no longer return to the remnants of the past, as does Robert Frost’s urban quester in “Directive,” to “Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.” One can only throw off confusion, like clothes, as an act of the will. Sexual fulfillment is better than no fulfillment at all. When the time comes to face the reality of such uninhibited abandonment (“Let’s face it, I have been momentary,” concludes the narrator of “For My Lover, Returning to His Wife”), then at least the moment has been luxurious. Confusion inevitably, often pathetically, returns; one must wear clothes again. But the harvest has been golden, if short-lived.

Berry, of course, would find this kind of harvest to be not only too ephemeral, but also illusory. He would classify it as the fruition of “ignorant love.” As he rather whimsically states in “The Mad Farmer Manifesto: The First Amendment”:

And I declare myself free
from ignorant love. You easy lovers
and forgivers of mankind, stand back!
I will love you at a distance,
and not because you deserve it.
My love must be discriminate
or fail to bear its weight. (CM, 21-27)

Discriminating love is harmonizing love; it is passion without lust, pleasure without hedonism. It is, in the final analysis, participation in the seminal processes of all plantings and all harvests and thus a consummation of all time.

NOTES

1 John Hicks, “Berry’s Husband to the World: A Place on Earth,” American Literature, 51 (1979), 251-252.


3 My text is The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke (Garden City, 1961).
John T. Hiers


6 My text is *Love Poems* (Boston, 1969).


THE WRITINGS OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER — AN ESSAY REVIEW

HERSHEL PARKER

THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

Of the nine volumes under review I have already reviewed two, *The Pioneers* and *The Pathfinder*, in the September 1981 *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. I will not repeat myself much. Working from the outside in, I praise first the dust jackets. The cover illustrations are striking, even gorgeous reproductions of early illustrations of scenes from Cooper's novels and of scenes he describes in his travel books: for *The Pioneers*, “Turkey Shoot” by Tomkins H. Matteson; for *The Pathfinder*, a depiction by F. O. C. Darley of Natty Bumppo and his friends hiding, in Natty's case not very furtively, from the “accursed Mingos”; for *Wyandotte*, a depiction by Darley of Nick escorting Major Willoughby and Maud to the Hut; for *The Last of the Mohicans* a sumptuous reproduction of Thomas Cole's “Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamamund”; for *Lionel Lincoln* an engraving by John Lodge of a drawing by Miller called “View of the Attack on Bunker's Hill, with the Burning of Charles Town, June 17, 1775”; for *Switzerland* the Castle of Spietz, Lake of Thun, by W. H. Bartlett; for *Italy*, “Venice,” as drawn by James Baker Pyne and engraved by S. Bradshaw; for *England* Thomas Hosmer Shepherd's engraving of Cheapside, looking down Poultry and Bucklersbury from High Street, Aldgate; for *France*, an engraving of the Garden and Palace of the Tuileries, by Jacques Antoine Dulaure. Within the volumes the cover illustrations are reproduced along with many other illustrations of scenes from the novels, scenes in America and Europe which Cooper depicted, and appropriate maps. The sources of illustrations are meticulously described in a succinct section at the front of each volume.

One cannot overpraise the effort to present the user of these volumes with contemporary depictions of scenes Cooper witnessed and with contemporary visual tributes to the vividness of Cooper's own prose scene-painting, tributes which must have contributed, however incalculably, to the enduring power Cooper's works have had on the American and European imagination. Readers will be most interested in the reproductions of illustrations for Cooper's novels, I suspect; a younger generation may need this sort of lavish reminder that contemporary painters and engravers loved doing scenes from Cooper about as much as they loved doing Rip Van Winkle, Ichabod Crane,
Herschel Parker

and the Headless Horseman. In his "Historical Introduction" to The Pioneers Beard has a fascinating paragraph on the rush to illustrate that book. Many illustrations known to have existed are now destroyed or unidentified, so Beard has to conclude that "the effect of The Pioneers (and the later Leather-stocking novels) "on the emergence of the Hudson River Valley School is difficult to assess precisely, but its impact would seem to have been direct and decided."

Richard Hendel's design for the Cooper Edition strikes me as the best for any CEAA/CSE Edition, although I can see why some would vote for Bert Clarke's Howells or P. J. Conkwright's Thoreau. The blue cloth is that of Mohicans looking smaller than that of Pathfinder (is it photographically reduced?). Within particular volumes, changes in font size are appropriately made, smaller type going to the textual commentaries and lists. As I said in 1981, from volume to volume there is flexibility in the design of the lists, as when the emendations list was put one column per page in The Pathfinder because the list was short but two columns per page in The Pioneers, where there are more items. It's easy to glance down the "Textual Notes" to see if there's a discussion about something that puzzled you, for the entries are printed in reverse paragraph indentation, the line number starting flush left and all subsequent lines of the note indented about six spaces. Reverse paragraph indentation may strike you as a ridiculous thing to be grateful for, but you'll agree if you look at the Irving Edition, which has the right idea but indents only two or three spaces, enough to have two digits catch your eye but not enough to separate the beginning of an entry from any numbers that happen to fall at the start of the second line of a note. Or you can contrast the Ohio State Hawthorne, which did not get the idea at all, and on facing pages has textual notes bobbing like demijohns in parallel off-white canals. I do wish Hendel had made better use of the running heads. Why give the title of the novel on both verso and recto when a chapter number could have been given, conventionally, on the recto? In the travel books, especially, it seems wasteful to see "England" on both pages in an opening when a location in England could have been specified, or at least the number of the "Letter" could have been printed. The Press served the Edition badly at times, as in the distracting occurrence of lightly printed and sometimes slanted lines.
JAMES F. COOPER

in *Mohicans*, presumably where late corrections were made. I thought I could review *The Prairie* here when I learned that some people had received copies, but the Press withdrew the volume for corrections. (Professor Beard mentions misprintings in various volumes which I prefer not to itemize here: errors are inevitable, and I don't want to bog down in particulars when I have some broad comments to make.)

The designer and Cooper experts did not think ahead to avoid awkwardnesses that result from printing footnotes at the end of each of the Historical Introductions. Writers of the essays ought to have been warned to put all essential information into the text rather than putting it in footnotes which are not even on the same page but several pages away. I have in mind needless mystification when a person is first referred to by surname, with the full name in the note; or when the pattern of following first mention of a novel by the date of publication is violated because the date is given in a note; or when the text has a reference (this is in *Wyandotte*) to "the arbitration with Stone" (p. xvii) but the information that Cooper had "won a stunning victory over Stone in an arbitration suit concerning the accuracy of *The History of the Navy*" is reserved for p. xxx. This failure to give sufficient information at the appropriate place penalizes good readers, who naturally assume that they have missed something, and then waste time reviewing the previous pages. Such failures to think in terms of the way readers encounter information, while distracting the few times they occur, are anomalies in a remarkably well thought out Edition.

James Franklin Beard and James P. Elliott in their *Statement of Editorial Principles and Procedures* (1977) (guidelines for themselves and the contributing Cooper editors) made it clear that they expected each "Historical Introduction" to offer much fresh biographical information in the course of telling, always for the first time, the story of the genesis, composition, early publication history, and contemporary reception. The essays in the volumes so far published do in fact constitute new chapters in Cooper's biography. They also constitute an extraordinarily important contribution to William Charvat's old project, the study of the profession of authorship in America — and in Europe. As a Melvillean I was struck by the remarkable resilience and confidence Richard Bentley must have possessed for him to have treated Melville as generously as he did after his experiences with Cooper's writings. Other readers will find these accounts of author-publisher relationships equally informative and provocative, for other
reasons. It will be a shame if one of the Cooper experts does not, toward the end of the Edition, draw all the information together in a monograph on Cooper and his publishers.

James F. Beard as general editor has approved the "Historical Introductions" which he did not write, so I have not felt obliged in this review to check historical and biographical facts. I made an exception when I encountered the claim by Thomas and Marianne Philbrick that the "reviews of Wyandotté were neither numerous nor, with a few exceptions, penetrating." I know from my work on Melville that you just don't make that kind of assertion without serious review hunting. I went up to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania with my research assistant Kenneth McNamee to see what the local papers did with a Lea and Blanchard book. In a couple of hours we had supplemented the Philbricks' account with a notice in the United States Gazette and one in the Pennsylvanian as well as one in the Saturday Courier which promised a fuller review (did it ever appear?); I also checked the New York Albion and found a notice of Wyandotté. We checked a little further in the Philadelphia papers and found three notices of The Pathfinder not mentioned in the historical introduction to that volume; one of them quotes from a review in the New York Evening Post also not mentioned.

I understand that the Cooper Edition has not been funded by NEH on the grand scale of some other editions, but I think the Cooper editors ought to have been able not only to use the files of reviews (admittedly incomplete) which Beard has set up at Worcester but also to supplement his files by what they could find through some systematic hunting expeditions. Of the volume editors only Donald and Lucy Ringe, in Lionel Lincoln, offer what looks like a genuinely representative survey of contemporary reviews, based on personal inhaling of newspaper dust and eye-strain from peering into microfilm readers. As I keep saying, any contemporary review may be more important than the most clever modern critical article simply because it may have affected the way an author wrote a later work. Anyone who does a historical introduction in collected edition owes it to the rest of us, and to posterity, to be as exhaustive as possible, or, at least, to avoid giving the impression that the work has been done when it has not: you have to earn the right to generalize about the number and the nature of reviews of any book.

The Editorial Apparatus in these Cooper volumes typically consists of "Explanatory Notes," "Textual Commentary," Textual
Notes," "Emendations," "Rejected Readings," and "Word-Division." The last of these the Cooper Edition puts compactly into double columns. I question only the inclusion of words like "New-York" and "Anglo-Saxon," where the capitalization of the second part would prevent anyone from mistranscribing. Since this list, one of Fredson Bowers's best innovations, and essential if one is to know how to quote accurately, has been the subject of much ignorant ridicule, it behooves editors to define it stringently. About the other lists, aside from the unexceptionable "Emendations," I have more to say.

The "Explanatory Notes" are succinctly informative. Following the page-and-line citation comes the part of the text being explained (a word or two or a phrase, usually; longer passages are given as the opening and closing phrases separated by three ellipsis dots), then after a colon comes the note. And the Cooper notes are useful, not pedantic. Where the Howells Edition sometimes glossed the obvious ("divvy" as slang for "divide," "without form and void" as biblical, "funeral baked meats" as Shakespearean), the Cooper editors tell you about "Rodney's victory" and "Denman's Midwifery."

Each "Textual Commentary" contains, in the words of the Statement, "a complete and concise explanation of all phases of the establishment of the eclectic text of the volume." All editors were enjoined to present information "as clearly and intelligibly as possible, with as little technical jargon and unnecessary complication as the inclusion of essential facts permits." Beard and his colleagues have made these commentaries about as clear and succinct as anyone could hope for, and the design, once again, helps the reader, for discussions of particular editions are usually set off by space and preceded by a subheading (e.g., "WILEY-CLAYTON FIRST EDITION"). The commentaries are well proportioned, short when a work went into few editions (7 pages for France), longer when the textual histories are more complicated (29 for The Pioneers).

When there is surviving manuscript to serve as full or partial copy-text the "Textual Commentary" is supplemented by a "Note on the Manuscript," and the textual apparatus takes on more than ordinary interest. The best fun comes in sharing Richard Dilworth Rust's great pleasure in demonstrating that the printed texts of The Pathfinder were replete with compositorial mistranscriptions which, cumulatively, are enough to undermine anyone's confidence that Cooper knew or cared much about stylistic felicity. (It's just too bad that Mark Twain cannot be shown to have worked himself into a
lather over an error in transcription.)

I like the look of the Cooper "Textual Notes" but not the way they are worded. They are not self-contained; you have to consult the text and other lists in order to know what the note is about. This is from Italy: "12.16. Cooper obviously means to suggest a contrast between the road and the rest of the scene, making the Bentley reading more appropriate." What Bentley reading? A reader who forgot what was copy-text might look in the "Emendations" list, but there is no entry for 12.16 because the Bentley edition was in fact the copy-text. Properly chastened, the reader may then look in "Rejected Readings," where he will find that the first edition (London) had "otherwise" while the American edition had "other." In England the textual note to 125.3 reads "Although both prepositions are possible here, 'on' seems more appropriate." Since my raise for 1986 depends on my doing this review right, I dutifully turned to the text at 125.3: "circumstances that enlisted the public feeling on his side, in which." I was not enlightened. "Both prepositions" might refer to "on" and "in" — after all, both occur at 125.3. But that couldn't be. On to the list of variants. Whoops! there is no list of variants. Try "Rejected Readings." No such list. Try "Emendations"! Success: "on[J]CE; of A" — just what I wanted to know: the first edition had "of" where the Cooper Edition prints "on." They could have told me so in the "Textual Notes."

Another example and I'll stop. The first of the "Textual Notes" to Mohicans reads: "The correct spelling actually originates in the second American edition." Well, I am a man of great good feeling toward the Cooper edition, but "actually," I don't care what correct spelling you are talking about if you don't care enough to tell me instead of teasing me. It's only for that 1986 raise that I look at "Emendations" and find that the first edition had "downfall" and the second edition had, actually, "downfall," which the Cooper edition adopted. With the addition of a little more information, enough to take up a dozen more lines for a volume, the notes could have been self-contained. If anyone tells me that the notes are not meant to be read I reply that if they are not meant to be read they should not have been included. I hope the Cooper Edition changes policy in subsequent volumes.

I approach a list of "Rejected Readings" cautiously because of its doleful sound, so suggestive of outgrown novels by Grace Livingston Hill and William Buckley. In the Cooper Edition the list consists mainly of readings in "authorial" editions (editions Cooper super-
vised or at least authorized) which the editors have judged to be non-authoritative. That is, in the case of volumes edited from manuscript they mainly consist of misreadings made by the first compositors, misreadings never corrected by Cooper in later editions. In the case of volumes for which the first edition is copy-text, the list consists mainly of words in later authorized editions which the editors think are not changes made by Cooper but by others, primarily compositors. Now, there is nothing inherently wrong about printing a list of words you do not adopt because you are pretty sure they are non-authorial, but sometimes the lists are long — nineteen pages in The Pathfinder — a lot of space to devote to words you think are non-authorial. I complained about this in 1981 on the grounds of misplaced priorities: ‘Rust prints a table of ‘Rejected Readings’ — readings from early editions which seem to be mainly compositorial errors or casual compositorial changes. He does not print a list of authorial revisions in the manuscript. I assume the reasons are partly economic — the manuscript alterations would take many pages to list (and could never satisfactorily represent the chronology of revision for a much-reworked passage) while the printed variants could be handled tidily. Whatever the justifications, the effect of the policy is to valorize the nonauthorial printed variants over the variants which survive from the author’s active engagement in what we must, as admirers of Cooper, call the creative process.’

The more I think about the “Rejected Readings” the more I think they are negative lists — mere records of words you can be sure, sometimes, are not Cooper’s and never were Cooper’s: when you have the manuscript, you can be fairly confident about when a variant in the first edition is there because a compositor had trouble reading a word that the Cooper editors, trying harder, can read perfectly well. Once in a while a reading on the list will be a variant Cooper could have substituted, though the editors think it is really not his (if they thought it was his change they would have put it in the “Emendations”). The inclusion of these lists is justifiable — these are not off-the-wall lists like the Kent State Arthur Mervyn list of variants in non-authorized editions. But when you are omitting any record of Cooper’s manuscript revisions and are including a long list of compositorial variants, you are getting your priorities wrong. Professor Beard wrote me in 1981 that a list of alterations in the Pathfinder manuscript would have been prohibitively expensive, fifteen times, he guessed, as long as the list of alterations of the manuscript in the Ohio State The
Hershel Parker

House of the Seven Gables. I take his word that the press would not have printed such a lengthy list, but given nineteen pages to play with, I would rather have had a sample of Cooper's revisions — after all, we know in these cases that the variants are all his — than nineteen pages of variants the editors think are not authorial.

My uneasiness with the "Rejected Readings" becomes acute in Wyandotte, where the editors in the "Note on the Manuscript" describe Cooper's holograph revisions: "The first stage of revision reflects chiefly an occasional groping for the right word and syntax. The later stage, insofar as it can be distinguished from the first, involves not only stylistic improvement but more substantial changes, most of them with the design of making what was written earlier consistent with what was written later." Now, the editors nowhere list the revisions Cooper made in order to make parts of the manuscript consistent, yet one would think those changes would be fascinating. It is very strange to see the editors suppressing such indisputable evidence of how Cooper revised yet printing (in the "Emendations" list) the later-stage continuation of the process of imposing consistency — the variants in the first edition which the editors take as Cooper's "extensions" of his patterns of revisions in the manuscript, including "the adjustment of early portions of the novel to elements introduced late in the composition." The result of this policy is that part of the pattern of weeding out inconsistencies is printed, but the less-interesting part — less interesting because farther removed from the creative process and less interesting because they are not certainly by Cooper but only very probably by him; the most interesting and the demonstrably authorial parts of the pattern are not listed. As I said in 1981, this is to valorize printed variants over manuscript variants (as almost all editing inspired by Greg and Bow- ers has tended to do) even when manuscript survives. The printing of these elaborate lists of rejected variants seems to me a case of doing meticulously something that is not the most desirable thing to do. What gets lost sight of is the use people might make of any conceivable list of variants for a particular work — real people who love literature and are concerned with the process of literary creation more than they are with the vagaries of compositors.

The Cooper apparatus is cautious and conventional. Apprised of some minor errors and blunders in advance, I have assumed that the lists are otherwise accurate except when something leapt out at me in Mohicans — where apparently the "Emendations" list does not con-
tain some 1850 changes in the “Introduction” which are discussed as emendations in the “Textual Commentary.” Now and then in the “Textual Commentaries” the reasoning may be awkwardly stated even though the decision is one most of us would approve, as in this rather circular passage from *Mohicans*: “Since the Miller edition, while liberally restyled, evidences no changes attributable to Cooper, the Clayton & Van Norden sheets sent to England presumably contained no scribal corrections.” One can argue about particular decisions, of course, as well the wording of the textual reasoning, but I think anyone would agree that for the most part the Cooper editors have carefully following the principles of editorial apparatus as developed by CEAA editions and as best explored (not just laid out) in G. Thomas Tanselle’s now-classic essay in the 1972 *Studies in Bibliography*. But it is fair to say that the editors do not seize the opportunity to rethink Tanselle’s arguments either when they follow the pattern which he had described or when they diverge from it, as in the “Rejected Readings” list. They do not, in short, use their textual findings to think through the rationales for all of the parts of the apparatus.

In textual policy one also finds that the Cooper volumes, as I said in 1981, are “models of conservative, responsible editing in accordance with W. W. Greg’s theory of copy-text.” The other side of this responsible policy is that textual evidence is not brought to bear on textual theory either to confirm or challenge it. Fredson Bowers has said practically everything about eclectic texts except why you might want one and what you can do with one once you have it. The Cooper editors had chances a plenty to rethink the utility of eclectic editing, as in *Mohicans*, where they print Cooper’s 1826 “Preface” in a form which no reader saw in 1826; Cooper’s 1831 “Introduction” in a form which no reader saw in 1831; an addition at the end of the “Introduction” which no one saw until 1850; and a text of the novel which no one saw until 1983. I am not arguing that the Cooper editors were wrong to do what they did, but merely that they passed by an opportunity to explore practical and theoretical issues of the highest interest. I made a similar point in 1981 in regard to Rust’s amusingly formulated “Agnes Principle,” according to which the editors carry out alterations which Cooper started but did not finish, as when he decided to change Mabel Dunham’s first name to Agnes. I was not and am not concerned with challenging the “Agnes Principle” but with reminding us all that even so reasonable a policy can be extremely
tricky: what if Cooper had punned repeatedly on "Mabel" in several chapters?

In 1981 I concluded that "Cooper's texts are being lovingly and learnedly prepared under the supervision of an Editor-in-Chief devoted to his author and responsible to the readers of the Edition. Cooper is having his second chance." The hottest topic at the 1984 MLA was the canon of American Literature, and in the present fervor about *Reconstructing American Literature* the danger is that Cooper will be swamped not by Herman Melville but by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Second chances are chancy, and fads, we all know, can delay the rehabilitation of a neglected writer, no matter how great his or her historical and even aesthetic significance. More frequently than we acknowledge, fads in what English professors write and publish can also delay recognition of important scholarship. I wish I saw clearer signs that the Cooper editors will receive the great praise they deserve for their durable contributions to the history of authorship in America, to Cooper's biography, and to the purification of classic texts.
THE FAILURE OF CONVENTIONAL FORM:

THE CIVIL WAR, SOUTHWEST HUMOR, AND KITTRELL WARREN’S ARMY STRAGGLER

WILLIAM E. LENZ

CHATHAM COLLEGE

The American confidence man emerged as a distinct literary convention within the tradition of Old Southwest Humor in response to conditions on the 1830s frontier. Prowling the “flush times,” he exposes suspicion, dishonesty, naiveté, and greed and marks by his successful manipulations a pattern of faith betrayed that resembles the historical cycle of boom and bust. Johnson Jones Hooper’s Simon Suggs is the definitive American confidence man; Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs (1845) codified frontier anxieties in a stable literary form and seemed to resolve the ambiguities of the “new country” in comic action. A combination of prankster, diddler, horse-trader, and thief, the fast-talking confidence man wins by deceit and abuses for profit the confidence of everyone during the “flush times.” “His whole ethical system,” writes Hooper, “lies snugly in his favorite aphorism — ‘IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY.’”

Imitators of Simon Suggs sprang up throughout the Old Southwest, some paying explicit homage to Hooper in sketches appearing in magazines like William T. Porter’s New York Spirit of the Times. The most talented of Hooper’s successors varied the humorous convention, investing it with new meaning while retaining the confidence man’s mastery of language, his manipulation of appearances, and his exploitation of ambiguities. Sometimes crossing the development of the Southwestern confidence man with other literary traditions, authors including Joseph G. Baldwin, George W. Harris, and Herman Melville refocused the convention in the 1850s to express their increasing distrust of the American “flush times.” Baldwin’s Simon Suggs, Jr., and Ovid Bolus, Esq., operate within a tight ironic frame, while Harris’s Sut Lovingood recounts his own exploits in a highly stylized vernacular narration. Melville’s Confidence-Man parodies the characteristic action and language of the Southwestern convention, confronting the inadequacy of conventional literary modes to continue to resolve historical anxieties. As if to confirm Melville’s doubts, Kittrell J. Warren, a little-known Georgia humorist, tries vainly to interpret
the Civil War through the comic structure of a shifty character.

Like George Washington Harris, Kittrell J. Warren was a Southern writer who supported the Confederacy in the Civil War; unlike Harris, who limited his efforts to the Sut Lovingood satires (collected in 1867), Warren enlisted as a Private in the Eleventh Georgia Volunteers. Of his first two literary attempts, *Ups and Downs of Wife Hunting* (1861) is a comic pamphlet for soldiers that admits kinship to William Tappan Thompson’s *Major Jones’ Courtship* (1843), while the *History of the Eleventh Georgia Vols., Embracing the Muster Rolls, Together with a Special and Succinct Account of the Marches, Engagements, Casualties, Etc.* (1863) is a factual tribute to his comrades in arms. *Life and Public Services of an Army Straggler* (1865) owes its form to Longstreet, Hooper, Baldwin, Harris, and to Warren’s first-hand combat experiences. Billy Fishback is a Confederate Army deserter who roams the no-man’s land of the battle-torn South, a confidence man turned vicious by the war who betrays all causes and denies all virtues. He has none of Simon Suggs’s sense of humor, Sut Lovingood’s knack for outrageous fun, or Ovid Bolus’s abilities and polish. Warren’s faith in and dependence on the conventional forms of Southwest Humor have been destroyed by the criminal realities of the Civil War; Billy Fishback plays lethal games which mirror the unpredictable chaos of national conflict.

Billy Fishback and Dick Ellis desert the Confederate Army before it engages in battle. By agreement, Ellis steals the Major’s prized horse, and Fishback, who alerts the Major, is sent out to recapture the horse and dispatch the thief. The original plan called for Ellis to wait for Fishback a few miles from the camp, and sure of no one else pursuing them, the two were to escape together. Fishback, however, requests assistance. Taking advantage of the Major’s order to “kill the villain” who stole his horse, Fishback sends the obedient Jack Wilcox, who is “armed to the teeth” and unaware of the deserters’ pact, on Ellis’s trail. As he watches Wilcox ride off, Fishback has “a good laugh over this pleasant and amusing little incident”: “Dick Ellis aint a guine to pester about telling nothing. That fool Jack’s dun turned him over to the tender mersez uv the carron croze. That’s a good joke I’ve got on Dick, manied to get his branes shot out thout my tellin a word.’ ” Here the story ends, and the natural conclusion to be drawn from the incident is that Ellis has been killed. That Ellis has by chance not been murdered is revealed forty pages later (87), but this information does nothing to change the reader’s horror at Fishback’s
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cold-blooded attempt. This violence is quite different from that in Longstreet’s “Georgia Theatrics” or “The Fight” (1835), both of which Warren mentions (30), and though unaccomplished ultimately its intent — which is imaginatively accomplished — makes the tricks of Simon Suggs, Ovid Bolus, Sut Lovingood, and “The Confidence-Man” seem harmless by comparison.

Warren takes care that no bond of sympathy or humor forms between the reader and the Confederate Private; Billy Fishback is no Henry Fleming or Colonel Carter any more than he is Simon Suggs. Fishback is more like Roderick Random, Smollett’s eighteenth-century picaro whom the reader despises with increasing emotion as Random symbolically pistol-whips friends and enemies alike. Yet, unlike Random, who controls the reader’s repulsion by telling his own story in the first person, Fishback is introduced within a “cordon sanitaire” (to use Kenneth Lynn’s phrase) that limits and defines his province:

I do wish I could introduce my hero in a fashionable manner. —Yea, verily, I would like to present him sumptuously appareled, reclining gracefully upon a magnificent ottoman, — just resting from the delicious employment of reading (that trans-anthropian specimen of splurgey) Macaria. I would have him a grand looking character. Intellect should beam from his lustrous eye, and nobleness peep forth from every lineament of his features. Nature should be in a glorious good humor, smiling graciously upon his first appearance. (5)

The sentimental rhetoric of Warren’s narrator contrasts ironically with the “Truth”: “With a rather well favored, though remarkably black face, and a stout, robust frame, wrapped in comfortable looking jeans wallowed the immortal William Fishback” (6). The narrator plays with a language unavailable to his “hero,” while Fishback’s confused admiration of “Captain” Slaughter’s oratory marks a limit to his understanding and to the type of role he may assume. To help the illiterate Fishback win the hand of the accomplished and wealthy Miss Callie, Slaughter — for fifty dollars — tells Callie that, though Fishback has been courted by the “rich and literary heiress, Miss Julia Evans,” Fishback will not be so unprincipled as to marry for money. To do so would be

“an imitation of Judas — bartering immortality for a sum of money. We are not the owners of the soul, and have no right to vend it — that
eternal element has been entrusted to us as custodians only; a truth which we find beautifully illustrated in the parable of the talents — if we bury it in the cumbrous rubbish of filthy lucre, how fearful will be the ulterior consequences? ...Bribe the needle to play truant to the pole — train the thirsty sun-beam to leave undrunk the dews of heaven, but this heart must revolve in its allotted periphery, or cease to move."

Although, so far as we know, our hero was wholly unacquainted with any foreign language, he had caught the gist of this conversation, and now ventured his own sentiments on the subject, in the following laconic style: "I'll be dad blasted ef I hadn't ruther try to set on a dozen rotten eggs twel I hatcht the last one uv 'em, as to marry a umurn jest for her munny, and spect to git along; thar aint narr bit o' use a tryin...." (58)

Three languages exist in this passage: the allusive, sentimental oratory of Slaughter; the rough, homely dialect of Fishback; and the normative, controlling rhetoric of the narrator. Fishback's attempt to echo the sentiments of Slaughter and Miss Callie is incongruous, and on this level Warren operates within the tradition of frontier humor. With Warren's narrator as with Harris's George the reader shares a superiority to the vernacular characters, though, unlike Billy, Sut helps the reader as he helps George to new perceptions.

Language is not Fishback's only limitation; several characters offer successful alternatives to his darkly egotistical vision of the world. Captain John Smith, Fishback's superior, combines the masculine virtues of the explorer with the understanding of a parent. Like Melville's myopic Captain Amaso Delano, Captain John Smith stands for American verities: confidence in mankind, belief in original innocence, and loyalty to boon companions. His desire to think well of Billy Fishback leads him to misperceive his malicious nature, and Billy has no trouble getting Smith drunk:

No sooner were Capt. Smith's eyes closed in the deep sleep of drunkenness than Fishback commenced making an inventory of his pocket-book which was found to contain nine hundred and sixty dollars. Taking out five hundred, he carefully replaced the balance, donned the Captain's uniform and sallied into the street. Arriving in front of Welch's store, he suddenly put on a drunken look, pulled his hat over his face, and staggered in. "Keep this fur me twell I get sober" said he, reaching the pocket-book to the man who stood behind the counter.

"What name, Captain?" asked the other, as he took the book in hand.
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“John Smith....” (36)

It is of course this honest merchant, rather than the clever Fishback, who appears to the Captain to have lightened his wallet. Although Smith hugs the real confidence man to his bosom, Smith’s values remain as an antidote to Fishback’s. As Evert A. Duyckinck noted in the Literary World of an historical Billy Fishback, “it is not the worst thing that can be said of a country that it gives birth to a confidence man...that one poor swindler...should have been able to drive so considerable a trade on an appeal to so simple a quality as the confidence of a man in man, shows that all the virtue and humanity of nature is not entirely extinct in the nineteenth century.”

The narrator himself is robbed by Fishback of a knapsack containing “a testament, the gift of my beloved Pastor, and ‘March’s Life of Webster,’ presented by Linda the morning I left home, with a special charge to ‘preserve it as I valued her love’” (42-43). For the most part, the narrator provides a model accessible to the reader; he is a Southerner and a soldier and — as he is one himself — understands and sympathizes with Fishback’s victims. His intrusions into the text, like his mock-invective against marriage, assure the reader that Billy’s tricks are at least narratively circumscribed, that a larger order — moral if not entirely comic — will prevail even though he has been abused. He condemns Fishback’s inhuman scavenging, symbolized by the narrator’s personal emblem of faith in the satchel, while he also satirizes the uselessness of extreme sentimentalism in a parody of wifely chatter: “I want no sugar-lumpshy-plumpshy-sweetness — pox take all finniken, sickening sugar-lumpshy-plumpshy-sweetness” (80). The reader appreciates and identifies with this aggressive masculine voice, neither rotten nor sugary, a voice in contrast to George Washington Harris’s full of moral optimism. As if to confirm the values of these normative characters, Fishback’s schemes — like the vicious twists of war they represent — are hardly ever successful. Mrs. Lane, who believes she has been widowed, awakens from a dream of her husband to find him returned to her in the flesh; her horse, which Fishback had stolen, like Charon escorts her husband home from the land of the dead. Captain John Smith ultimately learns of Fishback’s perfidy and renounces him. Fishback cannot even steal his friend “Captain” Slaughter’s purse: Slaughter anticipates his plan, makes him over-confident by apparently trusting him, and then catches him, literally, in a steel trap in flagrante delicto. Finally, Fishback contracts smallpox by his own attempt at manipulation, endures prison...
for his crimes, and, after first hearing that it was only his own suspicion that defeated his plans to marry the wealthy Miss Callie, dies.

This is poetic justice with a vengeance. The narrator's direct entreaties to his "most excellent reader," the reordering of the widow's world by the return of her husband, and the convenient end of the exposed Fishback suggest that Warren may be masquerading as a rough frontier humorist while he is in fact pledged to the sentimental values of writers like Mary Noailles Murfree, Thomas Nelson Page, and Joel Chandler Harris. In Warren's Straggler, as in mid-nineteenth-century America, two sets of values coexist. Warren attempts a golden mean, humorously exaggerating the "high" culture of J. Rufus Bates and "Captain" Slaughter and the pretensions of Major Graves while simultaneously condemning and satirizing the "low" culture of Billy Fishback.

Mrs. Lane, the unassuming widow, even more than the occasionally effeminate narrator or the too-trusting Captain Smith, functions as the work's normative center, a woman who though possessing the sentimental tendencies of her sex nevertheless has the strength to continue and the heart to help others, no matter how mean they are or how mean her circumstances. The narrator describes at length Fishback's first meeting with her, "a woman whose husband had been shot on picket a few weeks before":

The ruin and dilapidation every where apparent, plainly demonstrated the fact that she, a frail and delicate creature, and one whose manner indicated she had been in better circumstances, was compelled, with her own attenuated hands, to perform all the labor done on the premises. To her he applied for rest, rations and lodging for the night. This application she at first refused, by stating that she had already been taxed beyond her ability in feeding soldiers. But he appealed so piteously that her firmness yielded and her sympathies, (there's no plumb-line can fathom the depth of woman's sympathies), raised the latch and opened the door to our weary and shelterless hero. She told him that while any part remained of the little that was left to her, she could not send away shivering and hungry, those who were engaged in the service to which her husband had sacrificed his life. (11)

Mrs. Lane's honesty, accentuated by her initial refusal to take in one more straggler, seems about to transform a sentimental episode into a realistic drama, yet as his parenthesis confirms, Warren is unwilling to close the door on effusions of sentiment. In fact, within two paragraphs Mrs. Lane is sobbing and groaning over the loss of her husband and her family's inevitable doom. The reader, who at this point
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believes her husband to be dead (as he imagines Dick Ellis to have been shot), cannot but sympathize with her and admire her strength, her abilities, and her confidence. Her tears he forgives. For Mrs. Lane is not a bloodless martyr from the pages of Sarah Hale’s *Godey's Lady's Book*, but a healthy survivor. What she survives, moreover, is the Civil War, not incarceration by a stern father in her room. Warren’s impulses toward realism, sentiment, and southwest humor alternate and intermix.

The Graves family fares none too well at Fishback’s hands. Major Graves and his wife lecture their daughters “on the impropriety of encouraging a certain poor suitor, and warmly advocate the claims of filthy lucre, which they appeared to regard as the only ‘one thing needful’” (9). These opportunists are the traditional targets of Hooper, Baldwin, Harris, and Melville; Warren treats them in the manner of his predecessors, Fishback imitating the conventional action of earlier confidence men. The Graveses’ speculative greed, akin to Jedidiah Suggs’s, lands them appropriately in the poor house. Despite the incongruity between Fishback’s appearance and his pose, he convinces them he is a rich Georgia planter by means of false testimony, forged documents, and Major Graves's eagerness to believe in his good fortune:

The Misses Graves were now wholly forgetful of the fact that they had ever giggled at the comical chat and gawkish manners of our hero. There was nothing gawkish or comical about him. *He was such a nice gentleman, — so original and unaffected — deported and might be so appropriately said to draw the language in which he conversed, from Nature’s pure, unwrought well-spring.* (52)

Their hypocritical change of heart marks the Graves family as fair game for the confidence man’s sport. Fishback deflates their pretensions, defeats their aspirations, reduces them to poverty, and brings the reality of the Civil War into their livingroom; Jack Graves, the Major’s son, finds himself at the conclusion to the *Straggler* sharing the pest-house with Fishback (96-98). Warren subverts the conventional humor of the confidence man, though his satiric treatment of the Graveses indicates his ability to structure such a world — had he so desired. For the traditional comic order, he substitutes lethal disorder, deliberately defeating the reader’s expectations. The Civil War, despite the narrative’s comic moments, the narrator’s syrupy interludes, and Fishback’s ultimate failures, is always present; Warren insists that the War maintains its own disorder, over which his own
comic, sentimental, and moral vision has only the most tenuous control. This is the “Truth,” as he notes, “to which my conscience...has rendered me a conquered and loyal subject” (6). The War is a kind of final narrator in Straggler, changing the comic to the cruel, the sentimental to the horribly realistic, and redirecting the lives of Warren’s characters.

To structure his perceptions of this “Truth,” Warren employs devices borrowed from sentimental fiction and frontier humor. The humorists provide the narrative frame, the eccentric vernacular characters, and the detailed action of Fishback’s rough adventures. The return of the lover thought dead, the trapping of the fiend in his own trap, and the appropriately agonizing death of the deceiver are traditional sentimental motifs. Warren also uses the picaresque form, supported by humorous stock scenes like the incongruous wedding of Fishback to Miss Callie, and the narrator, digressive and allusive, laces his story with quotations and a full-length parody of Poe’s “The Raven” (94-96). Most important is Warren’s rendering of the confidence-man convention. Billy Fishback is Simon Suggs impressed into real combat, an Ovid Bolus who cannot escape to Texas, a cosmopolitan marooned alone, a Sut Lovingood whose soda-powder has been switched to gun-powder.

Fishback’s intended victims are not equally deserving of a fleeing. Captain Slaughter, who notes ironically that “‘I’ve all pure confidence in your honesty’” (73), is a capital comic gull, an enlisted man’s Bela Bugg. And in the Graves’s household, “the character he had established, the confidence he had enjoyed” (91) entitle Fishback to practice his profession. As Captain Smith, Mrs. Lane, and the narrator are victims who seem innocent of greed, pretension, and shiftiness, the reader finds their losses unamusing, and Fishback’s methods—artless theft, for the most part—do nothing to engage the imagination. It is as if Warren were retelling Harris’s “Snake-Bit Irishman,” substituting a live rattlesnake for the harmless intestine. Despite the reprieve these innocents receive, the threat of the rattler remains; Warren’s closing vision of the pest-house, containing Fishback, Slaughter, Jack Graves, and the “laborious” poet Delton, reveals that the snake’s fangs have not been pulled, that these characters have only death before them. The Civil War has soured the confidence man’s sense of fun to a vicious practicality and a self-undoing suspicion; like all the other characters, the confidence man falls prey to the war’s appetite. As Richard B. Hauck concludes, Fishback is
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helpless, “caught forever in absurd circles”; he seems genuinely lost in
labyrinthine lines of advance and retreat, destined to trip over his own
feet in his mad rush to escape the war that hounds him. Like Jack
Graves, who twice appears in time to thwart Fishback’s schemes, the
war repeatedly materializes when the confidence man least expects it,
confusing and immobilizing him.

That Warren consciously varies the literary convention becomes
apparent from his allusions to earlier confidence men. J. Rufus Bates,
in his biographical sketch of Fishback, refers to Longstreet’s “The
Fight” and “Georgia Theatricks”; Fishback is a descendent of Ransy
Sniffle and the aggressive Georgia youth (30). Fishback’s manipula-
tion of appearance is as shifty as Simon Suggs’s, as is his studied
avoidance of actual combat—except when the odds are forty to one.
Warren quotes from Chapter 2 of Simon Suggs, noting that an “accid-
ent” which befalls Fishback, in the words of Simon Suggs, proves
how all was “‘fixed aforehand’” (52). Just before the parody of Poe’s
“The Raven” (94), the narrator refers to Fishback’s friends as his “‘boon
companions,’” a term like the “fool-killer” Billy cries for (67)
firmly rooted in the nourishing soil of frontier humor. And Fishback is
clearly another proverbial “ugly man.”

Warren’s fictional response to the Civil War was immediate, and
to focus his perceptions, he relied on familiar literary forms: the pica-
resque, the sentimental tale, and the frontier humorist’s sketch. The
confidence man he creates is a symbol of the “ruin and dilapidation
every where” Warren perceives, the south burned to chthonic ash. The
disorder he chronicles is not the vanishing of the flush times, like
Hooper; the dawning of a corrupt “progressive age” heralded by Bal-
dwin; the national “ship of fools” Melville satirizes; or the survival of a
rough community that Harris celebrates and ultimately despairs of.
Rather, Warren imaginatively recreates a civilization returned to
chaos and embodies this “Truth” in Billy Fishback. It is because
Warren wants to believe in a better world that the confidence man
must die, an event unique in the history of his American ancestors.
Posing as a doctor aboard a crowded train, Fishback diagnoses a
soldier’s ailment as small-pox so that “Doctor” Fishback may have a
seat. The snap, however, is on Fishback, for the soldier gives the
“Doctor” not only his rations and his haversack, but also his fatal
disease.

In modifying the confidence-man convention so radically,
Warren created new problems. A humorless, shifty man, like Bald-
win’s Simon Suggs, Jr., requires firm narrative control, a clearly satiric framing rhetoric providing the reader a consistent normative guide. Baldwin’s narrator focuses on Simon, demanding that the reader evaluate Simon’s actions. Warren’s narrator develops Fishback’s victims; the Graves family, for example, Warren portrays alternately as hospitable and hypocritical without integrating these characteristics within coherent personalities, a feat Melville accomplishes brilliantly. Warren’s loose characterization also confuses the reader’s response to Slaughter, who seems both condemnable and commendable; to Mrs. Lane, who seems both pitiful and pitiable; and to Captain Smith, who seems both foolish and good. The narrator himself, like J. Rufus Bates, suffers momentary attacks of effeteness. These abrupt and almost random shifts of allegiance indicate Warren’s unsureness of narrative intention and control; to satirize all characters, including the intrusive narrator, unsettles the reader as it frustrates his conventional pattern of response. Unlike Melville, Warren varies his purpose and point of view inconsistently. He may have felt that his new materials required him to modify the conventions he had chosen, or he may have found that the conventions were suddenly beyond his control when used to interpret the Civil War. Warren may also have discovered that his feelings about Billy Fishback and the War were more intense than he had anticipated; the bitterness and cynicism which frequently appear in the narrator’s satire seem attributable to attitudes the author has not fully structured in fictional form. Finally, it seems most probable that Warren, a Georgia volunteer attempting to convey his perceptions of the War in 1863-65, was confused, searching for proper literary vehicles, conventions which would present in recognizable form the anxieties he felt about a country torn apart and embittered. His narrative ambivalence, the various languages he employs, and the sado-moralistic ending in which he dispatches Billy Fishback suggest the competing and often contradictory pressures under which Straggler was written, and are themselves evidence of Warren’s doubts and fears. These are, of course, moot points; Billy Fishback, confidence man, embodies—however precariously—the adaptation of the comic convention to express the serious concerns of the Civil War. Like the nation itself, the confidence man would need time to recover.

NOTES

1 Johnson Jones Hooper, Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs Late of
WARREN'S ARMY STRAGGLER


2 Floyd C. Watkins, ed., Life and Public Services of An Army Straggler. By Kittrell J. Warren. (Athens, Ga., 1961), p. 46. All references will be to this edition, page numbers following quotations in the text.

3 Evert A. Duyckinck, Literary World, 18 August 1849, p. 133.

4 Hauck, p. 69. Hauck is one of the few modern critics to notice Warren’s Straggler, and though I am unwilling to see Fishback as a prototypical “absurd hero,” Hauck’s reading is perceptive and stimulating.
"TRUST NOT APPEARANCES":
ADMONITORY PIECES FROM TWO TENNESSEE
JUVENILE PERIODICALS OF THE 1850s

MARY D. MANNING

EMERITA, EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Between 1855 and 1861, Nashville was the scene of publication of
two juvenile periodicals, the purpose of which was to "teach and
courage you to cultivate these excellent virtues—to be good, to
honor your parents, to make you intelligent that you may become
good, great, happy and useful and therefore honored and respec-
ted....The first great step in this whole matter is to teach you to love to
read; the second is to provide something useful and entertaining for
you to read—good food for little minds."1 Termed to be "solely devoted
to the interests of the Youth of the South,"2 first the Children's Book of
Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home, and
after five years, its successor, Youth's Magazine, were "frail barks
launched upon the troubled waters of the literary ocean"3 in Nashville
and were distributed throughout the Southeast.

The Children's Book lasted from January 1855 through April
1860, and was followed for only one year by Youth's Magazine. The
editors of the former, identified only as "Uncle Robin" and "Aunt
Alice," at least twice stated as their purpose the following: "In a few
years your dear parents will have passed away, and their places are to
be filled by you. You must never forget for a moment that you are to be
men and women by and by...and all the cares and anxieties of life will
be upon you" (CB, 1:27). An additional facet of the magazine's purpose
was presented by Aunt Alice, who, in speaking of herself, said: "When
she looked far away at the children of the Northern states, she saw
them with several pretty monthlies, prepared and published espe-
cially and solely to meet their wants; but those of the South and
Southwest, as far as she knew, had not one published for them...." (CB,
1:251). Further on she stated (now in the first-person), "...I hope it [the
magazine] may effect much good by the instruction it will afford, the
lessons of morality it will teach and the love of reading it will produce
in the minds of the young..." (CB, 1:251).

The Children's Book consisted of from thirty-two to forty-eight
pages per issue and sold for one dollar per year. Each number had the
same, relatively attractive cover—an engraving of a family scene of

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parents and at least seven children all reading, listening, writing, or being otherwise engaged in some intellectual pursuit (the father gazing out the rear window through a telescope). The border consisted of balloon-type sketches of important geographical entities such as the Capitol, Niagara Falls, a bridge, and a lighthouse. Superimposed on all this pictorial matter was the title “The Children's Book of Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home,” fashioned in a hodge-podge of lettering styles. At the bottom of this cover page were the editors’ names, the date and issue number, and the publisher’s name and address.

Subscribers were constantly pressured to help build the circulation of the Book. The June 1856 issue urged parents to re-subscribe: “if hours and days have been cheered and made happier..., then invite me still to come in among your little ones, to linger by your hearthstone, to gaze into the faces of your dear ones, and to nestle down into their hearts...” (CB, 4:78). In December 1856, the editors begged each reader to secure one new subscription during Christmas week as a New Year’s gift to the Book, because “we cannot afford new and rich pictures unless we have twice as many subscribers” (CB, 2:256). In September 1857, in “Correspondence” it was stated that, because of so many new subscriptions, eight pages and many new pictures had been added during the year, making the Book “larger...in better flesh...the largest child’s magazine published in America, known to us” (CB, 3:181). In the April 1858 issue, the editor asked the readers to plan to visit for another year for one dollar for twelve visits: “we intend to make each volume larger and finer than the one before and design to make the next issue prettier and more valuable” (CB, 3:464). “What Changes Four Years Have Brought” noted the increase in the number of illustrations and stated that large engravings cost ten to fifteen dollars, small ones four to five dollars, and that one book alone would cost one hundred fifty dollars, but subscribers get twelve issues for only one dollar (CB, 4:476).

Ministers of the gospel were requested to aid in introducing the monthly Book to every family of their churches and congregations: “What is being done for the little ones to instill into their young minds a love for their books, for the Bible, for study?” (CB, 2: inside back cover). Sabbath School teachers were also urged to solicit subscriptions from parents, to secure readers of the Book in their classes, and to use the Book “to vary the monotony of the class book. It would be a most interesting School reader” (CB, 2: inside back cover). Premiums,
consisting of “libraries” (Kriss Kringle’s Library, the Little Folk’s Library, Parley’s Cottage Library, Youth’s Pictorial Library, the New Juvenile Library, or the Select Library) of varying numbers of titles, were offered by Graves & Marks to ministers and teachers securing subscriptions to the Book.

Few advertisements appeared in the Book—usually only those for other publications of Graves & Marks. Early editions carried announcements for Edward H. Fletcher, a New York publisher, about the book Harry’s Vacation, with excerpts from and recommendations of it; and the back cover of the September 1856 issue gave the List of Juvenile Books sold by Graves & Marks Company.

In the March-April 1860 issue, Uncle George announced the demise of the Book and prepared the readers for its successor, Youth’s Magazine: “The next number will be called the Youth’s Magazine, and will be much larger and better.... It’s too bad but it must be done! Shake hands with the Book and bid it good-by. You will never see its smiling face again. Next month a more pompous one will take its place, but treat it kindly until you become acquainted, and I am sure you will like it” (CB, 5:472).

The contents of Youth’s Magazine were to consist of “forty-eight pages of choice and entertaining reading from the pen of its editors, contributors, and current literature; thus giving the reader 576 pages of a book for a small sum of one dollar.... The Magazine will be published for the Youth of the Sunny South, and to them we look for support... A Special Department will be kept up for answering queries relating to the studies, trials, and troubles of youth” (CB, 5:472).

In addition there was to be a department devoted to the “little ones,” that they too might be taught “early the ways of virtue” (CB, 5:472). Thus the magazine was designed to meet all the wants of the family circle. “Father and mother, brothers and sisters, young and old, will find it interesting” (CB, 5:472), said the advertisement in the front of each issue. Uncle George once promised that the magazine would be “as interesting as time and money can make it” (YM, 1:71). Sample copies were available and a money-back guarantee was offered “because we are positive it will please the most fastidious” (YM, 1: inside front cover of each issue). The subscription price was one dollar a year and subscribers were again enjoined to participate actively in acquiring new readers, for “two hundred new subscribers are necessary to cover the expense” (YM, 1: inside front cover of each issue).
The cover of Youth’s Magazine consisted of an engraving of a decorative leafy garland encircling the title, date, and editor’s name. A notice in each issue stated that “each number would contain a beautiful electro-plate engraving, numerous wood engravings, as well as four steel-plate engravings during the year” (YM, 1: back outside cover of each issue). Some of the illustrations accompanied stories, some explained informational articles, but the majority were of a religious nature. “The Picture Gallery,” a regular feature for a time, was a collection of religious pictures designed for “you to memorize these scenes and carry them in your mind to the next world” (YM, 1:321).

Bible stories, materials to use in the Sabbath Schools, and many articles relating to natural science, geography, history, music, language, and “the lives of great and illustrious men” filled the pages of these periodicals. In addition, both contained regular features such as Correspondence with young readers; Messages to Parents, Ministers of the Gospel, and Sabbath School Teachers; Puzzles, Games, Enigmas, Charades, and Conundrums, plus a newspaper of current events rewritten to interest children. Interesting and appealing as these pieces may have been to the editors and the subscribers of the 1850s, the most entertaining and arresting for the reader today are the admonitory selections offered solemnly on a miscellany of topics. It is with these pieces that this article deals.

As was noted earlier, an expressed purpose of the Children’s Book was to teach children to love to read. One of the selections devoted to this purpose, “The Two Soliloquies — the Idle Boy,” told of hating books when he was a child and vowing that he would never be troubled with them once he became a man. As a man, however, his cry was “Woe is me for having been such a little fool as a boy!” His friends had all surpassed him in wealth and power because of their love of books (CB, 5:337)! In another case the back-cover advertisement stated, “It is better to give [for a Christmas gift] a book that will improve the mind than to spend twice the sum for toys and candy, which only injure your body” (CB, 3: back inside cover). In a later issue, in his plea for renewals, the editor said, “Those who have read the Book for the past three years are better readers and more intelligent than those who have not.... We have told you about hundreds of things you wouldn’t have known about” (CB, 3:464).

Youth’s Magazine was also very fervent in advocating extensive reading for young people, stating: “There are no pleasures within the
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reach of mortals, apart from religion and virtue, which tend so much to elevate and satisfy our nature as those connected with a love of reading and the pursuit of knowledge.” However, the editor cautioned, “reading is not to be confused with the perusal of novels which is now too general to need to be stimulated.” He continued by saying that tobacco and whiskey are “not more unfavorable to human happiness and virtue” than that “pernicious literature which passes under the common designation of novels.” The relationship he saw between these evils is that “the craving for excitement induced by one, finds intoxication in the other.” “Because there are so many books that convey instruction while they please and interest,” he argues, “there is little to excuse or even palliate the perverted taste that would reject them in favor of trashy fiction” (YM, 1:382).

Some of the notions the editors passed on to their young readers regarding writing are amusing to those of us engaged in the teaching of writing today. Aunt Alice, in her concern to instill good writing habits, stated in one of her “Chats” that she wanted to encourage the children to write and to cultivate in them a commendable taste for writing. She directed them properly to head their papers and always to strive for a clean and well-written sheet. Thoughts must be clearly expressed and the penmanship readable. Particularly she admonished girls to learn to spell and to write because, according to her, too few were interested in reading and writing. She cautioned—again especially the girls—to do the puzzles for themselves and not to call immediately to “Ma and Pa” for help, for the object of the games and puzzles was to make them think, to use their brains. She went on to blame teachers for not forcing children to think—only to memorize (CB, 5:76).

In September 1860, when “Uncle John” assumed editorship of Youth’s Magazine, continuing the emphasis on writing, he encouraged the readers to “write about any and every thing that interest you; but write it in prose; don’t write poetry....We do not think this is by any means a useful exercise for young people.” He went on to say that “the mere capacity for rhyming is often mistaken for poetic talent....Now to write prose well is certainly a very valuable accomplishment. But even this is not a thing to be forced; it is an acquisition that must be slowly made—a faculty of tardy growth.” In writing prose, young people should labor for ideas and should learn to read well, spell correctly, and reason vigorously. With patience and industry and a good teacher, they “will work wonders” and neither “lack thoughts or an
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ability to express them” (YM, 1:236). In April 1861, in urging subscribers to submit material for publication, the editor commended a young correspondent who had contributed a piece to the current issue for his “judgment and good taste in making his essay short. Brevity and conciseness are the soul of good writing. The style and matter bespeak a measure of capacity which, by assiduous culture, may make the possessor eminent in the walks of literature” (YM, 1:573).

The editors of both magazines expressed a keen interest in language study and tried to communicate to their young readers the fascination of words, in such articles as “Words Altered in Meaning over the Years” (CB, 5:354); “Significance of Names” (CB, 5:380,442); and a verse entitled “Grammar in Rhyme” (CB, 2:83), which the children were urged to commit to memory. In an oft-recurring feature called “Improprieties of Speech,” constructions discussed and dogmatized upon were “half of/half a,” “a/an, -um/a Latin plurals, off/off of, let on, better/best, the misuse of complicity for complexion or complication, and two pages devoted to beside/besides, determining whether the word is a preposition or an adverb (CB, 2:350; 4:156; 5:142). In one letter submitted to Youth’s Magazine’s “Queries and Answers” feature, the question was asked if the editor “believed in dancing and parties.” The answer delineating the folly of such worldly diversions led to advice on language also: the avoidance of words like houdy or reckon, which he described as “lazy usages”—not of their original meanings whatsoever (YM, 1:45). In another instance a plea was sent out for “respect for American letters” (CB, 2:350) and like/as was cited as a “blunder more common in Southern and Middle States than in the North”—as was also the vulgarism of using don’t in the singular (CB, 4:156). One young reader came in for his share of Uncle Robin’s instructions on writing when he stated in “Correspondence”: “Your little book has instructed me a great deal, and has learnt me how to work out puzzles...” (CB, 4:158). Another correspondent was lectured on the shortcomings in his testimony “I am very well pleased with your book, and would like it if it came more regular” (CB, 5:76).

In the light of the magazines’ attitude toward fiction, it is easy to see why a preponderance of stories and anecdotes was of character-building intent. Usually the titles suffice for the content: “Member of the Try Company” (YM, 1:221); “Deeds of Kindness” (YM, 1:217); “Don’t Be Foolhardy” (YM, 1:276); “What Perseverance Accomplished” (CB, 4:243); “The Hole in the Elbow” (CB, 4:451); “Laughing
During Prayers” (CB, 5:329); “Trust Not Appearances” (YM, 1:121); and “Eighteen Tests of Good Breeding: Ways in Which Young People Render Themselves Very Impolite” (YM, 1:273). Two of these “ways” were rather appalling: reading aloud in company without being asked and cutting one’s fingernails in public!

The editors envisioned themselves, as one reader put it, “a ray of sunshine on our family” (CB, 3:461) or, as another said, “a helping hand in educating my children” (CB, 3:98). Therefore, they stated their purpose “to assist you to guide, to guard, to strengthen your children for the coming conflicts of life” (CB, 2:157). Thus, the parents came in for their share of admonitory pieces such as “Teach Your Children to Pray” (CB, 2:157) and “The Tired Housekeeper”—an unusual morality directed at mothers who felt harried by all the demands of home and family—concluding that “only by death can a wife and mother be released from her many cares and duties. Bear your trials patiently, and be thankful you have so many dear ones to love, so many sweet motives for exertion” (YM, 1:161).

The editors’ attitude toward poetry cited above could very well have been predicated on the quality of verse they had selected for inclusion in the pages of their publications. Most of the verse contained in the Children’s Book and Youth’s Magazine was cautionary: “Employment, That Is Enjoyment” (CB, 1:237); “He Never Told a Lie” (CB, 1:335); “Do Not Hurry” (CB, 2:364); “Games of Life” (CB, 4:250); “On Whiskey” (CB, 4:271); “What Shall I Give?” (CB, 5:346); “Do the Best That You Can” (YM, 1:378); “Will You Be There?” (YM, 1:57); “Not in Vain” (YM, 1:346); “The Orphan” (YM, 1:559); and “Take Care of the Hook,” addressed to a young fish (CB, 4:420). An inordinate number of selections dealt with the dead or dying child: “Early Lost, Early Saved” (CB, 4:71); “Waiting for God to Come for Me” (CB, 4:264); “The Dying Child” (CB, 3:443); “On the Death of Little Andrew” (CB, 5:444); “Little Bessie and the Way in Which She Fell Asleep” (CB, 5:105); “The Dead Baby” (YM, 1:134); “Going Home” (YM, 1:75); “Little Willie Taken Up” (CB, 5:183); “My Boy in Heaven” (YM, 1:511); “Sent to Heaven” (YM, 1:564); and “My Darling’s Shoes” (YM, 1:74).

A few “poems,” however, were of a more interesting content: “The Grammar School,” a verse on the parts of speech (CB, 1:34); “The Use of Flowers” (CB, 5:132); “The Meaning of Words” (CB, 4:374); “Uncle Sam,” a patriotic piece containing the names of “all 33 states” in its stanzas (YM, 1:180); and “Paltering in a Double Sense,” which was a trick poem about the Revolutionary War, which could be variously
interpreted by reading it in different patterns on either side of the commas appearing in every line (YM, 1:235).

The editors of the Book and Youth's Magazine frequently expressed their personal opinions about sports and games. According to them, such seemingly innocent pastimes as shooting marbles and jumping rope were not without their perils. When Aunt Alice was asked in the Correspondence about playing marbles, her reply was that she held it in very low esteem because "it provides no exercise," is played in a "hurtful position," "fosters angry feelings and harsh words, promotes selfishness, and tempts dishonesty and cheating" (CB, 2:355-6).

In "Caution to the Young," Uncle Robin listed several things for young people to beware of: the cardplaying circle, the gambling table, the ballroom, the dram shop, the billiard saloon, and the theatre. "Beware of such resorts; you can find respectable recreation elsewhere" (CB, 3:86), he urged. "A Just Reproof" lauded the refusal of brandy even for an "indisposition," as you do not "know where the first sip will lead you" (YM, 1:457). In another issue the children are cautioned against jumping rope, which is "so dangerous as to do injury to yourselves from which you may never recover." An example is provided of one woman "who was made a cripple for life" from jumping rope and of another who "sunk into absolute helplessness" as a result of jumping rope (CB, 4:156). Two little-known games are included, which apparently had the editors' blessing: "Honestly" and "Philopoena." The latter, a forfeits game imported from Germany, consisted of one person's drawing another into accepting a favor, and if successful, he said, "Philopoena"; the whole activity is known as "exchanging Philopoenas" (CB, 2:172). "Honestly," described as a "Winter Evening Game," was played by piling on hands and counting. The person whose number was called must answer questions asked by the other players "honestly." The editor warned that "the group should be careful not to ask questions which it would be improper to answer before a mixed company" (CB, 5:345). Another amusing note in the Book was a verse entitled "Is Not Santa Claus a God?"—a question supposedly "asked by a little child who had heard so many 'grand tales' of Santa Claus that he thought he must be a second God," but his father "reassures him and convinces him to believe in the Only One" (CB, 1:249).

When all avenues of literature had been exhausted, two direct vehicles remained to our editors for the instruction of the young: Aunt
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Alice had her "Advice Column" or "Chat with Her Nephews and Nieces," where she once said: "Be generous to orphans, say a verse of Scripture every morning at the table, value honest labor: idleness is a disgrace and a sin" (CB, 2:52). "Advice to Boys," in the Miscellaneous Reading Department, was Uncle Robin's chance to counsel on topics such as getting rich, detecting a thief, controlling one's temper, always doing well in whatever is undertaken, and avoiding "sauiness, passion, and laziness" (CB, 5:192).

The content of all these selections is only an extension of the customary fare of the magazines, but the tone and the details embodied in these articles distinguished by inclusion here are arresting to a reading audience more than a century removed from these "studies, trials, and troubles of youth," as the editors frequently termed them.

NOTES

1 The material for this paper is a result of work done on a volume tentatively entitled Children's Periodicals, edited by Professor R. Gordon Kelly of the University of Maryland and to be published by Greenwood Press. I am indebted to the Rare Book Collections in Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries for the use of their resources.

2 Children's Book of Choice and Entertaining Reading for the Little Folks at Home, 1(1855), 3. Further reference to this magazine will appear parenthetically in the text as CB with volume and page numbers.

3 Youth's Magazine, 1(1860), 44. Further reference to this magazine will appear parenthetically in the text as YM with volume and page numbers.
IRVING’S INCOME AS A DIPLOMAT
RALPH M. ADERMAN
THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MILWAUKEE

Although Washington Irving earned his living primarily by his writing, his income from his service as a diplomat supported him when his literary earnings were slow or non-existent. His nephew and biographer, Pierre Munroe Irving, who has itemized the receipts from the sale of his copy-righted writings from *Knickerbocker’s History of New York* to the *Life of George Washington* and the collected editions published by G. P. Putnam, has arrived at a total of $205,383.34 by the time of Irving’s death in November 1859. An additional $34,237.03 accrued from sales during the next four years. Since P. M. Irving did not include income from Irving’s journalistic writing for the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Analectic Magazine*, and the *Knickerbocker Magazine* and payments for other volumes not included in the tally, we can assume that his literary earnings probably totaled about $250,000. Irving, it is apparent, deserves the distinction of being called the first successful professional writer in America.

It is not my purpose here to discuss Irving’s literary income, but rather to examine those two periods of his life when he was an employee of the United States Government, first, in a junior capacity as secretary of the London Legation from 1829 to 1831 and briefly as acting chargé, and second, in the responsible role of United States Minister to Spain from 1842 to 1846. During these periods Irving was preoccupied with diplomatic responsibilities; and although he finished revising and touching up *The Alhambra* during his London tour of duty, he had little time for steady or concentrated literary work. These terms of diplomatic services were separated by a decade in which Irving returned to authorship and established himself as an effective chronicler of American exploration and commercial enterprise.

Irving did not deliberately seek out government service. The first job resulted when his relatives and friends, afraid that he was idling away his time in Spain, procured for him the position of Secretary of the U. S. Legation in London. Being informed of his appointment, Irving left the romantic setting of Granada and the Alhambra for London, where he settled into the routine of the diplomatic post for two years. Likewise, he did not solicit the position as Minister to Spain.
Daniel Webster, Secretary of State under President Tyler, found Irving's long residence in Europe and his familiarity with the Spanish language and customs to be assets, and so he offered the writer the position in February 1842.

Let us examine more closely the financial aspects of Irving's diplomatic service and begin with a consideration of the sources which provide the information about remuneration for his work for the government between July 1829 and September 1831 and between February 1842 and July 1846. Among the documents in the National Archives are the records of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, who was in charge of accounting for the funds expended in foreign diplomatic posts. Another copy of these accounts is to be found in the archives of the Department of State. From these we ascertain the extent and the categories of Irving's remuneration during these periods. Additional details about his finances can be gleaned from two account books which he kept during his stay in Madrid. Some of the entries in one relate to personal investments while others provide information about receipts and expenditures connected with his official duties. The other account book provides details about Irving's personal expenditures during his voyage to England, his stays in London and Paris, and his passage to Madrid, as well as an itemized listing of money disbursed for personal and household expenses and rental charges for the remainder of 1842 in Madrid. With these documents, then, we can study Irving's finances during his diplomatic service.

In 1829 Irving's brothers in business in America, disturbed by his seeming idleness and lack of purpose, arranged for his appointment as secretary of the United State Legation in London, a position which he accepted at a salary of $2,000 a year. Irving's pay started on 22 July 1829, the day he sent his letter of acceptance to Louis McLane, the American Minister in London. The salary as secretary continued to 20 September 1831, when Irving resigned. During this period he received $4,331.52. From 18 June to 20 September 1831, he served as chargé d'affaires and received an additional allowance of $646.35 for the three months and three days when he was responsible for the Legation. Moreover, he was allowed one-quarter of his annual salary as chargé ($1,125) to cover the costs of returning to New York and $421.48 for such contingent expenses as postage, porterage, presentation fees, clerk and messenger wages, books, office rent, and candles during his tenure as chargé. For his service as secretary and chargé, then, Irving received a total of $6,524.35. In addition, he was allowed to claim the
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sum of $44.22 for expenses incurred in securing the exequatur for Robert Monroe Harrison, United States consul in Jamaica.⁶

Between 26 October 1829 and 26 September 1831, Irving drew upon Baring Brothers & Co., London bankers, for $5,427.37. According to the report of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Irving received $1,326.87 after his accounts were settled, this sum being the difference between his drafts on Baring Brothers and the total of his salary at the London Legation and other claims against the United States government.

Upon his return to New York after a seventeen-year absence, Irving devoted himself to his writing and, later, to the conversion of an old Dutch farmhouse in Tarrytown into his castle on the Hudson which he named Sunnyside. (He modestly called it his “cottage.”) The financial panic of 1837 and the expense of remodeling and expanding his rural retreat, plus the falling sales of his writings, left Irving financially pressed by 1841. When Daniel Webster offered him the post of United States Minister to Spain, the ex-diplomat quickly accepted the position⁶ and began drawing his annual salary of $9,000 on 10 February 1842. With no thought of achieving distinction as a diplomat, Irving regarded the appointment primarily as a means of relieving his financial distress and of providing himself with the leisure for pursuing some literary projects in the calm, unhurried atmosphere he associated with Madrid.⁷ He did not realize this dream because of the turbulent course of Spanish politics during the intervening years after his departure from the Alhambra in 1829, a period marked by the death of Ferdinand VII and the succession of his under-age daughter Isabella to the throne and by the schemes and plots of Don Carlos, Ferdinand’s brother, to seize the reins of power in Spain.

Since Irving’s position as minister required him to live in a grand style, he was allowed an additional $9,000, the equivalent of a year’s salary, to outfit himself for the post with proper linen, plate and silver, diplomatic dress, horses and carriage, and servants for his residence. According to the report of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury, Irving received, in addition, as salary from the government between 10 February 1842 and 31 March 1843, the sum of $10,250. And he claimed contingent expenses of $437.58 for postage, newspapers, stationery, gifts to the servants, messengers, and officers of the Queen of Spain, repair of furniture in the Madrid Legation, expenses for the moving of books and furniture, for the building of bookshelves, and for freight
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and carriage on newspapers. Moreover, because he had lost money in the sale of his bank drafts to N. M. Rothschild & Son of London, Irving was allowed an extra $90.00. For this period, then, he was paid the sum of $19,777.58, an amount which obviously relieved his financial distress, enabled him to support his relatives staying at Sunnyside, and permitted him to live in the manner befitting a diplomat at the Spanish court.

The auditor’s report for the year beginning 1 April 1843 shows that Irving was paid $12,096.27 for salary (including $2,212.45 carried over from the previous year), $889.31 for contingencies, and $169.35 for losses incurred in selling his salary drafts to N. M. Rothschild & Sons. During this time Irving was away from his post from 7 September to 30 November 1843 on a visit to Paris. He had been suffering from a cutaneous complaint which left him very uncomfortable, and he felt that a visit of Sarah Storrow, his favorite niece, and absence from the pressures of diplomacy might restore his health. The vacation and the leave of absence with pay had the desired effect, and he returned to Madrid in much improved health and in better spirits.

During the next fiscal year, Irving’s finances remained about the same. According to the audit filed with the State Department, Irving’s income included payments of $10.03 for a balance owed him from the preceding year, $9,000 for his annual salary, $1,054.89 for contingent expenses, and $43.69 for reimbursement of losses on the sale of his drafts for salary. At the end of this period, he still had a balance of $2,712.28 due him in his account. On 14 July 1844, Irving acknowledged the approval granted by the Secretary of State for a leave of absence for reasons of health, and two weeks later he left Barcelona for visits to Paris and Birmingham. A bilious attack and recurrence of his herpetic disorder delayed his return to Madrid until 17 November 1844. Once again, Irving collected his entire salary during his absence from his diplomatic post.

According to the final statement covering Irving’s account from 1 April 1845 to 31 July 1846, he received $2,712.28 for past balances payable, $12,008.15 for sixteen months’ salary, $571.91 for contingency expenses, and $2,250 (the equivalent of salary for three months) for expenses for his return to the United States, plus $359.75 in the final adjustment of his account with the State Department.

During this period Irving again left his post for visits to Paris and England, departing on 2 September 1845 for some urgent dental work. On 1 October, he informed James Buchanan, the Secretary of
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State, that he had had to make a hasty trip to Paris for treatment of his herpetic ailment and that he hoped to return to Madrid in a fortnight. Once again, Irving was delayed by his slow recovery. While he was still in Paris, he was asked by Louis McLane, United States Minister in London and his former superior in the London Legation from 1829 to 1831, to assist in the negotiations with England on the Oregon boundary question. Irving agreed and spent the next five weeks in England in diplomatic discussions and on a visit to his sister in Birmingham.

Certainly Irving's extended absence from Madrid and the continuation of his salary were justified by his need for medical treatment and by his assistance in the negotiations on the Oregon boundary issue. Probably his absences from his official diplomatic duties were no more extensive than those of others in such posts. The fact remains, however, that he was absent more than fifty-three weeks from his post in the four years that he was American minister to Spain, an amount of time paid for vacations and medical leaves which seems very generous even by today's standards.

Two account books, one at the New York Public Library and the other in the Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia, provide other, more personal details about Irving's management of his funds during the early part of his service as Minister to Spain. The former provides a detailed accounting of his expenses on his voyage to England, during his stays there and in France, on his trip to Madrid, and during the period when he was getting settled in Madrid. His total outlay, presumably up to 10 October 1842, was $5,066.36, with many of the items duplicated in the second account book. One entry of particular interest and not repeated is an inventory of 216 bottles of French wine for which he paid $250.20. In addition, he purchased Aaron Vail's remaining stock for $167.70, for a total expenditure of $417.90 for wine. The details in the notebook in the New York Public Library provide us with a precise listing of Irving's expenses in 1842 as he began his diplomatic duties.

The second notebook repeats many of the figures found in the other one, occasionally with slight variations. Since they reveal something about Irving's lifestyle, some of them are itemized here. For example, he spent $141.46 during his stay in England en route to his post, $329.06 in France and on his journey to Spain, and an additional $30.39 for personal expenses in Madrid up to 10 October, 1842. Furnishing his quarters in Madrid included the purchase of furniture for
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$1,000.00 in Paris and for $608.00 in Madrid, plus $1,017.40 for household items he bought from his predecessor, Aaron Vail. In addition, Irving paid out $129.00 for transportation of his effects. Repairs to his apartment in Madrid cost $21.04, and the carpenter bill for shelves was $34.00. China purchased from Cavalcante de Albuquerque, the Brazilian Minister, cost $38.50. Personal expenses for the remainder of the year (presumably from 10 October) were $98.92; rentals for his living quarters were $431.30; house expenses were $554.05; and servants’ wages were $249.06. An indecipherable entry (heat?) for $1,082.45 and a few miscellaneous expenses bring the total of Irving’s disbursements to $5877.75 for the period ending on 31 December 1842.

Many of the items, needed for setting up his residence in Madrid, were one-time expenses. Regrettably, the notebook does not contain detailed accounts of his expenditures for the period from 1843 to 1846. One revealing item for 12 October 1842 indicates that he drew “on Mr. Storrow for fr[ance] 208.60 for 3½ doz gloves” presumably for use at required diplomatic functions. The other entries relate to drafts made on his salary and contingency accounts with Baring Brothers of London, T. W. Storrow, Jr., of Paris, and Henry O’Shea of Madrid. Incomplete though they are, the figures in these notebooks give us an idea of how Irving spent his money in his early months in Madrid, and they suggest that the allowance of a year’s salary for furnishing and outfitting was not excessive.

Irving’s ventures into diplomacy enabled him to augment his income sufficiently to relieve himself of any financial anxiety. His duties as minister in Madrid entailed considerable responsibility and delicate decision-making because of the slowness of communication between Madrid and Washington. Without doubt, the pressures and anxiety from these responsibilities caused him health problems, but in all likelihood these problems were no more serious than the ones he experienced during and after the composition of Bracebridge Hall in 1822. At that time the nervousness and physical exhaustion associated with meeting the publisher’s deadline caused a cutaneous rash which required a long time to heal. In Madrid he had a similar problem, but through leaves of absence, baths, and dutiful medication, he was able to restore his health.

Upon his return to Sunnyside, Irving soon entered into an agreement with George P. Putnam to re-issue his published works in revised form and to complete some other writing projects. From these literary activities he was able to produce a steady income to replace his diplo-
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matic salary. It should be emphasized, however, that his salary as United States Minister provided him with funds during a financially lean period. Indeed, it can be unhesitatingly asserted that Irving's service as a diplomat gave him a sense of financial security that enabled him, a man in his mid-sixties, to resume his writing career without debt or financial obligation upon his return to Sunnyside. Within a short period he produced a substantial study of Mohammed and his followers, revised and expanded a biography of Oliver Goldsmith, collected volumes of essays from earlier periodical contributions, revised his earlier published writings, and began serious and steady work on his monumental life of George Washington.

The trials and misgivings experienced while he was earning his salary as a diplomat were more than offset by his skill, tact, and graciousness in dealing with a succession of Spanish politicians and by the sense of satisfaction deriving from the knowledge that he was representing the interests of his country in a constructive way. Thus it seems that both Irving and his country benefited from his diplomatic service and that his salary as minister was money well spent for all parties concerned.

NOTES


2 William Charvat (The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli [Columbus, 1968], pp. 68-69) argues that this designation properly belongs to James Fenimore Cooper because “[h]e was...the first writer of imaginative literature to make a living from writing continuously and successfully.” Although Charvat excludes Irving and Hawthorne because of their government service, he ignores the fact that Cooper derived part of his support from inherited property and from his wife’s assets. Irving, I would emphasize, received the bulk of his income from his writing, and he regarded himself first and foremost as an author. Even in those periods when he was not actively writing and publishing, he was living on the fruits of his authorship. His periods of government service, as I indicate, were brief interruptions (though unquestionably beneficial to him from a financial standpoint) in his long literary career.

3 An 1845 itemized list of Irving's holdings in western lands and in railroad and bank stock in the account book totals $2,801.00. On another page he notes that “my interest in lands [in Mississippi and Tennessee] would amount to about $4,500[,] My share of outstanding debts drawing interest is $4,500[,] I have received in dividends $2,562[,]” In 1844 Irving expressed gratitude to Pierre M. Irving for “rak[ing] twenty-one hundred dollars for me out of the ashes and cinders” of his speculation in land in
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Green Bay, Wisconsin (24 March 1844; Letters, 3: 707-709). Four months later he thanked Pierre for selling “my — shares of — stock for — dollars a share. This is really so much money hauled out of the ashes” (18 July 1844; Letters, 3:802). Since Pierre in his protective way has deleted the specific details, it is not possible to ascertain whether or not this is a different transaction or merely another reference to the Green Bay sale. These references do suggest that Pierre was trying to sell his uncle’s holdings at a profit.


5 See Voucher 3099, dated 18 March 1833, 5th Auditor’s Office, Treasury Department, Records of U. S. General Accounting Office, National Archives, Record Group 217 (hereafter referred to as NA, RG). The figures in the next paragraph are found in the same document.


8 See Voucher 6487, 5th Auditor’s Report on Washington Irving’s account from 1 April 1842 to 31 March 1843, Treasury Department, NA, RG 217.

9 See Voucher 6981, dated 4 September 1844, NA RG 217.

10 See Irving to Sarah Storrow, 6 September 1843, and 1 December 1843, in Letters, 3:603, 622.

11 See Voucher 7462, dated 14 July 1845, NA, RG 217.

12 See Irving to John C. Calhoun, 14 July 1844, Letters, 3:800.


14 See Irving to John C. Calhoun, 16 October 1844; and to Sarah Storrow, 15 November 1844, Letters, 3:823, 827.

15 See Voucher 8204, dated 5 May 1847, NA, RG 217.


17 Irving to James Buchanan, 1 October 1845, Letters, 3:1030.


19 See Irving to Sarah Storrow, 2 February 1846; to Pierre M. Irving, 3 February 1846; and to Henry O’Shea, Jr., 10 February 1846, Letters, 4:8-11, 18.

21 Apparently Irving had outfitted himself with diplomatic apparel before he left New York. In London, before being presented to Queen Victoria, he “had to order some addition to my Diplomatic uniform,” but these items must have been inconsequential. See Irving to Catharine Paris, 3 May 1842, Letters, 3:213.
FAULKNER'S "OLD MAN" AND THE AMERICAN HUMOR TRADITION

W. CRAIG TURNER

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

William Faulkner's admiration for and use of the techniques of nineteenth-century humor have long been recognized. Yet with several major exceptions, including those on *The Reivers*, the Snopes trilogy, and the controversial *As I Lay Dying*, close studies of Faulkner's use of traditional humorous techniques within individual works are curiously lacking. The five chapters of his novel *The Wild Palms* that make up "Old Man" include some of Faulkner's most extensive and most obvious use of traditional American humor, and significantly *The Wild Palms* was published in 1939, one year before Faulkner's comic masterpiece *The Hamlet*. In this space I cannot hope to relate humor in "Old Man" carefully to the other five chapters of *The Wild Palms* story—indeed, I cannot hope to exhaust all the humor within "Old Man"—but I shall examine Faulkner's primary uses of humor in the story of the Tall Convict, briefly note its general relationship to the story of Harry Wilbourne and Charlotte Rittenmeyer, and suggest its significance as a catalyst that enabled Faulkner to complete *The Hamlet*.

Probably the most obvious mode Faulkner has drawn on in "Old Man" is the Tall Tale of the Southwestern humorists. The whole of the story, of course, is a tall tale: the convict encounters increasingly extreme natural catastrophes as the great Mississippi River flood of 1927 carries him further and further from the security of his prison home and deeper and deeper into a hostile world of flooded farmlands, dead livestock, drowned rabbits, hawks, snakes, alligators, and strangers who are belligerent or who speak another language. The Tall Convict survives near-drowning when his boat overturns—a recurring danger because of the cresting tributaries as the flood moves deeper into the South. He survives the threat of starvation; there are no provisions in the boat which the river carries at its whim. He survives the bullets of those who fear the freedom of a prisoner on the river. He survives the swarming water moccasins; he continually steps on and over them and even sleeps with them after achieving land. He survives the birth of a baby to the pregnant woman he is charged with rescuing, and he survives wrestling alligators with only
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a knife as a weapon. In short, throughout much of the story, the significantly unnamed convict is literally up a very big creek without a paddle.

The opening sentence of the narrative helps prepare us for the titanic encounters that follow: "Once (it was in Mississippi, in May, in the flood year 1927) there were two convicts." Faulkner quickly associates the Tall Convict's initial crime with heroic achievement when he has his protagonist conceive of the "loot" from the crime as a sort of "Olympic runner's amateur medal—a symbol, a badge to show that he too was the best at his chosen gambit..." (p. 25). Similarly, the man's most trying obstacle, assisting at the birth of the unnamed woman's child, is described as "the crest of his Golgotha" (p. 264).

Such dangers and such heroic associations are worthy of a Paul Bunyan, a Davy Crockett, or a Mike Fink. But the Tall Convict is not a Bunyan, Crockett, Fink, nor any other larger-than-life character from nineteenth-century fiction; indeed, much of the humor of the story derives from the simple-minded convict's inability to recognize the legendary proportions of his adventures. The second Southwest humor tradition Faulkner employs, therefore, is the natural successor to the Tall Tale—the mock heroic or burlesque epic. In the tradition of Johnson J. Hooper's Simon Suggs, Faulkner parodies the romantic concept of the lower class Southern hero; unlike the fast-talking, incorrigible Suggs, however, the Tall Convict derives from the predominantly Down East tradition of the naive, innocent hero. Even his crime establishes him as a foolish believer in magazine romance fiction:

He had laid his plans in advance, he had followed his printed (and false) authority to the letter; he had saved the paper-backs for two years, reading and re-reading them, memorising them, comparing and weighing story and method against story and method, taking the good from each and discarding the dross as his workable plan emerged, keeping his mind open to make the subtle last-minute changes, without haste and without impatience, as the newer pamphlets appeared on their appointed days as a conscientious dressmaker makes the subtle alterations in a court presentation costume as the newer bulletins appear. And then when the day came, he did not even have a chance to go through the coaches and collect the watches and the rings, the brooches and the hidden money-belts, because he had been captured as soon as he entered the express car where the safe and the gold would be. He had shot no one because the pistol which they took away from him was not that kind of a pistol although it was loaded; later he admitted to the District Attorney that he had got it, as well as the dark lantern in which a candle burned and the black handkerchief to wear over the face, by peddling among his pinehill neighbors subscriptions to the Detectives' Gazette. (pp. 24-25)
In flashback, Faulkner pictures for us the frightened young would-be thief in all his comic ineptitude frantically trying to convince an equally frightened mail clerk that his mail-order gun is costume—that it cannot respond to the clerk's two wild shots. Years later, he directs his outrage not "at the lawyers and judges who had sent him there, but at the writers, the uncorporeal names attached to the stories, the paper novels—the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such—whom he believed had led him into his present predicament through their own ignorance and gullibility" (p. 23).

Just as he embarks on his short-lived career of crime in complete innocence, so does he begin his seven weeks' freedom on the flooded river as an ironic innocent: "For the first time he looked at the River within whose shadow he had spent the last seven years of his life but had never seen before" (p. 73). Thenceforth, the narrative chronicles the superhuman feats he achieves in his innocent, child-like faithfulness to return boat and woman to the authorities, and himself to the security of his prison home. "'All in the world I want is just to surrender,'" he bemoans again and again (e.g., p. 174). The punch line of the entire anecdote reflects his naive, single-minded view of his fantastic journey when—after seven torturous weeks on the river—he turns himself in with the simple declaration: "All right...Yonder's your boat, and here's the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse' " (p. 278). Even after his return, the Tall Convict remains static, an uninitiated fool; obviously, the deputy recognizes this when he advises the warden: "Just call twelve men in here and tell him it's a jury—he never seen but one before and he won't know no better" (p. 328).

Much of his romantic innocence is appropriately devoted to his attitudes toward and his relationship with women. The narrator reflects, "who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragoned keep when he and his companion embarked in the skiff" (p. 249). Instead, he finds "on the lowest limb of one of the trees...in a calico wrapper and an army private's tunic and a sunbonnet, a woman...who sat clutching the trunk of the tree, her stockingless feet in a pair of man's unlaced brogans legs less than a yard from the water..." (p. 148). It was for a woman that he attempted his comically inept crime in the first place, and it is over a woman that he gets "in trouble" during his return upriver. "'You mean you had been toting one piece up and down the country day and night for over a month, and now the first time you have a chance to stop and catch your breath almost you got to get in
trouble over another one?" one of his fellow convicts incredulously asks (p. 334). Though the temptation does occur to him, he flees with a "savage and horrified revulsion" when he thinks of the baby (p. 335).

Such a simplistic code, of course, leads him to return to prison with the boat and the woman in tow and then to accept the outrageous addition of a ten-year sentence for attempted escape with the acquiescent reply of a childlike game player: "'All right...If that's the rule'" (p. 331). He adheres to acceptable rules of law or chivalry as simplistically and as unquestioningly as he had adhered to the rules for robbery laid down in the Detectives' Gazette.

In addition to his borrowings from the traditional techniques of Southwestern and Down East humor, Faulkner is not above resorting to the language misuses of the Literary Comedians. He will, for example, throw in a pun from time to time—as when the Tall Convict is described paddling his pregnant charge down the river "with a calculated husbandry of effort" (p. 154). Or he will reach back for a malapropism as when the doctor asks the Convict—in reference to his profusely bleeding broken nose—if he is "hemophilic;" the plump convict here interrupts the Tall Convict's narrative: "'Hemophilic? You know what that means?'...That's a calf that's a bull and a cow at the same time,' 'No it aint,' a third convict said. 'It's a calf or a colt that aint neither one'" (p. 242). Also in the tradition of the Literary Comedians, Faulkner goes on to strain for one more laugh: "'Hell fire,' the plump one said. 'He's got to be one or the other to keep from drowning [sic]'" (p. 242).

In keeping with his naive, simple code, the Tall Convict avoids unseemly words like pregnant and substitutes comic euphemisms such as "that thing in your lap'" (p. 152). He even comes to think of her as "the belly" (p. 161). Upon his return, he describes to his fellow prisoners the inhabitants of the Atchafalaya region of the Louisiana delta as "not white people... Not Americans. [People who talked with a] Gobble-gobble, whang, caw-caw-to-to’" (pp. 239-240).

Occasionally Faulkner employs satirical gibes of the sort favored by the comic lecturers of the last century. For example, the doctor explains to the Tall Convict why he does not turn him in: "'There has been conferred upon my race (the Medical race) also the power to bind and to loose, if not by Jehovah perhaps, certainly by the American Medical Association—on which incidentally, in this day of our Lord, I would put my money, at any odds, at any amount, at any time'" (p. 249). Likewise the warden, thinking that the convict has drowned,
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reasons that "The main thing is to get his name off the books as dead before some politician tries to collect his food allowance" (p. 80). Also from the tradition of the Literary Comedians, Faulkner borrows the anticlimax so valued by Artemus Ward. In fact, the final chapter of "Old Man" is, strictly speaking, an anticlimatic unwinding of the Tall Tale which peaks when the unnamed Convict surrenders.

Faulkner uses other traditional humorous devices in varying degrees. His use of dialect, for instance, entails regional vocabulary—"pirogue" (p. 252), "Cajan" (p. 253), and "levee" (p. 252)—and regional grammar—"'Hell fire, he aint dead,' the deputy said. 'He's up yonder in that bunk house right now lying his head off proby'" (p. 326). But Faulkner seldom makes use of decidedly regional pronunciation. Similarly, he utilizes third person narration for most of the story, but he also relies on a frame in which the Tall Convict can tell at least a part of his own story: "This is how he told it seven weeks later, sitting in new bed-ticking garments, shaved and with his hair cut again, on his bunk in the barracks..." (pp. 158-159). In addition to the frame narrative technique, Faulkner includes in "Old Man" Southwestern devices such as a humor of physical discomfort; an exclusively masculine, somewhat racy point of view; and the picaresque tradition inherited by the Southerners from European fiction: a rascal of low degree living by his wits as he encounters the adventures of the road. Also, Faulkner's comic imagery in "Old Man" is Southern, masculine, predominantly lower class, and heavily animal: "'You're bloody as a hog!' " (p. 150); "...the convicts sat in a line along the edge of the platform like buzzards on a fence...like dogs at a field trial they stood, immobile, patient almost ruminant" (pp. 66-67). His imagery tends to be very physical, almost slapstick at times: "The shrill voice of the Cajan seemed to buzz at him from an enormous distance...the antic wiry figure bouncing hysterically about him, the face wild and grimacing, the voice gobbling and high...the Cajan threw up the rifle, cried 'Boom-boom-boom!' flung it down and in pantomime re-enacted the recent scene then whirled his hands again, crying 'Magnifique! Magnifique!' " (p. 259).

Before the Tall Convict has picked up the pregnant woman, his boat is swept out of control and he is thrown to its bottom:

"He lay flat on his face, slightly spread-eagled and in an attitude of abject meditation. He would have to get up sometime, he knew that just as all life consists of having to get up sooner or later and then having to lie down again sooner or later after a while. And he
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was not exactly exhausted and he was not particularly without hope and he did not especially dread getting up. It merely seemed to him that he had accidentally been caught in a situation in which time and environment, not himself, was mesmerised; was being toyed with by a current of water going nowhere, beneath a day which would wane toward no evening" (p. 147).

This attitude—this lying face down in the skiff and blaming his broken nose on a fate outside himself—is much more characteristic of the Tall Convict than any heroic achievements he accomplishes during his seven weeks of freedom. At another point Faulkner compares words which the Convict addresses to no one with the scream of a dying rabbit; both he describes as "an indictment of all breath and its folly and suffering, its infinite capacity of folly and pain, which seems to be its only immortality: 'All in the world I want is just to surrender'" (p. 174). Ultimately, of course, both the Tall Convict and his "Wild Palms" counterpart, Harry Wilbourne, surrender: the Tall Convict's is the foolish surrender of his freedom for the sterile security of imprisonment in the State Penitentiary; Harry's is the painful, suffering surrender of a sensitive man to his romantic passion embodied in Charlotte Rittenmeyer. Both men are incurable romantics\(^5\) who resign themselves to separation from life when their romantic visions are swept away by the realities of living. But Harry Wilbourne's story is one of the "civilized" romanticism of human passion—and is thus tragic—while the Convict's is one of the "primitive" romanticism of the naif—and is therefore comic.

When on the final page of The Wild Palms Faulkner reflects on the sweetheart of the Tall Convict's adolescence — "who to know what Capone's uncandled bridehood she might not have dreamed to be her destiny and fate, what fast car filled with authentic colored glass and machine guns, running traffic lights" (p. 338)—by this time it is obvious that the author has relied heavily on traditional American humor techniques in creating "Old Man." To appreciate fully this use of humor, one must read together the alternating chapters of the stories of Harry Wilbourne and the Tall Convict. Then one can experience the comic mode of the "Old Man" reducing the tragic intensity of "Wild Palms" and providing contrapuntal relief. The relative success of the one story and the relative failure of the other will also, I think, become more obvious.

Since publication of The Wild Palms in 1939, most critics (and most readers) have preferred "Old Man" over "Wild Palms." One of the reasons is that the humorous mode is more suited than the tragic to
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the likes of our Convict and of Harry—men who so early give up on reality and retire from life, men who do nothing to help mankind endure and prevail. Thus, though we laugh frequently at the Convict's contrapunatal humorous portion of *The Wild Palms*, in the end we find his story not only more entertaining, but also more effective than the unhumorous narrative of Charlotte and Harry in communicating the writer's serious theme of failure. Incorporating "Old Man" into *The Wild Palms* was Faulkner's first successful mature experience with extended humorous writing. Its writing prompted him, I think, to resume work on a project that he had conceived and initiated in late 1926, but that had flagged soon after. Several years later he began reworking some of that material for short story publication, but it was not until completion of *The Wild Palms* that Faulkner came back to this material with a novel in mind: in late 1938 he resumed work on "The Snopes book."  

A partial catalogue of traditional Old Southwestern humorous devices Faulkner employs in *The Hamlet* would include the Tall Tale—for example, Ratliff's story of Flem outwitting the Devil; mythical, larger-than-life characters—Flem, Eula, and Ike; the mock heroic—Ike's chivalric love affair with the cow; and a lower-class, masculine viewpoint that at times is both cruel and bawdy—Lump's selling tickets to those who wish to see Ike with the cow. *The Hamlet* also makes use of Down East traditions such as the naive innocent—the romantic idiot Ike; the slick trader—Flem Snopes; and the horse-sense philosopher—V. K. Ratliff—as well as a great deal of verbal humor in the vein of the Literary Comedians. Further, there are some suggestive parallels between the Convict's story and the Snopes's story; in keeping with the sterile relationship between the convict and his pregnant charge, for instance, Faulkner creates an unconsummated marriage for Flem and his pregnant wife. Similarly, the overall emphasis on honor in the later novel, as well as Flem's and Ike's obsessive pursuits of their goals, reminds us of the Convict's single-mindness in "Old Man." Also, much as the "Old Man" story develops contrapuntally with the "Wild Palms" story, so *The Hamlet* develops contrapuntally through its stories of love and stories of trade. The full extent of specific influence that "Old Man" exerted on *The Hamlet* remains for other studies, but we can at least be confident here that Faulkner drew on his recently successful experience of presenting serious themes in the comic mode and of using the techniques of traditional American humor as he moved from one to the other. Much
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as Life on the Mississippi inspired Mark Twain to return to his work on the Huck Finn story, so "Old Man" must have led Faulkner back to the material that would comprise his comic masterpiece—the Snopes book.

NOTES


2 Acknowledging an indebtedness to Walter Blair's Native American Humor (1937), I would broadly define the Old Southwestern humor as marked by its framework narratives; its oral tale tradition (especially the exaggerated); its use of folklore and local color; its masculine viewpoint that stresses violence, physical discomfort, the bawdy, a general irreverence and the picaresque; and its fascination with the character of the frontiersman. The Tall Tale has been defined most concisely as "a kind of humorous tale common on the American frontier, which uses realistic detail, a literal manner, and common speech to recount extravagantly impossible happenings, usually resulting from the superhuman abilities of a character" (C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, 4th ed. [Indianapolis 1980], p. 440).

3 All parenthetical page references are to The Wild Palms (New York, 1939).

4 I would broadly characterize the Down East tradition by its authentic depiction of localized background and dialect, its variety of literary modes (letters, poetry, monologues, dialogues, etc.), its humorous interest in social and political issues, and its fascination with three character types (sometimes blended): the shrewd Yankee trader, the crackerbox philosopher, and the gullible innocent.

5 By "romantic" I mean, of course, the popular concept marked by an emotional attraction to an heroic, adventurous, mysterious, legendary, chivalric ideal.

6 Faulkner had obviously used comic and traditional humorous techniques in his writing from the beginning (see, for example, James M. Mellard, "Soldiers' Pay and the Growth of Faulkner's Comedy," American Humor: Essays Presented to John C. Gerber, ed. O. M. Brack, Jr. [Scottsdale, 1977], pp. 99-118), but two early pieces deserve special mention: As I Lay Dying (1930) is a problematical novel variously discussed for its humor, its comedy, its pathos, and its metaphysics, while "Spotted Horses" was published successfully as a short story in 1931 before its incorporation into
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The Hamlet (1940).


8 Blotner, 2:1006-1008.
THOMAS BANGS THORPE’S BACKWOODS HUNTERS: CULTURE HEROES AND HUMOROUS FAILURES

DAVID C. ESTES
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS

A puzzling fact in the publication history of “The Big Bear of Arkansas”—acclaimed for the past half century as one of the most successful humorous sketches of the Old Southwest—is that its author Thomas Bangs Thorpe did not choose to reprint it in his first collection of articles and short stories, The Mysteries of the Backwoods (1846). The misadventures of Jim Doggett had delighted his contemporaries since 1841 in numerous partial and complete reprints. Yet, when choosing which of his sketches to include, Thorpe must have recognized that his backwoodsman was the antithesis of the hunter he wished to present as a culture hero in Mysteries. For apparently the same reason, he also passed over his previously published story of the backwoods hunter Bob Herring in “The Devil’s Summer Retreat, in Arkansaw” and the humorous correspondence of a gentleman sportsman P. O. F. entitled “Letters from the Far West.” Instead, he wrote five new accounts of the wild animals and field sports on the Southwestern frontier and substantially reworked another. These he joined with ten pieces that had already appeared in print. This collection forms what is best classified as a sporting book, despite its inclusion in 1848 in Carey and Hart’s Library of Humorous American Works.¹

Mysteries presents successful frontier hunters who are models of skill, intellect, courage, and endurance. Moreover, they embody the perfections of the American character which was free to develop only in such a region beyond the constraints of civilized life. Thorpe’s frontier reflects the American myths of successful self-reliant individualism and the unspoiled western wilderness divinely ordained for human domination. His humorous hunters, on the other hand, reveal an ambivalence toward these popular myths. They either fail in pursuit of game or else achieve questionable success. Nonetheless, the frontiersmen Doggett and Herring remain as admirable as the other hunters. They suggest a counter-definition of the hunter as culture hero, one grounded in the realities rather than in the ideal conceptions of frontier experience. For the humorous hunters, aware of failure, rely on the power of backwoods tall talk rather than on verifiable physical skill and material gain to achieve their successes. The only one of
Thorpe’s hunters to remain a failure in all respects is the genteel traveler P. O. F., who cannot master the backwoodsman’s yarn-spinning. As an examination of the diverse hunters in Thorpe’s sporting and humorous sketches makes clear, the tall-talkers possess an ability indigenous to the frontier, yet one which contradicts the American myth of success based on material accomplishments. A brief survey of Thorpe’s sporting sketches precedes the discussion of his three humorous hunters. Thus, the individual works familiar to students of American humor can be examined within the context of sketches he was writing at the same time which also focus on the relationship between the hunter and the western frontier.

Known now for his skill as a humorist, Thorpe was equally popular in his own day as a writer of sporting sketches about the game and hunting practices on the Southwestern frontier. Because southern Louisiana was his home from 1837 to 1854, he had the opportunity to become acquainted with its wild animals and field sports. “We have been no idle participants in the wild sports of the woods and field,” he recalled in a Harper’s article after having returned to his native New York City. An invitation to join a fox hunt “was one of the first marked adventures of our Southern life.”  

The sporting sketches Thorpe wrote during the early 1840s appeared frequently in the New York Spirit of the Times, from which they were reprinted in sporting magazines in London and even in Calcutta. Characteristic of the genre, they not only provide information to readers unacquainted with the region’s animals and hunting practices, but also entertain through descriptions of particular hunts. One noteworthy tribute to Thorpe’s mastery of this genre is the number of pieces by him in the first American edition in 1846 of Peter Hawker’s popular British sporting manual, Instructions to Young Sportsmen. Among the volume’s thirty-eight sketches about field sports on this continent, the American editor William T. Porter included five by Thorpe. In contrast to popular contemporary sporting authors, Thorpe gave careful attention to the cultural significance of the frontier hunter. The figure of the hunter is central in each of his sketches describing a menagerie of regional beasts: bear, wild cats, deer, buffaloes, wild turkeys, alligators, opossums, woodcock, and several varieties of fish. More than reporting pursuits after game in the Lower Mississippi Valley, his writing reflects a belief that the frontier hunter embodies the truly American character.

True to the conventions of the genre, the sporting sketches in Mys-
teries recount successful hunts. Yet, Thorpe goes beyond the conventions by elevating the hunter to mythic proportions. For example, "A Grizzly Bear Hunt" states that "the hunter...presents one of the most extraordinary exhibitions of the singular capacity of the human senses to be improved by cultivation." He "calculates the very sex, weight, and age [of the bear] with certainty" merely from the trail it leaves. In this article Thorpe draws a sharp distinction between hunters and sportsmen: "The hunter follows his object by his own knowledge and instinct, while the sportsman employs the instinct of domesticated animals to assist in his pursuits." The sentimental idealism of these statements shows the high regard in which Thorpe held the hunter. But the man deserves such esteem who, as the article goes on to explain, can kill a hibernating bear in his den by arousing him with a lighted candle and then shooting him through the eye when he comes to investigate.

The arrow-fisher, the subject of "Piscatory Archery," is another hunter who must read the physical signs as he searches for his prey, for only the bubbles rising to the surface of the water in a particular manner indicate the location of the fish. This type of fishing is practiced in the so-called dry lakes which form along the Mississippi River after it floods in the spring. As one man paddles the canoe, another stands ready to shoot the fish with an arrow. Like shooting a bear in his cave, arrow-fishing exhibits what Thorpe called "the spirit of true sport" because it is "a rare and beautiful amusement" which increases the difficulty of killing the game. The sketch concludes with an explanation of the origin of the sport in the words of the region's oldest piscator, an explanation indicating that in Thorpe's mind it represents the native frontier spirit: "Uncle Zac...know'd fishes amazin', and bein' natur-ally a hunter, he went to shooten 'em with a bow and arrer, to keep up yearly times in his history, when he tuck'guns, and yerther varmints in the same way."

The wild turkey hunter also deserves mention here. "Wit of the Woods," which Thorpe predicted to his publisher would one day become "classical," describes this sport as a contest between "the perfection of animal instinct, and the superior intellect of man." With his bird call, the hunter may temporarily deceive the instinct of this "wildest of game," but only those "very few hunters who may be said to make a science of their pursuit" succeed in overcoming its wildness and wisdom. Thorpe found the distinctive character of the Southwestern frontiersman, and in turn of the American, embodied not in the
“pot-hunters” who killed as many animals as easily as possible, but rather in men such as these who recognized that the method of the chase is as meaningful as the death of the game. These were hunters confident that their own abilities could rise to nature’s greatest challenge.

*Mysteries* closes with “Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter,” Thorpe’s first published piece which was as famous at that time as “The Big Bear of Arkansas.” Although widely reprinted during the nineteenth century after its initial appearance in the *Spirit of the Times* in 1839, it has not been anthologized since 1904. It is unlike the preceding sketches because it excludes description of the game. Also, it offers a full portrait of an individual backwoods hunter rather than a more general composite picture. In fact, Tom Owen was a real settler near Jackson, Louisiana, who engaged in topping trees and hunting bees.

In the literature of the day, the bee hunter was frequently associated with the frontier because, according to popular belief, honey bees preceded civilization as it moved westward across the continent. “Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter” opens by identifying the relationship of this figure to the region that was rapidly changing: “As a country becomes cleared up and settled bee-hunters disappear; consequently they are seldom or ever[sic] noticed. Among this backwoods fraternity have flourished men of genius in their way, who have died unwept and unnoticed...” At first, the urbane narrator is amused by Owen and comments that “the difference between him and ordinary men was visible at a glance”:

His head was adorned with an outlandish pattern of a hat — his nether limbs were ensconced in a pair of inexpressibles, beautifully fringed by the brier-bushes through which they were often drawn; coats and vests he considered as superfluities; and hanging upon his back were a couple of pails, and an axe in his right hand.

The narrator quickly discovers that Owen does not differ from “ordinary men” in his idiosyncratic dress alone. More importantly, the skills which make him a successful hunter are beyond normal, therefore earning him respect despite his ungenteel appearance. He spots a bee in the distance far beyond the sight of anyone else in the group and boasts, “In a clear day I can see a bee over a mile, easy!” When Owen and his helpers disturb the bees as they chop down the tree containing the hive, his extraordinary qualities again amaze the narrator:
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There might have been seen a bee-hive of stingers precipitating themselves from above on the unfortunate hunter beneath...His partisans, like many hangers-on about great men, began to desert him on the first symptoms of danger; and when the trouble thickened, they, one and all, took to their heels, and left only our hero and Sambo to fight their adversaries. Sambo, however, soon dropped his axe, and fell into all kinds of contortions; first he would seize the back of his neck with his hands, then his shins, and yell with pain. “Don't holler, nigger, till you get of the woods,” said the sublime Tom, consolingly; but writhe he did, until he broke and left Tom “alone in his glory.”

Symbolically, this hunt conforms to the myth of the American frontier as a garden ordained by God for human domination. It shows that a successful hunter can literally make the land flow with an abundance of honey. Although Owen's prey is much smaller and much less powerful than that of such famous hunters as Davy Crockett, the narrator concludes that he possessed “an unconquerable genius which would have immortalized him, had he directed it in following the sports of Long Island, or New-Market.” The last sentence of the sketch glorifies this hunt because “the grandeur visible was imparted by the mighty mind of Tom Owen himself.”

Milton Rickels has written that Thorpe's “attitude toward his backwoodsman was still unfurmed” when he wrote this sketch and that “in consequence the tone shifts unsurely from the reportorial to the condescending.” In his view several passages are mock-heroic because they amuse by elevating the trivial. Yet, the piece as revised for Mysteries probably does not deserve such harsh criticism. For example, deleted from the original description of Owen's dress is the comment that “part of his 'linen,' like a neglected penant, displayed itself in his rear,” thus creating a more favorable response in the minds of genteel readers. Furthermore, the preface to the volume reminds readers that the author felt “there was an intrinsic merit in the subjects associated with the forests” of the Southwest. The treatment of other frontier hunters in the collection suggests that the elevation of the seemingly trivial might rather be viewed as an indication of Thorpe's exuberant, sentimental admiration for a particular frontier hunter and what he represented. While such persons might have been merely amusing to genteel society, Thorpe was setting them forth as culture heroes because of their visible success on the frontier where the American character was being nurtured.

Two humorous sketches — not reprinted in Mysteries — show backwoods hunters as unsuccessful. Even though the bears they have
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chased are dead at the end of each narrative, this turn of events is brought about by chance, not woodcraft. Because these hunters fail to overcome nature, the exclusion of their adventures from Mysteriess suggests Thorpe's ambivalence about his optimistic interpretation of the frontier experience in it. These sketches, although humorous, leave readers with an unsettled feeling about nature and the frontiersmen. By presenting hunters with insufficient skill, Thorpe forces himself to look at the settlers' actual hardships and to offer an alternative definition of the qualities a hero must possess. His re-definition is based on the recognition of failure rather than on the achievement of success.

As in "Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter," Thorpe uses a gentleman narrator in "The Big Bear of Arkansas" who gains insight from his encounter with a backwoodsman. This man does not observe the hunter tracking his prey, but rather listens to him, in the comfort of a steamboat cabin, telling about his adventures. Because the narrator's ride up the Mississippi River from New Orleans is to last only a few hours, he "made no endeavors to become acquainted with my fellow passengers...and more critically than usual examined" the newspaper. Just as he isolates himself from the others, they are in their separate groups at the beginning of the sketch. When Jim Doggett enters the cabin from the bar, all turn their attention to him because of his captivating skill at yarn-spinning. He amuses his listeners by laughing at the city folk he has met who "were real know-nothings, green as a pumpkin-vine — couldn't, in farming, I'll bet raise a crop of turnips — and as for shooting, they'd miss a barn if the door was swinging, and that, too, with the best rifle in the country." However, in his clever answers to questions designed to put him in his place, readers of Thorpe's sketch notice that this backwoodsman's pose curiously resembles the genteel New Orleanians who would be failures on the frontier according to him. By his own admission he is unsuccessful at farming. Because his beets grew as large as cedar stumps and the potato hills came to look like Indian mounds, he learned that "the soil is too rich, and planting in Arkansaw is dangerous....I don't plant any more; natur intended Arkansaw for a hunting ground, and I go according to natur." Furthermore, despite numerous comic boasts that he is "decidedly the best bar hunter" in the district, the chase he recounts at the encouragement of the narrator does not support these claims. Doggett admits that his neighbors began to tease him because his pursuit of the Big Bear dragged on and on. They
would taunt him with the question, “How come on that individual that never lost a bar when once started?” The inability to kill his prey finally made Doggett physically sick: “Well, missing that bar so often, took hold of my vitals, and I wasted away. The thing had been carried too far, and it reduced me in flesh faster than an ager.” Although the Big Bear finally died and Doggett made a bed spread of his skin, the backwoodsman refuses to claim that he was successful. Rather, mystified at the cause of his foe’s death, Doggett concludes he was “an unhuntable bar and died when his time come.” What upsets him, as he points out to the narrator, is that “I never liked the way I hunted him, and missed him.” These details from Doggett’s narrative highlight the struggle against nature’s harshness which overtaxed settlers’ physical resources, leaving them ultimately no more successful than city dwellers would have been on the frontier.

Given Doggett’s stories of failure, then, it is somewhat surprising that he is such a likeable character. The narrator says, “He appeared to be a man enjoying perfect health and contentment — his eyes were as sparkling as diamonds, and good natured to simplicity.” Furthermore, he notices Doggett’s “perfect confidence in himself.” What is the source of such robust self-confidence? According to Doggett’s pose, he is a man lacking trust in his own power. He is fully aware that he can be defeated by nature. However, knowing the dangers of frontier life, he is neither a ragged squatter nor a gaunt back-trailer, exhausted by disillusioning experiences. Doggett’s self-confidence springs from a far different source than that of Tom Owen. For he is playing a different game. His joke about “calling the principal game in Arkansas saw poker, and high-low-jack” suggests that he has an alternate measure of success from the hunting trail. Doggett pursues his game on the turf of backwoods tall talk where the comic strategies of boasting and self-derision successfully transform failure into entertainment. The narrator calls particular attention to Doggett as a talker. He “rambled on from one thing to another with a volubility perfectly astonishing.” And furthermore, “his manner was so singular, that half of his story consisted in his excellent way of telling it, the great peculiarity of which was, the happy manner he had of emphasizing the prominent parts of his conversation.” From the point of view of his audience, Doggett’s style of talking is of equal importance to the subject he discusses.

Yet, such tall-talking is not idle escapism. It contributes to a social well-being which mirrors Doggett’s robust health. He is able to draw
the widely diverse passengers away from their isolated groups and concerns. Even the urbane narrator lays aside his newspaper because “there was something about the intruder that won the heart on sight.” Sonia Gernes has pointed out that Doggett quickly creates a community by means of his story-telling. At the end of his tale, he invites everyone to the bar “to socialize on an equal plane.” As audience, they share an experience to which they also contribute; their verbal responses urge Doggett to pile whopper on top of whopper. The narrator, in particular, is transformed by this event. Although taken in by the tall tale, he still has been drawn out of his isolation. He continues to recognize a distinction between the genteel and frontier societies even at the end when he classifies Doggett as one of the superstitious “children of the wood.” Yet, the final sentence reads: “...I can only follow with the reader, in imagination, our Arkansas friend, in his adventures at the ‘Forks of Cypress’ on the Mississippi.” Doggett’s words accomplish what he says his actions were unable to do; they win him the admiration of his listeners — the rough and the urbane alike.

In sharp contrast to Doggett, Thorpe’s successful hunters are, on the whole, silent and solitary. While in “A Grizzly Bear Hunt” he does acknowledge having listened to the tales of hunters, they were always told by one “who had strayed away from the scenes once necessary for his life.” These narratives contained neither boasts nor exaggerations. In fact, Thorpe condemns such additions to the story of the chase as characteristic of sportsmen, but never of the true hunter. Yet, he was ambivalently attracted to frontier tall talk, and in “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” it is admired as a necessary strategy for dealing with reality.

Bob Herring in “The Devil’s Summer Retreat, in Arkansaw” is another backwoods hunter who is more verbally than physically adept, despite a reputation for “his knowledge of the country and his hunting exploits.” He remains admirable even though one evening at camp he tells about a bear hunt which brought him no glory and then the very next day has great difficulty killing a bear as the narrator looks on. These chases take place in a region called the Devil’s Summer Retreat, the description of which highlights the malignity of nature. The cane brake

is interwoven with vines of all descriptions, which makes it so thick that it seems to be impenetrable as a mountain. Here in this solitude, where the noon-day sun never penetrates, ten thousand

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birds...roost at night, and at the dawn of day,...darken the air as they seek their haunts, their manure deadening, for acres around, the vegetation, like a fire, so long have they possessed the solitude.

Yet, Herring has lived in this inhospitable territory at what he calls the "Wasps' diggins" long enough to have "become the ancientest inhabitant in the hull of Arkansaw." A braggart similar to Doggett, he boasts that "he was made on too tall a scale for this world, and that he was shoved in, like the joints of a telescope." Despite an appearance which attests to the rigors of his life, he is strong and healthy: "Poor in flesh, his enormous bones and joints rattle when he moves, and they would no doubt have long since fallen apart, but for the enormous tendons that bind them together as visibly as a good sized hawser would." As the hunting party settles down to sleep, Herring rouses them by asking

very coolly...if any of us snored "unkimmonly loud," for he said his old shooting iron would go off at a good imitation of a bear's breathing ...then there commenced a series of jibes, jokes, and stories, that no one can hear, or witness, except on an Arkansas hunt with "old coons." Bob, like the immortal Jack, was witty himself, and the cause of wit in others, but he sustained himself against all competition, and gave in his notions and experience with an unrivalled humor and simplicity.

To end the evening, Herring tells the tenderfoot narrator one more story about how he came upon a bear, "blazed away, and sort a cut him slantindicularly through the hams,...not a judgematical shot." After a second shot missed, the wounded animal began chasing Herring: "If I ever had the 'narvious' that was the time, for the skin on my face seemed an inch thick, and my eyes had more rings in them than a mad wild-cat's." In trying to fire again, Herring "stepped back and fell over." However, the bear also fell into a root hole in trying to attack his pursuer, thus allowing the hunter time, at last, to get off a successful shot.

Events the next day confirm this backwoodsman's pose of ineffec-
tuality. In the chase Herring is "a foot taller than usual, stalking over the cane, like a colossus." But after the dogs bring the bear to bay, his first shot strikes it in the nose. He then tries twice to stab it with a knife; the animal knocks the first one out of his hand, and the second is too dull to penetrate the skin. Finally, someone hands him a rifle which fires properly. In self-justification Herring immediately comments, "I saw snakes last night in my dreams...and I never had any
good luck the next day, artersich a sarcumstance; I call this hull hunt, about as mean an affair as damp powder.” Maintaining his good humor, he jokes about what he affirms is his perpetual bad luck. The narrator closes the sketch by recalling that the meal of bear meat along with “Bob Herring’s philosophical remarks, restored me to perfect health, and I shall recollect that supper, and its master of ceremonies, as harmonious with...the Devil’s Summer Retreat.” Thorpe would never have praised such a failed hunter in his sporting sketches. Yet, here the hero captures his listeners’ admiration for a story-telling victory more difficult to achieve than Doggett’s because they have witnessed unquestionable evidence of his insufficient prowess in the chase.

Thorpe’s burlesque of numerous accounts of frontier expeditions, the “Letters from the Far West” series, appeared in his Louisiana newspaper and in the Spirit of the Times at irregular intervals during 1843 and 1844. The twelve letters were not reprinted until 1978 and, therefore, have not yet received the attention they deserve. P. O. F., the gentleman sportsman-author, lacks the native abilities which Thorpe applauded in Doggett and Herring. Although his characterization is not unified throughout the series, he consistently suffers a double failure. Touring the prairies with a party of experienced hunters, P. O. F. soon learns that, because of his powerlessness, he is actually the pursued rather than the pursuer. This inversion also appears in the above two humorous sketches, but unlike the backwoodsmen in them, he cannot speak the language of the frontier and cannot refashion defeat into victory. On one chase he becomes stuck in the mud and cannot get out of the path of an enraged bear that “rushed on me, seized hold of my deer-skin breeches, and shook them as clear of mud as if I had been laying on a feather bed.”

Numerous similar experiences during the five-month expedition lead P. O. F. to conclude, “This frontier life, ain’t what it is cracked up to be.” One night he proposes a toast to “the Indian hunting grounds ...more interesting in ladies’ books, than any where else.” Seeing an opportunity for practical joking, the frontiersmen in his party imitate the animals in giving him a chase. P. O. F.’s deerskin clothing allows them an excuse to frighten him which in his naiveté he will not question. “Six times since I wore them,” he writes, “have I been near being shot for an Elk, which makes my situation very pleasant indeed.” The half-breed Spaniard from Santa Fe, Don Desparato, also chooses him as prey at an exhibition of his lassoing skill. After
several make the suggestion, P. O. F. agrees to ride the horse whose hind foot is to be the target. The men, however, do not have the pleasure of seeing him thrown from the galloping horse because Desparato misses. Foolishly, P. O. F. joins in the general derisive laughter at this failure. To recover from the humiliation, Desparato lassoes the rider on the next throw. Amid shouts and laughter, P. O. F. finds himself “on the ground, the lasso round my neck, and he holding on the opposite end of it, grinning at me like an enraged monkey.” Instead of being dragged across the prairie, he is released after letting his captor take a plug of tobacco from his pocket. “Don’t get mad, that was a Spanish joke,” said somebody. ‘And he don’t understand the language well enough to enjoy the wit of it,’ said every body.”

The letters are filled with instances in which P. O. F. records as facts the outlandish comments and tall tales which the others tell him. Thorpe’s satire of his genteel illusions is sometimes heavy-handed. Because P. O. F. never becomes adept at decoding exaggeration, he never masters the art of tall-talking. Confronted with physical failure, P. O. F. cannot transform his experiences imaginatively and cannot rescue himself linguistically. Characteristically imperceptive, he bemoans his lack of time for literary pursuits while traveling, unaware that, even if he had the time, the appropriate language for communicating his mis-adventures would be frontier tall talk and not the written word. Notably, P. O. F. is the only one of Thorpe’s hunters who is not a native frontiersman. His failure as both a good shot and a good talker, therefore, indicates that the strengths of the American character are native to that region alone — a belief which runs throughout Thorpe’s writings.

Thorpe’s contradictory assessments of the precise skills and qualities which make the backwoods hunter culturally significant are impossible to resolve. Such ambivalence might be expected from a man who was never a permanent resident of the frontier himself. Yet, Thorpe’s careful attention to the literary tastes of his day probably contributed more powerfully to his inconsistency. Needing to support his growing family, he was eager to write books that genteel Eastern readers would purchase. Shortly before Mysteries was to be issued, he inquired about full-time literary employment with his Philadelphia publishers Carey and Hart. The letter calls attention to his “judgment with regard to books that will please the public without sacrificing anything to depraved taste. I feel very competent to compile books, select popular subjects....” The sketches collected in Mysteries show
Thorpe's ability to embody conventional American myths about the frontier in highly polished examples of the sporting sketch. A book praising as heroes those hunters who subverted such notions through their failure and yarn-spinning might not have been a financial success in Thorpe’s opinion. So, he shaped his writing to popular taste. Censoring himself, Thorpe stopped exploring the cultural significance of the backwoods humor which he himself enjoyed, leaving himself neither more wealthy nor more famous than when he published his first humorous sketch. It would take Mark Twain to succeed in the literary marketplace with the materials Thorpe declined to pursue.

NOTES


2 “About the Fox and Fox-Hunters,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, 23 (1861), 750, 752.

3 Porter reprinted “Woodcock Fire-Hunting in Louisiana,” “The Wild-Cat,” “Opossum Hunting,” “Grizzly Bear Hunting,” and “The Devil’s Summer Retreat, in Arkansaw” (under the title “Bear Hunting in Arkansas”). The last of these is discussed as a humorous sketch in this article.


5 Mysteries, p. 148.

6 Mysteries, p. 44.

7 Mysteries, p. 45.


9 Mysteries, pp. 64 and 62.

10 The most recent reprinting is in Alexander DeMenil, ed., The Literature of the Louisiana Territory (St. Louis, 1904), pp. 140-143.


12 Mysteries, p. 185.

13 Mysteries, p. 186.

14 Mysteries, p. 187.
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15 *Mysteries*, p. 188.

16 *Mysteries*, pp. 189-190.

17 Rickels, p. 39.

18 *Spirit of the Times*, 27 July 1839, p. 247.

19 *Mysteries*, p. 8.

20 *Spirit*, 27 March 1841, p. 43.


22 J. A. Leo Lemay has argued that the "supercilious" narrator condescends to Doggett throughout and "learns nothing." See "The Text, Tradition, and Themes of The Big Bear of Arkansas," *AL*, 47 (1975), 321-342. Sonia Gernes agrees on this point. Neither discusses the implications of the closing sentence. Even though the narrator takes the tall tale literally, he does comment perceptively and approvingly on the style of Doggett's delivery. Therefore, one should not conclude that he is merely condescending. His response is more complex, an indication of Thorpe's belief in the recognizable heroic qualities of the frontier tall teller.

23 *Mysteries*, p. 146.

24 *Spirit*, 20 August 1842, p. 295.


26 *Concordia Intelligencer*, 25 November 1843 [no pagination in this periodical]; *Spirit*, 16 December 1843, p. 497.

27 *Concordia Intelligencer*, 19 August 1843; *Spirit*, 9 September 1843, p. 333.

28 *Concordia Intelligencer*, 4 November 1843; *Spirit*, 18 November 1843, p. 445.

29 *Concordia Intelligencer*, 14 October 1843; *Spirit*, 4 November 1843, p. 421.

30 *Concordia Intelligencer*, 16 December 1843; *Spirit*, 27 January 1844, p. 569.

31 In only one letter does P. O. F. tell his own tall tale to readers. He claims to have observed two wolves and a buzzard contending for the same buffalo carcass, which unexpectedly rolled down the hill, killing all three of the greedy animals. See *Concordia Intelligencer*, 2 September 1843, and *Spirit*, 23 September 1843, p. 356, P. O. F.'s ability to use language ironically
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here does not carry over into the other letters to allow him to interpret the yarns which the others tell him.

32 Letter to Abraham Hart, 5 December 1845. Quoted from Rickels, p. 112.
ISAAC McCASLIN AND THE BURDEN OF INFLUENCE

PAUL J. LINDHOLDT

IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY

The fiction of James Joyce has long been acknowledged as a source of stylistic influence upon Faulkner’s work. Parallels have been drawn between the two writers’ similar use of compound words, synesthesia, discontinuities of time, classical and Christian myths, and the interior monologue. So pervasive indeed has Joyce’s influence been upon writers of this century that one would be surprised if the author of “The Bear” had not been affected by him. Cleanth Brooks has further confirmed Faulkner’s artistic debts by tracing specific passages from his work to those of Joyce, thus illustrating that the American writer borrowed more than mere stylistic elements from his Irish contemporary.¹ Perhaps most significant, however, Brooks provides conclusive proof that Faulkner had read A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man early in his career, before he was fully able to assimilate and conceal his literary sources.² While it may be difficult to concede that a writer so thematically American as Faulkner was influenced in “The Bear” primarily by an Irishman only fifteen years his senior, such an argument, supported biographically, will underlie this paper. Further, I will use the poetic theories of Harold Bloom to show that the coming of age of Isaac McCaslin in “The Bear” is a “misreading” of the story of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s Portrait.

Faulkner was characteristically skeptical of critical attempts to attribute too large a portion of his achievements to the influence of other writers, but he was always willing to admit respect for Joyce. In a 1957 interview at the University of Virginia, he was asked about the visit to Europe he had made in 1923 and about the degree to which he believed himself to have been influenced by Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson, who were then also abroad. He responded guardedly: “at the time...I wasn’t interested in literature nor literary people.” This fantastic claim—his book of poems, The Marble Faun, appeared in 1924—is followed immediately by the unsolicited disclaimer that “I knew Joyce, I knew of Joyce, and I would go to some effort to go to the café that he inhabited to look at him. But that was the only literary man I remember seeing in Europe in those days.”³ Faulkner may have revealed more than he hoped here. In another interview, he peculiarly referred to Joyce as “a genius who was electrocuted by the divine
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fire.”⁴ The full meaning of this statement didn’t come clear till the next year when he elaborated by saying that “James Joyce was one of the great men of my time. He was electrocuted by the divine fire. He, Thomas Mann, were the great writers of my time. He was probably—might have been the greatest, but he was electrocuted. He had more talent than he could control.”⁵ This qualified admiration, with its overtones of mysticism, is interesting for reasons best explained by turning to Harold Bloom.

According to the theory first advanced in *The Anxiety of Influence*, writers of the past two or three centuries are afflicted by a sense of historical belatedness and are inescapably bound up in relationships with previous writers who limit their potential for originality.⁶ The anxious later writer of an artistic relationship exhibits in his work a “creative correction” of the stronger early writer; this correction (or revision) constitutes a psychic defense whereby the later writer (or ephede) attempts to affirm his own strength of identity by willfully misprizing the accomplishments of the earlier writer (or precursor). While Bloom does not directly discuss the possibilities for biographical evidence of misprision, neither does his book dismiss them. And while we may read Faulkner’s enigmatic evaluation of Joyce as alluding to his relatively early death at fifty-eight, the comment in this context appears more likely a suggestion that Joyce had not achieved greatness resulting from a more specific artistic failure. Further supporting such an antithetical interpretation of the quoted passage is the repeated use of the word “divine.” Often noted for his rhetoricalness, Faulkner is nevertheless rarely given to religious or mystical hyperbole in interviews; and although he may be merely paying lip service to popular conceptions of Joyce’s massive talent, “divine” here also may be read as Faulkner’s veiled acknowledgement of Joyce as his true creative forefather, responsible for his artistic incarnation. Elsewhere in an interview, he designates Sherwood Anderson as “the father of all my works,”⁷ but this claim is easily attributable to the anxiety of influence. For by publicly naming the weaker Anderson as his father, Faulkner assures his public that he had surpassed his father’s achievements.

Hugh Kenner has noted in a discussion of “Faulkner and the Avant-Garde” that “his equivocation about his knowledge of *Ulysses* is famous,” a fact Kenner reads as evidence only that Faulkner believed “what writers learn from one another is either private or trivial.”⁸ What does Kenner mean here by “private”? In a companion
article, "Faulkner and Joyce," he analyzes some remarkable parallels of rhythm, dialect, and phrasing between Faulkner's work and *Ulysses*, and he argues that Faulkner had "read in" but had not actually read *Ulysses*. These findings lead Kenner to a curiously Bloomian statement: "A man quick to take hints, his mind full of a book he wanted to write, could readily have absorbed all those methods and more from *Ulysses* without really reading it." Bloom's theory provides that the ephébè need not have actually read his precursor to fall under his influence. It is also typical of the ephébè to attempt repeatedly to resist or disclaim the influence of his true precursor; accordingly, while Faulkner freely praised Joyce, he also went to some trouble during an interview in Japan to deny the Joycean influence in his work. What we see then generally is a series of discrepancies between Faulkner's personal statements about his art and the facts revealed by that art itself.

If this examination of the Joycean influence in Faulkner appears to disregard the portion of Bloom's theory which describes the precursor versus ephébè relationship in terms of dead writers versus living writers, a brief explanation should clarify my position. First, it is a mistake to interpret Bloom as saying that the anxiety of influence is a factor only where dead and living writers are involved. For example in *A Map of Misreading*, the 1975 book which followed and expanded his earlier theory, Bloom himself studies the influence of Wallace Stevens on John Ashbery, whose careers overlapped for several years. "Dead" and "living" are primarily convenient terms for discussion. In the case of Joyce and Faulkner, each was writing at the height of his powers at the same time; significantly, however, Joyce's *Portrait* appeared a full ten years before Faulkner's first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, in 1926. Perhaps more important, Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*—the volume of stories containing "The Bear"—was published just one year after Joyce's death in 1941.

"The Bear" has been called a novella, and certainly at 140 pages it is difficult to class as a short story. Joyce's *Portrait* is a short novel, also divided into five parts, each of which corresponds to Stephen's age over a given period, though—unlike the story of Isaac McCaslin—the chronological progression of the *Portrait* is linear. Because many of the events in "The Bear" are treated more fully in other parts of *Go Down, Moses*, which Faulkner insistently referred to as a novel, he removed the long and difficult fourth section when he printed the story separately. The relationship between *Ulysses* and *Portrait* is
similar to that between Go Down, Moses and “The Bear;” Ulysses profiles Stephen at later points in his life, and much of Go Down, Moses details actions both before Isaac’s birth and after he has grown old. “The Bear,” in fact, may be regarded as a microcosm of Go Down, Moses, since it touches upon events which span some 175 years. Centrally, however, the Faulkner story treats Isaac’s life between the ages of ten and twenty-one; Joyce’s novel chronicles Stephen’s growth from six to twenty years. Both are essentially narratives of education and initiation which carry the protagonists through a series of epiphanies to adulthood.

The prominent twentieth-century theme of the search for and conflict with the father is a central problem for both protagonists. Indeed, Joyce and Faulkner confirm the centrality of this issue by giving their characters names allusive of familiar father-son relationships from Greek and Christian myths. An important difference between the two names, however, is that Daedalus was a skilled craftsman and loving parent of Icarus, whereas Isaac is best remembered as the young man who nearly became a sacrificial victim of the piety of his famous man, Abraham. The distinction here serves to mirror the precursor-ephebe relationship of the two authors. In this analysis it is necessary to see the experiences of Stephen and Isaac as poems, the protagonists themselves as poets, and their struggles for selfhood as mimetic of the artistic concerns of Joyce and Faulkner.

Faulkner’s story swerves from its Joycean model near the beginning with Isaac’s developing consciousness of his heritage and paternity. He is ten years old. His mother and father have been dead for some time. “He had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the big old bear with one trap-ruined foot” (192-193) that had grown legendary in the land where it was hunted each year, but that Isaac is too young to take part in the pursuit of because he has not yet “entered his novitiate to the true wilderness” (195).13 Bereft of both parents, unable to join the hunters, Isaac is essentially uncreated and thus paradoxically must beget himself. The images here are ones of presence and absence (birth and paternity), and the irony of his situation is that his partner in self-creation is no blood relative but “a son of a negro slave and Chickasaw chief” (206)—Sam Fathers, whose name is no accident. A former slave owned by Isaac’s dead grandfather Carothers, Sam is noble and well-respected by the hunters, in ironic contrast to his dead master whose acts of miscegenation and incest produced only ill; the product of mixed bloods himself, Sam’s role in

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Isaac’s spiritual birth is ironically mixed also, though productive instead of good. To Isaac it seemed “that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth” (195), and the wagon ride through the woods is described in imagery evocative of sexuality and parturition. In choosing or being chosen by Sam Fathers, Isaac exhibits a reaction-formation against his own ignoble bloodlines, as Faulkner also is reacting against Joyce.

The stage of revision discussed above—clinaman—moves swiftly to the answering tessera which concludes part one of the story.14 When Isaac at age eleven finally sees the bear, he recognizes it as part of the entire “wilderness coalesced” (209), which is his legacy. Faulkner’s use of the bear here, as synecdoche for the wilderness, operates by accretion in the rhetorical final passage describing the appearance of Old Ben. The last step in a revisionary dialectic, the bear for Isaac represents the nature myth against which his troubled blood heritage still serves as limitation. Most complex, however, are the psychic choices Faulkner’s protagonist must make before he is allowed to confront the animal. If he has symbolically denied his birthright by effecting self-creation with Sam Fathers, he is still bound to the trappings of that birthright: the gun, the compass, and “the old, heavy, biscuit-thick silver watch which had been his father’s” (207). These he must abandon, and does, in a reversal of selfhood which rejects for the moment those ancestral instruments of aggression, space, and time—of civilization—which his earlier initiation to the camp of hunters had awarded him. Thus, Faulkner and Isaac McCaslin both antithetically complete their precursors; by turning against himself, Isaac ultimately furthers the formation of his self-identity.

As Isaac had become the protégé and spiritual progeny of Sam Fathers, had participated in forging his own origins, had achieved communion with Old Ben—symbol of the wilderness and his new legacy—“So he should have hated and feared Lion” (209). For the huge dog is the agent of a harsh kenesos in the poem of Isaac’s experiences which comprise “The Bear.” Isaac appears to be only continuing “the yearly pageant-rite of the old bear’s furious immortality” (194), repeating the traditions of the hunt which had been bequeathed to him. But the addition of Lion results in the death of both Old Ben and Sam Fathers when Isaac is sixteen. The afflatus with which his imagination had imbued the bear and man is emptied out, as is his strength of imaginative anteriority that he had gained from them. This revisionary stage or ratio covers parts two and three of the
story and is marked throughout by the presence of the dog—blank, mechanical, amoral—like Popeye of the earlier Sanctuary, functioning here as a metonymy for mortality, dying with its victims. The big woods, once rich and full, now appear empty of all but “wildcats and varmints” (253); and Isaac, who had previously set aside his watch and compass, falls back into time and space so that part four of the story begins with the flat statement, ominously uncapitalized: “then he was twenty-one” (254).

For Stephen Dedalus, on the other hand, an approximately parallel regression or ebbing is reached by quite different means; and a point-by-point comparison between the experiences of the two young men is neither possible nor desirable. Stephen’s self-consciousness begins much earlier and more conventionally with sense impressions, the dawning recognition of his Catholic heritage, and the eventual exertion of independence in the rector’s office where he objects to his unjust pandying by Father Dolan. This phase is followed by a period of personal tension between his real and ideal worlds, which merge at the end of chapter two in his seduction scene. With chapter three Stephen’s (and Isaac’s) low point is reached, through the religious retreat, the sermon about hell, his vision of personal depravity, and the eventual confession—an emptying out of those thoughts and actions he had previously perceived as strengths and pleasures. Isaac’s story is organized by means of a nature myth, whereas Stephen’s gains coherence primarily through the more familiar tenets of Christianity.

With the deaths of his imaginative precursors, Sam Fathers and Old Ben, Isaac is torn from the timelessness of the myth of nature and thrust back into the realities of his ancestral past. With the additional blow, also at sixteen, of the discovery of the incestuous and miscegenous misdeeds of his grandfather (which the reader doesn’t learn until later), he is thrust back into the even more tainted time of man’s first sin. For these reasons the long conversation of part four, with his cousin Cass when Isaac is twenty-one, interrupts the chronology of the story and attempts to place the kenotic deaths in historical perspective. Why is man bound to ancestral history? How can he escape it? By rehearsing mankind’s blighted past, from the Garden of Eden to the Civil War, Isaac hyperbolically de-individuates the role his recent ancestors had played in settling the land. They are neither to be commended for their pioneering achievements nor condemned for their role in the destruction of the wilderness, because they were part
of a sublime scheme that had gone awry before they were born. The counter-sublime Isaac would adopt for himself necessitates his repudiation of the ownership of land; however, by embracing a Christian sublimity which he presumes had been denied his ancestors, he represses much of his normal humanity, as we shall see. The high and low images cluster about his evidences of man's manifestly fallen state. The genealogical limitations imposed by his experiences at sixteen are synthesized into a rejection of the land which has been twice his birthright.

A repudiation of his twin inheritance, however, is not enough for Isaac, and the last section of the story finds him adopting a Christ-like existence as a means of self-purgation. The metaphorical life of the carpenter he adopts and the tools he buys represent a conscious sublimation of the ease and luxury enjoyed by his landed, slaveowning ancestors; but on a broader and more significant scale, his new asceticism—his *askesis*—attempts a selfish isolation from society in general. This isolation approaches solipsism because his Christ-posture betrays him as no longer content merely to deny his birthright and tainted legacy; rather he yearns again to attain the self-created ideal he had enjoyed as a young hunter in the big woods before the fall of Old Ben and Sam. In terms more specific to the anxiety of influence, his design is no longer simply to negate influence, but instead to become an influence. In so doing, he yields up his common humanity to such a degree that making love with his wife—surrendering his virginity at last—becomes a struggle to which he reluctantly succumbs only because he desires a son. His only available approach to self-creation is fatherhood, yet this fulfillment he is never to achieve.

Part five of "The Bear" is Isaac's *apophrades*. Everything appears much as it had at the beginning of the story, though now we are conscious that the timber rights to the land have been sold and that, after this final hunting trip, Isaac would not return again. Here he attempts to shed the growing solitude of *askesis*, the solitude which at eighteen years he had not yet pledged but which the events of his sixteenth year had already decided for him. He opens himself once more in the big woods to the influence of his precursors, both mythical and genealogical, and finds that the latter has overwhelmed the former. Symbol of his fallen ancestries, the train still "resembled a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds" (318), but it had now "brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill" (321). Imaged as a
serpent, the train here forecasts the fall of the belated wilderness and of the vestigial myth of nature. Isaac’s mythical precursors, Sam Fathers and Old Ben, are rendered impotent and thus cannot return to him; he must return to them, to their graves. When he does, he is confronted by a huge rattlesnake, which many critics have mistaken for a symbol of the wilderness because he addresses it “Chief...Grandfather” (330), as Sam had addressed the great buck in “The Old People.” Through metalepsis the snake comes instead to represent the train, which, by means of its association with the fallen world, in turn conjures his Grandfather Carothers, whom he is in fact addressing. The deadly snake, then, may be seen as having diminished the timeless and regenerative world of natural myth by encroaching upon the burial plot. Isaac’s vision of Boon beneath the tree full of squirrels enforces this reading; Boon’s mad attempt to possess the squirrels is in degenerative contrast to the incident twenty years before when he had sat beneath the treed bear “all that night to keep anybody from shooting it” (319), so that it could escape to safety the next day.

The return of the dead to Isaac is also a return of the dead James Joyce to Faulkner. The Christian symbology of the conclusion, as well as Isaac’s adoption of a Christ-posture, represents a renewed influx of style and theme which had been so central to the earlier Portrait. The parallels are remarkable. Isaac chooses for himself a vocation as a carpenter because Christ too had been one, whereas Stephen in the parallel chapter rejects a vocation of priesthood, in turn rejecting Christianity. While Stephen’s affirmative decision comes as an epiphany gained from the sudden, imagistic vision of the girl on the beach, Isaac’s negation emerges from his poring over old plantation ledgers and from the exhaustive midnight conversation with his cousin. Each in his own way declares a refusal to follow his ancestry, though Stephen quotes the non serviam of Lucifer. More similar is the development of personal philosophies that each young man broods over and expounds at length, Stephen’s largely aesthetic, Isaac’s historical and moralistic. Finally, Isaac’s “Chief...Grandfather” salute appears as an ironic echo of Stephen’s journal entry which concludes the Portrait: “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.”

The Bildungsroman has been a popular vehicle for twentieth-century fiction writers. If Bloom’s theory is correct that the more historically belated a writer is, the greater becomes his struggle to attain originality, then twentieth-century literature would lend itself
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best to antithetical criticism. A Map of Misreading provides some fresh insights to the critical problems associated with “The Bear;” and the striking parallels of plot between the two narratives, along with recent biographical findings, appear to affirm the theories advanced in The Anxiety of Influence.

NOTES


2 Ibid., pp. 132-133. Brooks apparently is the first writer to have noticed in Faulkner’s second novel, Mosquitoes (1927), the brief phrase “yet weary too of ardent ways,” which “represents a very slight reworking of the first line of the villanelle composed by Stephen Dedalus in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.”


4 Ibid., p. 53.

5 Ibid., p. 280—syntax distorted there.


9 Ibid., p. 27.

10 Faulkner at Nagano: “The names I mentioned yesterday [Anderson and Dreiser] were the names of the men who I think influenced me. When I read Joyce and Proust it is possible that my career as a writer was already fixed, so that there was no chance for it to be influenced other than in the tricks of the trade” (44). “I meant only that I had named the ones which I felt were my own masters, that had influenced me” (45).


13 My text here is the Random House reprint of its original 1942 edition.
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of Go Down, Moses.

14 I use these terms as Bloom uses them: *clinamen* stands for artistic misprision and alteration; *tessera* is completion and antithesis; *kenosis* involves an ebbing, emptying, or diminishing; *daemonization* is the establishment of a personal counter-sublime; and *apophrades* is a reinfusion of the precursor’s influence, a return of the dead.
EXCHANGE ECONOMY IN HENRY JAMES'S
THE AWKWARD AGE

PEGGY McCORMACK
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, NEW ORLEANS

A review of scholarship on The Awkward Age shows that critics have followed James's own lead in the preface, wherein he calls attention to the novel's "dramatic" form. This term supposedly explains a story dominated by bewilderingly elliptical conversations from which even the most patient readers have difficulty extracting clear meaning. We are additionally confounded by a shyly self-effacing narrator who strikes a pose of confusion regarding the action analogous to the reader's difficulty. Addressing this difficulty, Todorov argues that it is not easy to answer the simple question of what The Awkward Age is about. Todorov notes that we feel "an uncertainty about the very meaning of words" in the story which is like the "uncertainty a foreigner would naturally feel whose knowledge of the language was imperfect" (p. 351). But since there is no foreign language spoken in The Awkward Age, the reader comes to feel that "it is not the vocabulary that one is ignorant of but the referent[s] of the vocabulary used by the conversants" (p. 352). Todorov believes "that the characters themselves seem to have just as much trouble understanding as [the reader] does," which explains why characters repeatedly ask one another, "What do you mean?" (p. 351). Their questions may be taken as a guide for the reader who also struggles to decipher meaning from the conversations. The characters' questions to one another cue the reader to the problem of whether determinate meaning is possible from the text itself: "It is, therefore, the act of interpretation which gives rise to the symbolism of the text—the answer which creates the question. This much understood, one must still identify the hidden meaning whose existence has been recognized" (p. 358). But in detecting the determinate or "hidden meaning," we discover what Todorov elsewhere identifies as a central tenet of James's fiction: that hidden meaning can never be known. As he states in "The Secret of Narrative," "Henry James's secret...resides precisely in the existence of...an absent and absolute cause....This secret is by definition inviolable, for it consists in its own existence." For Todorov, then, The Awkward Age, like James's other fictions, never yields up its secret meaning, for to do so would violate its nature as a text whose purpose
is indeterminacy. As Mrs. Brooks says, "Explanations, after all, spoil things" (p. 198). Todorov also comments: "The reader is therefore more than ever involved in the construction of the fiction, and yet he discovers in the course of the project that his construction cannot be completed" ("Verbal Age," p. 369). In sum, Todorov concludes that The Awkward Age "is one of the most important novels of our time" because of its "perfect fusion of form and content;" it is "an oblique book about obliquity" ("Verbal Age," p. 371). While Todorov does not use Derridean terminology, his essay suggests that he sees The Awkward Age as a meditation on language's self-reflexivity, a literary text that deconstructs itself. James "writes" a novel in which he creates the illusion of "speech," but since this fictive speech so often seems undecidable to the other characters in the novel, James seems to be anticipating Derrida's argument that speech does not have a privileged status in relation to writing, that speech is in fact a kind of writing in that it too is subject to the problematics of absence and undecidability.

Thus, Todorov's insight into the novel's obliquity, deriving from the reader's confusion about the referents of the conversations, leads him to conclude that there is no determinacy in this language. As in the characters' own efforts to complete the meanings of one another's speech, the reader's possible interpretations seem endless. Although Todorov correctly points to the theme of meaning and interpretation in the novel, the language within the novel and subsequently the novel itself do not conform to Todorov's open and indeterminate reading. The characters do draw conclusions about the meaning of the conversations, and their actions are manifestations of their referential decisions in this regard. Since the characters represent readers as interpreters, their determination of meaning should inspire our own ability to determine meaning from James's text. Thus, while the text is fluid, it is nonetheless decipherable. It is precisely at this level of a decipherable code that I wish to study The Awkward Age. Here, as in many James fictions, encoded language, particularly economic language, provides a veiled window onto an otherwise-hidden exchange system which prescribes all characters' behavior.

Consistently, James's novels depict characters attempting to create demand for the assets they possess, whether these are as concrete as physical attractiveness or wealth or as abstract as culture or title. These characters seek to trade or to sell their assets to another member of this society who possesses an equivalent or even more
marketable set of qualities. In other words, they participate in an economic exchange system in which relationships are based on the transactions of human attributes as commodities.

While exchange of some kind is a universal feature of social interaction, as game theorists have argued,⁴ there are three features which define the particular language of exchange in James's fiction. First, metaphor is used to encode or hide the exchange system from non-initiates. Here, just as in any internally coherent semiotic system, from Christ's use of parable in the Gospels to Joyce's web of allusions to *The Odyssey* in *Ulysses*, the encoding process excludes outsiders from understanding while facilitating communication among insiders who share a set of interpretive strategies and thus constitute a community of interpretation.⁵ While Todorov may attempt to maintain the openness or indeterminacy of written discourse through ingenious interpretation, James demonstrates that, within the local confines of a cohesive community, textual meaning is stable and determinate, however problematical it may seem at first to the outsider. Of course the power of a given community to stabilize and enforce the meanings of its discourse can erode, and this is precisely what happens in *The Awkward Age* when Mrs. Brook attempts but fails to manipulate the exchange code for her personal ends. Second, this verbal currency becomes the dominant vehicle through which the members of this society view one another. Thus, the repeated use of economic language to describe relationships inevitably reduces all human qualities to their mere economic utility. And finally, the structuring aspect inherent in the language of economic exchange governs behavior, constituting as it does a set of rules that allows certain moves while ruling out others.

James's attitude toward this exchange system as an undesirable given of society is inferrable from the nature of the protagonist's encounter with it. Protagonists, initially outsiders, enter this society understanding neither the existence of this system nor the linguistic code by which its exchanges are covertly transacted. In fact, many of the examples Todorov cites as he argues the indeterminacy of language in *The Awkward Age* are moments in which Longdon, the outsider, expresses his confusion concerning the codes of the interpretive community dominated by Mrs. Brook. Todorov fails to note that, as the encounters between Longdon and the Londoners continue, the intended meanings of speakers emerge with increasing clarity. As we shall see, there is a moment when the full implications of Mrs. Brook's
manipulation of the economic code become clear, and this revelation is the climactic moment of the novel. Initially, however, Longdon enters London much as the reader enters the text; both are confused about the codes in place, but both become progressively acclimated until the illusion of indeterminacy dissolves.

Typically, in James, protagonists such as Longdon use the same economic metaphors as do the members of the exchange system, but the protagonist uses these as metaphor, as a linguistic equivalent for another concept, while the insiders of the exchange system literalize the metaphors with which they describe and thereby delimit one another's complexity. For example, in *The Awkward Age*, the Duchess anatomizes Mitchy in economic metaphors. She describes him as "forty thousand a year, an excellent idea of how to take care of it and a good disposition" (p. 63). That she values Mitchy only for his economic utility is proven by her ruthless efforts to marry him to Aggie, despite the prospect of their future unhappiness since he loves Nanda. That is, she not only describes him in these forms, but this is also her dominant mode of perceiving him. Her view is analogous to the literal-minded reader who wishes to reduce a text to one meaning and thereby reduce that text to a commodity, to be consumed once and then discarded.

This literalized use of economic metaphor is central to the plots of James's fictions, which grow out of the conflict between the protagonist's and society's differing uses of the same terms and which are propelled toward the protagonist's discovery of this semiotic and moral gulf between him and her and his or her community. Economic language, then, is not simply a stylistic quirk of James's prose; rather, it is integral to his tragic vision. In his stories, so many human relationships fail precisely because they are defined by economic discourse. With the exception of *The Golden Bowl*, no protagonist successfully "intermarries" with a member of the exchange system. And within the exchange system, financially successful relationships also fail because human feelings have been excluded from the bases of these partnerships. But these are results of what *is* present in the economic code rather than the consequences of indeterminacy.

What threatens James's protagonists, then, is the rigid *determinacy* of the economic encoding process governing human relationships. Thus, the indeterminacy which Todorov points to as the theme of James's fiction reflects *only* a partial explanation of the novelist's work. While Todorov suggests that the absent cause in James's fiction
can never be made present through analysis, I suggest that when encoded economic language is literalized consistently by a fictional society, the protagonist’s discovery of this fixed meaning “names” a presence of such venality that, as a result, the protagonist is henceforth radically alienated from his society. As John C. Rowe argues, in “The Authority of the Sign in Henry James’s The Sacred Fount,” the “form of the Jamesian novel [examines] the tensive relationship between [the protagonist’s] desire for originality and [the author’s] reflection on those social and linguistic constraints frustrating that desire.”

To turn then to The Awkward Age, even the most devoted James scholars may not be able to bring the plot of this middle-period novel (1898) to mind. Briefly, two women, Mrs. Brookenham (Mrs. Brook) and the Duchess, are each responsible for a young woman of marriageable and, hence, the awkward age: Mrs. Brook’s daughter, Nanda, and the Duchess’ niece, Aggie. Each woman wants her charge to marry the wealthy Michett ( Mitchy). Mitchy loves Mrs. Brook’s daughter, Nanda, but the girl refuses his marriage proposals because she loves, albeit hopelessly, handsome, young Vanderbank. Her love is hopeless because Van prefers an intellectual, emotionally superficial, pseudosexual relationship with Nanda’s mother, Mrs. Brook. Mr. Longdon, the catalyst in the plot, re-enters London after thirty years in the countryside to meet the family of the only woman he ever loved—Mrs. Brook’s mother. Nanda, coincidentally, is an exact duplicate physically, if not psychologically, of her grandmother. Longdon, moved by Nanda’s resemblance to his dead love and by the Duchess’ suggestion that he provide Nanda with a dowry, offers Van a sizable income to marry Nanda.

Structurally, Mrs. Brook dominates the first half of the novel, while Nanda emerges in the second half to turn the novel’s gameplaying from strictly economic ends to more humane goals. The first half resembles an agon between the Duchess and Mrs. Brook for a wealthy son-in-law, thus making this section more typical of the “social, realistic novel about love and money, and therefore about marriage” (“Verbal Age,” p. 369). This agon is first dominated by the Duchess’ opening move: manipulating Longdon into doting on Nanda as an inducement for Van to propose to her. The Duchess’ motive is, of course, to leave Aggie as the only remaining available female to whom Mitchy can propose. The Duchess’ gambit, however, is countered in the second part of the agon by Mrs. Brook’s powerful double thrust:
first, she tells Mitchy that Longdon has offered Van money to marry Nanda, thus humiliating Van into rejecting Longdon’s offer; second, she impels Longdon to remove Nanda from her mother’s corrupt and uncaring society by her crude behavior at Tishy Grendon’s party (p. 439). In the last half of the novel, Nanda dominates the action by trying to hold together her elders’ society with an adhesive other than a common interest in sex or money. Nanda understands that her mother’s society operates upon the encoded economic language of exchange. She learns how to manipulate this language to her own ends by witnessing the Duchess and her mother commit the same error: forgetting that, as members of a system, they are manipulated by it far more than they can control the system. Into the power vacuum created by the two women’s losses enters Nanda, with her own ideas of how to play this game. She learns to exert the same verbal power over Van, Mitchy, and Longdon by learning to use the same encoded economic language of her mother and the Duchess, but Nanda transforms the game’s meretricious goals into compassionate, non-sexual, non-economic exchanges with these three men.

Detailed analysis of the game-playing logically begins with the Duchess, a powerful but frequently unnoticed creator of plot events. She makes the first move in the marriage-brokerage game played with Mrs. Brook, and also the Duchess’ constant and blatant literalization of economic metaphors makes her language representative of the values of the exchange system, a society in which “the relative values of usage are disguised as absolute laws of judgment” (Rowe, p. 231). Hence, she epitomizes the cunning survivalist tactics of this society. She first announces her intentions to “divert the stream of Mr. Mitchett’s wealth” unless Mrs. Brook claims a prior interest in Mitchy for Nanda (p. 64). The Duchess’ apparently free gift of a first chance at Mitchy to Mrs. Brook is, in fact, a strategy by which she covertly gains what she really wants—Mrs. Brook’s proud silence because she will never admit to an economic interest in him for Nanda. In contrast, the Duchess frankly acknowledges her own unscrupulous plans for Aggie:

“T’ve got Aggie’s little fortune in an old stocking and I count it over every night. If you’ve no old stocking for Nanda there are worse fates than shoemakers [Mitchy] and grasshoppers. Even with one, you know, I don’t at all say that I should sniff at poor Mitchy. We must take what we can get and I shall be the first to take it.” (p. 62, italics mine)
The Duchess’ initiation of the game’s first move is clear to both women who “tacitly...exchanged” a non-verbal but unmistakable “further stroke of intercourse” that the hunt for Mitchy has begun (pp. 64-65).

But the Duchess’ more significant move occurs with Longdon, at his country home, Mertle. In this conversation, her language is that of a chess player who attempts to move characters like pieces on a board, rearranging their lives until their relationships to her and Aggie conform to her mental diagram of how they should fit into society. She will “give” Longdon to Aggie as a philanthropic godfather (p. 234); so also, she needs to “place” literally Mitchy next to Aggie so that he will remain metaphorically by her side in marriage (p. 236).

The Duchess, as in her apparently generous offer to Mrs. Brook of the first crack at Mitchy, claims here with Longdon only to be interested in Nanda’s welfare. She reasons that, in the risky “business” of marriage, mothers must “move fast,” speculate wisely, and win a monied male before their daughters lose their assets of beauty or suspect the marital doom to which their mothers sell them:

“But we must move fast...If Nanda doesn’t get a husband early in the business—...she won't get one late—she won't get one at all.
One, I mean, of the kind she’ll take. She’ll have been in it over-long for their taste...in the air they themselves have infected for her.”
(p. 258)

She anatomizes Van’s assets on the marriage market just as she previously estimated Mitchy’s: he is handsome, entertaining and has only one correctable social handicap—poverty. Despite Longdon’s shocked response to the Duchess’ suggestion, “What it comes to then, the idea you’re so good as to put before me, is to bribe him to take her?” (p. 251), she is non-plussed, replying that she suspects him of having already thought of the same idea (p. 251) and that she is ready to “put [her] cards on the table” (p. 247) to win Mitchy for Aggie.

While the Duchess may be ready to lay her cards on the table in the marriage game, she feels exactly the opposite about her sexual games; specifically, she is secretive about her affair with Lord Pether-ton even though everyone in their circle is aware of the liaison (p. 64). Ironically, the economic victory that her arrangement of Aggie and Mitchy’s marriage signifies is simultaneously her own sexual loss when Aggie, once initiated by marriage into this society’s sexual/economic values, takes Pether-ton, her aunt’s lover, for her own:
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"But poor Jane —...She took her stand so on having with Petherton's aid formed Aggie for a femme charmante—!" "That it's too late to cry out that Petherton's aid can now be dispensed with? Do you mean then that he is such a brute that after all Mitchy has done for him—?" "I think him quite capable of considering with a magnificent insolence of selfishness that what Mitchy has most done will have been to make Aggie accessible in a way that—for decency and delicacy of course, things on which Petherton highly prides himself—she could naturally not be as a girl. Her marriage has simplified it." (p. 442)

Thus, the Duchess' pyrrhic economic victory perfectly realizes a subplot representative of the competent, cunning players of the exchange system, the novel's largest circle of characters including the Duchess, Aggie, Petherton, the Cashmores and Harold Brookenham. This group assumes that marital and sexual happiness are mutually exclusive goals. Marriage is a serious game because it involves money; sex is an entertaining but not always profitable one, given its social and emotional risks. In both arenas, the cunning players' social language becomes more conventional in direct proportion to the degree of their illicit sexuality, hiding behind a mask of clichéd language which has no direct reference to people's actual behavior. As the Duchess sums up Carrie Donner's error regarding the public character of her adultery: "It's only in this country that a woman is both so shocking and so shaky...If she doesn't know how to be good" — "Let her at least know how to be bad?" (pp. 99-100). Indiscrétion, then, for these competent, cunning players, refers not to any specific sexual behavior, but rather to the violation of their cardinal rule to protect themselves by never verbally exposing one another's venality. Their decorous, conventional language is analogous to their literalized use of economic metaphors in that both codes allow their users to deceive themselves about their venal actions. To employ the same economic metaphor, they cannot "afford" to recognize the brutal human consequences that their linguistic misusage both creates and signifies. Hence, these characters' "failure" grows from their "lack [of] imaginative powers [or moral insight] to recognize the conventionality [that is, the immorality] of their lives" (Rowe, p. 225).

The second move in the marriage-market competition is made by Mrs. Brook in response to the Duchess's initial gambit. Mrs. Brook, Van, and Mitchy form a smaller, inner circle which shares the larger circle's assumption that money is a necessary condition for happiness in this society. See, for example, Mrs. Brook's declaration that a
person’s wealth is “the very first thing I get my impression of” (p. 179). However, this trio abstains from the outer circle’s recreational use of sex. Instead, for recreation, they play verbal games for their aesthetic pleasure. The various games of the outer circle are the subjects of this inner group’s verbal contests; the goal of the conversations is to remain covert about the sexual and economic subject of these games while still predicting an affair’s outcome. Todorov, undercuts his argument about language’s indeterminacy, notes that Mrs. Brook’s circle “not only understands everything that is said but also permits anything to be said....the two fundamental and complementary rules which regulate the use of language in this salon are: one may say anything and one must never say anything directly” (“Verbal Age,” p. 363). Thus, this group’s winning conversations are its most metaphorical, elliptical and ambiguous. Consequently, such conversations prove the most difficult to analyze. The characters “try to penetrate words, to get behind them, to seize the truth; but on the other hand the possible failure of this quest is as if neutralized by the pleasure they take in not saying the truth—in condemning it forever to uncertainty” (“Verbal Age,” p. 363). In discussing the reliance of discourse on absence, Derrida somewhat fancifully compares discourse to autoeroticism, both dependent on the absence of an object.7 If truth is assumed to be the object of this inner circle’s conversation, pleasure derives not from evoking truth’s presence but in prolonging its absence, ostensibly increasing their desire for its presence by perversely never fulfilling that desire. The pleasure these characters take in discussing the sexuality absent from their own lives but presumably present elsewhere seems, then, to have a proto-Derridean quality to it. But as Todorov himself stated, Mrs. Brook’s circle “understands everything that is said;” thus, the elliptical and indirect conversations of these people do not support a thesis concerning the indecipherability of language in this novel.

Through the control of language, augmented by her personal beauty, Mrs. Brook competes with the Duchess in the marriage market. However, Mrs. Brook handicaps herself from blocking the Duchess by her own rule of public silence regarding her sexual and economic goals. She pretends to everyone but her family and Van that she is not interested in either Mitchy’s or Longdon’s money for Nanda (see her contrasting public and private attitudes toward Longdon’s money for Nanda, pp. 179-192). In addition, she pretends to everyone, including Van, that she is not blocking his marriage to Nanda pre-
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...what stupefies me a little," Vanderbank continued, "is the extraordinary critical freedom—or we may call it if we like the high intellectual detachment—with which we discuss a question touching you, dear Mrs. Brook, so nearly engaging to your most sacred sentiments. What are we playing with, after all, but the idea of Nanda’s happiness?” (p. 306, italics mine)

Thus, Mrs. Brook’s unrestrained “freedom” to discuss explicitly Van’s economic advantage in marrying Nanda is ironically the moment in which her speech is the least free in the sense of having any freemay of associative meaning. She has been too free in her choice of subjects and not sufficiently indeterminate about her meaning in regard to her subject.

Not only does her tactic cost Mrs. Brook an emotional loss; it fails to secure her economic goal as well. She prevents Van from proposing to Nanda, but she never anticipates Nanda’s subsequent rejection of Mitchy precisely because he does love her after her mother has taught her that she is unloveable. As Nanda describes her feeling to Mitchy, “there’s a kind of delicacy you haven’t got...The kind that would make me painful to you...my situation, my exposure—all the results of them...
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I show” (pp. 357-358). Secondly, Mrs. Brook does not anticipate Van’s revulsion towards her willingness here to scrap Nanda’s future in order to save Van for herself. Finally, when she forces Longdon into taking Nanda off her hands by behaving cruelly at Tishy Grendon’s party, she amply demonstrates the corruption from which Longdon should rescue her daughter now that Van will not marry her out of it. But when she reveals to Longdon her monde’s mercenary, sterile “self-consciousness” (p. 302), she forces Van to confront it as well. So then, just as the Duchess represents the exchange system’s venality, Mrs. Brook symbolizes her group’s excessive cleverness which renders its members emotionally impotent. Her wit is a fatal kind of potency which she exerts in a milieu where female game-playing finds no other arena than the drawing room and its marriage-market bargaining. Mrs. Brook’s “free” speech has always been in the service of control and social manipulation. Here, she blindly assumes that she can remain “free” of the explicitly economic implications of her speech. Ironically, her unencoded economic speech creates structures that in turn limit her emotional options, just as each move in a chess game limits as well as creates options.

As speaker, Mrs. Brook fails to see herself as an object also controlled by the discourse she and those around her perpetuate. Whether Mrs. Brook’s wit is the cause or the effect of her stunted emotions is impossible to determine here. In either case, her coldness while in power is particularly evident in comparison with her daughter’s subsequent generosity when Nanda replaces her mother as a verbal power broker. Thus, the first half of the novel concludes with Mrs. Brook losing her agon with the Duchess in the marriage market. She fails to assess the reflexive effects of her economic discourse, which unexpectedly and ironically limit her options. Furthermore, each woman also loses her lover in trying to secure her daughter’s marriage. In the novel’s remaining half, Mrs. Brook’s diminished influence over Van, Mitchy, and Longdon and Nanda’s increasing verbal power over these same three men signify the costly loss associated with transgressing the rules of this linguistic game.

Nanda is absent from much of the first half of the novel, and James uses her introduction to Longdon at Van’s to demonstrate how “extraordinarily simple” she is initially (p. 137). In this scene, Longdon, Van, and the reader understand that Mrs. Brook has sent Nanda to Longdon to secure the family’s financial future. But Nanda so openly repeats her mother’s directions to make Longdon like her that
she unknowingly clears herself of any complicity in her mother's scheme. In addition, the narrator comments throughout this meeting on "her crude young clearness" (p. 148) and a "directness that made her honesty almost violent" (p. 149). Mitchy even questions Nanda's ability to "understand" what Mrs. Brook expects from her daughter's relationship with Longdon, describing the girl's literalness as a "tragic" lack of "a sense of humor" (p. 143). Her present defect is a want of irony or ability to speak in and understand the multiple levels of meaning in her elders' conversations. Thus, we accept her complete indifference to Longdon's money in asking him "Do you like me?" here (p. 151). Guilelessly unaware of her mother's motives, she pursues Longdon to fulfill her own emotional needs. Sensing his hesitation to trust her, she guesses that "You're not sure how much I shall understand" (p. 153). She predicts her future role in the novel by assuring him that "I shall understand...more, perhaps, than you think...I promise to understand" (p. 153).

Nanda's reappearance in Book Six sharply distinguishes her present verbal dexterity from her previous simplicity. With her mother again, after a long stay at Longdon's country home, Beecles, Nanda's acquired subtlety is the fruition of her earlier promise to Longdon "to understand" (p. 153). She is now doubly dangerous to her mother's society: she is still unafraid to tell the truth because she seeks neither the sexual nor economic powers which motivate her mother and the Duchess; in addition, she now discerns irony in others' conversations and speaks ironically when she wishes to combat their sexual economics. For example, she apprehends and immediately rejects her mother's "vulgar" (p. 323) mercenary interest in Nanda's stay at Longdon's. While Mrs. Brook gnaws over her concern to provide "money, money, money" (p. 326) for the family's ever-mounting needs, Nanda lightly recounts the economic abundance she enjoyed at Longdon's, completely indifferent to his money as a measurement of her pleasure in his friendship. Delicately, she tries to show her mother how important Longdon's acceptance, rather than his money, is to her:

A supposititious spectator would certainly on this have imagined in the girl's face the delicate dawn of a sense that her mother had suddenly become vulgar, together with a general consciousness that the way to meet vulgarity was always to be frank and simple and above all to ignore. "He makes one enjoy being liked so much—liked better, I do think, than I've ever been liked by
Thus, Nanda politely rejects Mrs. Brook’s notion that she owes it to her family to “work” (p. 329) Longdon, even in the light of her mother’s tactless attention to Nanda’s inability to procure a wealthy husband. Sadly, Nanda’s counter offer to her mother—that at least she will no longer be financially dependent upon them—does not evoke relief in Mrs. Brook, but rather an envious resentment that Nanda will escape the financial necessity to sell herself sexually to which all of the novel’s other female characters have submitted: “Mrs. Brook spoke as with a small sharpness...produced by the sight of a freedom in her daughter’s life that suddenly loomed larger than any freedom in her own” (pp. 327-328). For while Nanda will have to sacrifice sexual fulfillment in her union with Longdon, Mrs. Brook has not found that either. Furthermore, Nanda gains emotional and financial security while her mother festers in a loveless, bourgeois marriage.

Subsequent witnesses of Nanda’s increased verbal power and her mother’s loss of the same are Van and Mitchy, who talk first with the mother, then the daughter in the final chapters of the novel. In these conversations, James uses the “characters...[as] inventions...to expose the grammar of society” (Rowe, p. 228), a grammar that Nanda transforms by effectively reversing positions with her mother. Mrs. Brook has become desperately and tastelessly explicit about her greed for Longdon’s money. Both Van and Mitchy, just as Nanda in the previous conversation, reject her no longer subtly encoded economic language. In contrast, the once “extraordinarily simple” (p. 137) Nanda is now extraordinarily subtle in reworking her mother’s conversation, turning its previously economically-oriented signifiers into generous, humane means of communication. In other words, she restores a symbolic or hidden meaning to her mother’s economic language, but substitutes a non-economic series of referents for that same language.

In Van’s final talk with Mrs. Brook, he coldly indicates that he cannot help but “understand now” that her garish demand to have Nanda back from Longdon at Tishy Grendon’s party was, in fact, a deliberate action so coarsely performed that Longdon would be impelled to take Nanda away forever. Van describes Mrs. Brook’s behavior at that party as a “smash,” a “wonderful performance” in which she smashed the temple to taste she once shared with Van and Mitchy (p. 439). He leaves her, refusing to commemorate their circle’s “bon temps” by refusing to play their verbal games one last time (p.
As in his revolted response to Mrs. Brook’s exposure of Longdon’s secret offer to Mitchy, here Van emphasizes that his resistance stems from his comprehension of the unmistakable determinacy of her words: “I...didn’t...fully understand what had happened. But I understand now’” [p. 439]. In both cases, what damns her in his eyes is the crude clarity of her language; her desperation drives her to explicitness; consequently, her auditors can no longer avoid witnessing her greed. Her determinacy here painfully contrasts with her once rich manipulation of social language and with Nanda’s present adaptation of that same language.

Just as Nanda and Van’s withdrawals from Mrs. Brook indicate her loss of power, so also Mitchy’s nervous, evasive behavior in his last scene with her records the change in the social barometer toward her (pp. 466-474). In response to Mitchy, Mrs. Brook’s actions further manifest her shrinking influence: she continues to feign ignorance of her desire to palm Nanda off on Longdon at Tishy Grendon’s (p. 466); she is not aware that Van, Mitchy, and Longdon all seek out Nanda now (p. 450); and as a result, she makes inaccurate predictions about these characters’ behavior (p. 462). Clearly, she is no longer the powerful figure in her monde who “strokes her chin and prescribes advice” (p. 104) to the lovesick that she once was in this Jamesian transmogrification of a courtly love counsellor.9 We last see her alone in her downstairs parlor, confused and frustrated by her inability to draw any circle of admirers around her while upstairs her daughter is sought out by all three men in the same way but for different reasons than those which once drew them to Mrs. Brook (p. 474).

In contrast to her mother, Nanda demonstrates her deepening complexity through an ability to use the encoded economic language of her mother’s world without letting that language reduce human worth to monetary value. For example, when Van suggests about her friendship with Longdon that she has “been thinking of [herself]...as a mere clerk at a salary, and [she] now find[s] that [she’s] a partner and [has] a share in the concern” (p. 334), she quickly cautions him that this economic explanation is only an analogy for the relationship: “It seems to be something like that” (p. 334, italics mine). Further, she reminds him that her contribution to the friendship has no worth except on an emotional level; hence, his economic metaphor breaks down: “But doesn’t a partner put in something? What have I put in?” (p. 334). As if to make clear to Van that she is now aware of the subtle linguistic level at which this society’s values are evident, she
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cautions him that “I’m not struck only with what I’m talked to about. I don’t know...only what people tell me” (p. 335). To demonstrate her understanding, she directly acknowledges the economic exchange basis on which this world functions and the servile role her family plays within it: “Aren’t we a lovely family? ...We seem to be all living more or less on other people, all immensely ‘beholden’ ” (p. 346). With this awkward recognition comes her self-definition as opposed to that system: ‘‘Well’—she pulled herself up—‘I’m not in that at any rate’” (p. 346). Thus, Nanda knows of the system but wishes to remain outside of it unless she can redefine it. She first attempts a redefinition by pushing Mitchy into marriage with Aggie to “keep her...from becoming like the Duchess” (p. 355) and because Aggie will “save” Mitchy (p. 362) from some undetermined fate as well. Nanda’s intrusion here is in contrast to her mother and the Duchess’ self-interested attempts to maneuver Mitchy into marriage for purely selfish reasons because of Nanda’s generous but naive motive to bring together two people whom she loves.

Of course, Aggie’s marriage, instead of saving her, makes her more like the Duchess by allowing her to steal the Duchess’ lover, Petherton, for her own. As a result of this disaster, Nanda defines herself even further in opposition to the sexual economics of her society and particularly against their desire to control as the destructive element in their relationships. As a case in point, Nanda assesses Van’s failure to marry her as the result of Mrs. Brook’s effort to manipulate him: “...it was when you were most controlled —... That we were most detrimental” (pp. 338-339, italics mine). She translates this effort to control into a lack of free play, just as when Mrs. Brook exposed Longdon’s offer of money for Van to marry Nanda, next when she demanded that Nanda “work” Longdon for money for the family, and finally when she forced Longdon to take Nanda away forever by acting so garishly at Tishy Grendon’s party. So, in Nanda’s final conversations with Van, Mitchy, and Longdon, her language contains economic metaphors, but she uses them as metaphor to effect the non-economic exchanges by which she hopes to heal the wounds her mother’s determinacy has gashed into this community.

In Nanda’s talk with Van, which directly follows his confrontation with Mrs. Brook, Nanda offers him a surprising exchange, neither sexual nor explicitly economic, which eases his strained relations with both her and her mother. She reverses her typical posture with him from that of eager listener hoping for a long-awaited pro-
posal to that of a supplicant toward whom he can appear generous in granting her a simple favor—to remain kind to her mother. What distinguishes Nanda’s “bargain” (p. 513) from all others in the novel, except Longdon’s, is her lack of self-interest, her wish not to control others’ behavior, and her humility while repairing damage done by values alien to her own. She has inaugurated a new meaning to her mother’s discourse:

Where indeed could he have supposed she wanted to come out, and what that she could ever do for him would really be so beautiful as this present chance to smooth his confusion and add as much as possible from his having dealt with a difficult hour in a gallant and delicate way? To force upon him an awkwardness was like forcing a disfigurement or a hurt, so that at the end of a minute, during which the expression of her face became a kind of uplifted view of her opportunity, she arrived at the appearance of having changed places with him and of their being together precisely in order that he—not she—should be let down easily. (p. 500-501, italics mine)

She offers to influence Longdon favorably towards him which, in turn, so moves Van that he agrees to stay by Mrs. Brook: “‘Well, let us call it a bargain. I look after your mother—’ ‘And I—?’ Nanda had had to wait again. ‘Look after my good name’ ” (p. 513, italics mine).

As with Van, Nanda offers Mitchy an exchange which is neither sexual nor economic. We see again that her values, unlike her mother’s, are not materialistic, but are nonetheless far more valuable to Mitchy. She agrees never to “abandon” (p. 526) him, thus granting him his wish which is, pathetically, the opposite of the exchange she enacts with Van wherein Van never has to commit himself to her. In response, Mitchy emphasizes the salvific effect which the ritual language of Nanda’s friendship performs for him and for all characters who recognize the value of human exchange based upon motives other than greed:

“I shan’t abandon you.” He stopped short. “Ah, that’s what I wanted from you in so many clearcut golden words—though I won’t in the least of course pretend that I’ve felt I literally need it. I don’t literally need the big turquoise in my neck-tie; which incidentally means by the way, that if you should admire it you’re quite welcome to it. Such words—that’s my point—are like such jewels: the pride, you see, of one’s heart. They’re mere vanity, but they help along.” (p. 526, italics mine)

It is as if he has only her words and, thus, has no other way of reifying
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them except by analogizing Nanda’s precious loyalty, the signified of his words, with his big, turquoise jewel, an obviously valuable economic signifier. Finally, Mitchy articulates the transformed nature of the final exchanges made in the novel as the result of the shift from Mrs. Brook to Nanda as the creator of these exchanges. His expression is closely akin to his speech on the value of ritual language in friendship quoted above. Human needs remain the same, but these needs can be either starved or nourished by the mercenary or loving quality of the necessary exchanges made among characters in society:

“You may remind me of Mrs. Brook’s contention that if she did in her time keep something of a saloon, the saloon is now in consequence of events, but a collection of fortuitous atoms; but that, my dear Nanda, will become nonetheless, to your clearer sense, but a pious echo of her momentary modesty or—call it at worst—her momentary despair. The generations will come and go, and the personnel, as the newspapers say, of the saloon will shift and change, but the institution itself, as resting on a deep human need, has a long course yet to run and good work yet to go.” (p. 522-523, italics mine)

Thus, Nanda’s own verbal exchanges restore the positive connotation to the free play of language and action that her mother’s “saloon” once symbolized and which “remains a deep human need.” In contrast to the Duchess and her mother’s language which becomes increasingly explicit as their expectations become more self-interested, Nanda’s language becomes increasingly metaphorical as she relinquishes any expectations for herself. Just as the older women’s language loses its free play in proportion to the control they seek over others’ lives, so also Nanda’s language successfully retains this freedom when she employs its ambiguity to fulfill others’ needs rather than her own.

In Nanda’s final exchange with Longdon, she gains a listener, if not a lover, with whom she can test her growing sense of herself. Longdon acquires a companion, a living icon of his unconsummated love, but he must sacrifice his aesthetic wish that the reproduction correspond exactly to the original. However, Nanda’s friendship with Longdon cannot counter her blighted self-concept as lacking the beauty her grandmother possessed and the wit her mother squandered, a permanent handicap acquired while growing up in a sexual/economic exchange system. Nonetheless, Nanda promises never again to leave him in return for his wholehearted acceptance of her as
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she sees herself (p. 541). As a result, Nanda escapes the seemingly inevitable loveless marriage or life alone represented in her parents’ society. She discovers a loving relationship in which human value is not determined by the number of social marbles one can win, but instead by the quality of fair play shown toward others throughout the game. Thus, it is not the elements of play, game, or exchange to which Nanda and Longdon object; rather, it is the society’s refusal to accommodate their demand for fair play among the players which impels them to leave. Like so many unmarried Jamesian protagonists, Nanda’s own exchange is very costly; she escapes marital slavery only by sacrificing the possibility of a passionate, loving relationship.

While this conflict between the protagonist and his society which I have just described in The Awkward Age remains the same at a stylistic level throughout James’s work, its structure undergoes transformations from the early to the middle and finally to the major phase novels. In James’s early fiction, the protagonist makes this linguistic discovery and suffers the consequent moral alienation at the fiction’s conclusion, leaving him completely victimized by society’s exploitation of his ignorance, as in Roderick Hudson, The American, “An International Episode,” and The Portrait of a Lady. For example, Isabel Archer learns that Osmond’s and her own understandings of the freedom which they would have in sharing her money are opposed. While he meant to feel free literally spending her money as he chooses, she understood the term metaphorically in which the actual money would be used to satisfy the aesthetic and moral requirements of her, and as she once thought his to be, rich imagination.

In the middle novels, this discovery occurs earlier and, as a result, the protagonist voluntarily chooses some form of exile, psychological or physical, from his corrupt society in order to avoid the victimization of the early phase, as in the following middle phase novels and stories: The Bostonians, The Princess Casamassima, The Tragic Muse, “The Pupil,” The Spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew, and The Awkward Age in which Nanda exemplifies the difference between these protagonists and their earlier counterparts such as Isabel. Having discovered that the members of her society can only see one another as the economic terms with which they describe themselves, Nanda creates with Longdon an alternative society wherein she is allowed, as Barthes describes it, a “writerly” text to her discourse, unconstrained by literalized economic language.

Finally, the central figures of the major phase represent the com-
pletion of this pattern's development. These figures remain in their societies after discovering the exchange system in the hope of converting at least one member of this society out of his economic motivations. In *The Ambassadors*, Strether tries, although unsuccessfully, to talk Chad out of his preference for his mother's money over Marie de Vionnet's love and is, sadly, much more effective in showing de Vionnet that she has been victimized by her mercenary world. In the process Strether, like Nanda, exchanges an old world for a new, at once losing and gaining. In *The Wings of the Dove*, when Milly Theale leaves Merton Densher the money for which he sought to marry her, she effects the kind of conversion upon Densher which Stretcher failed to achieve with Chad. Finally, Maggie Verver, in *The Golden Bowl*, is the single successful protagonist to detect, negotiate, and manipulate the exchange system without becoming either its victim or hopelessly alienated from her society. Maggie's success in achieving her own non-economic desire lies in her manipulation of the Prince and Charlotte as members of a society who cannot directly confront their economic dependence upon her. Significantly, Maggie does not become a member of this system by her exploitation of its values and tactics. Hence, she is the only outsider to negotiate this system and its encoding process toward her own end: the preservation of her marriage. But even her success must nonetheless be within the economic structure the arbitrariness of which she discovers and reworks. As John Rowe suggests, "All of James's novels seem to demonstrate that the individual is free to the extent that he recognizes his bondage to a language that is never his own" (p. 227). Still, the protagonist struggles against these linguistic boundaries, decoding the "arbitrariness of the sign which is masked by these false authorities" of the exchange society, continually seeking "to discover how he functions in relation to such [social] codes, and how their boundaries may be measured" (Rowe, p. 239).

In sum, then, while the nature of society's corruption remains the same over the entire canon, James's protagonists become modestly more capable of penetrating this system and defending themselves against it. They acquire its economic dialect, but then adapt this corrupt dialect into a mode of non-economically based communication and exchange. But in laying bare one level of meaning and asserting another in its stead, the constancy of encoding is reaffirmed. To equivocate from my original use of "economic," the protagonists retain an "economy" of exchange at the same time that they have
attempted to alter the referents of the economic terms used to operate this exchange system. Nanda, as I hope to have shown, wins one battle for herself; she negotiates several compromises for her mother, but she fails to end the war of distrust waged among the players of sexual and economic exchange in *The Awkward Age* and throughout James’s fiction.

In each novel, James’s protagonist moves from a state of innocence to one of experience as he or she learns the implications of the sexual/economic discourse he or she is forced to encounter. This learning process could not occur if the novels maintained the state of verbal indeterminacy Todorov argued for in “The Verbal Age.” Contemporary criticism has attempted to “save” literature from the fate of our culture’s numerous disposable commodities, and it has attempted to do this by making the text infinitely reproducible; “the writerly text” is something fresh and new each time an act of reading reproduces it. But for this to occur, the language of the text must somehow remain open and indeterminate—a vessel to be filled only by the reader. In imposing this aesthetic upon the novels of the past, we must also take stock of what we might be losing as we “save” them. James creates a society in which human affairs are conducted in a verbal world which is deceptive and problematical, but it is ultimately a world in which people can, if they will, come to know what others mean.

**NOTES**

1 Henry James, *The Awkward Age* (New York, 1908), p. xvi; all subsequent references to the text will be to this, the New York edition.

2 Tzvetan Todorov, “The Verbal Age,” trans. Patricia Martin Gibby, *CritI*, 4 (1977), 351; all subsequent references to this article will be included in the text.

3 Tzvetan Todorov, “The Secret of Narrative,” in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N. Y., 1977), p. 175. All future references to this article will be included in the text.

4 See, for example, *YFS*, 41 (1969), 5-167.


6 John C. Rowe, “The Authority of the Sign in Henry James’s *The Sacred Fount*,” *Criticism*, 19 (1977), 225; all future references to this essay will be included in the text.
After she returns from a three month stay at Beecles, Longdon's country home, Nanda explains to Van that Longdon's "listening" to her has made her feel more important than she has ever known: "Between his patience and my egotism, anything's possible (p. 215). Thus, this is a crucial piece of action which is reported rather than shown. Todorov, however, claims that "no important event takes place in the lapses of time which the book does not recount" ("Verbal Age," p. 367).

Mrs. Brook, as she is described here by the Duchess, becomes a parody of the queen presiding over the love trials within her court, as Andreas Capellanus describes in the late medieval and early Renaissance courtly love tradition: Andreas Capellanus, _The Art of Courtly Love_ (New York, 1941), pp. 32-36.

ALECK MAURY'S TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

JERRY A. HERNDON

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Critics of Caroline Gordon's *Aleck Maury, Sportsman* (1934) have generally agreed that the theme is Aleck's contest with time and death, a contest he carries on through a life-long, passionate commitment to the rituals of hunting and fishing. His quarry is delight, his purpose to forestall mutability by wringing from time's grasp every bright, golden day possible.

But, despite agreement on the novel's theme, the critics have varied widely in their assessment of the ultimate meaning of Maury's life. Louise Cowan finds his pursuit of nature's secrets "foredoomed to failure," and sees his pursuit as "a flight," which ends finally in his "defeat and betrayal" as he finds himself "trapped in nature."\(^1\) William Van O'Connor says that Maury lives a "highly successful life,"\(^2\) and avers that in him "skillful, thoughtful, and sensitive men win at least a temporary victory—all they have ever hoped to win."\(^3\)

Radcliffe Squires characterizes Aleck Maury as a "perfectly happy hero,"\(^4\) while most other critics see tragic implications in his story. Louise Cowan and James E. Rocks, for example, see it as ending in failure. Others, while commenting on the tragic overtones, do not see the novel as unmitigated tragedy. William J. Stuckey, for instance, points out that Maury does recover from his wife's death through his rediscovery of his delight in the natural world. He says the novel "is not a tragedy."\(^5\) Frederick P. W. McDowell comments that, while "there are tragic aspects to Maury's career," there are also "rich fulfillments."\(^6\) He sees the novel as exhibiting a "double-edged view of life as both exhilarating and poignant...."\(^7\)

Critics also tend to divide over the question of whether Aleck Maury's life is properly characterized as "heroic" or as "irresponsible." Mary O'Connor is one of several who takes the heroic view, seeing Maury as an "independent and unconquerable old man."\(^8\) Jane Gibson Brown finds him "a hero only by default," who, though he has achieved "a kind of dignity and discipline," has done so at the cost of "renunciation of his family and community...."\(^9\) Andrew Nelson Lytle agrees that Maury has neglected family responsibilities for his sport, and sees "the death of his wife...[as a] judgment upon...his feckless manhood."\(^10\)
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Andrew Lytle also suggests that Aleck’s “obsessive” commitment to hunting and fishing is a consequence of his sense of dislocation, wrought by the “ruin” of the ante-bellum order:

Behind his pursuit of the arts of the field and stream lies the ruin of the hierarchical values which he might have expected to sustain him. In this society hunting and fishing would have taken their proper place; but because of the ruin, and in his terms this meant a loss of identity...he instinctively turned to the one knowledge and love more nearly a substitute. But the pursuit of his pleasure becomes obsessive, so that in the end it becomes not pursuit but flight....14

In another critical piece, Lytle remarks further on Aleck Maury. He says that Maury “is an exile...[who] has instinctively chosen the one ritual left which can more nearly use all of his resources. Of course it never quite does it. Hunting and fishing had their places in the society that was destroyed. They were not meant to fill out a man’s total occupation.”15

And, Lytle says, Maury, as a “dispossessed” man, “is seeking [a] means of preserving [his] integrity....” In the ante-bellum culture, Maury would have been one of “its ornaments and leaders.”16 Several critics have followed Lytle’s lead. James E. Rocks, for instance, says that Maury “spends a lifetime in search of his rightful position in the agrarian society of the modern South.”17

II

It seems appropriate at this point, in view of the notable lack of critical agreement, to give the novel a fresh reading. This reading will overlap the interpretations of several of the critics reviewed, but it will attempt to demonstrate what they usually present simply as assertion.

To begin with, Lytle’s influential view of Maury as displaced ante-bellum agrarian deserves some criticism. One suspects, in the first place, that it is man’s mortality, not social and economic change, which is Aleck Maury’s goad. One suspects that, given the kind of man he is, Maury would have been as much of a sportsman in the Old South as in the New. As a plantation owner, one imagines, he would have hunted and fished far and wide while his overseer ran the plantation. If he were a schoolteacher, he would undoubtedly have spent as
much time in the field and as little in the classroom in the 1850s as he did in the 1890s.

Actually, the interesting thing about the post-bellum southern agrarian's life, as displayed in the novel, is how little it had changed, despite the war. The care and feeding of slaves had given way to the free-labor wage system or to the share-cropping system, but plantations like that of Maury's Uncle James were still owned and managed by the whites and tilled by the blacks, while the gentry still rode to the hounds.

When Aleck Maury was hired to teach a rural community school in southwest Kentucky, the arrangement was for the parents of the students to pay the tuition which constituted his salary. The same system would have been utilized in the Virginia of the 1850s to pay the master of an "Old-Field" school. And Maury finds the agrarian life still possible, hardly ruined. Mr. Fayerlee has sizeable holdings, believes in crop diversification and crop rotation, and expects the fertilizer formula invented by his kinsman, Charles Fayerlee, to be used eventually to help "'rejuvenate worn out lands all over the south....'" (AMS, 76-77). Undoubtedly, Mr. Fayerlee would welcome Maury as a partner when he marries Molly Fayerlee, but he is simply not interested. Mr. Fayerlee arises at 3:30 every morning (or earlier, in lambing time) and always gets to bed after dark. Aleck Maury has about all he can stand of this steady routine during a one-week stint in lambing time. He tells Mr. Fayerlee, "'I could get up early when I had something [a fishing expedition or hunting trip] on hand but I didn't believe I could do it every morning to save my neck'" (AMS, 97, 92-97).

The point is this: Aleck Maury, as schoolteacher, has found precisely the "position in the agrarian society of the modern South" which he needs. The occupation gives him considerable free time to spend in hunting and fishing, just as the same position would have in the ante-bellum South. He does not wish to be fitted too tightly into the agrarian scheme; i. e., he prefers being an "ornament" of that way of life to being one of its "leaders." He remarks that, as he rides away from Mr. Fayerlee, bound on a fishing trip:

I remember thinking...that I would not have changed places with him for all the money in the world. He had once told me that he had never gone fishing except as a very small boy and had never had a gun in his hand until at the age of fifteen he enlisted in the Confederate army. (AMS, 97)
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Aleck Maury and his shooting partner, Jim Fayerlee, have, in "the farms of the various members of the connection, something like 20,000 or 30,000 acres that we were at liberty to shoot over" (AMS, 81). One cannot imagine how Maury's position, in terms of his vocation and the opportunities for sport afforded him in the neighborhood, could possibly have been any better in the ante-bellum South.

As for Lytle's comment on "the ruin of the hierarchical values which [Maury] might have expected to sustain him," one does not quite know what to say. Surely he is not regretting the demise of slavery! One feels like reassuring him by pointing out that the blacks in Aleck Maury's world still do the work for the whites, still call them "Mister" and "Missus," and still eat in the kitchen, even if they are the most valuable hands in the entire neighborhood.

III

Looking back over his life, Aleck Maury tells of his Uncle James Morris's outrage when Aleck and his cousin Julian, for the hell of it, allow Old Whiskey to catch and kill Old Red, the fox whose running has become a tradition, even a legend, in the neighborhood. The boys were supposed to hold the hound and Uncle James gives the "...damn little scoundrels' ....the worst licking either of us ever had in our lives" (AMS, 48).

In retrospect, Maury knows all too well the reason for Uncle James's fury. Even at the time, he says, "I had a queer feeling when I saw Old Red's brush held up. It didn't seem possible that he'd never give us another run" (AMS, 47). Uncle James went into his final illness not long afterward. Both Aleck Maury and James Morris would have understood the unwillingness of Ike McCaslin and Sam Fathers to shoot Old Ben, and they would have sympathized thoroughly with Mr. Earnest of Faulkner's "Race at Morning," who unloads his shotgun before finally running down the magnificent buck he has tried for years to outwit and outrun. Mr. Earnest snaps his empty gun at the buck three times in a gesture he is obliged to make, but with an empty gun, he is not obliged to kill him. He explains to the outraged twelve-year-old boy with him that they cannot give chase to a dead deer next season.19 Aleck Maury, too, finds "no really good day...ever long enough" (AMS, 97-98).

Aleck's conception of life is essentially tragic, though he does manage to achieve a kind of triumph through the rituals of his sport,
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and he is finally not overwhelmed by the tragic view. Still, his rituals are necessary to him as a means of imposing an order on the seeming disorderliness and chaos of life. They are as necessary to Maury as Nick Adams's efforts are to him in "Big Two-Hearted River." Nick avoids fishing the swamp on the first day, one recalls, because in there "the fishing would be tragic...a tragic adventure."20

Perhaps Aleck Maury's researches into nature's secrets are attempts to discover an order in the natural world and thus to reconcile himself to the apparent disorderliness of mortality. But it is definitely the fact of mortality which drives him to seek the utmost intensity of delight in life. He says that "life, the life of adventure that is compacted equally of peril and deep, secret excitement, began for [him]" (AMS, 7) when black Rafe first took him possum hunting at the age of eight. Later, he is "fired with a sudden, fierce desire" to learn the secrets of nature's creatures, "to follow that strange, that secret life," when Uncle James "observed that a man—a sporting man ...might observe every day of his life and still have something to learn" (AMS, 57). Thereafter, Aleck can never view life as commonplace or matter-of-fact; it always remains an adventure for him. Years later, he tells his wife and daughter that he has come to know the waters about Gloversville too well and must move to Poplar Bluff to fish fresh waters, or die (AMS, 187).

Aleck's first awareness of mortality strikes him when he sees Uncle James's horse give way under his weight. Thereafter, too heavy to ride, Uncle James is finished with hunting. Aleck recalls:

I stood there, a boy of fourteen, and I realized that man comes up like a weed and perishes. I had seen old people around me all my life but I had never thought of them as growing old...Foreboding rushed over me. The decay of the faculties came to everybody, would come to me, to Julian, to the very little negroes squatting on the fence rails. I could not bear the bright sunshine...I turned and went in the house. (AMS, 48-49)

After leaving Virginia, Maury does not keep up his correspondence very long. He says: "After a certain period of my life I never went back...or exchanged letters with any of my connection there. Some men foster these ties all their lives. For me it has always been too painful..." (AMS, 60). Molly Fayerlee, appropriately, first recites for Professor Maury from "Cicero's essay on Old Age": "As for the unsatisfied and greedy part of humanity, as they have possessions subject to uncertainty and at the mercy of chance, they who are
forever thirsting for more...’” (AMS, 82).

Maury is too conscious of the fleeting nature of time, and of mortality, to spend his life trying to “get ahead.” He does not want to win a few brief, scattered moments for sport by the penance of doing the world’s labors with almost no letup for the rest of his life. His sometime hunting partner, William Mason, a prosperous Memphis businessman, has an office the windows of which “looked out on an expanse of brick wall, not even a leaf broke its monotony.” Maury “wondered how a man could endure to look out on it day after day” (AMS, 137). Mason tells him, regretfully, “‘Professor, I’m afraid I haven’t as strong a character as yours. I haven’t got in three days’ hunting in the last five years’” (AMS, 137).

Harry Morrow, Maury’s able assistant at Oakland Collegiate Institute in Mississippi, where Maury is president for seven years, eventually becomes president of Rodman College of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, and gives Aleck a job. Harry rarely has time for fishing; Aleck goes almost every day (AMS, 221). He gives thanks to God that it is Harry Morrow, not himself, who has to bear the burdens of the president’s office (AMS, 197).

While recuperating at Jim Buford’s place near Cadiz, Kentucky, from the effects of Molly’s death, Aleck listens for perhaps the thousandth time to Jim’s story of how as a boy he had learned that channel cats are night, surface feeders. He remarks that this story “was Jim’s only sporting anecdote out of a life of hard labor...” (AMS, 233-234). Aleck observes, “The average man wears out his life in uncongenial employments whereas...I had done very little that I didn’t want to do and that only for a small portion of my time...I had been lucky” (AMS, 225). After Molly’s death, Aleck engages in some serious introspection, and realizes that it is the “almost transfiguring excitement [of the chase or fishing stratagem]...Delight...” (AMS, 223-224) by which he has lived, and which he has feared to lose: “I knew now what it was I had always feared: that this elation, this delight by which I lived might go from me...” (AMS, 224).

For therapy after Molly’s death, having discovered that he has indeed lost the elation, the delight, he has always found in fishing (his weight and game leg have already made him give up hunting), Maury conducts experiments in the feeding and management of pond fish. He carries on these experiments on several ponds on Jim Buford’s place near Cadiz, Kentucky, for two years, in the company of a black boy named Wisdom. Aleck remarks that it is there, “drifting about on
the still waters of Lake Lydia that for the first time in my life I was able to contemplate the thought of my own death.” (AMS, 241).

Near the end of his stay at Cadiz, Aleck goes fishing on the Cumberland River near Canton, at Lock E, with a young friend (AMS, 242-244). Having never allowed himself more than the biblical three score and ten and being nearly seventy, he broods over his mortality, but the sight of an old fishing friend, Colonel Wyndham, restores him to himself. Colonel Wyndham is now ninety, yet fishes every day with as much delight as ever. Aleck muses:

 Ninety years old...It seemed a great age, not as old as I once would have thought it but far beyond the Biblical three-score and ten which I suddenly realized was all I ever allowed myself. Well, a man who reached the age of ninety had achieved something: he was free from the fear of approaching old age. It was already here. One might return then, in a sense, to the timelessness of childhood. Every day would be a gift from the gods and it would be a man’s plain duty to enjoy it. (AMS, 245)

Significantly, with this altered perspective on his life, Maury responds to Tom’s “‘Well...we are here,’” with “‘Yes, by the grace of God’” (AMS, 245). Shortly after this fishing trip, Maury watches an expert, but not superb, fisherman land a magnificent bass from Lake Lydia, replays the fight in his mind, and recovers the elation, the delight he has lived by (AMS, 253-256). He soon goes to Florida, looking for fresh waters to conquer.

IV

The views of some critics that Aleck Maury irresponsibly neglected his family and thus helped erect a barrier between his wife and himself are contradicted by other commentators. Frederick P. W. McDowell finds Aleck’s attitude toward his wife and children “the affection of a large-souled man”21; Radcliffe Squires says Aleck’s “capacity for compassion and love is never in doubt.”22

It is true that Molly once upbraids Aleck for being more concerned for the safety of Gyges, his dog, while they are travelling to Mississippi, than he was for six-year-old Dick when he had travelled alone from Louisville to Gloversville. Aleck tells her that “Dick had been put in the care of the conductor who was a friend...”, then thoughtlessly adds, “‘Dick to anybody but his parents looks like any other little boy...Gy is the smartest bird dog in Kentucky’” (AMS, 135). Molly
does not dry her tears until Aleck reassures her by reminding her that she and the children mean more to him than any bird dog. Aleck remarks that she shows that she believes him. Later, however, Aleck's apparent rapid recovery from Dick's tragic death by drowning at age fifteen causes a constraint to develop between them:

...sometimes coming out of one of those wild fits of sobbing she would turn to me utterly spent and I would have to sit beside her and tend her as if she were a child. But gradually her attitude changed. It was as if my apparent recovery from the bereavement—and to her distraught mind I must have appeared perfectly recovered—had put a barrier between us. She rarely spoke to me now of Dick. (AMS, 161)

The significant words are "apparent" and "must have appeared." Aleck remembered far more vividly incidents in the boy's life than he did those of the girl, Sarah's (AMS, 129-130); he was trying to make a wing shot and hunting companion out of Dick that year (AMS, 153-154); he realizes that he had held Dick back, thinking that he had enough of what no man ever has enough of: Time:

I stood there under the great pine tree and watched the light fall on the dark leaves and tried to realize that it was Dick who lay so still on the bed in there. I stood there and thought how short his life had been and it seemed to me that I had held him back from many pleasures he might have had, feeling that everything was yet in store for him...And now he would never do any of these things. (AMS, 158)

When Aleck sings his daughter Sally to sleep on the night of the tragedy, he chooses "Der Erkönig," singing it through, he says, even to the line: "‘In seinen armen das kind lag tot [“In his arms the child lay dead”]" (AMS, 156-157). One sees, as Aleck sings for his daughter, that his thoughts are with his dead child. He expresses his grief by indirection. Later, when "inaction" becomes "unendurable" (AMS, 161), he goes hunting again. One understands that the ritual is a mode of coping with grief. Earlier, on the night of the boy's death, he had held Molly in his arms beside the child's body until the breaking of the day (AMS, 158).

Aleck's real feelings and the reality of the grief he never really gets over are suggested in his description of the way the scene periodically comes back to him and forces itself on him even after the lapse of many years. He refers to the day of the tragedy as "that Sunday afternoon whose every event remains etched in my brain, a cinematic
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film that every now and then and seemingly without volition unrolls itself and goes on minute incident by incident to the end" (AMS, 154).

One senses the unstated horror he must have felt whenever he had to view the scene again. Years later, after Molly's sudden death and her burial in Gloversville, Aleck returns to Poplar Bluff "in time for [his] eight o'clock class" (AMS, 219). The lesson was "the final magnificent chorus" of Sophocles's great tragedy, Oedipus Tyrannus (AMS, 219). A presumably typical translation reads:

Let every man in mankind's frailty
Consider his last day; and let none
Presume on his good fortune until he find
Life, at his death, a memory without
pain.23

One realizes, in this skillfully handled, superbly understated passage of the novel (the chorus is given in Greek), where Aleck's thoughts really are and how necessary the resumption of routine is to him to enable him to cope with the tragedy of life. He remarks that "The Robbins girl said theneton for thneton and I corrected her as I had done a hundred times before" (AMS, 219). According to Dr. Howard Keller, Professor of Russian at Murray State University, theneton is a nonsense word; the correct word, thneton, may be translated, "liable to death, mortal."

Aleck's correcting the girl for the hundredth time in regard to this highly significant word indicates that, just as the rituals of sport are for him necessary devices for imposing an order on life, so too are the rituals of the academy—anything to keep a sense of chaos at bay.

After the two years spent in recovering from Molly's death "as much as people ever get over such things" (AMS, 221) and with the recovery of his capacity for the "almost transfiguring excitement" of sport, Aleck goes to Florida. He is disappointed in the fishing, because a likely-looking lake is filled with eel grass, but his daughter Sally, now married, rescues him. She and her husband Steve invite Maury to come to Tennessee to help them select the home he is to share with them. They agree that it is to be on a good fishing stream.

Steve and Sally fall in love with a house on a river which Maury says will be muddy half the year. It is also too far down to the water for a man as old and heavy as he has become (AMS, 275-278). At a bus-stop restaurant in McMinnville (when Steve and Sally calculate that it will take three months to get the house ready to move into, and
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tell Aleck that it won’t kill him to go without fishing for three months, if he is going to spend the rest of his life doing it), Aleck tells them he has just turned seventy. Sally clucks at him, failing to understand what he is telling them. At seventy, he is living on borrowed time, and he doesn’t have three days, let alone three months, to spare (AMS, 284-286). So, while Steve and Sally continue their planning, Aleck Maury eases out the restaurant door, deserts them, and catches a bus to Caney Fork, where there is excellent food, good lodging, and superb fishing—all year ’round.

Thus the novel ends. The reader responds to the noble gallantry of the man for whom sport was not a mere “pastime,” but a “passion,” and who would not succumb willingly to time’s inexorable grasp. Aleck’s mood, as we see him last, is that expressed in “Old Red,” an Aleck Maury story which the author did not incorporate into the novel. In that story, Aleck’s awareness of the pathos of time’s swift flight makes him determined to keep pace with it: “...time was a banner that whipped before him always in the wind! He stood on tiptoe to catch at the bright folds, to strain them to his bosom.” In the novel, Aleck succeeds in keeping time at bay, as much as anyone in this world ever can. The image of the protagonist we are finally left with is not, as Andrew Nelson Lytle sees it, one of “feckless manhood,” but one of heroism.

NOTES


5 Cowan, pp. 18-19.


8 Ibid., p. 35.

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10 Ibid.


14 Ibid.


16 Ibid., p. 8.

17 Rocks, p. 124.

18 Caroline Gordon, Aleck Maury, Sportsman (New York, 1971; rpr. of 1934 edition), p. 75. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be designated parenthetically in the text with the initials AMS and appropriate pagination.


20 "Big Two-Hearted River: Part II," The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The First Forty-Nine Stories and the Play The Fifth Column (New York, 1938), p. 329. At this point, it is appropriate to specify what is meant by Maury's "tragic sense of life." His sense of life as tragedy derives from his haunting sense of mortality and the brevity of man's time on earth. His sense of man's limitations is underscored later in the book (AMS, 219) by the introduction of the final chorus from Oedipus Tyrannus. But Aleck's sufferings derive not from pride or moral blindness, but from his sense of time's ultimate victory. Oedipus at Colonus, which Sophocles wrote in extreme old age, adds this sense of time to the tragic theme. Oedipus tells Theseus, "The immortal/Gods alone have neither age nor death! / All other things almighty Time disquiets." Oedipus at Colonus, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone, ed. David Grene (Chicago, 1954), p. 107. The translation of these lines and a subsequent line by Gilbert Murray, as given in an article ("Sophocles") in the Encyclopedia Americana (New York, 1971), 25: 261, is also apropos:

Only to gods on high
Not to grow old is given, nor yet to die,
All else is turmoiled by our master, Time.
Decay is in earth's bloom and manhood's prime....

21 McDowell, p. 18.

22 Squires, p. 473.

In the “Afterword” Gordon prepared a few years ago for the reissue of the novel, she commented on her displeasure with the English edition’s title, *The Pastimes of Aleck Maury*, because it “seemed to ... contradict the book’s content.” Her own title had been “The Life and Passion of Aleck Maury.” See the “Afterword,” *Aleck Maury, Sportsman* (Carbondale, 1980), p. 289.

MERCY WARREN AND "FREEDOM'S GENIUS"

CHERYL Z. OROVICZ

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Given the standards of her time and place, Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) was a woman of advanced education. Her father, Colonel James Otis, a merchant conscious of his own lack of formal education in the law, which he practiced in Barnstable and argued often in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, encouraged Mercy to grasp whatever learning she could. Initially this meant being tutored by her uncle, the Reverend Jonathan Russell, and having access to his library where, as biographers duly note, she began the lifelong study of history which culminated in her own History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution, completed by 1791 but not published until 1805. The second important educative influence on her life was her beloved but unstable brother, "Firebrand" James Otis, Jr., who willingly shared with his eldest sister what Harvard College was then teaching its young men. More importantly, perhaps, James nurtured the penchant for politics already preoccupying a family who for years had battled the increasing power of the Hutchinson-Oliver enclave. Marriage to James Warren in 1754 brought another dimension to Mercy's political consciousness, for this James was active in organizing the Committees of Correspondence and served his colony in various capacities that brought the Warrens into contact with many of the patriot leaders. Through each of these contacts, then—local, colonial, and inter-colonial—Mercy Warren began to see politics as history and history's dependence on public and private virtue. Further, from this identification stem her first writings to warrant the label "Regional" and her earliest public efforts to chart the trajectory of "Freedom's Genius" from the Old World to the New.

Originally published serially, three political satires in dramatic form titled The Adulterer (1772), The Defeat (1773), and The Group (1775) address what Warren perceives as the systematic co-optation and corruption of Massachusetts politics. Warren's satire is that of the bludgeon rather than the rapier, and the farces themselves can now largely be appreciated as period pieces, immediate emotional responses to local incidents such as Thomas Hutchinson's perfidy. Of these early "Dramatic sketches," Warren later observed that they faithfully describe "a period when America stood trembling for her
invaded liberties,” the result of venal politicians’ publication of “falsehood until the people as usual were deceived in character, and bullied into a supineness which frequently sinks beneath the weight of oppression and there was danger they would remain long insensible either of their right or power of resistance.”

The history of Servia, her thinly-disguised Boston setting, is thus by implication placed within an established tradition of liberties abused by faithless rulers and abandoned by a complacent populace. By her own standards, the “sketches” thus succeed; although aesthetically crude, they delineate “the exigencies of the times [that] required the vizard should be stripped from the face of intrigue” (Adulateur, p. 6).

Of slightly greater interest are two occasional poems (dated 1774) commissioned by good patriotic friends. The first, bearing the unwieldy title “To a Gentleman Who Requested a List of the Articles Which Female Vanity Has Comprized Under the Head of Necessaries,” appeared in the June number of the Royal American Magazine. The poem is a sprightly rehearsal of Clara, Clarissa, and other colonial ladies’ full hearing on the question of the need to sacrifice not just tea but laces, lawns, “catgut works, and silken hose and shoes,/ And fifty ditto’s that the ladies use.” Gathering “in full convention...for the debate / To fix a plan to save a sinking state,” Warren’s women express a variety of viewpoints from Lamira’s initial tepid “wishes [that] freedom may succeed” to the more assertive stance represented by Clarissa’s “Spartan” catalog of real necessaries. Climaxing the poem is an oblique historical overview of the consequences of acceding to the dictates of fashion cast within a blatantly political framework. At this point the ladies’ concerns coalesce with an unnamed but “long list of gen’rous worthy men / Who spurn the yoke and servitude disdain,” thus confirming the theme, now grown serious: heaven “sanctifies the deed” by commanding all to “fight for freedom, and for virtue bleed.”

More resonant is the revised poem, now simply called “To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq.,” as it appears in the 1790 Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous, where an explicit parallel drawn between the Israelites under Pharaoh and the colonists under George III lends a broader historical context to her theme. Perhaps significantly Warren permits Lamira to introduce the analogue, referring to

...those ancient times
When Pharaoh, harden’d as a G____ in crimes,
Plagu’d Israel’s race, and tax’d them by a law,
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Demanding brick, when destitute of straw;
Miraculously led from Egypt's port,
They lov'd the fashion of the tyrant's court;
Sigh'd for the leeks, and waters of the Nile,
As we for geegaws from Britannia's isle; (Poems, p. 209)

The Biblical typology Warren here employs is worthy of note, for this is a rare appearance in poems far more reliant on allusions to history's secular exponents of tyranny, both abettors and resisters. Somewhere between 1774 and 1790, the poet chose to underline her message in terms unmistakably linked to the typological heritage which, while not the exclusive province of Puritan New England, was most pronounced in that region's interpretation of the significance of contemporary events. (Such a context is, for example, altogether absent from her second poem commenting directly on a specific event. “The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs,” verse composed at John Adams's request, is simply a whimsical commemoration of the “native Americans’” dumping of tea into Boston harbor.)

Beyond these celebrations of local political events, a few elegies for friends and family, and meditations on human temporality, there is little in Warren's poetry, public or private, to reflect the impact of her long residence in Barnstable and Plymouth. She is not, to begin with, a local-color nature poet meticulously recording the terrain she daily views. Typical of this characteristic is “On Winter,” a stock eighteenth-century response to the passing seasons. The settlement of “Dread Winter,” with its “hov’ring snows” and “Fierce chilling blasts,” predictably casts all inhabitants in pallid hues. Yet, “Favonius' genial breath” will mark spring's return as assuredly as “fields of ripening grain” will eventually send forth the reapers. No effort is made to locate the seasonal transitions within any particular locale. Even Warren's “An Invitation to Retirement” addressed to James lacks a firm sense of place. A poem which might paint graphically the allurements of Clifford Farm instead exists as a commonplace contrast between “the noisy smoky town / “Where innocence and cheerful health / With love and virtue reigns.” Everywhere Warren makes clear, as surely as did Anne Bradstreet years before, that Nature exists as instructress to the poet whose vocation is to adore that God “Who lends these charms to time!” (“On Winter”); to remind “the upright heart, / Its God is ever nigh” (“From my Window”); or to “Secure and guard the wandering mind / From errors baneful way” (“An Invitation”). Not place but moral is evoked, and that moral extends back-
ward from standard neoclassical didacticism to the messages of American Calvinism. Her moral consistently portrays the pilgrim wending his or her way through the world, noting in passing what is comely and fine, but never forgetting that heaven (or its counterpart) is the destination to be held in view. What Warren advocates is the pathway of moderation and piety long proclaimed by her forebears.\(^5\)

Consequently, regionalism for Mercy Warren is appropriated not by the eye surveying the landscape around her, but by the mind’s worldview, by a coherent vision of a society deservedly free because it has been made aware of the lessons of a particular reading of history. Rather than sharing with Jefferson, Crévecoeur and others of her day a conviction of America’s size and the accessibility of land promoting healthy cultivation of soil and soul—the agrarian ideal—Warren looks to her region’s ethical and intellectual heritage as the hope of the nation in gestation or newly born. What gives her writing such power and influence in her own times (and, to some extent, in ours as well), I believe, is this: confronted by conflicting and contentious questions of religious, social, and political theory that pushed many into postures of philosophical relativism, deism, or skepticism, she offered a vibrant re-reading of the bases of American Calvinism as the key to America’s salvation. What she proffers may perhaps be termed the vision of a Calvinist republican.\(^6\)

A decade ago it would perhaps have been unnecessary either to raise this point of ideological identification or search for a label encapsulating Warren’s mutually-dependent religious and political philosophies. Recent scholarship, however, suggests a trend toward placing Warren outside, beyond, or well in advance of thinking common to New Englanders’ minds. Essentially, the debate focuses on two points: the invasion of deistical perceptions of the universe and its operations and its corollary, the viability of evoking a Providential God as more than a rhetorical strategy. Since these questions have been raised concerning Warren as poet and historian, they require direct attention.

In her important and influential study The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945, Emily Stipes Watts, in the process of arguing that Warren ought properly to be viewed as an incipient feminist, identifies Warren as a “traditional Christian Deist,” establishing something of a standard for such an identification by yoking Warren’s religious views with those of Benjamin Franklin.\(^7\) This dubious comparision is not drawn by a more recent critic, Edmund M.
Hayes, but the label remains. Hayes’s argument in “The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren” is more complex. As partial explication of a poem clearly commenting on young James Otis’s derangement, Hayes attributes artistic motivation of “A thought on the inestimable Blessing of Reason...” to “her brother’s condition as well as her own Christian Deism...” (213, n 11). His placement of Warren among that diverse group known as Deists is, however, earlier qualified by acknowledgment that “throughout most of [the poems published here] runs the theme that Warren ultimately must place herself in the hands of God. It is clear from the pieces that her Puritan sense of guilt was one troubling aspect of her life” (202). To some extent Hayes’s thesis—that the “poetry reveals a quest for truth and faith” (203)—reconciles these seemingly exclusive categories. However, it must be recalled that Puritans, no less than Deists, held reason in the highest regard and that constant searching for what is right, rational, and true was the Puritan’s most sacred obligation.

Warren’s writing, public and private, makes quite clear her evaluation of anything approaching “a Deistical tincture,” as she calls it in a typically admonitory letter to one of her young corresponents. Scripture, “some sudden display...of providence..., conscience, reason, the moral sense, and all the powers of nature” may be brought to bear to “confound the weak cavillings of modern Deism,” she counsels her son Henry as corrective to such pernicious ideas as those circulated by the “sarcastic strokes of the philosopher of Fernay” and the “half digested infidelity” propagated by Hume (“Letter-book,” MOW to Henry Warren, 20 February 1780). “Pure christianity,” she reminds another son, “contains the purest morality;—and strict morality is doubtless enjoined by the christian system (“Letter-book,” MOW to George Warren, 29 November 1793). “Yet there are few but will acknowledge that no system of ancient theology, nor the sophistry of modern Deism aided by superior erudition and supported by all the powers of language can furnish a code of equal excellence” (“Letter-book,” MOW to Charles Warren, 1 January 1784). As a final example, consider her outburst addressed to John Adams concerning the “vanity, ignorance, and supercilious folly, cloathed with the plumage of sudden acquisition, tinctured with the crude opinions of the mimic Deist,” which, by “tak[ing] the lead in the theory of religion and government” threaten to “subvert” the spirit of real republicanism (“Letter-Book,” MOW to John Adams, 8 May 1780). Such conviction, however, she later confesses in the same letter, “may be the anti-
quated notions of the last century.” Old-fashioned she may be, but nowhere does Warren sound apologetic for her defense of the “old” religion.⁹

Publicly, she declares antipathy for Deism most plainly in her poem “To Torismond” (her son Winslow), beginning with the epigraph: “My soul is sicken’d when I see the youth, / That sports and trifles with eternal Truth” (Poems, p. 183). No less than it did for John Winthrop and his generation could that “eternal truth” reflect an assurance that individual lives are divinely directed and that this continent was discovered precisely when the Dissenters needed a sanctuary where they might live out their belief. Their reading of history told them this, and in an age which either disbelieved or was fast rejecting this solace, Warren clung to it tenaciously. Without, at this point, specifically connecting her faith in providential guidance to national destiny, Warren indirectly addresses the issue when urging Torismond to eschew his skepticism, an attitude nourished by the likes of Hume, Shaftesbury, and Voltaire. The poem proper begins by sketching England’s earliest days when superstition and ignorance led many to lack of faith. Following this, she traces the ascendancy of “Celestial reason,” so evident in the thought of Locke, Boyle, and the unmatchable Newton, who “taught philosophy to shine / Own’d and rever’d the oracles divine” (Poems, p. 184), and functioned as illuminator of the moral and intellectual darkness surrounding him. Newton stands as the major exponent of a school of thought advancing human understanding without falling into the error of “Presum[ing] he knows the plenitude of power” (Poems, p. 185). The sneering skeptic, however,

Through nature’s system, through her grand design,
...strips the veil from Providence divine;
Sees clearly through the vast mysterious plan,
Can prove that Heaven forgot its creature man. (Poems, p. 185)

For one so steeped in doubt, there is no “friendly beam,/ No intimation of his will supreme.” Eventually,

...infidelity’s his last resource;
By turns exploding grace, free will, and fate,
Still apprehensive of some future state,
Suspense distracts his oscillating brain,
Till________assures him death shall end his pain. (Poems, p. 186)
A message recurrent in Warren’s poetry, thus, is here made plain: Faith and a reliance on Providence hold out the only cure for the sickness of doubt.

Again and again Warren’s writings show her turning to the notion of Providence to explain events, to assuage, console, and guide herself and others, in short, to make sense of experience. Rare indeed is the “Letter-book” entry which is devoid of some reference, direct or implied, to the controlling hand of God ordering a world conformation to His will. Nonetheless, in his compelling, though restrictive study *The Revolutionary Historians: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution*, Lester H. Cohen argues that, for Warren and her fellow historians, Providence ultimately “yielded its once exalted status as a mode of explanation and became a mode of narrative description” or “attractive descriptive metaphor.”10 Further, he contends that “unlike the Puritans, who saw the hand of God in all events ‘prosperous and adverse,’ the revolutionary historians used providence in a strictly partisan way.” Cohen’s historians cannot do otherwise because, for them, “providence and chance [have become] mutually exclusive,” a byproduct of the increasing strain between theology on the one hand and ideology on the other.11

There is much to recommend such a reading. Warren is, for example, sensitive to language. After quoting extensive passages from the scriptures to “compose my own soul,” as she writes to Winslow, her problem is finding “language...[to] give comfort” amidst his affliction. Capricious fortune she passes over quickly, choosing instead “to write more in the stile of the christian, that a kind providence will direct events to promote your permanent happiness” (“Letter-book,” MOW to Winslow Warren, 22 May 1791). Typically, though, Warren attests to no such options in either “language” or “stile.” Troubled by the ocean passage that will soon separate her from both Winslow and Charles, she finds solace in the recollection that “the same eye of omniscience who can when he sees fit hasten” reunions (though perchance in the hereafter). Warren reflects that human hopes are met or thwarted “not so much by accidents as mortals idly imagine, but by the sovereign direction...of [God’s] providential power” (“Letter-book,” MOW to Winslow Warren, August 1785). To an ailing George she sends praise for “your calm resignation and faith” while feeling “the temporary evils of life” as readily as she beseeches “the arm of heaven may yet preserve to America, those blessings unimpaired, and
guaranteed against the grasp of any despotic power on earth” (“Letter- 
book,” MOW to George Warren, 5 February 1800; MOW to A. Adams, 
May 1798).\(^{12}\)

Unless we are to believe that Warren unthinkingly or selectively 
adopts such professions of belief when it is simply convenient (and I 
cannot), then her references to Providence must be viewed seriously—
even in her account of the Revolution. Crucial to grasping the signifi-
cance of the way she presents history are the sentiments with which 
she launches and concludes her study. Prefacing the text appears the 
obligatory underestimation of her qualifications for the task. And 
“yet,” she continues, “recollecting that every domestic enjoyment 
depends on the unimpaired possession of civil and religious liberty,” 
(emphasis mine) she persisted, “soothed...with the idea that the 
motives were justifiable in the eye of omniscience.”\(^{13}\) “Providence,” 
she goes on to observe, “has clearly pointed out the duties of the 
present generation, particularly the paths which Americans ought to 
travel. The United States form a young republic, confederacy which 
ought ever to be cemented by the union of interests and affections 
under the influence of those principles which obtained their independ-
ence” (“History,” 1: 7-8). Many of these principles derive from the New 
England heritage she will presently review in a far from uncritical 
manner.\(^{14}\) A rehearsal of the early Puritans’ bigotry moves swiftly to 
considerations that “universal happiness” is the intention of “the 
benevolent author of nature” and that “the variety of [religious] opin-
ions among mankind” exist not merely to sharpen human reason by 
uncovering what is false, but to “learn us to wait in a becoming 
manner, the full disclosure of the system of divine government” (“His-
tory,” 1: 13).

The heart of Warren’s text—replete with reflections on the 
actions, inactions, heroes, and anti-heroes of the Revolution—
atttempts to chart the course of this “disclosure.” Independence 
secured, she proceeds to project the lessons of history and experience 
onto the prospects for Americans. This country “may with propriety 
be stiled a land of promise, ...a fertile vineyard in which its citizens 
may labor” (“History,” 3: 438-439). The introductory theme is recalled 
as she observes that “Under the benediction of divine providence 
Americans may yet long be protected from sanguine projects and 
undigested measures” of Europe’s despotic governments. Those 
governments have failed because their foundations fail to insist on the 
need for “publick virtue, ...general freedom, and that degree of liberty
most productive of the happiness" of a nation. The presence of these principles in America suggests for Warren "indul[ing] the benign hope that America may long stand a favored nation," immune to civil discord and international conflict ("History," 3: 434-435). Indeed, her final statement makes an even larger claim: "The western worlds, which for ages have been little known, may arrive to that stage of improvement and perfection, beyond which the limits of human genius cannot reach, and this last civilized quarter of the globe, may exhibit those striking traits of grandeur and magnificence which the divine Economist may have reserved to crown the closing scene" ("History," 3: 440). Culminating her text with the twin elements of cautious optimism and a sense of divinely-assigned purpose cannot have been a casual act. For many of her contemporaries, Providence may, in fact, have become the rhetorical trope Cohen claims it to be. Warren herself implies this when she admits "reflections" on Providence are currently "not fashionable in the intercourse of polite life" ("Letter-book," MOW to Janet Montgomery, April 1785). Yet, its prominence in the structure of her text underscores the ironic misconstruction of which John Adams is guilty in "accus[ing Warren] of having written for the nineteenth century: if anything, her belief in virtue and conviction that God or Providence had used the American experiment to further His ultimate plan for humankind seems closer to that of the seventeenth century."15

Providence and what would be described specifically as republican virtue, then, comfortably coexist in Warren’s worldview. Salvation of the individual or the society at large depends mightily on character, private and public. Basic to her vision are assumptions to be made about human nature. If that nature is unalterably depraved, then any kind of effective moral persuasion or social orchestration becomes nigh unto impossible, for the materials are corrupt beyond correction. Warren’s vision, however, admits the possibility of conscience so fostered as to control, if not extinguish, the inclination toward error. A meditation on this subject presented early in her "History” offers this overview:

The study of the human character opens at once a beautiful and a deformed picture of the soul. We there find a noble principle implanted in the nature of man that pants for distinction. This principle operates in every bosom, and when kept under the control of reason, and the influence of humanity, it produces the most benevolent effects. But when the checks of conscience are

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thrown aside, or the moral sense weakened by the sudden acquisition of wealth or power, humanity is obscured, and if a favourable coincidence of circumstances permits, this love of distinction often exhibits the most mortifying instances of profligacy, tyranny, and the wanton exercise of arbitrary sway. ("History," 1: 1-2)

References to benevolence and "the moral sense" should not obscure or override the impact of "checks of conscience" within this summary statement on human nature. There is a lingering sense here that, for Warren, what best "checks the conscience" may still be the horrifying picture Wigglesworth had painted when showing the damned convicting themselves as they stood at the bar of justice. What checks the collective conscience of Warren's envisioned society might just as well be a bone-deep understanding and acceptance of the causes prompting the flight of "Freedom's Genius" ever westward, as peoples time and time again forfeit their freedom and acquiesce to the bonds of moral and, thus, political slavery. Such coupling of sentiments perhaps sheds new light on the warning penned privately for her sons that the political tracts they "may find in her cabinet" have not been made public because of fears her works "may not be fully understood. . . [because of] changes of opinion" (Adulateur, p. 5). There seems no other way to read such an admission than as Warren's foreboding that her New England way will finally bow to rising folly and skepticism as Federalist thought comes to dominate American minds.

As early as 1774, for example, writing to Hannah Lincoln, Warren urges contemplation of

the nature of man; consider them as originally on an equal footing, subject to the same feelings, stimulated by the same passions, endowed by the same heavenly spark to point them to what conduces most to the tranquillity of society, and to the happiness of the individual, and then say, is it not astonishing, that by far the greater part of the species, in all ages of the world, should become the willing dupes of a few who claim an indefeasible right to seize on the property and destroy the liberty and lives of their fellow men? ("Letter-book," MOW to Hannah Lincoln, 3 September 1774)

The record of avarice—virtue's contrasting quality—triumphing over the virtuous few serves as a constant threat. Current strife, Warren can write in 1775, is but natural to "the genius of liberty
arising] to assert her rights in opposition to the ghost of tyranny.’” Once despotism, the inevitable outgrowth of avarice, is banished, “then may the Western skies behold virtue (which is generally the attendant of freedom) seated on a throne of peace, where she may preside over the rising commonwealth of America” (“Letter-book,” MOW to E. Lothrop, 1775).

Uncertainty, even disillusionment, however, progressively comes to dominate Warren’s reading of events. Anxiously explicit in its claims for an intimate tie between adhering to Calvinist precepts and preserving the freedom of a nation is a poem dated 10 October 1778, which Warren entitles “The Genius of America Weeping the Absurd Follies of the Day,” perhaps with justification placed at the end of her volume of poems. It is a poem offered as a dream vision wherein Warren spies “Columbia’s weeping Genius” pensively and “in broken accents” querying “Shall freedom’s cause by vice be thus betray’d?” (Poems, p. 246). She catalogues what is perceived as “the folly of the age”: overattention to pleasure, riotous avarice and selfishness, a heedless love of luxury, particularly—and most treacherously—observable in leaders for whom “gold’s the deity” revered (Poems, p. 246). On a more joyous note, this Genius recollects those days when patriots became willing martyrs to her cause. But now the mode deems it

...heroic to deny his God,
Or to dispute his providential care,
Deride his precepts, or to scoff at prayer.

Discard such antique, odd ideas of truth,
Such musty rules for regulating youth. (Poems, p. 250)

What, Warren muses toward the close of her poem, can one expect of a people for whom “musty rules”—the old Calvinistically-tinged republican virtues—have become a “wanton jest”? Even “The deist blushed at [this] bolder strain” of those “Who rail aloud ’gainst puritanic rules / And learn their morals in deistic schools,” who “prattle nonsense” which bounces them into the lap of folly (Poems, pp. 251-252). Her concern for America is widespread. Perhaps each generation, if it is to remain deserving of liberty, must read anew those works which maintain a right perspective. But looking around her, she finds a literary scene fraught with undesirables. To the list referred to earlier, she here adds Bolingbroke, Mandeville, and Chesterfield, the latter, for Warren, representing a “specious digest of Mischief.” Unde-
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sirable as well are those writings teeming with "the many temptations of the present day to the puerile study of Romance and knight errantry, instead of those useful lessons of virtue and science which may be drawn from the various pictures of human life, exhibited in the faithful pages of authentic history" ("Letter-book," MOW to Winslow Warren, 24 December 1779).16

Her own account of the Revolution, of course, read aright stands as one type of corrective. But she found close at hand yet another medium for her message, one possibly more attractive to the rising generation's tastes—the heroic drama. She wrote two for her 1790 Poems, "The Sack of Rome" and "The Ladies of Castile." Pointedly stating their function within the volume, Warren contends in her introductory "to the Public" that, in spite of many authors' efforts to explain the lesson derived from the study of a people, such as Rome's, that lesson has consistently gone unheeded:

In tracing the rise, the character, the revolutions, and the fall of the most politic and brave, the most insolent and selfish people, the world ever exhibited, the hero and the moralist may find the most sublime examples of valour and virtue; and the philosopher the most humiliating lessons to the pride of man, in the turpitude of some of their capital characters: While the extensive dominions of that once celebrated nation, their haughty usurpations and splendid crimes, have for ages furnished the historian and the poet with a field of speculation adapted to his own peculiar talents. (Poems, pp. 10-11)

If, then, the new Americans find unpalatable a moral essay on the need to remain true to their mission—providing a fit residence for "Freedom's Genius"—Warren will use her drama to review precedents of backsliding.

Both of her heroic dramas, modeled closely on Addison's Cato, focus on the conflict between love and honor or duty typical of their genre. Likewise, both plays possess such rambling plots that I will make no effort here to summarize specific action. Suffice it to say that each drama opens at a time when the respective societies, Valentini-an's Rome and Castile's final days before Charles V's takeover, have reached the brink of destruction. The dramas themselves document that destruction, frequently in graphic terms, and in each case Warren emphasizes that liberty has been lost because of the citizens' self-indulgences and laxity in insisting their governors act for the good of the commonweal.
Cheryl Z. Oreovicz

To underline the desperation of the times, Warren provides in each play only one truly heroic figure. AEtius, the moral center of “The Sack” dies early in the drama, but not before admonishing Gaudentius, his son, to “remember that thou liv’st for Rome.” As his father’s sword earlier has been wielded to save the commonwealth and as AEtius’s whole life has been dedicated to encouraging virtuous living, so he instructs his son to shun temptations sure to “Contaminate thy patriotic worth” and instead to make of his life an “example [to] teach [Rome] to be free” (Poems, “Sack,” I, iv). Significantly, AEtius alone interprets the invasion of those “Routh, naked boors” of the north as “the chosen scourge, by heaven design’d” to chastise Roman profligacy (Poems, “Sack,” I, i). Also important, however, is the opportunity open to Gaudentius to demonstrate filial piety in action. But he is so bedazzled by love for Eudocia and so possessed by the idea of freeing her from the conquering Vandals that Gaudentius loses sight of his greater obligation. Consequently, he fails both to uphold his father’s principles and to effect the desired rescue. In all of Warren’s writing, no work equals “The Sack of Rome” in bleakness of outlook.

“The Ladies of Castile,” only slightly more optimistic, is a more interesting and, perhaps, more successful play. Aesthetically, for example, Warren here achieves a greater symbolic integration of imagery of unseasonable storms with the social tempest which is her focus. But of greater interest, given the conventional male superiority within such dramas, is the fact that the prime upholder of virtue in “Ladies” is a woman, Dona Maria.17 Bereft of her husband and fearful for her own safety and that of her child, she still resolves to regroup the remaining patriots and personally lead them in battle. In a speech designed to revive flagging spirits, she challenges someone to slay her child before her eyes if the citizens intend to succumb to cowardice and despair. Dona Maria colorfully depicts “freedom’s genius,” under whose “lenient reign” all of Castile has flourished, and she declares that if necessary, rather than herself betray that “genius,” she will “light the towers, and perish in the flames,/ And smile and triumph in the general wreck” (Poems, “Ladies,” V, i). A noble proposal uttered by a demonstratively noble person, but the act never takes place. Instead, taking the prudent course, Maria and her son seek sanctuary in the court of Don Emanuel. This is, however, of little matter. Warren has achieved her purpose, first articulated in the 1774 poem on ladies’ “Necessaries” examined above, though now in more earnest terms:

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first, to display, again, the inevitable enslavement of a society no longer worthy of its freedom; and, second, to declare boldly that both a nation’s men and her women must play active roles in preserving that liberty. Unlike Ardelia, spoken of so often as the epitome of Roman womanhood but never shown to possess the required virtues and spirit, as a character Dona Maria proves herself worthy of the esteem which others within the play—both male and female—invert her. She emerges, finally, as a figure who could quite credibly enmesh the Conde Haro (in most respects her male counterpart) in conflicting loyalties. But it is Maria the playwright selects as poignant, eloquent spokesperson against the aggressively opposing forces bent on robbing her people of their treasured “ancient rights” (Poems, “Ladies,” III, v).

I would agree, in general, with Emily Stipes Watts’s assessment of Mercy Warren’s entire body of writing: “In whatever literary form [she] wrote,” claims Watts, “she had but one theme—liberty” (Watts, p. 39). But I would modify the particular types of liberty Watts goes on to ascribe to the various kinds of writing Warren engaged in. A concentration on political liberty is far from restricted to her political satires and her “History.” It is a theme permeating what she wrote for both private and public edification. Everywhere Warren looks, she discovers some intersection between the immediate subject and the larger theme of freedom, a very special brand of freedom predicated on the values articulated in the creeds of the old New England she knew and regarded so well. What results is a life’s work vibrating with a curious blending of Calvinist and republican thought.

NOTES

1 Among the best biographies are those by Maud M. Hutcheson, “Mercy Warren, 1728-1814,” WMQ, 3rd series, 10 (1953), 378-402; Jean Fritz, Cast for a Revolution (Boston, 1972); Katharine Anthony, First Lady of the Revolution: The Life of Mercy Otis Warren (Garden City, 1958). An earlier version of the present study was read as part of the Boston Women Writers panel at NEMA in 1983.

2 Adulateur Manuscript, Houghton Library, Harvard University, p. 1, hereafter cited parenthetically as Adulateur. Permission to quote from this volume is gratefully acknowledged.


4 (Boston, 1790), hereafter cited parenthetically within the text as Poems.
5 Quotations from Warren’s verse throughout this paragraph are drawn from the poetry section of the Adulateur Manuscript. Modern printings of full texts are included in Edmund M. Hayes, “The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” NEQ, 54 (1981), 199-224, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

6 Modern literature on American republicanism is too vast to enumerate here. Useful surveys are two studies by Robert Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” WMQ, 3rd series, 29 (1972), 49-80, and “Republicanism and Early American Historiography,” WMQ, 3rd series, 39 (1982), 334-356.

Warren’s reputation as a prominent republican was widespread, so much so that the anonymous author of Sans Souci, Alias Free and Easy (Boston, 1785) could confidently satirize her views in Act II, scene i, through a character identified simply as “Mrs. W — — N.” One major purpose of the present study is to explore the degree to which Calvinist precepts inform Warren’s republicanism, particularly the concept of Divine Providence as she invokes it. My use of the term follows that of John F. Berens in being a shorthand reference to American providential thought, that is, the following cluster of interwoven qualities or characteristics: “(1) the motif of America as God’s New Israel; (2) the jeremiad tradition; (3) the deification of America’s founding fathers; (4) the blending of national and millennial expectations; and (5) providential history and historiography” (Providence & Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815 [Charlottesville, 1978], p. 2).

7 (Austin, 1977), p. 43, hereafter cited parenthetically within the text.


12 Also indicative of her invocations of Providence in the “Letter-book” are letters to John Adams, 15 March 1779 and 29 July 1779; to Winslow Warren, 19 April 1791; to George Warren, 4 December 1796, a fascinating...
and lengthy meditation on the book of Job.

13 "History Manuscript," Houghton Library, Harvard University, I, 3, 7. Permission to quote from this document is gratefully acknowledged. Hereafter citations will be parenthetically inserted as "History."

14 For private expressions of pride in this history, see the "Letter-book" correspondence to Samuel A. Otis, 22 December 1772; to Catharine Macaulay, 9 June 1773; to Josiah Quincy's sister, 1774 [1775?].

15 Joan Hoff Wilson and Sharon L. Bollinger, "Mercy Otis Warren: Playwright, Poet, and Historian of the American Revolution (1728-1814)," Female Scholars: A Tradition of Learned Women Before 1800, ed. J. R. Brink (Montreal, 1980), p. 174. Wilson and Bollinger quickly dismiss the longstanding question of attributing authorship of The Blockheads (1776) and The Motley Assembly (1779) to Warren. They correctly assert that Warren would share the political sentiments of both plays. But because I read an utter consistency of style and subject throughout Warren's canon, I cannot agree that the plays' "vocabulary and broad sexual humor afford a glimpse of a considerably less staid and protected homebody than her portraits and private correspondence would lead us to expect" (p. 167).

16 This celebrated opinion attained some popularity and was twice reprinted in full—in The Independent Chronicle and the Advertiser for 18 January 1781, and the January 1790 issue of the Massachusetts Magazine.

OF NOVELS AND THE NOVELIST:
AN INTERVIEW WITH ELLEN DOUGLAS
JERRY SPEIR
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Ellen Douglas has been writing novels for more than twenty years. Like many women writers, she was only able to devote herself to her craft after her three sons were old enough to go to school.

Since then, she has produced five novels and a collection of stories, won the Houghton-Mifflin Fellowship Award, received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship grant, and been nominated for the National Book Award. Twice her books have appeared on The New York Times’ list of the five best fiction titles of the year.

Her childhood was spent in Arkansas and Louisiana—where she recalls her father’s difficulties with the Huey Long administration over road-building contracts. But her real roots are in Mississippi, where she can trace both sides of her family back into the eighteenth century.

She spent her college days at the University of Mississippi (to which she now returns one semester each year as writer-in-residence) and was once president of her sorority (Chi Omega) there—a fact which she says her sons wish she would quit telling people.

After college, she was off to New York, where she clerked for a time in the celebrated Gotham Book Mart and rubbed shoulders with literary lions from Allen Tate to Henry Miller. During World II, she worked variously as a disc jockey and an interviewer at a military processing center. After the war, she married her college sweetheart and settled in Greenville, Mississippi.

Her latest novel, A Lifetime Burning, was released in October, 1982, by Random House. The Washington Post called it “startling and entirely impressive...a splendid piece of writing.” The New York Times said, “Ellen Douglas has all the qualities a reader could ask of a novelist: depth, emotional range, wit, sensitivity and the gift of language.” Her fellow Mississippian, Eudora Welty, termed it “a rare novel [where] the mystery of ordinary life...is hair-raisingly and most satisfactorily present.” Cast in the form of a diary, A Lifetime Burning is the story of a sixty-year-old mother’s poignant and persistent attempt to tell the truth, to fathom the murky depths of her personal...
INTERVIEW: ELLEN DOUGLAS

rage, to perceive the limits and power of her own sexual obsessions, and to pass this hard-won, fragile wisdom along to her children. I am curious about the book’s genesis.
SPEIR: What launched you into A Lifetime Burning?
DOUGLAS: Well, I’ve been interested for some years in the business of obsession, and I suppose that one is interested in a psychological or moral problem or a human fact because one sees a lot of it. It seems to me that obsession, and maybe even possession, a kind of demonic possession, is a fact of our time. And when I got to thinking about that, I began to pull very disparate fragments of observation and experience together. Then, of course, it changed and grew. Actually, with my last two books, The Rock Cried Out and this one, I’ve been very much concerned with the nature of jealousy and possessiveness, and I think that they’re very powerful and destructive and irrational emotions that masquerade as love.
SPEIR: Is there any sense in which this novel is autobiographical?
DOUGLAS: I certainly see the artist, in general, as obsessive in the same way that in the past obsession has been poured into religion. We’re like the religious in other periods, I think. And, yes, I think I’m obsessive.
SPEIR: Does age really bring “passion, more passion, obsession, fury, frustration, as if one lived again through an adolescence that would open out not into maturity, but into oblivion”—as your narrator suggests in this novel?
DOUGLAS: Yes, but is that necessarily bad? Would it be better to sit down in a rocker and wear a groove in the porch floor? It’s my profound conviction that people of fifty or sixty or seventy or eighty feel very deeply the human passions that they felt at fifteen, twenty-five, and thirty-five. The human passion is there until you die.
SPEIR: Speaking of human passion, I’m curious about your use of homosexual affairs in A Lifetime Burning. Did you include those for some “shock value,” or what was your intention?
DOUGLAS: I think the reverse really. Certainly it was not introduced for shock value. Rather, it seemed to me that the “emotional freight,” which an ordinary heterosexual affair wouldn’t have, gave both the affairs an intensity that I felt the book needed for Corinne to have been driven to the kind of deception and lying that she was driven to. Aside from that, it also seemed to me that it was useful to say clearly that human passion is human passion and that, in that sense, whether it’s heterosexual or homosexual doesn’t matter a lot. That
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would be the only sense in which I think homosexuality as homosexuality would have a bearing—the reverse of shock—but rather the making ordinary, in every life, of human passion.

SPEIR: I suspect that people who know you—as a “normal,” “happy,” “honest,” woman of sixty—may wonder why you want to write, as you do in A Lifetime Burning, about a woman of sixty-two who is very unhappy, tormented by obsession, entangled in a web of lies and involved in a very bizarre relationship.

DOUGLAS: Well, my own life—and I think this a serious generalization about any artist’s life—is not necessarily relevant to the “art problem.” I perceive or observe fragments of character, fragments of themes, places that intrigue me and that seem significant, and maybe I’m not even sure at the time why they seem significant. What happens to the individual sentence and paragraph as you write should obviously be as conscious as possible, but what makes you put sets of material together and invent particular things to go with those sets of material is much more mysterious. But over a period of years, maybe, or months or weeks, those fragments begin to coalesce so that you have sets of perceptions that seem to work together. And that’s the way, for me, that the beginnings of a book or a story come about. Aside from that, it’s just simply true that the inevitability of old age and death and the failure of love are universal human themes and that it doesn’t matter much whether the artist’s life at a particular moment is one way or another. They remain universal human themes, and there are always specific instances of comedy and tragedy that you can use to realize them. If you wanted to put what I’m talking about as extremely as possible: Faulkner didn’t spend forty years sleeping in the bed with a corpse, you know, and neither did he kill himself because of his incestuous love for his sister. So I think that the artist is intrigued by a theme or a character or a story, and it doesn’t necessarily have anything specific to do with his personal life.

SPEIR: Why do you think you’re sometimes perceived as an “old-fashioned” artist?

DOUGLAS: Well, the general statement I would make about art is that art—my art, anyway, the art of literature—is a kind of fulcrum between the past and the future that seizes upon the past and attempts to capture it in the present to give it to the future, not in the literal sense, but in the sense that Susanne Langer speaks of as a “virtual” past or an “as if” kind of history. But I can also appreciate the point of view of the more “experimental” or “modern” artist whose chaotic or
nihilistic works grow out of a concern that the future is going to vanish, that the whole human world may vanish—not just our society. And I think that’s a valid perception, too. But I suppose I’m just not temperamentally able to believe that the world will die. I have to assume that there is a past which I in the present can attempt to give to a future that will exist. And I think I’ve said that over and over again in my stories. The narrator in this new book says it, too, because what she’s doing, of course, is attempting to give her life as if it were a gift, however explosive and unwelcome a gift it might be, to her children, to make whatever use they can of it. It’s an active act of communication, whatever the cost. And, in this connection, I think it’s also true that writers of tales like Dinesen and Mann and Conrad—who seize the past in its formal aspect or in its mythological aspect, in its fairy tale aspect or its political aspect, and attempt to give order to it and give it to the reader—are the kinds of writers who interest me most. And that’s a deep concern of mine in all my work. I also think that my works are unified by the need to make my characters move out and affirm, in some way, a humanity larger than they thought themselves capable of. But be very careful to remember, now, I’m talking about my fiction. I’m talking about myself as a writer and what I put into a book, not about myself. Whether I’m capable of doing that is irrelevant, utterly irrelevant.

SPEIR: Your earlier works have been very much acclaimed for the realism with which they deal with race relations. What can you tell me about your early experiences with blacks and racism?

DOUGLAS: I have very strong memories of powerful black figures from my childhood, particularly the old woman who was the model for the black woman in “The House on the Bluff,” who lived in the household of a family with whom I was intimate. One of the most vivid memories of my childhood was that you kissed her when you came for a summer visit, just as you kissed your aunts and your grandmother, and that set her in an extraordinary category, you know. I think she’s the only black person I touched in that way when I was a child—in an intimate, affectionate way—and I’m sure it had a strong effect on me. That’s the way you recognize humanity—by embracing people. It was very fortunate for me, that I had that relationship and several others with powerful black figures.

When I first remember thinking about racism seriously would be about the time when you start thinking, for example: What is all this about bootlegging and whiskey being illegal—and Father’s got this
bottle of whiskey in the pantry? At the same time, you’re thinking: What is all this about Sunday School and “loving your neighbor as yourself” and “keeping the Sabbath day holy”—while the cook is fixing the Sunday dinner? And all that happens, I think—with me anyway—when you’re about thirteen or fourteen, and by fifteen it’s become a large question. I remember having serious arguments with my father about the morality of prohibition in those years: “You’re always telling me about the law. What are you doing with this bottle of whiskey in the kitchen?” Not that I had any objection to anybody’s drinking whiskey, even as a child, but how can you talk about the law if you live in a world in which the law is consistently broken—by you, by everyone?
SPEIR: What did your Father say about that?
DOUGLAS: Well, he was a very gentle man and an unshakeable man, and he’d seen a lot of the world, and he just mainly listened and let me run up and down the room and holler.
SPEIR: I understand that your great-great-grandfather, Thomas Henderson, wrote something called Tom Paine Confounded that was the first book printed in Mississippi. Is that right?
DOUGLAS: So I was told by my parents anyway.
SPEIR: What do you know about him and folks of that era?
DOUGLAS: Well, he was born, I think, around 1770, 1775, and he would have been in Natchez by 1800 anyway. So, he was very early.
SPEIR: That’s on your father’s side?
DOUGLAS: Yes. And he was a big Presbyterian. He was one of the founders of the Presbyterian church in Mississippi, although he was not a minister. He was a presiding elder. They were very devout, very devout Presbyterians—and slaveholders, of course. His son was one of the people involved in General Wilkinson’s attempt to upset the government of Cuba and annex it to the U. S. as a new slave state. So, I judge from that that they were real slaveholding “fire eaters,” although that’s not true of a great many people in Natchez and various others in my family—because Natchez really was a Whig town. Probably part of the reason it wasn’t destroyed was that it really didn’t want to secede in the first place, although everybody down there tries to forget that now.
SPEIR: What about on your mother’s side?
DOUGLAS: My mother’s family was very mixed, as a matter of fact. Her mother’s mother and father were English-Irish and Presbyterians. But her father’s family was Spanish-French-Creole. They came
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into Mississippi maybe even before the Hendersons did, during the
period of the last Spanish occupancy and the last part of the French.
Her great-great-grandfather, Jose Vidal, was the last Spanish com-
mandant of the fort there.
SPEIR: The fort at Natchez?
DOUGLAS: Fort Concordia, right across the river.
SPEIR: I continue to be amazed at the extent to which Mississippians
can trace their family histories.
DOUGLAS: Well, one thing about Mississippi that you may not have
taken into account is that nobody had any money. They couldn’t go
anywhere. They hardly had enough money to buy a train ticket.
Unless they had somebody who worked for the railroad to give them a
pass, they stayed at home. And if you stay home, you know who your
grandmother was; she’s still hanging around. And she knows who her
grandmother was; she was still hanging around. A great many people,
in fact, are still in houses like the one my father’s great-grandfather
bought in the country out from Natchez in 1808. There are lots of old
letters, old day books, his medical records, the commissary records,
ods and ends like that, including shells engraved with Bible verses
and old pairs of spectacles and pince-nez and old false teeth. You name
it; it’s out there.
SPEIR: Most people, I think, would argue that place is a major part
of your fiction. But I wonder if you agree, or is it just that stories have to
be somewhere? Your narrator in The Rock Cried Out, in fact, asks: “Do
you think there’s someplace in the world that’s different from here?”
DOUGLAS: I think place, in the sense of the specific, is absolutely
essential, but I don’t think a place, you know, is what I’m talking
about when I say “place.” If I had grown up in Birmingham or New
York City, the place would still have been immensely important
because novels are specific and they are made out of bricks and people.
Therefore, place is important. I don’t think regionalism is important.
Place in the south is important, too, as a moral climate, or was when I
was young, but not as houses and bricks. Houses and bricks are
everywhere, and the novelist is simply concerned to evoke them
specifically.
SPEIR: What do you mean by “a moral climate?”
DOUGLAS: Well, I mean that, when I was growing up, the race
question was something that one dealt with every single day in one
way or another and that the world was absolutely formed by relations
between black people and white people. And that was not true in cities
where—although white people saw black people, black people saw
white people, black people worked for white people—everybody went home and didn’t know each other any more. But in a small town in the South, relations were much more intimate and the racial climate was much more pervasive. And it was a very specific moral climate in which people professed—and, of course, myself included, I’m not making a judgment—to one set of standards and lived by another set of standards with regard to black people. And then, too, this pervasive self-deception among white people about what their own behavior was and what its significance was, and the elaborate structure of beliefs about what black people were like—a structure meant to serve our own self-deception—created a sort of ghost world, a wholly unreal vision of the lives of the very black people we lived so intimately with. Every now and then I read a black writer who grew up in and writes about the world I grew up in, and his version of his life is as different from the version I would have received of it as a Chinese scholar’s view of Confucianism would be from a Presbyterian missionary’s.

SPEIR: Yet, despite your reputation for dealing most realistically with race relations as a major theme, this new book has essentially nothing to do with that theme. Do you have any response for critics or readers who are expecting that sort of thing from you?

DOUGLAS: The relationships between black people and white people were just not relevant to this story—in any large way. I think you have to remember that the writer is always concerned with a particular story and its demands and requirements. That doesn’t mean I won’t think of another story where it will be relevant again. That’s not to say, either, that the problems of race don’t still exist, because, of course, they do, and they are still threatening. But things have changed in the last twenty years and that particular regional obsession with guilt has become a national problem. Perhaps Southern writers don’t any longer have to be exclusively obsessed with it. A few other people can take it on for a while, maybe. And, of course, it’s also true that black writers do, as they should, deal with it more and more strongly, and perhaps better than we can.

But I think A Lifetime Burning is very close to the rest of my work. From the beginning, I have written mainly about the ordinary life of ordinary people—their losses and betrayals, and murderous rages, and humor and heroism, and lust and greed, about people who live in middle-sized houses with yards around them—and in this book I don’t move into another world. I simply look with more obsessiveness and more intensity into the life that I’ve always been looking at. All those
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passions are there in ordinary lives.
SPEIR: The New York Times reviewer of one of your early books, Black Cloud, White Cloud, said: "To be Southern and relevant is to be obsessed." Is that still true?
DOUGLAS: Maybe, in some sense. But it may not just be Southern writers. Certainly, just the overwhelming need to come to terms with the problems of race in the South was obsessive with Southern novelists and writers for a long time. But it may just be that artists are obsessed in general; otherwise, you'd be out making a lot more money doing something else.
SPEIR: I also perceive in your work a perpetual concern for such matters as how to tell the truth, how we come to know the truth, how the mind works, and the fragile nature of consciousness and understanding. And, in that regard, I wonder what you mean when you say, as you have, that you're "not an intellectual" or not a "novelist of ideas."
DOUGLAS: Well, I'm just not an intellectual, you know; I'm not a scholar. I have no systematic grounding in philosophy—or even literature. I read what comes to my attention—next. And then I look in the bibliography in the back of the book if it interests me and I read that, you know. I'm not an analytical thinker. I'm a craftsman, a maker. And my exploration of the nature of consciousness and of the distortion of truth, so-called—the reason that I'm concerned with it is that it's been stimulated by my observations of the human world, not because of any particular following through of philosophical or psychological theses. I would be much more likely to be influenced, for example, by something like a movie, like Rashomon or Providence, than I would be by the methodical reading of psychology or anything like that, although I do a good bit of reading in areas other than literature. I've certainly been influenced by the reading of Proust, and Proust is very much concerned with the way character and personality are metamorphosed in the passage of time and people become their own opposites. Another influence on my work, and this has to do again with whether I have a systematic or intellectual approach, which I don't, is Susanne Langer, a philosopher of art whom I mentioned earlier. When I say she was an influence, I mean that the way she lays out the nature of what the artist does is true to my own feeling about what I do and what other artists do. She makes a fine distinction between discursive thought and the kind of thinking that the maker or the craftsman or the artist does. And all those things—Proust, Con-
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rad, certain movies, my observations of human behavior and of my own behavior, the work of Langer, and to a lesser degree Cassirer and people who've been concerned with those subjects—have interested me in the transformations of consciousness that you're talking about. And this latest book certainly is a metaphor for those kinds of transformations—I hope.

SPEIR: When did you begin to think of yourself as a professional writer?

DOUGLAS: I've been writing really since childhood. I may be wrong about this, but it does seem to me that the interest in writing has to do with—something—maybe genes, or maybe just family habit, but with an interest in the language that you get very, very early. And that, it seems to me, came to me particularly through my mother and through my father's mother at a very early age so that I always cared about language, about telling stories. So, I was doing that all through grammar school and high school and did a little of it in college, but in college you're so busy writing papers that you don't think about writing in imaginative terms, and you really haven't time to do the kind of reading that a novelist does later on—at leisure. Or, at least, I didn't. Then, I began to write again as soon as I finished college, during the time when I was working as a disc jockey, for example. It was grand being a disc jockey. You had those great big old eighteen-inch discs and you put one on and you made an announcement and read the ads at the beginning of the half hour, and then the disc played for the whole half hour. You had maybe twenty-five minutes when you were just sitting there, and I did a good deal of writing while I was doing that. Then, when I went to New York, I did try to sell a couple of stories, without any success. So, at that age, at the age of twenty-two or twenty-three, I was already thinking in terms of selling stories.

SPEIR: What can you tell me about your New York experiences? You worked for a time at the Gotham Book Mart, did you not?

DOUGLAS: Yes. At the time I worked there and for the preceding fifteen or twenty years, the Gotham Book Mart had been the headquarters for avant-garde literature in the U. S. Miss Steloff, who ran the place, who was the Gotham Book Mart, had the most extensive collection of little mags from the twenties and thirties anywhere in the world probably. She had whole sets, lots of whole sets of Transition, with the Joyce work-in-progress that had been coming out then. She had full sets of Poetry, full sets of all the old Partisan Reviews, everything, everything from the twenties and thirties. And people like...
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Pound and Marianne Moore and Kenneth Patchen and William Carlos Williams and Henry Miller and Tennessee Williams—you name it, that was where they came when they came to New York. She had her own little press. She printed books by people who couldn’t get their books printed elsewhere, if she wanted to bet on them. For example, she printed Anais Nin when nobody else would print her. She printed Kenneth Patchen when nobody would print him. She, I believe, brought out some one-act plays of Tennessee Williams before anybody else printed him. She used to sell Henry Miller’s paintings. They were hanging all over her walls, and she sold them for five and ten dollars apiece so he’d have enough money to eat on. She had all the Miller—Tropic of Cancer, Tropic of Capricorn—under the desk, because this was before you could sell them over the counter, and Miller was in there often.

SPEIR: Do you have any famous-people stories from that experience?
DOUGLAS: Well, if anybody was in town, Miss Steloff would have a party for them. And while I was there, the party that I enjoyed most was the one she had for Allen Tate—another Southerner. No doubt, I was a little bit homesick. Miss Steloff was a vegetarian and a non-drinker of alcoholic beverages, so she always had this huge samovar with lots of tea in it. But Mr. Tate brought his bourbon, and it was a nice party.

SPEIR: What are your recollections of Henry Miller?
DOUGLAS: You couldn’t believe what a nice fellow he was. Gentle. I suppose he would have been in his—I thought of him as an old man, you know; I was only twenty-three years old—he must have been fifty, fifty-two or -three years old. He was already pretty bald, and just had a fringe of white hair. But he would just come in and wander around and look at books and talk in a very quiet voice. Very polite. Of course, I’d already read the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn by that time, so the contrast of the man with the work was startling to say the least.

SPEIR: And, then, after New York?
DOUGLAS: Then, I got married and had three children fairly quickly and was too busy to do any writing, to have the amount of time I needed to have to myself. I say that, but I think another thing was involved too, and this is probably truer of women of my generation than it would be of men of any generation—and that is that I was inexperienced in the world. I didn’t think that I was equipped by my life to have very much to say about the extremes of human emotion,
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about the world at large. I had been a sheltered young woman, and that made it very difficult for me to feel that I was equipped to do that. I was, however, during those years, doing some editing which was very valuable to me later on. Kenneth, my husband, was doing some writing, and I was re-typing and discussing and editing his work, which gave me a kind of course in structure and realizing character and writing that I wouldn’t have had if I’d just been hanging around the house raising kids. So, I had that under my belt six or seven years later when I began to write again. I had spent many, many hours doing that sort of thing. I had also been reading consistently through a great deal of the body of English literature, particularly through modern literature—and some earlier. I had been reading James and Conrad and the Russians, had read Proust and Joyce and Faulkner and others. And then, when my youngest child went to kindergarten and I had the house empty in the mornings and silent, I began to write again. That was when I was about thirty-three or thirty-four. At that point, I started doing it simply because that was what I wanted to do. I didn’t have any specific professional ambitions at all and had probably much abandoned the notion that I was going to be a famous writer or anything like that. I just did it because it interested me, and so I fiddled around with that first novel for five or six years because it interested me. Then it sold.

SPEIR: Do you spend much time organizing before you actually start writing?

DOUGLAS: A lot of time. Maybe six months to a year—very often as long as that. I construct family trees; I draw maps of whatever place I’m setting things in. I write brief character histories. I know, even if it’s not in the book, you know, where they went to school and what kind of accent they have, what their past is like. It’s very hard to make up a convincing character unless you have a firm notion of what the past life has been like—no matter whether you use it or not.

SPEIR: I gather you go through several drafts. Does that rewriting take any particular pattern?

DOUGLAS: Well, several different things happen. One is that the first draft is sketchy; and as drafts go along, they accrete; they gather to themselves materials that I didn’t think of the first time. So they get larger. Another major thing that happens is that you re-write very specifically for sentence structure and language and intensification. And then sometimes, not so often, but sometimes, major structural changes. Something just seems absolutely wrong, and I take it out and
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put it somewhere else or get rid of it altogether—even a whole character.
SPEIR: You once said that “The habit of mind of a writer is to detach himself. And the curse of his life is that he is detached.” What exactly did you mean by that?
DOUGLAS: Maybe that would only be true for a person who tends to be a romantic. But what I meant was that, on the one hand, one wants to be swept away by passion—whether its political passion, sexual passion, or whatever—and, on the other, the essential for the writer is not to be swept away. And while one is being swept away, by whatever it is, even a flood, one had better be busy observing exactly what it looks like, sounds like, smells like, and feels like, or else one’s not going to have it when the time comes to write about it. So, those two desires, the desire to be swept away and the desire to observe everything as clearly as possible, are always battling with each other.
SPEIR: In A Lifetime Burning, Corinne uses her writing, her diary, to “contain” her craziness, in a way, or to try to deal with it. Otherwise, she apparently leads a normal life to everyone else’s eyes. Does writing serve any such “containing” function for you?
DOUGLAS: I’m not sure that’s a relevant question. Keep your eye on the fiction. It only matters what the fictional character thinks and says, not what the author thinks and says about similar questions. I think that whatever work structures one’s life tends to fend off chaos—and not just for writers.
SPEIR: I was also curious about the California sequence in the book which serves, obviously, to take Corinne “out of herself” and out of her environment, to show her relationship with her son, and, of course, it introduces her to Alice, with whom she has some self-revelations, and it provides a certain parody of the modern world. I wonder, I suppose, if you had any more grandly “symbolic” things in mind there?
DOUGLAS: Well, whatever’s there is there. I think what you’ve said is valid—that’s an outer world that’s a reflection of the kind of inner world she’s been struggling with. I think that her narration of that makes an ironic comment on her character, made by herself, which in itself, again, is an illumination of her character. In short, it gives you a sense of her capacity for detachment—in which she sees in the paranoia of the other woman the same kind of thing that she’s seen in herself, even though she’s incapable of acting on her detachment. And, of course, everybody in this book is driven by one obsession or another: the son, Alice, the husband, Corinne, Mrs. Crouch.
SPEIR: We’re a fairly obsessive species, are we?
DOUGLAS: In this book.
SPEIR: In this book. I don’t know, people want writers to make more general statements, I think.
DOUGLAS: Yes. But my really, really strong conviction is that that’s not the writer’s business. He makes his statement in the book. And then he might want to make another statement in another book, you know.
SPEIR: Plotting, you’ve said, from the point of view of craft, is what fascinated you in *The Rock Cried Out*. What aspect of the craft was maintaining your attention in this latest novel?
DOUGLAS: Well, maybe I felt that I had hit upon a very strong metaphor for the doubling back on itself of the ego, that irresistible need for self-justification, and the battle between self-justification and the need to reach out honestly toward other human beings. So, it was a working out of that metaphor that interested me most, I think. I don’t know. I enjoyed writing this book and a lot of things about it interested me. The structure of it was interesting to work out, too. In artistic terms, to try to pull off a form that is as symmetrical as the form of this book is certainly risky. I hope it worked. In more general terms, it seems to me, and again, a lot of this comes out of Langer, that human lives have organic forms. They exist in time with beginnings and middles and ends and crises and repetitions. To borrow a term from transactional analysis, you might even say that there is a script by which one lives one’s life, and in every relationship, one re-enacts whatever one’s script is. The forms of novels and the forms of stories are not arbitrary. They are deeply rooted, or so it seems to me, in the organic forms of human life, the way human beings live their lives.
SPEIR: I know that, before you settled on *A Lifetime Burning* as a title; you considered calling the book *The Stone and the Thread*, and I was very much taken by the thread image and metaphor, but I wonder if you might enlighten me a bit on what you had in mind with the stone.
DOUGLAS: Well, in the epigraph, the phrase “old stones that cannot be deciphered” casts another light on the stone metaphor. I think that, probably, what the narrator considers the stone—she says, in fact, “it’s the stone of my life, and I will not carry it.” So, in that sense, the stone is all the unmutable material in one’s life that one has to deal with. But also, of course, it’s the stone of the past, the stone of other people’s lives, the stone of the cemetery with the grandmother’s name.
on it and the mysterious circumstances of her life which are there, an unmalleable fact out of the past which is undecipherable.

SPEIR: One critic has argued that your fiction is concerned primarily with perpetuating the “ethical norms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition.” How do you respond to that?

DOUGLAS: Well, I think people ought to try to be decent to each other. But I don’t know, that’s a heavy-duty question and maybe not relevant. It’s relevant, of course, in the sense that there’s a ground out of which your work rises, and obviously the ground out of which my work arises is a childhood in a Presbyterian family who took their religion seriously. But, when you write novels, it doesn’t seem to me that perpetuating norms is one of the things you think about.

SPEIR: I’m impressed that your novels seldom deal with perhaps the most over-worked of modern themes, that of alienation, except as it sometimes affects certain male characters. Is alienation more a male problem, more a theme of male writers, do you think?

DOUGLAS: To me it seems more a male problem. Somebody like Joan Didion, for instance, would probably disagree radically with that point of view. I think just the biological fact that women bear children makes them less likely to think of themselves as alienated—certainly from the physical world—than men are and that the necessity of caring for children, the loving and cherishing of children, ties one to a very strict reality. There isn’t any reason why that might not disalienate a few males too as far as that’s concerned. I think that Nat Stonebridge in Where the Dreams Cross is probably as close to an alienated character as I’ve produced.

SPEIR: Do you consider yourself a “women’s novelist?”

DOUGLAS: No. I think that Southerners are cursed by reviewers who dismiss their books as being Southern. You never, never see books from California being dismissed as: “Oh, this is another California novel. This is another Ohio novel.” In the same way, women are cursed by reviewers who say, “Well, this is another woman’s novel.” And I think it’s just something that’s easy to say. If somebody is identified as being from Mississippi or as being of the female sex, it fills up a piece of the paragraph in a book review. So, I think writers, in general, who have that happen to them—and I’ve had both those things happen to me—tend to resent it. Probably it’s true that my first novel would have appealed more to women than men. But I don’t see that that should necessarily be true of the later ones. Of course, this new novel is, to some degree, about female rage, and that tends to
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make some men uncomfortable—which is not surprising. But that’s just one of the many things it’s about. It’s also very much about the impossibility of telling the truth. So, no, I don’t think I’m a “women’s novelist.” I hope not, anyway. I just don’t like labels, although I certainly see the need for men and women to look into each other’s eyes and see each other as equals. And I don’t think I’m a “Southern novelist,” either. I hope not.

SPEIR: But you’ve also said that you’ve “tended always to think of women as being realists and less likely to delude themselves” than men.

DOUGLAS: I think that that realism is a kind of biological realism, you know—that one’s life is tied much more closely to the biological realities of birth and the child-bearing years and menopause. Men can fly off from those things more easily than women can. They can certainly fly off forever from child-bearing and menopause.

SPEIR: And that quote went on to say: “Survival is essential in order to deal with the sort of ideas that are being promulgated by the Southern man.”

DOUGLAS: Well, now that’s another matter altogether. I suppose what I was thinking about then was that—and maybe realist was the wrong word—that women can’t afford idealism, or couldn’t, any more than, say, blacks could afford idealism. How can I say what I mean? If you live in a world in which you see very clearly that it’s essential to lie a good deal of the time in order to keep people who are in control of the society you live in reasonably comfortable and get from them the things you need, then you can’t think of yourself as an idealist. You have to think of yourself as a realist. And that’s the kind of society that women and blacks have lived in in most places for quite a while. So, I think that women are realists in that sense, as well as in the biological sense.

SPEIR: And the “ideas that are being promulgated by the Southern man?”

DOUGLAS: Well, now. Maybe things are better now, you know. But when I was young, my mother said to me, realistically, you can’t let men see that you’re intelligent or you’ll not be able to find a husband. You’ll be a threat. And so, therefore, you must conceal your intelligence, and these are the ways that we take care of men and help them to be what they need to be. They’re very fragile creatures who need women to tell them how smart they are and to support them. And my reaction to that was to look around far and wide to find a man that I
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didn’t have to do that with. It occurred to me that life would be pretty rough if you did that. She didn’t really mean that I should do that either. What she meant was: Unless you make yourself appear to be what men expect you to be, you’ll never get to the places where it’s essential for you to get in order to find a man who won’t expect you to be that. You see? You’ve got to work your way through this thicket of lies in order to find somebody with whom you can live. And that was true to a degree in that world. I think it’s less true now. There are men and women who seem to do a little better.

SPEIR: Well, obviously, times have changed and are changing. Surely the women’s movement has had something to do with that.

DOUGLAS: Yes, it has. But times change faster in most places than in Mississippi, I think.

SPEIR: How do you see yourself in relation to the tradition of women writers?

DOUGLAS: Well, I don’t know that I think about myself particularly in connection with a “tradition” of women writers. It’s just not the way I think of myself. I think of myself as an American writer who’s read a lot of American and English fiction by both males and females. I would be hard-pressed to put together a tradition of female writers; they’re so different from one another. But I’ve learned a lot from a lot of them—and should have learned more from some. I really like George Eliot and think I’ve learned a lot from her. I like to read Wuthering Heights over every now and again: that’s a wonderful book.

SPEIR: You’ve also been quoted as saying, “I think the process of writing fiction is the process of learning what you mean.” Have you learned what you mean?

DOUGLAS: Oh, I think you learn what you mean in every book. You only learn what you mean in that book, and then in another book you mean something else and you have to learn what you mean in that book. If you’re lucky. If you’re unlucky, you decide you already know what you mean, and then you just keep repeating yourself.

SPEIR: Let me try to deal more specifically with what you meant in A Lifetime Burning. Though the book does not end despairingly, exactly, and Corinne claims to be “open” in the end, it does seem to argue for a rather gray, if not black, vision—namely, that, despite one’s individual willingness and hope for connection, it’s virtually impossible.

DOUGLAS: That’s a general statement about the whole human race at all ages that you’re making. And I’m only writing one book about
one couple at one period in their lives.

SPEIR: You want to keep this down on a small scale, do you?

DOUGLAS: I’m not making such an enormous statement as that about all human connections, you know. I just finished writing a book before I wrote this one [The Rock Cried Out] in which the young man who’s the hero is sure that he’ll move on into connections that will work for him. And I felt that he was right, that he would.

SPEIR: People try to blow writers’ books up to too grand a scale, you think?

DOUGLAS: I think possibly at sixty a narrator would be more pessimistic about the possibility of connections than she would say, at twenty-nine, but that doesn’t mean all those connections in between weren’t there.

SPEIR: You think one gets more pessimistic as one gets older?

DOUGLAS: That’s another book.

SPEIR: Well, in your youth, you took a degree in sociology and then later insisted that you were “not a sociologist.” But, on the other hand, you’ve also said: “I think the function of the novelist in general over the past two or three hundred years has been to criticize society.” How do the sociologist and novelist differ?

DOUGLAS: Sociologists deal in statistics and novelists deal in specifics, individuals.

SPEIR: So, you’re not trying or expecting to reform the world?

DOUGLAS: Oh, my goodness. No! Mercy!

SPEIR: What effect do you hope to have? Or, what do you hope to be remembered for?

DOUGLAS: I would be glad if people would continue to like to read my books—for a while.

SPEIR: I wonder if you’d forgive a turn to “politics,” in a broad sense, for a moment. I realized, reading over the passage again this morning, that this may be a little unfair, but nevertheless, what I remembered from the ending of The Rock Cried Out was the idea that, until you can do without gasoline and paper, you can’t criticize International Paper and Exxon.

DOUGLAS: Until you can do without gas and paper, you can’t present yourself to yourself as a person who is so pure that he is not involved in these things. Alan’s problem throughout that book and the problems of a great many young people growing up is that he thinks there’s an ideal way to live in which he’ll be free from complicity in anything evil. And the process of growing up teaches him that, in fact, there is
no way for a human being to be free of complicity in many evil things. But, in general, it doesn’t seem to me that I have the erudition or the experience to talk sensibly or valuably about global politics. I see that things are complex and bad, and I try to make my own personal political decisions as sensibly as I can on the basis of immediate circumstances and immediate people. Maybe I ought to be a martyr to the cause of serving mankind, but clearly I’m not going to do that. I’m a writer, and I write novels. I suppose if I were to stop writing novels and devote myself for the rest of my life to working for a cause, the cause would be nuclear disarmament. But I wouldn’t be absolutely sure, ever, that I was doing the right thing for my own cause because I don’t think you can ever be sure that you’re doing the right thing, even if you’re sure the cause is right. And I guess the only time I’m reasonably sure I’m doing “the right thing,” in quotation marks, is when I’m putting Band-aids on children’s fingers or reading to them or trying to write as good a book as I can. And trying to write as good a book as I can is what suits me temperamentally. Reading to children suits me sometimes. And putting Band-aids on fingers is necessary.
THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES:
HAWTHORNE'S LEGAL STORY

BROOK THOMAS

THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

In 1851-1852 William Wetmore Story, later to become Hawthorne’s friend in Rome and whose statue of Cleopatra Hawthorne helped make famous in *The Marble Faun*, published a two-volume account of the life and letters of his father, Justice Joseph Story, a distinguished professor of law at Harvard, the foremost legal scholar of his day, and a member of the Supreme Court from 1811 till his death in 1845. Describing his father physically, he wrote: “The muscular action of his face was very great, and its flexibility and variety of expression remarkable. Its outward form and feature seemed like a visible text, into which every thought and emotion translated themselves,—a luminous veil, which moved with every vibration of the inward life. His face was a benediction. Through it shone a benignant light, whose flame was fed by happy thoughts and gentle desires...while he spoke, his face was haunted by a changeful smile, which played around it, and flashed across it with auroral light.” At almost the same time, Hawthorne created his fictional Judge Pyncheon of *The House of the Seven Gables* who also has a variety of expression and a face that can be read like a visible text. When the veil is lifted on Judge Pyncheon’s face, however, it reveals not “the genuine benignity of soul, whereof it purported to be the outward reflection” but something “cold, hard, immittigate, like a daylong brooding cloud” (119).

Although Hawthorne’s description could be read as a response to Story’s, the dates of composition rule out any direct influence. Nonetheless, comparing the two helps us to understand how deeply Hawthorne’s portrayal of his judge is rooted in his times. The description of Story is not merely that of a respectful son honoring a famous father; it is pervaded by the metaphors used to combat a powerful anti-judicial sentiment in antebellum America. Confronted by complaints from Jacksonian Democrats that judges too often made political decisions benefitting a wealthy elite, defenders of the profession responded with an image of the judge as a disinterested defender of the republic’s central principle, rule by law. No other national judge of the time, with the possible exception of John Marshall, was cited as
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a living monument to that principle more often than Joseph Story.

What I want to do in this essay is use the lens of Hawthorne's fiction to look at a segment of American legal history at the same time that I frame Hawthorne's portrait of Judge Pyncheon within the period's legal history. In the first section, I will detail Story's participation in Salem's most famous murder case, a case Hawthorne used as a model for The House of the Seven Gables. In the second section, I will look at Story's participation in two landmark cases as a way of better understanding his legal ideology and how Hawthorne's fiction challenges it. In the final section, I will examine the politics of Hawthorne's aesthetics, for despite a radical potential in his work, Hawthorne, in his reaction to the same market conditions that helped to shape Story's conservative legal ideology, lapses into a conservatism of his own. My underlying assumption, then, is that Hawthorne's fiction and Story's legal opinions are social texts, which read together allow a symptomatic reading of their age.3

II

The most obvious model for Judge Pyncheon remains Charles W. Upham, the Salem Whig politician Hawthorne felt was responsible for his removal from the Custom House. But at least one of Hawthorne's contemporaries recognized enough allusions to Justice Story to write on the flyleaf of a first edition of The House of the Seven Gables:

There seems no doubt that Hawthorne, from some pique or other, has to a sufficient extent to have annoyed Judge Story not a little, had he lived to read these pages, though not enough to ground an action of libel on, introduced very unpleasant allusions to the late Mr. Justice Story in this volume. We know that in preceding work, Mr. H. treated some very respectable old people in Salem, who had incurred his displeasure, in a similar way; & there is therefore nothing strange in this attack. Probably, Mr. H. having been a Revenue officer in the district of which Judge Story had jurisdiction, some ill-feeding arose out of their official intercourse. These instances, of a vague, indefinite resemblance, are numerous, though unconnected as a whole. There was never in N. England that I can learn of, but one Pyncheon family and almost the last (female) descendant of it, Judge Story married. Judge Story & a Mr. Crowninshield were nephews of the late Mr. White, a wealthy gentleman of Salem whom the latter murdered by night, destroying his will &c. (see p. 335) Crowninshield was hung, however. The
That a contemporary would think of Justice Story when reading about Judge Pyncheon is not surprising. Story was after all, like Hawthorne, a Salem man and its most famous judge. His first wife, who died shortly after their marriage, was indeed a descendant of the Pynchon family which felt so unfairly attacked by Hawthorne’s use of its name in his fiction. Story’s second wife, the daughter of Judge William Wetmore, was a distant relative of his first. An equally interesting observation is that the connections between Story and Judge Pyncheon are too vague to ground an action of libel. First of all, it explains why, even if it were my main purpose to do so, I could not establish conclusive evidence for the connection. Second, it suggests a pattern we repeatedly find in Hawthorne’s fiction. At the same time that he suggests a historical connection, he uses the cover of his fiction to make certain that he could never be convicted of making it. His book is, after all, a romance not a real history, “having a great deal to do with the clouds overhead, than any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex” (3).

So warned, readers continue to return to the history of the county of Essex to understand Hawthorne’s fiction, and the murder of Captain Joseph White in 1830 is a part of that history often cited. George Parsons Lathrop, Hawthorne’s son-in-law, wrote in his introduction to The House of the Seven Gables: “In all probability Hawthorne connected with [the Pynchon murder], in his mind, the murder of Mr. White....” Thus, our contemporary reader’s allusion to the trial is not unusual. Nor is it unusual, given the sensational aspects of the case, that he himself offers a fictionalized account of the case, an account influenced no doubt by his reading of Hawthorne’s fiction. As we shall see, Story and Crowninshield were involved, but they were not nephews of the victim.

The White murder case has been described by someone not interested in making a point about Hawthorne as resurrecting “in the early years of the Nineteenth Century the apparatus of the Eighteenth Century romance.” In April 1830, Captain White, a rich Salem merchant on whose ships Hawthorne’s father had served, was found murdered in his bed. The town was in an uproar, fearing that life and property of respectful citizens were no longer safe. A committee of vigilance was formed, made up of twenty-seven leading citizens. Its vigorous pursuit of the murderers added to the climate of crisis, as critics recalled the witch hunts two hundred years earlier. Some sus-
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pected White’s servants who reported the murder. Some thought that White, eighty-two, had been involved in a love affair and was the victim of a jealous rival. Others speculated that a Black committed the crime in revenge for the large profits White had made from the African slave trade. Even White’s lawyers were suspected. Eventually, two sets of brothers, the black sheep of two prominent Salem families, Frank and Joseph Knapp and Richard and George Crowninshield, were accused of the murder.

Three years earlier, Joseph Knapp, a captain of one of White’s ships, had married Mary Beckford, the beautiful daughter of White’s niece and long-time housekeeper. Accusing Knapp of fortune hunting, White had removed him from command and cut his favorite Mary out of his will. Mistakenly believing that, if the will of Captain White could be destroyed, his mother-in-law would inherit half the fortune, Knapp hired Richard Crowninshield to murder White while Knapp, still having the run of the house, would steal the will. Crowninshield executed the murder, and Knapp did steal a document, but the wrong one. White’s real will was kept safe by his lawyers. In the real will the major inheritor of a great fortune was the once-suspected nephew Stephen White, a Massachusetts State Senator and also Joseph Story’s brother-in-law.

Although Story had a personal stake in the trial, he stayed to the background as controversy about the case made news throughout the country. What he did do was arrange for his friend, Daniel Webster, to aid the prosecution. Thus, the White case involved an alliance that was one of the shaping forces in antebellum law, an alliance combining the oratorical skill of Webster and the legal expertise of Story. Because of numerous complications, including Joseph Knapp’s confession in exchange for immunity, the suicide of Richard Crowninshield, the death of presiding Chief Justice Parker by apoplexy, and Joseph’s loss of immunity by refusing to testify at his brother’s trial, all of the power of that alliance was needed to bring about a conviction.

Indeed Webster was given personal credit for the conviction of Frank and Joseph Knapp, George Crowninshield having been granted an acquittal. His concluding speech at Frank’s trial has been called “the greatest ever delivered to an American jury.” Not all of those impressed by its power were impressed by its fairness. One critic went so far as to call Frank’s conviction “an example of judicial murder.” Enough Salem residents were outraged at Webster for help-
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ing to hang two members of a prominent Salem family that he was never again warmly welcomed in their town. Others were understand-
ably upset at the irregularity of having Webster brought in from outside to serve the prosecution, especially since, contrary to his official denial, he was paid $1,000 by Story’s brother-in-law, the same fee paid to Crowinshield to commit the murder. Salem residents would also have known that Webster, who stayed at White’s home during the trial, received a gift of a yacht from White, that the half-brother of Webster’s first wife married one of Story’s nieces, and that Webster’s son married another. That Webster was allowed to argue the case for the prosecution seems even more unfair when we remember that Robert Rantoul, the young Jacksonian Democrat who would later battle Story over the codification of Massachusetts law, served as assistant for the defense, but contrary to the defendants’ wishes, was not allowed to argue their case because he was not a member of court. The Webster v. Rantoul opposition points to a possible political aspect of the case that historical distance too often lets us forget.

As any resident of Salem would have known, Story might have had more interest in this case than his nieces’ inheritance. Early in his life he had been an ally of the Crowinshields, a rising merchant family which joined the Jeffersonian party to challenge the staunchly-Federalist merchant establishment in Salem. But the alliance had turned sour. In 1808 Story maneuvered a Crowinshield out of a seat in Congress. Further, if the local Salem diarist Dr. William Bentley can be trusted, Story had risen in the State house by depriving the same Crowinshield of the speakership and had replaced him as president of the Salem Merchants Bank. Bentley referred to Story, the man later honored as an impartial lover of justice, as “the Ambitious wretch.” Even in his role as judge, Story continued to be involved in Crowinshield family affairs. In 1817 he sat on the Supreme Court as it decided the bankruptcy case of Sturgis v. Crowinshield, disallowing a Crowinshield’s attempt to discharge past debts. Other ways in which Story might have antagonized the Crowinshields are suggested in a letter from Mrs. Crowinshield to her husband, the Secretary of the Navy in Washington: “Yesterday afternoon I had the pleasure of seeing Judge Story....He told me you may be home in May....He likewise says you have fine times with the girls in the house...[I also understand there are] so many ladies that almost every night you send for music and dance. Now you have never told me this and I have many times asked you how evenings you
sometimes recollect you have a wife at home peering over her knitting and two daughters studying their lessons by her side” (Dunne, 158). Finally, as the 1830 trial proceeded, another Crowninshield lost his race for Congress, the outcome probably affected by publicity from the trial.

In all of this Hawthorne could hardly have been a neutral observer: the Crowninshields were his distant cousins. Nonetheless, he does not appear to have been too upset. In a letter to his relative John Dike, he does not mention the Crowninshields at all and, as to the Knapps, he writes: “For my part, I wish Joe to be punished, but I should not be very sorry if Frank were to escape.” For my part, I do not want to suggest that Story had evil motives, although his role in hiring Webster does raise ethical problems. The most obvious interpretation of Story’s low profile during the trial is that he wanted to maintain judicial integrity by avoiding public involvement in a case personally affecting his relatives. If he had wanted to be certain of influencing the case, he had a perfect opportunity. Governor Levi Lincoln offered him Isaac Parker’s seat as Chief Justice. Story refused, however, citing fears that President Jackson would choose his successor to the United States Supreme Court. Instead, after consulting with Webster, Lincoln decided upon Lemuel Shaw, later to become Herman Melville’s father-in-law. Shaw reluctantly accepted the post he would occupy for thirty years, but he disqualified himself from sitting on the White case because he had served as the attorney for one of those suspected before the Knapps and the Crowninshields were arrested.

What is important in terms of Hawthorne’s use of the White murder case is not to assert, almost certainly incorrectly, that a famous judge committed wrong-doings to reap personal gain and to get rid of past enemies, but to suggest how Hawthorne’s imagination transformed historical material into a fictional account of a dispute between and within two Salem families. As we examine that transformation, it is wise to keep in mind Hawthorne’s warning to read his work as a romance, not history—a warning echoed by George Parsons Lathrop who cautions, “that such resemblances as these between sundry elements in the work of Hawthorne’s fancy and details of reality are only fragmentary, and are rearranged to suit the author’s purposes.” In fact, it is precisely the political implications of that rearrangement along with Hawthorne’s desire to deny the historical ground of his fiction that concern me.
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When Hawthorne first makes obvious use of the White murder in his fiction the result is a story quite different from his later romance. In “Mr Higginbotham’s Catastrophe” (1834) the murder of a rich merchant is plotted by three men: a white, a Black, and an Irish servant. The first two lose courage, leaving the Irishman alone to commit the deed. The hero of the story interrupts him, saves the merchant, and marries the rich and beautiful young niece. In recalling the original suspicion directed against a Black or a servant as White’s murderer, Hawthorne’s tale confirms the racial and class prejudices of elite Salem. His use of material from the White case in The House of the Seven Gables is both more accurate and more radical.

Some points of similarity between the romance and the historical accounts of the murder are obvious. Unlike in the short story, where a servant plots a murder against a rich man, in the romance, as in the Salem murder, the alleged plot occurs within the rich man’s family and is over inheritance. Instead of the poor committing crimes against the propertied, the propertied commit crimes against the poor. In addition, there is the confusion of wills and lost documents. There is the possibility of a niece inheriting a large fortune. There is a judge who dies of apoplexy. There is the possibility of someone avoiding a stiffer penalty because of “the high respectability and political influence of the criminal’s connection” (22). And, of course, there is Judge Pyncheon, who like Justice Story presides over meetings of bank directors, who like Justice Story has considerable financial investments, and who like Justice Story is not above using the law to protect his private interests.

But to understand better why one of Hawthorne’s contemporaries felt that Story would have been so upset by Hawthorne’s portrayal of Judge Pyncheon, we need to go beyond the Salem murder case and look at a part of legal history in which Story actively participated as a judge. These cases comprising this history are not as attractive to a writer of romances as a sensational murder case, and there is no reason to assume that Hawthorne knew more about them than the average educated New Englander. To be sure, he might have discussed some of the cases with his trusted friend, George Hillard, who along with Charles Sumner was Story’s most prized pupil. But the point is not to prove Hawthorne’s knowledge of specific cases. The point is that looking at these cases makes Story’s opinions on the law accessible to us and lets us see the legal ideology against which Hawthorne was reacting. One of the most important cases Story sat
on was *Dartmouth College v. Woodwd* (1819).

III

The Dartmouth College Case arose over a dispute between the college and the state legislature. The legislature had amended the school's charter to make it more responsive to state needs in a manner similar to Jefferson's proposed University of Virginia. Powerful members of the college wanted to preserve its elite, private nature. With Webster arguing the case for the trustees, the U. S. Supreme Court held the Dartmouth Act invalid under the impairment-of-contracts clause of the Constitution.

The case was welcomed by the rising commercial class because it established the principle of the vested rights of corporations. Corporations of all kinds could appeal to their original charters as sacred contracts under the law not to be altered by legislative attempts to control them. Significantly, it was Story's concurring opinion, not Marshall's opinion of court, that explicitly extended this corporate privilege to private business enterprises.

What accounts of the case too often leave out is Story's personal stake in the outcome of *Dartmouth College*. In a preliminary ruling on the case, Story was careful to make a clear distinction between public and private corporations, since a better case could be made for legislative control over public corporations than private ones:

[A] bank, whose stock is owned by private persons, is a private corporation, although...its objects and operations partake of a public nature. The same doctrine may be affirmed of insurance, canal, bridge, and turnpike companies. In all these cases, the uses may, in a certain sense, be called public, but the corporations are private...(Dunne, 181)

What Story did not mention was that the Merchants Bank, of which he was president, perfectly fit this description. Nor did he mention that Harvard College, to whose board of overseers he had just been appointed, would be protected from legislative interference by the *Dartmouth College* decision.

Modern readers immediately recognize a conflict of interests. But Gerald Dunne, one of Story's biographers, warns us against applying our own standards to Judge Story. "No one," he writes, "seemed particularly concerned that Story held both judicial and corporate office" (Dunne, 141). Story's ability simultaneously to hold positions...
as judge and bank president depended on the widespread belief at the
time in a guardian class of virtuous, disinterested men who could keep
public and private interests separate.

Justice Story firmly believed that "There can be no freedom where
there is no safety to property." It was the task of the guardian class
made up of disinterested lawyers and judges to protect the rights of
property against those forces which would violate them. To Story, the
major threat to property was the legislature: "That government can
scarcely be deemed free, where the rights of property are left solely
upon the will of a legislative body, without restraint." Dartmouth
College was such a triumph for his principles because it reaffirmed
judicial over legislative control of the economy. In a letter to Chancello-
or James Kent after the decision, he wrote, "Unless I am very much
mistaken, these principles will be found to apply with an extensive
reach to all the great concerns of the people, and will check any undue
encroachments upon civil rights, which the passions or the popular
doctrines of the day may stimulate our State Legislatures to adopt."11
In asserting the power of the rational, impartial guardian class to rule
over the irrational, partial masses as represented by state legislatures,
Dartmouth College had helped to solve the basic problem of govern-
ment as Story saw it: "how the property-holding part of the Communi-
ty may be sustained against the inroads of poverty and vice."12

Hawthorne's fictional work radically challenges Story's vision of
a just society because it questions the existence of a specially-trained,
professional elite that can disinterestedly uphold the law. Vice in The
House of the Seven Gables is not coupled with poverty, but with
property. The guardian class is as irrational and partial as the popu-
lar masses. Recalling the witch trials, the book's narrator remarks:
"The influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be
leaders of the people, are fully liable to all the passionate error that has
ever characterized the maddest mob" (8). Judges, if we are to judge
from Judge Pyncheon, seem especially inclined to let personal ambi-
tion sway their judgments. And judges, if we are to judge from Justice
Story, seem especially inclined to minimize the passionate error of
judges by appealing to universal legal principles. In a lecture at Salem
in 1828 on the Puritans, Story argued that behind the irrationality of
the witch trials lay beliefs "which had the universal sanction of their
own and all former ages;...which the law supported by its mandates,
and the purest judges felt no compunctions in enforcing."14

Of course modern readers do not need Hawthorne to point out that
the guardian class is not as disinterested as it claims. Without having first read *The House of the Seven Gables*, we can still, I hope, note the contradiction when—on the page after Story's most sympathetic legal biographer praises him for believing in "an independent guardian class of virtuous lawyers and judges"—he details the subtle manner in which Story used Webster "to influence Congress to enact legislation favorable to his conservative designs."15 What Hawthorne's fiction can do, however, is offer an alternative to the legal history we are often told. For instance, Story's other biographer defends the Story-Webster alliance by arguing that it was an accepted practice: "It should be emphasized that the relationship was compatible with then contemporary standards for judicial interests and behavior. No one was particularly scandalized by Webster's legislative activity on Story's behalf, nor by Webster's action in requesting Story's intercession with the reconstituted New Hampshire court to secure a clerkship for an associate" (Dunne, 161). What Hawthorne's fiction shows is that some contemporaries were indeed scandalized by the guardian class's claim of judicial impartiality when judges continually made decisions benefitting the class to which they belonged. In fact, Hawthorne's Judge Pyncheon even suggests the Story-Webster alliance, since the Judge has resemblances not only to Story, but also, as Henry Nash Smith has pointed out, to Webster.16 Certainly, the Judge's political aspirations draw attention to the contradiction involved when Story and his friends claimed that the Jacksonian call for elected judges would politicize the judiciary.

Nonetheless, Story's inability to see that his notion of the judiciary was as political as the Jacksonians' was the result of neither stupidity nor willful deceit. It results from the radical separation between the public and private spheres accepted by most people of that time—Democrats and Whigs alike. Defenders of the impartiality of the judiciary were not so naive as to believe that judges were without private beliefs or interests. But they did believe that when a man delivered his public opinions as a judge he could, to a large extent, suppress his private opinions. Similarly, private business matters could be kept separate from public policy matters. What is important to see is that the same distinction between private and public which justified Story's judicial impartiality was written into American corporate law by Story himself. The result is not at all impartial.

Under traditional common law, private corporations with a public function were bound by so many charter obligations to the state
and public as to make them as much an instrument of common welfare as a vehicle for private enterprise. But with the transformation in America from an agrarian to a market economy, the status of the corporation changed. In underdeveloped America bridges, turnpikes, and canals needed to be built to help develop the land. In a capital-poor country, public funds were not easy to find. The solution was to transform common law to meet the demands of a dynamic, market economy. Traditional common law, based on a static agrarian economy, favored the maintenance of the status quo by holding to the principle that the first owner in time was the first in right. But in the first years of the nineteenth century, property laws were reinterpreted to favor the first developer. Most notably, special privileges were granted to new corporations so that private investors would risk capital in projects beneficial to the entire public. The principle of the vested rights of corporations established in Dartmouth College was felt to be essential to the welfare of the country by pro-development people such as Story because it assured investors of the legal consequences of their investment. Once the terms of a charter were established, they could not be altered, no matter how the economic situation might change.

The problem with the second stage was that it could discourage further development by granting too many privileges to the first developer. Too often public-service organizations turned into private, profit-making organizations, making the theory justifying their special favors outdated. Under the new conditions, Story's distinction between public and private gave such corporations the benefits of a public corporation without its obligations. Thus, just as the old agrarian laws had favored those already possessing wealth, so, after an initial redistribution of wealth, did the new laws. As a result, the law was once again reinterpreted and transformed, this time to encourage competition by undermining the privileges granted a generation earlier.17

The case pointed to as marking the transformation from the second stage of law to the third is Charles River Bridge v. Warren Bridge (1837). The extent to which Story served the interests of those who benefitted from the second stage is clear when we compare his involvement in this case to his involvement in Dartmouth College. In 1785 the state of Massachusetts had granted a corporation an almost exclusive franchise to build a toll bridge across the Charles River. By 1827, it was collecting tolls of $30,000 a year. In an effort to spark
competition, the legislature chartered the new Warren Bridge Company, which promised to be toll free in six years. The Charles River Bridge, loosely connected with Story's Harvard College, claimed that the new bridge violated its charter and hired Webster to argue its case when it went to the Supreme Court in 1837. But this time Webster lost, and Story was forced to write a dissenting opinion. The opinion of the new Jacksonian Chief Justice Taney sounded to Story much like Holgrave's reforms would have sounded to Judge Pyncheon. Just as Holgrave proposes that each generation should be able to restructure society to serve its present interests, so Taney ruled that considerations of public interests at the present time could overrule the original conditions of a corporate charter. Story's defense of the sanctity of contract, on the other hand, recalls the Pyncheons' desire to have the present generation bound by the wills of the past.

Story took his defeat hard. He wrote to his wife, "A case of grosser injustice...never existed. I feel humiliated" (Dunne, 360). That the highest court in the land had agreed to give up its regulatory control to state legislatures seemed to Story a threat to the republic. His gloom was confirmed even before the Court adjourned for the year when the Panic of 1837 swept the country. These public setbacks along with the confirmation of a permanent illness to his wife caused Story to consider retiring from the bench and withdrawing to full-time teaching or private business. In the public sphere Jacksonian policies seemed to have triumphed, and America seemed to have given itself over to irrational control.

Hawthorne once again challenges Story's political vision, which saw Jacksonian policies as the threat to the country. He does so by offering an alternative to the version of history Story adheres to. Although Story defended his legal principles as eternal, Hawthorne, by recording the three stages in the transformation of American property law with remarkable accuracy, shows that some of those principles were of fairly recent origin. According to Hawthorne's fictionalized Salem history, the country was founded on the agrarian principle of "first in time makes first in right," a principle giving Matthew Maule the right to his land, land he has cleared with his own hands. That original agrarian principle is violated, however, when Colonel Pyncheon asserts his power in order to take over Maule's land, just as the rising commercial class manipulated the law to increase its power. The clearly established ascendancy of the Pyncheons marks the start of a new era similar to the new era marked by the changeover
in the presidency of Salem's Merchants Bank. "Our Merchant's Bank," lamented Dr. Bentley, "by passing from the Crowninshield interest to the Story...has not the same friends" (Dunne, 142). Thus, Hawthorne's portrayal of how the Pyncheons first bend the law to accumulate property and then appeal to it to protect their property might have reminded historically-aware residents of Salem of how Story and his allies used a rhetoric about the eternal sanctity of property rights to protect property only recently acquired. Contrary to Story's version of history, then, Hawthorne's version allows us to see the Jacksonian threat to the propertied class not as a threat to basic American values, but as an attempt to return to America's original agrarian values, just as the radical reformer Holgrave threatens to return the Pyncheon property to its rightful owners. There is, to be sure, a certain nostalgia for a democratic, agrarian America that never really existed in this version of American history, a nostalgia also found in Jacksonian politics. 18 Nonetheless, Hawthorne's history does place Story's claim that he was protecting eternal rights in proper perspective and would clearly have upset the judge, just as Hawthorne's explanation of public interests in terms of private ones would have done.

In his portrayal of Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne makes it clear that public and private interests are connected, that merely keeping one's beliefs private does not mean that they do not affect one's public role. For Hawthorne, to know the public man one must know the private man:

As regards the Judge Pyncheon of to-day, neither clergyman, nor legal critic, nor inscriber of tombstones, nor historian of general or local politics, would venture a word against this eminent person's sincerity as a christian, or respectability as a man, or integrity as a judge, or courage and faithfulness as the oft-tried representative of his political party. But, besides these cold, formal, and empty words of the chisel that inscribes, the voice that speaks, and the pen that writes for the public eye and for a distant time—and which inevitably lose much of their truth and freedom by the fatal consciousness of so doing—there were traditions about the ancestor, and private diurnal gossip about the Judge, remarkable accordant in their testimony. It is often instructive to take the woman's, the private and domestic view, of a public man. (122)

But if Hawthorne's emphasis on the private undercuts Story's ideology of disinterested public service, it reflects another ideology of the time, one shared by most of the period's writers. Public questions
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for Hawthorne can almost always be explained by reducing them to a private, individual level. For him, to write for the public eye inevitably involves distortion. Truth is to be found in the private. So, two years later when he took up "the pen that writes for the public eye and for a distant time" to compose the campaign biography of Franklin Pierce, he emphasized his intimate knowledge of his old friend's private character. For Hawthorne, politics was basically not a question of issues, but of character.\(^{19}\)

In The House of the Seven Gables, for instance, the corruption Hawthorne exposes in Salem can be explained by the corrupt heart of Judge Pyncheon or the private greed of the small group of politicians who would nominate him governor. When the Judge suddenly dies, Maule's curse is magically lifted and the book can come to what seems to be a happy ending. Thus, while Hawthorne condemns his Puritan ancestors who participated in the witch trials, he retains their world-view that explains social contradiction in terms of a conspiracy theory. If we turn once again to my comparison between Justice Story and Judge Pyncheon, we can see how inadequate this view is. Even though Justice Story served the same elite interests as Judge Pyncheon and, like him, may have disguised personal ambition behind a benevolent smile, he was not evil. He might not have radiated the light his son claimed, but he did not have a heart which, like Judge Pyncheon's, threw "a great black shadow over everything" (306). The way in which judges, even honorable ones, can help perpetuate social injustice needs a more complex explanation than Hawthorne's fiction can provide, for ultimately Hawthorne diverts our attention from the historical perspective his romance offers to an exploration of the universal character of the human heart, including his own.

No matter how telling Hawthorne's criticism of the legal profession's ideology might be, it loses some of its power because Hawthorne, the judge of judges, in his heightened self-consciousness hints that he is not exempt from his own criticisms. If judges, like Story, relied on a distinction between the public and private self, so did Hawthorne, who referred to his fiction as a veil covering his private self. It was, he pleaded, the public self that readers should judge. Hawthorne's image of the self he tried to sell to the public shares an important similarity with the public image judges tried to project. In ante-bellum America judges were not the only professionals claiming to be above the squabbles of local politics; artists made the same claim. Hawthorne, in fact, made precisely this claim in protesting his
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dismissal from the Custom House. Appointed an artist, he should not, he felt, be the victim of petty politics.20 Yet, as readers of "The Custom-House" and The House of the Seven Gables knew and should know, Hawthorne's works can be very political on a local and even, I have argued, national level. Nonetheless, like Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne conceals his politics behind a public role. Also like Judge Pyncheon, Hawthorne covers up a gloomy disposition by putting forth a sunny face to the public in The House of the Seven Gables. And that forced sunshine, like the Judge's sunny smile, is in part motivated by commercial interests, as Hawthorne, hopeful of increased sales, tried to open up commerce in both senses of the word with his consuming public.21

The way in which both artists and judges reacted to the conditions of the new marketplace explains Hawthorne's similarities with his judge better than any universal theory about the darkness of the human heart, for as much as Hawthorne distrusted Story's guardian class of lawyers and judges, he distrusted the class about to replace it even more. In fact, the major inaccuracy in Hawthorne's version of history is that the values of the class to replace the Pyncheons would not be the somewhat nostalgic and idealized agrarian values of Phoebe and Holgrave, but ones even more acquisitive and selfish than those of the Whig elite, values represented by the young consumer of cookies, Ned Higgins.

IV

Describing why Story's position as a bank president exemplified the transformation of economic orders, Dunne offers a valuable description of the new market conditions that both judges and artists had to face:

The rise of banking cut the fabric of tradition with an especial sharpness. Though the significance of the change was barely grasped and rarely articulated, the growing importance of banking amounted to a revolution in the traditional system of credit, which forced profound changes in outlook and values. Sharply challenged were the old agrarian views under which gold and silver, like fields and flocks, were the true essence of wealth. Rather, wealth was changing in form to the intangible—to paper bank notes, deposit entries on bank ledgers, shares in banks, in turnpikes, in canals, and in insurance companies. More important, perhaps, debt was no longer necessarily the badge of improv-
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idence and misfortune. And from the creditor's point of view debt, in the form of bank notes or bank deposits, became an instrument of power. (Dunne, 142-143)

In the new economy, the old theory that value was determined by the inherent properties of an object gave way to a subjective theory of value, in which the value of an object was determined by laws of supply and demand. In capital-poor but land-rich America, the land itself became just another commodity, fluctuating in value according to market conditions, the enterprise of developers, and the confidence games of speculators. That in The House of the Seven Gables deeds and wills become as important as possession of the land itself in determining ownership is one way Hawthorne's fiction reflects the new economic reality in which paper documents and notes become the measure of wealth and power.

Since they could use the new system of credit to gain power, Justice Story and his allies, like the Pyncheons, initially benefitted from this new order. It was their enemies the Jacksonians, with their legacy of Jeffersonian agrarianism, who were most nostalgic about the lost theory of value and who responded with an attack on the Monster Bank. But even Story could not be comfortable with a subjective theory of value. It made the economic situation too unpredictable. If the market were, as Karl Polanyi terms it, "artificial," any cunning person might wrest wealth from those in power, a possibility thoroughly explored in Melville's The Confidence Man, in which legitimate selling becomes indistinguishable from artful swindling. For Story, the answer to the instability of the marketplace was to be found in the monumental quality of the law, just as the Pyncheons sought an answer to the flux of time in monumental buildings. Constructed according to the solid eighteenth-century values of perspicuity, elegance, and logic, the law was to provide a firm foundation to order an economy which seemed to defy all laws because its only control was the formless passions of the masses. Most important in a time of flux, the edifice of the law housed eternal truths. Lawyers and judges were of the guardian class, because, specially trained in the law, which Story granted the status of a science, they had privileged access to those eternal truths.

Hawthorne, of course, reminds us that the legal system's foundation was not so stable, that its science was not so rational, and that—if the Pyncheons' commercial transactions are an example—its definition of legitimate commerce was not so just. Nonetheless, judges of the period were not the only ones to react to the new economic conditions.
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by seeking eternal truths. If public law did not house stable truths, they must be sought elsewhere. Commercial times, Emerson argued in "The Transcendentalists" give rise to Idealism.24 Caught in a market economy which rendered the value of things subjective, turned Nature itself into a commodity, and seemed beyond man's ability to control, men needed to seek stable truths in transcendental laws. For Emerson it was the imaginative artist's special role to see those transcendental truths, just as for Story it was the trained lawyer's to discover eternal truths in the law.

By making this comparison, I do not want to minimize the difference between the Transcendentalists and the legal profession. Although Story started his career as a poet and continued to write poetry all of his life and although he strongly urged his law students to study literature as a source of eternal truths, he was uncomfortable with nineteenth-century poets. His models were the eighteenth-century figures of Pope and Johnson, whose balance and reason expressed "truth," not the "ideal sketches of the imagination"25 of modern poets. Story's eternal truths were "public"; the Transcendentalists' "private." But despite their differences, both Story and Emerson's social visions depended on keeping the public sphere separate from the private. Story wrote a poem called "The Power of Solitude" and then embarked on a public career. Emerson, finally bringing himself to talk on the Fugitive Slave Act, starts his speech: "I do not often speak to public questions;—they are odious and hurtful, and it seems like meddling or leaving your work."26 To compare Hawthorne's conservative Judge Pyncheon with his radical artist Holgrave is to discover the hidden affinities between judge and artist that I have suggested.

Holgrave, who champions change and flux, would seem to be the total opposite of Judge Pyncheon, who shares the lawyer's love of order and stability. Holgrave's friends—"reformers, temperance-lecturers, and all manner of cross-looking philanthropists"—according to Hepzibah "acknowledged no law and ate no solid food, but lived on the scent of other people's cookery" (84). Nonetheless, Holgrave's profession as an artist betrays his affinity with the Judge. In his portraits he is able to fix flux—even the varying expression of the Judge—to capture the essence of a personality. Holgrave can live in the flux and embrace it because, like the Transcendentalists, he believes in the artistic individual's access to fixed, permanent laws. Although Holgrave made Phoebe uneasy because he "seemed to
unsettle everything around her, by his lack of reverence for what was fixed," Hawthorne immediately adds "unless, at a moment's warning, it could establish its right to hold its ground" (177). As Hepzibah says, "I suppose he has a law of his own!" (85). While Holgrave's dislike of the Judge shows how the artist's private law often conflicts with the judge's public law, his conversion to conservatism at the end of the book shows how the artists' desire to find eternal truths can lead to political conservatism.

This mixture of conservatism and radicalism that we find in Hawthorne's work can be explained in part by the mode of writing by which he chooses to present himself to the public—the romance. If, as de Tocqueville observed, the discourse of the law at that time imparts—or attracts men with a predisposition to—conservative "habits of order, a taste for formalities..., [an] instinctive regard for the regular connection of ideas, which naturally renders them hostile to the revolutionary spirit and the unreflecting passions of the multitude,"27 the genre of the romance helps to determine—or is the most appropriate mode to express—Hawthorne's politics. Politicizing the generic work of Northrop Frye, Fredric Jameson has argued that the romance, by portraying conflict in terms of good and evil felt as magical forces, disguises social and historical causes of conflict. Of course, Hawthorne's work, which is not a pure romance but a novel-romance, does not completely disguise social and historical causes of conflict. As I have argued, it accurately portrays the stages in the development of antebellum economic law and through the Pyncheon-Maule conflict shows the class struggle involved. Nonetheless, as I have also argued, Hawthorne's fascination with the sensational, along with his tendency to personalize and see social conflict in terms of conspiracy, distorts the acute historical analysis that he offers.

Jameson goes on to argue that the precondition for the romance "is to be found in a transitional moment in which two distinct modes of production, or moments of socioeconomic development, coexist," such as in antebellum America when market capitalism started to replace the old colonial, agrarian order. He adds, however, that "their antagonism is not yet articulated in terms of the struggle of social classes, so that its resolution can be projected in the form of a nostalgic (or less often, Utopian) harmony."28

 Appropriately, Hawthorne's resolution of conflicts in The House of the Seven Gables has been read alternatively as nostalgic, Utopian, and even ironic.29 It is nostalgic if we see the return of the property to
the Maule family as an idealized reassertion of democratic agrarian values, a yearning for a non-existent Edenic past. In this reading, Hawthorne’s “romantic” ending reflects the inherent nostalgia in the Democratic alternative to Whig elitism. It is Utopian if we read the romance (as Hawthorne tells us to) as offering possible, if not probable, alternative visions to society and see Holgrave and Phoebe’s proposed marriage as a destruction of class barriers and a union of idealism and practicality, a harmony not yet consummated, but one projected for a possible future. It is ironic if we see Hawthorne self-consciously undercutting his too obviously nostalgic or Utopian visions and suggesting, through Holgrave’s conversion to conservatism and Phoebe’s inheritance of a great fortune, that Maule’s curse has not ended, but is starting all over again. But whether the ending is nostalgic, Utopian, or ironic, it saves the protagonists from confronting the world of commerce with which the rest of Salem has to deal. Watching the barouche carry Clifford, Hepzibah, Holgrave, and Phoebe to the country home of Judge Pyncheon are two men of the street:

“Well, Dixey,” said one of them, “what do you think of this? My wife kept a cent-shop, three months, and lost five dollars on her outlay. Old Maid Pyncheon has been in trade just about as long, and rides off in her carriage with a couple of hundred thousand—reckoning her share, and Clifford’s and Phoebe’s—and some say twice as much! If you choose to call it luck, it is all very well; but if we are to take it as the will of Providence, why, I can’t exactly fathom it!”

“Pretty good business!” quoth the sagacious Dixey. “Pretty good business!” (318-319)

Once again Jameson’s discussion of the romance can help us understand what is at stake in Hawthorne’s artistic retreat from business realities. This is Jameson’s description of the end of Joseph von Eichendorff’s Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts:

It is because Eichendorff’s opposition between good and evil threatens so closely to approximate the incompatibility between the older aristocratic traditions and the new middle-class life situation that the narrative must not be allowed to press to any decisive conclusion. Its historical reality must rather be disguised and defused by the sense of moonlit revels dissolving into thin air, and conceal a perception of class realities behind the phantasmagoria of Schein and Spiel. But romance does its work well; under
the spell of this wondrous text, the French Revolution proves to be an illusion, and the grisly class conflict of decades of Napoleonic world war fades into the mere stuff of bad dreams.30

So too with The House of the Seven Gables, which transforms the class conflict of antebellum America into an imaginative vision “of the writer’s own choosing or creation” (1). Alone with Phoebe in the garden, Holgrave exclaims:

Could I keep the feeling that now possesses me, the garden would every day be virgin soil, with the earth’s first freshness in the flavor of its beans and squashes; and the house!—it would be like a bower in Eden, blossoming with the earliest roses that God ever made. Moonlight, and the sentiment in man’s heart, responsive to it, is the greatest of renovators and reformers. And all other reform and renovation I suppose, will prove to be no better than moonshine! (214)

Later, as Holgrave and Phoebe acknowledge their love, they

transfigured earth and made it Eden again, and themselves the first two dwellers in it. The dead man, so close beside them, was forgotten. At such a crisis, there is no Death; for Immortality is revealed anew, and embraces everything in its hallowed atmosphere.

But soon the heavy earth-dream settled down again! (307)

Historical reality is but an earth-dream; the Edenic moment of romance, reality.

What our examination of the period’s legal history should let us see is that paradoxically an important aspect of the historical reality from which Hawthorne retreats is a market system that made value “fictional.” Hawthorne’s attraction to imaginative romances is in part a nostalgia for a world in which “true” values would be tangible. His Judge Pyncheon is fully aware of how the new economy makes it possible to fictionalize one’s “value.” Talking to Hepzibah, the Judge describes how his Uncle Jaffrey concealed “the amount of his property by making distant and foreign investments, perhaps under other names than his own, and by various means, familiar enough to capitalists, but unnecessary here to be specified” (234). The type of wealth that Uncle Jaffrey had, though indicated only on paper, was of course real, yet Hawthorne, the writer of romances, wants to deny its power over him.
To be sure, it exerts complete power over the most powerful, practical man in Salem—Judge Pyncheon. The judge’s pursuit of his uncle’s missing property focuses on his quest for the deed to the mythical Maine land. It becomes his one castle in the air. From Clifford he demands “the schedule, the documents, the evidences, in whatever shape they exist, of the vast amount of Uncle Jaffrey’s missing property” (235). But by the end of the romance, these documents turn out to be utterly worthless. In a legal system that since Charles River Bridge no longer upholds the sanctity of contract, the original Indian deed to the lands had “long been worthless” (316). It is of course appropriate that the secret to the whereabouts of the deed is the one “possession” Holgrave inherited from his ancestors. If the secret source of wealth is after all fictional, it has been controlled all along by our representative writer of romances. The writer controls the paper economy, not vice versa. Having arrived at such a vision, Hawthorne can close the book on the radical reforms that at first seemed so necessary if the faulty foundation of an unjust legal system were to be repaired.

The reader, however, can keep the book open since, despite his conservatism, Hawthorne has exposed contradictions in the legal ideology that are not to be dismissed by his invocation of the special privileges of the romancer. Hawthorne’s ability to expose those contradictions depends to a large extent on the historical perspective he offers, a perspective in turn dependent in part on his particular biographical situation which made him a resident of Salem, a town whose historical development allowed it to produce as its most famous judge a man whose life traces the transformation of American law even more accurately than Hawthorne’s fiction. That famous judge’s involvement in Salem’s most famous murder trial makes his legal biography an ideal text to compare to Salem’s most famous writer’s fictionalized version of Salem history. Interweaving these texts, we are in a better position to understand the ideological implications of both Joseph Story’s view of the law and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s view of art, a view which caused him to invoke the privileges of a romancer to retreat from the truly subversive potential of his own legal story.

NOTES

1 William Wetmore Story, Life and Letters of Joseph Story (Boston, 1851), 2:552.

2 Gerald Gawalt, The Promise of Power (Westport, Conn. 1979), passim.
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5 George Parsons Lathrop, Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston, 1898), 3:9.


7 Howard A. Bradley and James A. Winans, Daniel Webster and the Salem Murder (Columbia, Missouri, 1956), pp. 219, 10.

8 Gerald T. Dunne, Justice Story and the Rise of the Supreme Court (New York, 1970), p. 142. Further page references to Dunne will be included parenthetically within the text.

9 E. B. Hungerford, “Hawthorne Gossips about Salem,” NEQ, 6 (1933), 455.

10 Lathrop, p. 9.


12 William Wetmore Story, 1:331.

13 Miller, p. 215.


Gilmore's entire discussion in "Emerson and the Persistence of the Commodity" is useful here.

Miller, p. 148.


See my discussion of the ending in *The House of the Seven Gables: Reading the Romance of America," PMLA*, 97 (1982), 195-211.

Jameson, p. 149-150.
TRIOMPHE DE VILLANDRY

GEORGE W. CABLE

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FISHER IV AND MICHAEL P. DEAN

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Introduction*

"Triomphe De Villandry" carries with it none of Cable's better known treatment of racial issues that brought down upon him abuse during his lifetime. With its date of 1907 and the yoking of it to Strange True Stories of Louisiana, published in 1889, this story may have been an attempt on Cable's part at shifting from volatile issues within the American scene toward the "international story" that brought successes to Howells and James. Although we can attach no certain date to "Triomphe De Villandry," it stands as a turn-of-the-century story, one that, excepting the happy ending Cable effects for his young lovers, might have kept company with those set against a French background in the vein mined by Ella D'Arcy or Ernest Dowson, who were customarily associated with The Yellow Book. We may well remember that Henry James was an invited contributor to that standard bearer of decadence, that the periodical was widely read and criticised, and that Cable may, in an experimental tactic, have tried to write his story for a market less troublesome than that linked with his racial writings. Perhaps he recognized, however, that others had more frequently and more artistically trod ahead of him in paths of the international tale, and consequently he withheld "Triomphe De Villandry" from publication. He may also have remembered the controversy engendered because intimations that he dealt unfairly with those who provided source materials for Strange True Stories had enlivened periodical columns during the 1890s; and such remembrance could account for this story's never seeing print within the author's life. A slight piece, "Triomphe De Villandry" appears here with no claims for its being a hitherto unattended masterpiece. The love springing between John Whitcomb and Lucie is handled with little subtlety, although such a relationship, during an era when a young woman's chief concern was to achieve a marriage that would bring security and social stability, is not altogether implausible. The Cinderella theme, though, imparts a saccha-
rineness that probably would have deterred readers in the age of realism. The red rose called “Triomphe de Villandry,” named by the Duchesse de Vauvert, whose gardener had developed it, assumes modest artistic dimension in Cable’s hands. Its furnishing a title for the story links it at once with the traditional red-rose symbol of passion. Second, but related deftly, the flower’s name incorporates the name of the French setting; for the story overall this locale provides a “world” that is geographically accurate (a known French area) and simultaneously fitting for the enchanting love affecting Lucie and John. For both American John and French Lucie, in other words, Villandry serves as a far-away, romantic spot (she is no native of this region). The captivating and the withered roses respectively represent live, vibrant flowering love in the John-Lucie bonding and the unhappily ended marriage of the Duchesse.

As an international story written by an American author, this one typically presents Americans travelling into Europe and then marrying Europeans. Cable structures his story in hour-glass form by intersecting the growing relationship between John and Lucie with the disintegrating marriage of the Duc and Duchesse de Vauvert. That the Duchesse, after her own marriage has dissolved, sends her gift of roses to the young lovers, is reasonable. She has, we learn, been their guardian angel in terms of informing Madame Champeaux (the nurse to this well-starred Romeo and Juliet) of John’s true background and prospects.

If the circumstances of wealth-poverty and mistaken identity cast amidst misunderstandings seem a falling off in Cable’s techniques, the dialogue, time and again, balances such weaknesses with a sprightliness and irony that are true for the ear and the mind of the reader.

In many respects, “Triomphe De Villandry” takes a place among other turn-of-the-century stories with surprise endings, such as Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” and those made popular by O. Henry. Given its imperfections, it affords us a glimpse at a variety of work that has not brought Cable his greatest acclaim, but that nevertheless is genuine Cable.

STRICKLY, this is not my story. But I have printed others in this same way before. In one whole volume of “Strange True Stories of Louisiana,” not one of them is wholly my invention, nor any two of them mine in the same manner or degree. This one is not even of
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Louisiana but of France, and all I can plead for it is that the modest French gentleman and friend from whom I have it asks me to tell it for him. Says he:—

These incidents took place one summer when I had just finished my third year at the Superior Normal School, in Paris, and while awaiting my appointment as professor was spending my vacation in Touraine, at the home of an uncle, hard by the city of Tours, in the delightful village of Sainte-Radegonde.

In Tours, one afternoon, I was in an apothecary's shop, when a tall man whose strong, sweet smile won me on the spot entered and addressed the druggist in English:—

"Good-afternoon, sir. My name is Whitcomb. I am from the United States."

His bearer bowed and he spoke again: "While I spend a few weeks here in Touraine I should like to stop with some family in which I may improve my French. Do you know—?"

The druggist looked from him to me. The stranger pointed to a gilt sign on the door: English Spoken. "Don't you speak my language?" he asked in French.

"Oh!" cried the apothecary, with unblushing amusement, "Not I, sir! The customers, if they wish!" He waved the inquirer to me: "This gentleman will converse with you."

Meantime a lady had entered and he turned to her. "Madame la Duchesse!" he called her; a young and beautiful woman, dressed in the height of the fashion, yet visibly sad and careworn.

After a brief conversation Whitcomb and I walked out together and sat down to a glass of wine in a neighboring café. "That lady we saw," I presently found myself remarking, "is your countrywoman."

"Yes," was his only reply, and before long I was further explaining unasked, that she was the daughter of a New York millionaire, had been married only six months, to the Duc de Vauvert, and was dwelling in the chateau of Villandry, about twelve miles away southwestward.

"I know," he said; "I see by to-day's Figaro she is suing for a divorce." He showed a kindly, man-of-the-world smile.

"The same old story," we agreed.

"Some of you American boys," I went on, "ought to play us tit-for-tat and take wives from France."

He smilingly shook his head: "Entangling alliances, I am against them all. I've never yet found my ideal, but I am sure she is in America."
It was good to hear the tall, strong fellow speak of "ideals." It chimed like sweet bells from a fine spire. We talked on other themes, mostly mine chosen as tests. "As to boardinghouses," I said—

But he broke in: "I prefer a private family. I have letters—my father is a well-known banker—I am a graduate of Harvard." And so we walked again together until, on the little terrace of my uncle's villa we found my kinspeople.

With them was a former neighbor, Madame Champeaux, who lived now beyond Tours the other way, in Villandry. This good lady was accompanied by a Mademoiselle Lucie Duchesne, a beautiful girl of, say, twenty, with black hair and eyes, who seemed very distinguished, and who, by her fair complexion, I saw was no Tourangelle. "My near neighbor in Villandry," Madame said as we were presented.

Our jolly Madame Champeaux quite appropriated my Yankee. "We have a lovely American lady in Villandry," she said to him, "married to the Duc de Vauvert. Lucie has made her acquaintance, through the sisters in the convent. She—ah," she broke off, "there's the car! Come, Lucie!—I was only on errands, but I longed to see you all."

"Then come again Sunday—for the day," cried my aunt, hurriedly explaining that it would be the votive fête of Sainte-Radegonde. "And bring Mademoiselle Lucie!"

Not many moments later my aunt, who had read my wish, was offering Mr. Whitcomb a room with us. He accepted it with his favorite word, "ideal." At supper, on the terrace, he prompted us to speak of the girl who had hurried away with Madame Champeaux. "Mademoiselle Lucie," replied my aunt, "is from the north of France and has lately lost a beautiful home and both her parents. She lives now with a neighbor of Madame Champeaux, in Villandry, by name, I believe, Blanchard."

The remaining four days of the week we employed in seeing Tours and its vicinity. Soon we were the best friends in the world, while as for my aunt she quite made John one of the family.

Sunday came, a perfect day. At eight, fire-crackers, drums, trumpets, bands and street-organs raged and every house was decked with tricolor flags, bunting and garlands. In the midst of the tumult arrived Madame Champeaux in full glory: a huge hat trimmed with big roses and pinks, and a florid face that radiantly belied a full third of her sixty years.

Lucie was in black even to her parasol, but the morning air had
colored her cheeks too, and her attire, no less than her bearing, bespeak a life habituated to refined elegance. Her hair and eyes, so soft though so dark, were a subduing wonder, and upon John, I saw their effect as he talked with her.

After a déjeuner à la fourchette we went to mass in the parish church; a quaint eleventh-century edifice which gave John and Lucie a theme for converse all the way. He and I taking seats directly behind the three ladies, Madame Champeaux's vast hat eclipsed, for me, both altar and priest, and left me to observe how John followed Lucie's every movement.

I began to be filled with a bitter anxiety. Not as a rival. I was already in love with, and engaged to, the sweet maiden who no great while after became my wife. My distress was that I could not believe this rich young man would genuinely seek alliance with an orphan girl in staring want, dependent for her very board and bed on the charity of social inferiors.

At the conclusion of our indoor lunch John sang for us, at the piano, and presently Lucie asked him for a "song of home." She even played its accompaniment. In a rich tenor voice he sang a true hymn to hope as well as home, and when he ended, her smile was bedewed with frank tears of sweetest gratitude.

Then they sang together! The theme was love and the words were still English, of which Lucie's too strict pronunciation made sweet ruin. Yet I never had dreamed the English tongue could be so bewitching, and still less, I think, had John. But, alas! what a cruel snare for a French girl reared in convents! I was glad enough when my aunt proposed that we go out again and ascend the abrupt cliffs which overlook the valley of the Loire between Tours and Vouvray, and soon we were climbing. The young pair being next behind me I now and then overheard their conversation, and already they had got to where they were talking about each other! From the frequency of John's laughter I perceived he had found a vein of humor in his companion of which none of us had been aware.

We ended the day on our terrace, viewing the fireworks on the banks of the Loire. When about nine our visitors took the Villandry car the merest "good-evening" was all John and Lucie said; but I saw, and they knew I saw.

"I kill a turkey next Thursday," was Madame's last backward call. "The young gentleman must come help me do it justice. It is as big as an ostrich!"
All travellers in Touraine visit Azay-le-Rideau, that chateau of Francis I, “a glimmering pearl... turned into a king’s house.” It lies but a step beyond Villandry, and on Thursday, Ostrich Thursday, John and I started for it early on our bicycles, purposing to go there at one stretch and on our return to stop and dine with Madame Champpeaux. But the day was hot and we made no haste. At the cross of Taconiere, we took an old road winding up to the plateau of Azay. Halfway up the hillside we came to a small white house over the door of which hung a branch of juniper. At one side, under a broad apple-tree, sat an old man and two elderly women.

“You keep this inn?” I pointed to the juniper.

“If we may call it one, messieurs,” said the man, “since the new road has supplanted this old one.”

In a clean little dining-room with roses and honeysuckles at its windows, “Give us,” I said, “the regular courses; at fifty cents to each of us.”

After twenty minutes the two women brought a repast so decently varied and abundant, and served with such grace, such good wines red and white and such coffee, that John and I looked at each other!

“A dollar each,” said John, “Let me pay.”

The old gentleman reentered, “Messieurs,” he flatteringly said, “we trust you are pleased. The bill, altogether is fifty cents.”

John stared at me again. Then to the landlord he said, “Take these two dollars, monsieur.”

The good soul protested vehemently, but in vain:—

“Then, messieurs, come under our apple-tree! I have an old bottle of Rochechon, 1874; the last one. We shall have no better occasion to uncork it!”

With the two old ladies we sat down at a small table, and our host had just opened the treasured bottle and filled the glasses, when who should appear, from the village, but Lucie!

“Then,” cried I to our entertainers, “you are the Blanchards!” We were in Lucie’s home.

Our honest shame made her laugh, while their tender and happy surprise was to us, in turn, delightful. A flock of birds could hardly have made the old apple-tree more vocal. Presently, telling us we were to meet her and the Blanchards at the ostrich dinner, Lucie left us with the old man. To him my straight-forward John eagerly turned: “How is it, monsieur, that Mademoiselle Lucie lives with you?”

“I was her father’s foreman, messieurs, for twenty-five years. The
Duchesnes were the leading manufacturers in wool of northern France. I saw little Lucie in her blue cradle the day after her birth. Her father and mother were the providence of Etréauport—a small town, messieurs, but the glory of the Oise valley. They had but this one child, but her mother was incomparable, and with all the daughter’s education and talents she is an admirable housewife. And her fortitude!—it is without a flaw.”

“How came adversity?” persisted John.

“Destiny, messieurs! Who can prevail against destiny? Her father was defrauded by a partner. His aged mother, his two brothers, his wife, all, died within a few months and Lucie was left alone.”

“But with wealthy relatives, one may hope?”

“Oh, monsieur, you are young!”

“Or suitors?”

“Ah!—while there was a dowry.”

“Of course,” mused Whitcomb.

“Coming to your senses!” thought I with grim joy.

More than once I called his attention to the beauties of the château, but—“It doesn’t interest me,” he said, privately, “except as a warning.”

In Madame Champeaux’s garden we were welcomed by Lucie. I talked with the old man and let the young one who was coming to his senses walk with the dark-eyed girl “to enjoy the landscape.”

Alone with her, John boldly asked what plans she had for the future.

“Monsieur,” she quietly replied, “I have found a place as a teacher.”

He started with pain and could only ask, “Where?”

“At Guise, near my native Etréauport.”

“But will it not distress you to be so near—?”

“Ah, no! Rather I shall delight to see often the town of my birth.”

“A table!” cried our hostess; the feast was served, a lovely sight. Our converse held us at the board until ten o’clock. Lucie, in view of her own early departure, offered her adieu to John as final. But he would say only “au revoir.”

“But you will soon be in America, monsieur!”

“There will still be ships, mademoiselle.”

“Well, then, au revoir!” she yielded, with a change of eye and a lightening of the bosom, which the very Blanchards might have seen.

Mounting our wheels we returned to Sainte-Radegonde in an
evening of stars and nightingales. In days closely following we rode much together, but the charms of Touraine seemed to have palled on my friend, and of Lucie there was never a mention.

Presently, receiving my appointment at the Lyceum of Bourges, I had to go there for a time, and John went to Paris, promising to return for a last day or two with us "before leaving for America."

"Yes! before Lucie leaves for Guise," thought I.

One afternoon what does he do all unaccompanied but bicycle into Entreaupont. Strangers, possible buyers, daily visited the Duchesne manufactory, and he was little noticed. From the huge buildings came no sound. The gates stood ajar, weeds grew in the yard, the window-panes were shattered.

"And where are the owners?" he asked of a sad women who kept the workmen's inn.

"In the cemetery, monsieur! Their twelve hundred operatives had to leave town. Ah! had you beheld those scenes! See that noble mansion. It was bought for a bagatelle—and by a retired butcher!"

John tarried there several days. I was already back in Sainte-Radegonde when he returned to us. As we sat alone in the terrace after supper he asked me if Lucie was still at Villandry. I said she was. "Mon ami," he suddenly exclaimed, "do you think she would accept my hand in marriage?"

The question seemed so cruelly unfair that I broke into laughter: Ho, ho-o! Out of any hundred Frenchmen ask ninety-seven. My dear sir, she could not possibly decline!"

"Then, my dear sir, I cannot possibly make the offer!" He sprang to his feet. The smothered [feeling? Cable dropped a word] of weeks of anxiety and incertitude set his heart ablaze. "That's what I was afraid of!" He turned on me: "Is it she, or I, whom you regard as an article of commerce?"

While I stammered, the distress of his doubt quenched his resentment. "Can you suppose," he pleaded, "that my offer would give her dreams of carriages, gowns, balls, travels, automobiles?"

"No!" said I, putting on the superior air he had cast off, "not at all! But she was reared in luxury, and—"

"Oh! is no one ever so reared in luxury as to be able to live humbly yet happily?" He dropped to a seat: "Until I know she loves me for myself and would take me without a dollar, she shall never again see my face."

"And how are you ever to find it out?"
TRIOMPHE DE VILLANDRY

"My dear boy, you are to find out. You French people—I am a stranger to your manners and customs. You must go, for me, to Villandry!"

We stared at each other and I spoke: "You will be trusting a rotten plank."

"Then you will go?"
"Yes, John, you're a grand fellow!"
"Bah! I have only found my—"
"Oh, yes, I know!"

Promptly after breakfast next morning I mounted my wheel for Villandry. As I passed through Tours I bought a copy of an American paper, Paris edition. This day was fine. The world knows that a Frenchman with a chivalrous idea is ready to storm all the capitals of Europe. Yet out in the open country my valor began to leak away appallingly. What, after all, was my plan of strategy? Clearly I must get that from Madame Champeaux. And what if she were not at home? Slow and slower ran my wheel, and at last I sank into the turf to rest.

While I lay heartily wishing myself back in Sainte-Radegonde I felt in my pocket, and drew forth the American newspaper. On its third page an item brought me to my feet in sad amazement. Yet only by littles as I again moved toward Villandry did this piece of news take on all its weight and value. With it and Madame Champeaux I might hope to win out. Yet poor John Whitcomb! Poor John!

But at Madame Champeaux's door I was told she had gone home for a day or two. Sick at heart I faced about for Sainte-Radegonde. Going by the iron gate of the convent, who but Lucie should issue from it! She had been telling the sisters goodbye; she said: "Do you come from Madame Champeaux's? But she is away."

"Well, I am now returning home."
"Ah! but first come and have lunch with us."

I lifted my eyes to my good stars. We walked back side by side. "Yes," she ran on with a lightness my gloom resented, "I go tomorrow." And just then drove by, giving Lucie a faint preoccupied bow, the Duchesse de Vauvert.

"I was at the chateau the other day," said Lucie, "with the Sister Superior. Madame de Vauvert had invited her to see the 'Triomphe de Villandry', a wonderful red rose lately developed by her own gardener. With such roses I can fancy I should never be unhappy."

Her lovely bouyancy contrasted so cruelly with the mood of her
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absent lover that I felt angered.

"Do you know John has returned to us?" I asked.

"No!" Her cheeks became rivals to her "Triomphe de Villandry" and the smiling words caught in her throat: "I thought—he was to go to Switzerland and th—thence to America!" Our conversation died and it was a relief to reach the home of the Blanchards.

There, at table, the talk was of Whitcomb. I said he seemed under a faint cloud of gloom and mystery.

"Can he have received bad news?" asked Lucie.

I passed her the newspaper. She glanced through a line or two, gave me a wild look, and in an agitated voice began to translate:

R. J. Whitcomb, the Wall street banker who lately lost his entire fortune in wild speculations, committed suicide yesterday at his Broadway hotel. His only son is said to be touring in Switzerland.

A harrowing silence followed. Then in deep emotion yet with splendid courage Lucie asked, "Are you sure this is our friend?"

"Ah! who can doubt it?" was the general sigh.

"I must ask him!" I said, rising to go. "But it may take time to ask. We are not in his confidence, you know."

"Except me!" broke in Lucie. "My like fate puts me there. Oh, I know what it is to fall asleep in luxury and awake in want and bereavement. Monsieur, "—to me—"I have a thousand francs in savings-bank. I have my mother's jewels, left me after all was paid. He shall have both! Tell him so! He shall have all!"

A parting word was on my breath, when the mayor of the village called and the old people hurried out to negotiate with him for a bit of vineyard. Lucie sat down near a window and offered me a chair.

"Have you told all you know?" she demanded.

I had to drop my head.

"You have, then, the assured fact!" she gasped. "He has lost his father and is also ruined!"

"Really, mademoiselle, all I know is—is—"

"That he has—?"

"A thorn in his heart."

She gazed at me.

"He loved a young girl."

"Oh-h-h! And she is rich, and now—"

"She is far from rich, mademoiselle."

Lucie's breath stopped. We arose. I had presumed too far, yet I stood my ground.
“In love with a poor girl!” she murmured. “And this poor girl”—her rising voice quivered—“Now refuses him—because—?”
“Her never really encouraged him, mademoiselle. While he was rich he forebore to ask her, for fear—”
“Ah! naturally and right! His family—”
“No, not his family. He feared she—she might—”
“Ah-h-h!—might care most, or too much, for his riches! I see-ee! And has it so turned out?”
“Mademoiselle, how is he to know?” I held her gaze: “Having feared to ask her then, how can he now when he has only poverty to offer?”
Her eyes escaped out of the window, and standing with her back to me she presently said:—
“The girl is American, of course?”
She is a French girl, mademoiselle.”
I heard a deep sigh. Lucie leaned weakly on the window-frame.
“Sit down, mademoiselle,” I urged, and she did so. “Mademoiselle!” I murmured, my prudence all gone. Mademoiselle! If that girl—were you?”
She rose and whirled upon me; then she laughed scornfully, though her eyes were full of tears. “I must not keep you longer,” she kindly said.
“Ah, but—but—Oh, let me send him to you!”
“Send him?” She kindled again, but again softened: “It is quite too late, monsieur; to-morrow Monsieur Blanchard conducts me to the Tours station to take the eleven-thirty train for Paris and Guise.”
“Monsieur Blanchard—assuredly! Yet can you not be there in time to give John half an hour?”
Her smile grew bitter: “Oh, monsieur! how can he, who has just lost everything, want half an hour for a parting already spoken?”
“Mademoiselle! For pity’s sake! Have I spoiled all?”
“All what, monsieur?” She nervously laughed. “Make no apologies. But!—she flashed—‘on my honor!—never repeat what I have told you about my money or jewels! Yet—present my sincerest sympathies.’”
On the way home I broke my wheel, and arrived by the car only at dusk. John was out—to meet me on the highroad. As I lay on my couch in the twilight his returning tread came up the staircase.
“Are you ill?” he asked in the doorway.
“I hope so.”
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“Have you met a repulse?”
“Repulse? I have met Sedan-Waterloo-Trafalgar! Go away! Go! Never again will I attempt—”
“You disheartened Frenchman!” gently said John. “You sink straight to the bottom.”

He pressed his inquiries with courageous meekness but I gave him only crumbs of information. How could I do more and be fair to her? “At any rate,” he urged, “tell me this: When you asked for the half-hour did she imply say yes, or no?”
“Yes!—No!—Both!—I—I—don’t know which!” He sprang up and paced the room.
“Well, that is success enough for one day. Come, let us go to bed happy.”

“Happy! With her refusing to see you, and with transatlantic news so dreadful that I cannot press you to speak of it? John Whitcomb what are you hiding from me?”

His tender dignity utterly melted me. “I am in great sorrow,” he said; “but you who know that great sorrow and great happiness can fill the same heart at the same time, must not ask me to explain just yet. Good-night. Get your rest.”

Next morning we started for Tours, and before eleven o’clock we were there. But when the Villandry car was overdue I had not arrived. Instead, came rumor of an accident to it and of one or two persons injured. Full twenty minutes passed and more, the twenty-eighth, the twenty-ninth and—here came the car! Our two friends stepped from it unharmed but with not an instant to give us. Lucie had barely time to spring aboard her train and the next moment it had disappeared round a curve. The old gentleman broke down and sobbed.
“I fear,” he said, “I shall never see her again.”

We tried to comfort him, gave him coffee at a hotel near by and conducted him to the Villandry car. Then we strolled along toward Sainte-Radegonde. We were silent long, till John laid a hand on my shoulder: “Mon ami, you have done me a priceless service.”
“I have shipwrecked your cause!”
“No,” he replied, and by and by added, “I wrote about her last night to my mother.”
“How does your mother bear up, John?”
He answered tardily: “Very well. Very bravely.” And then he said, “You must let me stay with you till I get her answer, by cable, next week.”
Toward the end of the week John and I called one afternoon on Monsieur Blanchard. The branch of juniper was gone. The place was no longer an inn. We found him in an arm-chair under the apple-tree. His face showed suffering and his handgrasp was clammy. He handed us a letter received that morning from Lucie.

John read it to me. She had—"seen once more her dear Entréau-pont. I dared not pass near the blessed home," she wrote. "The present owner, no one has learned why, is negotiating its resale. Poor home! . . . But that is all one," she cheerily concluded; "I shall soon be at work," etc.

"At work!" moaned the old man, "for her living! The daughter of my old master!"

"Monsieur," said John, "may I answer this?"

"Ah, have you not trouble enough of your own?"

John admitted he had, but we went to the post-office and he wrote and then read to me,—

_Mademoiselle:_— _I make myself secretary of all of our friends to tell you there is sore need that you leave your work permanently and return here at once. If you do this brave deed Monsieur Blanchard will owe his life to your goodness. Were other reasons needed to move you I could readily give them, but our knowledge of your noble heart forbids us to suppose this, and we trust you to trust us for the final issues of your self-sacrifice.

There was more but he stopped. "It sounds absurdly cold and stiff," he said, "doesn't it?"

I thought not, but he would read no farther, and so it went.

In the evening of the following Saturday came the joyful word that Lucie had returned. Sunday, wrote Madame Champeaux, was the fête votive of her village and she invited us all to lunch with her at the Blanchards'.

We found the old man reading his newspaper under the apple-tree, marvellously restored in mind and frame. Lucie, he said, had gone to church with Madame Champeaux. Wherefore as soon as John and I could slip away we strode thither, determined to give our piety full swing.

We stood at the end of the nave, among peasants in blue blouses chatting about their vineyards. Lucie was in a pew near by. A golden sunbeam from a stained window formed a halo about her head, and she wore a face serene with inward joy.

We were back at the Blanchards' when she and Madame Cham-
peaux arrived. The lovely girl was more lovely than ever. She bowed to me with particular kindness, as if she saw I needed her smile. The older ladies went into the house. Monsieur Blanchard and my uncle drifted to the kitchen garden. I ascended to an arbor at a corner of the vineyard, not guessing that thence I could still see John and Lucie under the apple-tree.

There they sat, this golden September morning, whispering together—if the ear of my fancy told me true—the immortal song of love. More than once Lucie dried her eyes; but John, in an attitude of loving reverence, seemed to say,—

“My own, these are your last tears.”

They arose, and while Lucie entered the house he came slowly up to meet me. But down, down sank my heart as he came, for not a smile shone from him. Was it only his rayless Yankee way of taking unspeakable joy? I tried to hope it.

“Come to the telegraph office,” he murmured.

We went in silence. I secretly prayed he might be about to cable home, but he wrote only,—

Raquin, Notaire, Etreaupont: Agissez promptement.

Returning, we found Lucie under the apple-tree, charming, lustrous, yet wearing a maiden inscrutability as baffling as his. At lunch Madame Champeaux and Monsieur Blanchard sat at either end of the table, and Madame, as usual, did most of the talking. John and Lucie, on the host’s right and left, were but two of us, and a serene vivacity was the rule until, with the dessert, the gladdened old man prepared to open a bottle of sparkling wine. Then John laid a touch on his arm and we all looked that way.

“Are we to have a toast?” my uncle inquired.

“Oh! if Monsieur Whitcomb will propose it?”

John gratefully bowed; then drew forth one, two, three documents, dropping slow speeches between them: “I cannot, dear friends, offer this toast until I—make evident certain facts of which,—as far as I know, even you, mademoiselle,—are ignorant. I wish the more to do this,” he went on, “as of late I have let mistaken inferences distress you—and even you, mademoiselle, to my advantage.”

“Blessed be God!” cried my aunt across to her husband, “that means John is not, then,—”

But Lucie fervidly broke in,—“You are not, then, in affliction?”

“I am. My only sister, the angel of our home, died four weeks ago. But here is a letter”—he passed it to her—“from a lifelong friend of
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both my parents, Chief Justice of our state, naming my father as one
of its most honored citizens."

We sighed our compassion; but Lucie, with eyes deep in the docu-
ment, gave a start, read aloud, "Ralph H. Whitcomb!" met John's gaze
and blushed.

"Not R. J.!!" cried two or three of us.

"No," was his quiet reply. "In America we have as many Whit-
combs as in France you have Duponts or Durands. With the unfortu-
nate Wall street banker we were neither related nor acquainted. We are
under no financial stress. This, Monsieur Blanchard, is a letter from
my banker, stating that in my own right I have—you see the figures—
a competency."

The aged reader's gasp, and his widening eyes, provoked our
tearful smiles and we did not at first observe that Lucie's gaze was
resting steadfastly in John's with her tears pouring down unhindered.

"And here, mademoiselle," he said with a hint of tremor, "is my
father's own letter saying that he and my mother lovingly trust all to
me in a matter of which they seem to have given, as well as got,
information in advance of mine, through some source un—"

"Monsieur!" called Madame Champeaux as she rose: "Unknown,
yes! unknown to all this innocent company. I am that source, thanks
to my blessed friend—and yours if you but knew it—the Duchesse de
Vauvert! Ah, had it not been for her, my beloved boy, you never should
have come here a second time!"

Lucie was on her feet aghast, but her words and the glowing
apostrophe with which her lover claimed her were drowned in our
mirth and applause. Then John rose and bade us drink—"To Lucie
Duchesne, my promised bride if this good man consents."

With one note of approval all our glasses went up save two. A
hand of the old man lay on the fair wrist that held Lucie's uplifted cup,
and one of hers rested on the hand that held his. He spoke:—

"Is it thy whole heart's glad choice?"

"Only if it be thine!" Ravishingly she held his look. His glass rose
trembling, and again she went blind with tears. Yet her glass followed,
and we drank.

We had but half relaxed into gaiety when John's voice again
commanded: "One toast more! Many a happy year yet to Monsieur
Blanchard, henceforth life-custodian of my love's first wedding-gift,
just purchased by telegraph, her childhood's home at Etreaupont. If
she wills it our wedding shall be there."

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Even after the overwhelmed old man had beautifully responded, our hearts were too big to make merry at once. Even our valorous Madame Champeaux sobbed amid her laughter.

"Stop!" she cried; "hear, all of you!" and we pledged a long life, ever brightening, to Madame de Vauvert.

When John and Lucie took ship at Havre, whose name should we find on the passenger list but Madame de Vauvert's! She had obtained her divorce.

A fortnight later, by a letter of arrival, I learned that the winds, though fair, had been a risk enough to excuse the weary lady from table and deck, but that on the final morning, in the harbor of New York, while John was explaining to Lucie the chief landmarks, a steward came saying there was a pot of roses in their room. They found a "Triomphe de Villandry" in full bloom and with it these lines:

To both of you my tender congratulations. I beg Mrs. Whitcomb to accept this souvenir of my garden. I had another quite as fair; but yesterday it was broken and to-day is withered because headlessly I had failed to provide for it the right kind of stay.

"Tarry awhile,"

Northampton, 1907.

NOTES

*Generally we have allowed Cable's original spellings and syntax to remain untouched. We have, however, silently emended certain accent marks for consistency's sake, and in one spot where he or his typist omitted a clarifying phrase we have supplied a notation.


Cable's manuscript (actually a typescript of forty-five pages) for "Triomphe De Villandry" is held in Special Collections, Tulane University, whence comes permission for using it. Courtesies permitting publication also come from George W. Cable's heirs: William H. Cary, Jr., Bolton; and Anne Cary Harkless, Newton Highlands, Massachusetts. We owe thanks as well to Wilbur E. Meneray, Head of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Tulane University; to his predecessor, Ann S. Gwynn; and to Thelma S. Turner, Durham, North Carolina. Professor Fisher wishes to acknowledge special gratitude to Steve Rayburn, Kelly Cannon, and Harry M. Bayne.
CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH: AMERICAN(?)*

J. A. LEO LEMAY

THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

Three major criteria for nationality formed the basis for inclusion in the *Dictionary of National Biography*—1, historical importance to the country; 2. British birth and background (therefore Smith and other founders of the English colonies are in the *DNB*); and 3. loyalties. Since the meaning of the last criterion may not be apparent, I'll point out that Benjamin Franklin and George Washington are not in the *DNB*. But Cadwallader Colden, Thomas Hutchinson, and William Franklin are. In short, the American loyalists are in the *DNB*, the patriots (as we call them) are not. Of course Captain John Smith is an American author because of his historically important role in founding the first permanent English colony of the New World (and incidentally, I will elsewhere make the new argument that Smith is responsible for the headright system of land grants—and the headright system peopled America). But I will argue here that Smith is an American writer for literary and intellectual reasons; and I take comfort from the fact that Sir Sidney Lee and the other compilers of the *DNB* thought that ideas and ideals, like historical importance and birth and background, are important criteria of nationality.

Four arguments support my thesis. 1. Of any known early colonist, Smith had the grandest—and the most radical—secular vision of the meaning of America. 2. Smith was the best promotion writer during the crucial period of American colonization, 1607 to 1631. 3. Smith first tried to define what it meant to be an American and first claimed that American identity was distinctive and desirable. And 4, Smith thoroughly identified with America.

1. SMITH AND THE MEANING OF AMERICA

Smith believed that America offered the individual the opportunity to create himself. By 1616, when he wrote his great promotion tract *The Description of New England*, his American experiences had validated his incipient social philosophy. In the post-feudal society of Renaissance England and Europe, most farmers worked for the local gentry in a state of semi-vassalage with little hope of controlling their own labor or owning their own land. But America, Smith wrote,
afforded "vs that freely, which in England we want." In America "every man may be master and owner of his owne labour and land" (196). Smith's contemporaries disagreed. The Virginia Company intended to create a neo-feudal society in American where the aristocrats would own thousands of acres of land and where the mass of the colonists would work for the few great baronial landowners. Smith defied the Virginia Company with his first publication, and he repeatedly advocated ideals repulsive to the leaders of the Company—and repulsive later, to leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Company.2

Captain John Smith advocated a radical democratic philosophy. Other early Virginia governors naturally reserved the best food and choicest dainties for themselves and their favorites, but when Smith became governor, he shared the very worst with the colonists, reserving the choice foods for the sick (112, 126, 156, 392). When George Percy succeeded Smith, Percy naturally reverted to the old aristocratic forms. In a letter to his brother Henry, the ninth Earl of Northumberland, Percy wrote on 17 August 1611: "the place which I hold in this Colonie (the store affording no other means than a pound of meale a day and a little Oatemeale) cannot be defraied with smale expence, it standing upon my reputation (being Governour of James Towne) to keep a continuall and dayly Table for Gentlemen of fashion about me."3 Just over two years earlier, Smith chose II Thessalonians 3: 10 as the text of his speech to the colonists: "We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." As Christopher Hill has shown, this biblical text was a rallying call of social unrest during the Interregnum.4 Certainly its anti-aristocratic implications were the same during Smith's day. Smith proclaimed that "he that will not worke, shall not eat" (149). That speech announced (what his contemporaries surely knew before then) Smith's identification with and support of English radical traditions.5

Smith thought that in America, people should be as free as possible. In a single sentence in the 1616 Description of New England, Smith encapsulated the meaning of America. The availability of nearly limitless land, the abundance of fish, fowl, and game, the incredible supply of lumber, and the lack of an existing social order—all created the possibility of making a new society where achievement rather than one's inherited social position would determine one's standing. "Heer" in America, "nature and liberty affords vs that freely, which in England we want" 212-213). Those two factors—nature, by which Smith meant the total natural environment, and
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liberty, by which he meant the social, political and institutional forces—freed the common man from the remnants of his feudal condition and allowed him to create ab origine his own role in the New World. Smith’s new American Adam would live in a democratic society—a society completely unlike any existing in the Western world. Smith claimed that “those can the best distinguish content that have escaped most honorable dangers, as if, out of every extremity, he found himself now born to a new life” (963).

Smith most fully and clearly expressed his hostility to the social hierarchy in his last work, the 1631 Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters. Human psychology, he said, dictated that men should be free. People worked harder when they worked for themselves than for others, and they were discontented when they were not entirely free. Flatly contradicting the Renaissance commonplace that social hierarchy was based upon the Providential system of degree in all nature (the locus classicus, of course, is Troilus and Cressida I, iii, 84-141).6 Smith stated that the very idea of servitude was “odious to God.” “Let all men have as much freedom in reason as may be, and true dealing; for it is the greatest comfort you can give them, where the very name of servitude will breed much of ill blood, and become odious to God and man” (948). Smith’s statement of egalitarianism and freedom is extraordinary in its day. It is the first and one of the noblest statements of belief in the possibilities of a new American order. In the New World, humanity will enjoy greater democracy, greater freedom, and greater liberty than ever existed before.

2. SMITH AS PROMOTION WRITER

Smith was the most effective promotion writer of the early seventeenth century. Some scholars have actually said that he wrote demotional rather than promotional literature.7 Typically, other promotion writers claimed that colonization could be “attained without any great danger or difficulty.”8 Such pie-in-the-sky exaggerations had become stereotypes long before the Virginia Colony was founded. George Chapman, Ben Jonson and John Marston lampooned the promotional propaganda in their 1605 play Eastward Hoe!9 Smith was a realist. He said an emigrant must “hazard” his life (208). Everyone who actually thought of committing himself to America knew that colonization was risky. Most emigrants died. Virginia seemed cursed. All but thirty-eight of the first one hundred and five people in
Virginia died within six months of settlement (488, 531, 611, 912). Smith left five hundred colonists in Virginia when he returned to England in the fall of 1609. But after that winter of 1609-10 ("the starving time"), only a few "more then 60. most miserable and poore creatures" were left alive (170). The situation did not soon improve. An observer reported in 1613 that every year more than half the Virginia colonists died.  

Other promotion writers ignored or glossed over these ghastly statistics. Smith gives the facts, explains how so many people could perish, emphasizes that colonization entails risks, and tells what kind of people will live and succeed in America—hard workers. Although everyone knew that Eastern North America had no great flourishing Indian cities filled with gold and silver and no great mines comparable to those in Mexico and South America, only Smith at this date emphasizes that hard manual labor is the key to survival and success in America. Prospective emigrants knew the unsavory reputation of America and the anti-American ballads and satires. They wanted the facts. Those scholars who do not realize that Smith was the greatest promotion writer of his day ignore both his audience and human nature. Like the second-rate promotion writers, those scholars must believe that most prospective emigrants were susceptible fools, ignorant of the deaths in America, of satires on it, and of the common rumors about it.

Smith combined a realistic practicality with visionary ideals. Although he appealed to honor, virtue, fame, and magnanimity, and although he envisioned a utopian social world in America, he tempered these ideals with common sense and brusque practicality, saying that only the hope of wealth would make most people become colonists, not "Religion, Charity, and the Common good." "I am not so simple as to thinke, that euer any other motiue then wealth, will euer erect there a Commonweale; or draw companie from their ease and humours at home, to stay in New England to effect my purposes" (212). Smith is the greatest promotion writer because he best understands the aspirations of the ordinary person of his day and because he wholeheartedly believed in America. Smith saw America as possibility. He appeals to a sense of adventure. He knows that the common people want to better themselves. He believes that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary determination and hard work. He inspires his audience with a belief in the importance of colonization and with
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their possibly heroic contribution to it. Smith grandly appeals to the imagination and ideals of the common man. Although his classic expression of the American Dream repeats a number of the hackneyed motifs of promotion literature (such as the conversion of the Indians and the winning of Lebensraum for England's supposed overpopulation), Smith's personal characteristics distinguished his version of the dream. The marginal gloss by his grandest promotional statement calls for "men that have great spirits and smal means." Who does not want to think of himself as possessing "great spirits"? The heading alone, with its contrast of great and small, makes those with "small means" discontented. Emigration is the answer. Smith, an extraordinary leader who inspired fierce loyalty (167, 181, 184, 185-186, 230, and 231), believes that "great spirits" exist in common men. And of course the belief creates and inspires the reality. Here is his pitch:

Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, than to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If he haue but the taste of virtue and magnanimitie, what to such a minde can bee more pleasant, than planting and building a foundation for his Posterity, gotte from the rude earth, by Gods blessing and his owne industrie, without prejudice to any? If hee have any graine of faith or zeale in Religion, what can hee doe lesse hurtful to any: or more agreeable to God, then to seeke to convert those poore Saluages to know Christ, and humanitie, whose labors with discretion will triple requite thy charge and paines? What so truely sujettes with honour and honestie, as the discovering things vnknowne? erecting Townes, popling Countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things vniust, teaching virtue; and gaine to our Native mother-countrie a kingdom to attend her: finde employment for those that are idle, because they know not what to doe: so farre from wronging any, as to cause Posterity to remember thee; and remembering thee, euer honour that remembrance with praise? (208-209)

3. SMITH AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

In the early seventeenth century, even proponents of English plantations in America admitted that colonists were the outcasts and undesirables of society. In "Of Plantations" (1625), Francis Bacon wrote: "It is a shameful and unblessed thing to take the scum of people, and wicked men, to be the people with whom you plant; and not only so, but it spoileth the plantation; for they will ever live like rogues, and not fall to work, but be lazy, and do mischief, and spend victuals,
and be quickly weary, and then certify over to their country to the
discredit of the plantation.”12 In 1630, John Winthrop called previous
emigrants to America “unfit instruments, a multitude of rude and
misgoverned persons—the very scum of the Land.”13 Philip Massin-
ger’s The City Madam (acted in 1632) castigates Virginians as “Con-
demned wretches, forfeited to the Law...Strumpets and bawds, for the
abomination of their life, spewed out of their own country.”14 But
Captain John Smith, despite criticizing gentlemen, lazy colonists,
and Virginia Company policies, constantly refutes the aspersions on
America and Americans (82-83, 103-04, 378-79, 516, 605-606, 610-14,
681, 689). Smith reminds us that “Every thing of worth is found full of
difficulties.” He states that “nothing” is as “difficult” as establishing
“a common wealth so farre remote from men and meanes,” and he
thereby implies that colonization is the greatest possible achievement
a man could undertake (96; cf. 228).

Although numerous writers promoted American colonies before
Smith, he first celebrated the American. He disgustedly labeled those
who attacked colonists as “Spanolized English” (944)—that is, Eng-
lishmen who betrayed England’s interest to the Spanish. Smith
claimed the early colonists were heroes. He said that the primary
purpose of the General History was to eternalize “the memory of those
that effected” the settlement of Virginia (385). He compared colonists
to the greatest figures in history and in the Bible. As farmers, they
follow the model of Adam and Eve, who first began “this innocent
worke, To plant the earth to remain to posteritie, but not without
labour, trouble, and industrie.” As bringers of civilization, the colo-
nists succeed Noah and his family who “planted new Countries” and
who gradually brought “the world” to its present estate. As teachers of
Christianity, they imitate the model of Abraham, Christ, and the
Apostles. Smith reminds his English readers that if such past evange-
lists had not “exposed themselves...to teach the Gospel...euen wee our
selues, had at this present beene as Salvage, and as miserable as the
most barbarous Salvage yet vncivilized.” Further, as the founders of a
future empire, American colonists enact the roles of “the greatest
Princes of the earth” whose very best achievements were “planting of
countries, and ciuilizing barbarous and inhumane Nations, to ciuilitie
and humanitie.” Just as those “eternall actions” of the greatest prin-
ces “fill our histories,” so the deeds of the earliest Americans will fill
future histories (228-229). Smith’s vision of American identity
inverted the commonplace negative images of his time. No one before
Smith celebrates American identity. No other early seventeenth-century colonist had as grand a secular view of what it meant to be an American.

4. SMITH'S IDENTIFICATION WITH AMERICA

From age twenty-five to his death twenty-seven later, Smith devoted his life to exploring, mapping, reading, thinking, and writing about America. He was born the son of yeoman George Smith, but his ideal ancestors were those persons who, like himself, had "advanced...from poore Souldiers to great Captaines" (191)—not the "great Captaines" of war (although some, like Smith, achieved success in war as well) but of exploration and discovery. His ideal genealogy appears repeatedly in his writings: Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortez, Francisco Pizarro, Hernando de Soto, and Ferdinand Magellan (191, 228, 705, 965). Smith had, in some ways, a less glamorous role than his predecessors, but the challenge of the unknown lands still existed. Just as "all the Romanes were not Scipioes: nor all the Geneueses, Coloumbuses: nor all the Spanyards, Corteses" (288)—so he knew that not all the English were Captain John Smiths. Disappointed that he had not achieved more, Smith nevertheless in 1622 claimed that all existing English colonies in America were "but pigs of my owne sowe" (265). In 1624, he called them his "children; for they haue bin my wife, my hawks, my hounds, my cards, my dice, and in toall my best content, as indifferent to my heart as my left hand to my right" (265; cf. 893). And in 1631, the year of his death, he called the colonies in Virginia and New England his posterity, his "heirs, executors, administrators and assignees" (946).

NOTES

*This lecture was delivered at a meeting of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature at the Modern Language Association Convention in Chicago, 28 December 1985.

1 Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, eds. Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1910), 212. Future references to Smith's writings are to this edition and will be given in the text. Since the volumes are paged continuously, just the page number will be cited.

2 David B. Quinn, in "Prelude to Maryland" and "Why They Came," Early Maryland in a Wider World (Detroit, 1982), 11-29, 119-148, expertly surveys the various reasons for emigration and emphasizes the London Company's leaders' desire for baronial holdings in America. Bernard Bai-
J. A. Leo Lemay


During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, radical thought is hard to document except during the Interregnum, but we do have evidence of democratic ideas in the Tudor and early Elizabethan drama, in popular proverbs, and in some religious groups. Altogether, these furnish a background for the radical ideas of the English Revolution and prove that a continuous tradition of radicalism existed as an underlying current of popular thought throughout Captain John Smith’s life. For the drama, see Gentleness and Nobility in Richard Axton, ed. Three Rastell Plays (Cambridge, England, 1979); Kenneth Walter Cameron, The Authorship and Sources of Gentleness and Nobility (Raleigh, N. C., 1941); William Wager’s Enough is as good as a Feast (1565?); David Bevington’s discussion of social themes in these two plays and others in Tudor Drama and Politics (Cambridge, Ma., 1968); and Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge, England, 1980), esp. “From Popular Drama to Leveller Style; a Postscript,” 237-257. For one popular proverb, see Albert B. Friedman, “When Adam Delved...: Contexts of an Historical Proverb,” The Learned and the Lewed, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge, Ma., 1974), 213-230. For social themes in religious writings, see Helen C. White, Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century (New York, 1944); and T. Wilson Hayes, “John Everard and the Fascist Tradition,” The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism, ed. Margaret Jacob and James Jacob (London, 1984), 60-69.


8 The Voyages and Colonizing Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, ed.
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David B. Quinn, 2 vols. (London, 1940), 450.


10 Carville V. Earle argues that less than two-thirds of the white population died that winter: "Environment, Disease, and Mortality in Early Virginia," The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society, eds. Thad W. Tate and Daniel L. Ammerman (Chapel Hill, 1979), 96-125. But of course we are not here concerned with the reality (although it was dreadful indeed) but with what English people of the early seventeenth century believed to be the truth.


16 Ian Beckwith's investigation of Smith's background suggests that Smith's education prepared him to transcend his yeoman background and that his father intended Smith to—as Hawthorne says of Major Molineux's kinsman—"rise in the world." Ian Beckwith, "Captain John Smith: The Yeoman Background," History Today 26 (1976), 444-451.
SLAVES AND SHREWS:
WOMEN IN MELVILLE'S SHORT STORIES

ROBERT SCOTT KELLNER
TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

There are few women in Herman Melville’s major novels. In an age when most novels were not only written for women, who comprised the majority of the reading public, but about women, Melville’s work appears to some as an anomaly. William Wasserstrom, writing about the genteel tradition and the novel of sentiment in Heiress of All the Ages, all but excludes Melville from his study: “the matter of love was too much circumscribed” for Melville, he writes.1

Melville, however, was not immune to the influence exerted by the literary tradition in which he was working. He simply did not present women in the typical way. There are two conflicting critical overviews of the portrayal of love in American literature: one sees the American writer portraying love as a successful moral force, guiding and shaping American destiny; the other declares that a less positive attitude exists, where the uncertainties and anxieties of existence are not resolved by love.2 Melville’s fiction belongs in the latter category; it pronounces the limitations and even the failure of love.

Melville’s first novel, Typee, initially presents an idyllic encounter between an American male and a native girl. But the hero quickly discovers flaws in his South Seas Eden. Fayaway’s sweet ministrations are suspect. The beautiful Polynesian girl is in the service of the cannibal chiefs. “What could be their object in treating me with such apparent kindness,” asks the young man, “and did it not cover some treacherous scheme?”3 In his next novel, Omoo, Melville portrays women as sensual creatures who enjoy abusing men physically and spiritually. And in his third novel, Mardi, we find the influence of Poe’s “Ligeia,” where the concept of female innocence and chasteness is brought into question. Trying to enjoy the embrace of the beautiful Yillah, who embodies ideal love, young Taji is pursued by the twin spectres of lust and death. These first three novels are thematically related by the protagonists’ search for, discovery of, and disillusionment with love—not just spiritual, but physical, sexual love.

Women either do not appear at all or have very minor roles in Melville’s next three novels, including Moby-Dick. The most sustained treatment of women is found in Melville’s seventh book, Pierre
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[A detailed study of this novel appears in Kellner's "Sex, Toads, and Scorpions: A Study of the Psychological Themes in Melville's Pierre," Arizona Quarterly, 31 (1975).] In this novel, love leads to the death not only of the young hero, but of his mother, sister, and fiancée. Although Pierre is Melville's most comprehensive depiction of the contradictions of human sexuality, it is not his final portrayal of women. In his short stories—Melville turned to magazines for a more profitable return on his writing—he continues to emphasize the deleterious nature of women and the negative aspects of sex. There is very little that is gray in the depiction of female characters in his short stories. Melville presents women as either slaves or shrews; there is no in-between. Despite critical acclaim to the contrary, what we discover in Melville's short stories is one of the most consistently negative portrayals of women in American literature.

The second story in Melville's diptych "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" has received considerable attention as an example of his artistic concealment, his ability to present controversial, in this case sexual, subjects both symbolically and allegorically. In "The Tartarus of Maids," Melville was so successful that few if any of his contemporaries—and certainly not the publisher of Harper's New Monthly Magazine, where the story first appeared—discerned the real meaning of the paper-mill imagery.

Modern readers understand that the story is more than an allegory about sexual reproduction; it is also an attack on the Machine Age. Melville wanted to alert his audience to the dehumanizing aspects of industrialization, the onslaught of the machine and the attendant loss of the human spirit. In a perceptive article, Marvin Fisher notes both themes. He discusses the sexual allegory in terms of "submissive and suffering femininity" and relates that to the "aggressive impersonal force" of industrialization. But Fisher and critics in general fail to relate their discussion of submissive women in this story to a similar pattern of female characterization that appears in Melville's works. Fisher consciously glosses over this in order to focus his attention on the social satire. Of the two themes in this story, the sexual allegory and the rebuke of the Machine Age, Fisher writes: "It is the second [theme] that has been more provocative, and I mean to look at the first only long enough to establish some links and suggest the unity of the whole design." While a number of critics, beginning with E. H. Eby in 1940, interested themselves in the imagery of this story only to the extent that it reveals the sexual allegory, Fisher
investigates the sexual allegory only as it underscores Melville’s denunciation of the industrial process. The imagery is yet to be carefully studied for what it reveals about the female characters.

Melville uses Tartarus, the lowest region of hell, as the setting for the paper mill, indicating on one level that industrialization is hell. But it also reflects on the sexual meaning, as Melville later makes clear, that women and the function of procreation and human reproduction are part of the devil’s domain. The seedsman’s entry into Tartarus, represented as man’s sexual entry into woman, is through a “Dantean gateway”; those who enter into a sexual liaison with women give up all hope.

Such sexual contact, which should be warm and passionate (especially in Tartarus), is paradoxically cold and dispassionate. There is no warmth for the seedsman in Tartarus, despite his contact with the maids. The first woman he encounters has a face “pale with work and blue with cold; an eye supernatural with unrelated misery” (SW, p. 201). He is “stiff with frost” when he enters the mill (SW, p. 201). The cold and ghostly appearance of the maids may not entirely be caused by the unthinking, dehumanizing, industrial processes. The possibility exists that Melville is commenting about women themselves. How can the sexual drive, supposedly warm and passionate, exist in such frigid creatures as women?

Melville’s imagery to describe the sex act and the female genitalia goes far beyond anything that relates to either a simple allegory of procreation or a reproach to the industrialists. The female sex organ is the “Devil’s Dungeon” from which “Blood River” emerges, “one turbid brick-colored stream, boiling through a flume among enormous boulders” (SW, p. 196)—a river of blood that boils “demoniacally” (SW, p. 200). The maids are more than dehumanized; they are monstrous. To enter this Devil’s Dungeon, the seedsman has to fight a violent blast of wind while pushing through the “narrow notch”; and the wind that results makes him think not of anything positive like the onset of procreation, but of “lost spirits bound to the unhappy world” (SW, p. 198). Once inside to view the inner works of the paper mill, the seedsman is greatly disturbed by the “inflexible iron animal.” The machinery, the female body, “strikes, in some moods, strange dread into the human heart, as some living, panting Behemoth might” (SW, p. 209). When examined close up, the mystery of woman is far from awe-inspiring: “the thing is a mere machine,” the seedsman determines, “the essence of which is unvarying punctuality and precision.”
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(SW, p. 207).

The most significant feature in this story is not Melville’s disgust with women and sex. This is not new in Melville’s writings. It appears as early as his third book Mardi in his portrayal of Hautia. What seems to interest him most in the “The Tartarus of Maids” and in his other short stories is the remarkable submissiveness of women, their slavish acceptance of whatever life throws at them. The maids might be in the paper mill against their will, but not one of them rebels. They are all docile, “like so many mares haltered to the rack” (SW, p. 203).

writes Melville, “They slowly, mournfully, beegeingly, yet unresistingly” (SW, p. 209) go through the procreative process. There is no evidence in the text to back up such assertions as Ray B. Browne’s in Melville’s Drive to Humanism that the diptych is a contrast between Melville’s “uncommitted person with those who were very much committed, the male bachelors by choice as opposed to the female bachelor against her will.”

One wonders what commitment he is talking about. The women are pale, passive, unprotesting automatons, slaves to the “dark-complexion man,” Satan, in charge of the mill.

Almost all of Melville’s other slaves to authority rebel—or at least harbor rebellious thoughts. From Tommo to Billy Budd, his sailors are conscious and protective of their own individuality. Tommo and Omoo jump ship; White Jacket contemplates throwing himself and his tyrannical captain overboard; and Billy Budd flails out instinctively against his false accuser. In Melville’s other short stories, imprisoned black slaves overthrow their masters; scriveners refuse to work; even a machine turns against its master-creator. But Melville’s women rarely rebel. They are passive to the extent of being suicidal. In “Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow,” Hunilla is raped not once but twice and does nothing to raise fortifications against the possibility of new assaults; in “The Piazza” Marianna fears to journey down the mountainside to possible safety and rejuvenation; and in “The Tartarus of Maids” the maids in the paper mill go through their twelve hours a day, 365 days a year totally mute and unprotesting.

One wonders how “The Tartarus of Maids” would have ended had the paper mill been staffed with the black Babo and his friends instead of the silent maids. Warner Berthoff, quoting from White Jacket, credits Melville more than he deserves when he says that Melville reminds us “of the simplest instinct of life that is in every earthly creature, an instinct ‘diffused through all animate nature, the same that prompts even a worm to turn under the heel.’”

That instinct
might be in Melville’s men, in Babo and White Jacket, but it is not in the maids.

It is interesting to consider another author’s treatment of this same subject. In Charles Knight’s “The Spirit of Discontent,” written just a few years before Melville’s “The Tartarus of Maids,” a factory girl undergoes the same dehumanization depicted by Melville; she is a slave to her machine. Unlike Melville’s maids, this girl rebels against her enslavement: “Up before day, at the clang of the bell—into the mill, and at work, in obedience to that ding-dong of a bell—just as though we were so many living machines. I will give my notice tomorrow: go, I will—I won’t stay here and be a white slave.”

No such potential heroine emerges in Melville’s paper mill. Melville presents his maids as victims, both of the industrialization process and of their own sex organs, but they are such unprotesting victims that the reader does not feel sorry for them. It is not true, as Browne suggests, that “Melville’s sympathy lies with [the maids] and all they symbolize.” The maids are slaves to their own bodies and entirely submissive to the social system; Melville does not sympathize with such docility. The paper mill machines are “menially served” by the women, “served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan” (SW, p. 202). They are “their own executioners; themselves whetting the very swords that slay them” (SW, p. 205). Language such as this to describe the maids—“menial,” “mute,” and “cringing”—does not convince us of Melville’s “growth in understanding and sympathy” as Fisher insists.

The one woman in Melville’s short stories who appears to get his sympathy, at least on the surface, is the Chola widow in the eighth sketch of “The Encantadas.” Along with her husband and brother, Hunilla is stranded on a barren island in the Pacific. They had engaged round-trip passage to the island to gather tortoise oil. But after collecting the round trip fee and dropping them off, the scheming captain left without any intention of returning. Shortly afterward, the two men drown, a scene that Hunilla helplessly witnesses, and the woman is left completely alone, not to be rescued for three years.

Most critics feel that Hunilla’s virtue lies in her patience and faith and that Melville’s intention was to underscore this patience, a theme that these critics see in several of his short stories. Leon Howard, for instance, remarks that the separate portraits of Hunilla and Bartleby depict the “theme of nonaggressive but unshakable patience,” themes that according to Howard also appear in his stories “Cook-a-Doodle-
Doo!" and "The Piazza." Warner Berthoff also associates Hunilla with Bartleby. "Hunilla and Bartleby," he writes in The Example of Melville, "came to represent for Melville some general truth about the capacity and fortune of the human creature."14

Hunilla, though, is not a female Bartleby. Bartleby deliberately brings about his own situation; he is not a victim of fate. His refusal to participate in life can be viewed in part as a heroic rebellion, quite Thoreauvian in its own way, against the industrialized and corporate state. Bartleby's inaction is based on a personal decision, one that is reiterated throughout the story. The reader knows that Bartleby can act otherwise—should he prefer to. Browne points out Bartleby's strength: "There has seldom been a more poignant, all-knowing, and superior statement than Bartleby's response: 'I know where I am.' No longer a victim, even in appearance, Bartleby is master of the situation."15 In no way is Hunilla similarly master of her situation. She is as passive and submissive as any of Melville's Tartarus maids. Melville's depiction of her as one who "gazed and gazed, nor raised a finger or a wail" while watching her husband and brother die is the image we get of her throughout her entire three-year stay on the island.

Being deserted on an island puts Hunilla in the company of Defoe's famous hermit. Melville even mentions Robinson Crusoe in the story, inviting our comparison between the deserted woman and the ingenious sailor of Defoe's tale. But the only real parallel is that both Crusoe and Hunilla have to learn to mark the passage of time: "As to poor Crusoe in the self-same sea, no saint's bell pealed forth the lapse of week or month" (PT, p. 226). And this is about all Hunilla does: she marks time. Unlike Crusoe, who creates for himself a new world where he learns to master both his environment and his own being, Hunilla is completely buffeted by fate.

Perhaps Melville's original intention was, as Leon Howard and others insist, to draw a picture of an Agatha figure, the patient and all-suffering woman. But his reference to Robinson Crusoe creates a conflicting image. Nowhere in the story of Hunilla, which covers a three-year period, do we discover the determination of spirit and ingenuity of mind that we associate with a Crusoe figure. We do not know how Hunilla manages to remain alive and retain her sanity during her involuntary exile from civilization. The fact is she does nothing actively to save herself. When her husband and brother drown, she lives on for the next three years in a semicomatose state. The work
which the three were engaged in before the death of the two men is immediately and permanently discontinued. When her rescuers arrive at the widow’s camp, they see the pots of tortoise oil that her husband and brother had collected. Her inactivity is manifest: “In a pot near by were the caked crusts of a quantity which had been permitted to evaporate. They meant to have strained it off next day,” said Hunilla, as she turned aside” (PT, p. 232). She had given up their work entirely. Even the hut where she lived for the past three years “seemed an abandoned hay-rick, whose haymakers were now no more” (PT, p. 231). Instead of being her own place after three years of use, it is still the old hut of Felipe and Truxill. Hunilla’s survival is apparently the result of luck and nothing else. She has even allowed her two dogs to multiply into ten, letting them share her precious water, “never laying by any considerable store against those prolonged and utter droughts which, in some disastrous seasons, warp these isles” (PT, p. 232).

There is also in this story the association between women and death that Melville makes in Mardi and Pierre: the fatal embrace of Hautia and Isabel. But in the Chola widow sketch, the situation is reversed. Instead of sex leading to death, the death of Felipe and Truxill leave Hunilla unprotected, and she is raped on two different occasions by whalermen. She does nothing to guard against new assaults. She might have gathered tortoise oil to bribe future whalermen to protect her and even take her off the island; or she might have built a stronger hut to keep them from getting at her. But she lacks the will; consequently, she is prey to stronger natures.

Such inattention to possible emergencies and passivity in the face of life-threatening situations should make the critical reader of this story question such unqualified praise as Bernstein’s “Alone, without hope, at the mercy of the elements, Hunilla continues her courageous struggle for life.”17 Hunilla is not a struggler. She survives in spite of herself. She does not show any interest in life. And she is certainly not the “superwoman” that Browne incredulously calls her.18 She is a defeatist actually, a quitter, another Tartarus maid who is overwhelmed by a harsh and indifferent universe.

The other woman in The Piazza Tales, Marianna in “The Piazza,” is just like Hunilla in temperament and in situation. But instead of being stranded on a Pacific island, she is alone and isolated in the Berkshire mountains. And instead of doing anything to improve or change her situation, she too remains passive and totally submissive to her fate. Most critics see this story as a study of human subjectivity,
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a lesson in vision, perspective, and illusion. These assessments of the story are valuable mostly for their treatment of Melville’s narrator—even when their conclusions about the narrator are totally at variance. For instance, William Bysshe Stein sees the narrator withdrawn from a “dynamic involvement in life,” while Leon Howard sees the narrator as a reincarnation of the old Melville, once again “free from his self-centered broodings,” apparently ready to return to a dynamic involvement with life. The main problem with most of these readings is that the focus is almost entirely on the narrator, either ignoring for the most part the young woman, Marianna, or failing to treat her with the same critical intensity given the narrator. The reader is not only interested in the narrator, but in Marianna as well, and wonders about her withdrawal from and possible re-entry into life. What are her chances of imitating the narrator and breaking free from the limitations of her immediate environment, and from the imprisoning forces of her own fears?

When the narrator first sees Marianna’s house, it is a gloomy autumn day, when the woods and sky are smoke-gray. The house, seen from a considerable distance, is “One spot of radiance, where all else was shade” (PT, p. 6). When he spots it the second time, it is after a gentle shower; the house can be seen at the rainbow’s end. His thoughts about the house are fanciful, that it was situated in a spot surrounded by “some haunted ring where fairies dance” (PT, p. 6). He imagines a “queen of fairies at her fairy-window” sitting in the house or coming back down to earth, “at any rate, some glad mountain-girl” (PT, p. 8). The image is a bright one, and positive, by which the girl is pictured in ideal terms, another Fayaway or possibly another Yillah. And, indeed, Marianna is compared to both these Melville characters. At first sight of her, the narrator thinks she is like “some Tahiti girl, secreted for a sacrifice” (PT, p. 12). But this comment reveals a dark ambivalence that clashes with the image of brightness. The combination of women and death, typical of Melville, foreshadows Marianna’s fate.

Also intermingled with the bright images of radiant fairy-rings and rainbow ends are dark and foreboding images. The autumn day when Marianna’s house is first spotted is bleak and gray, and there is a reference to “guilty Macbeth and foreboding Banquo” (PT, p. 6) that brings the story into an ambiguous association with treachery and death. The images of light are especially cast in ambivalent terms. The reflection of the sun off Marianna’s newly shingled roof is de-
scribed as “a broader gleam, as of a silver buckler, held sunward over some croucher's head” (PT, p. 7). And the shifting light in the Berkshire hills makes the narrator think of the “old wars of Lucifer and Michael” (PT, p. 7).

R. W. B. Lewis does not refer to this story in his consideration of “Melville the myth-maker at work upon the matter of Adam,”22 but he might have. The journey to the “fairy-land” symbolizes in part the narrator’s desire to return to the Edenic state. He wishes to “cure this weariness of life” (PT, p. 8). When he nears Marianna’s cabin, he spots some fruit on the ground: “Red apples rolled before him; Eve’s apples.” And in a recreated scene from Genesis, the narrator bites into one: “it tastes of the ground” (PT, p. 10). What he has entered is a blighted Eden; he will find that it is inhabited by a subdued Eve.

Marianna has been left alone on the mountain by the death of her brother. In her isolation she is more like Tennyson’s Marianna than Shakespeare’s. Melville’s character, like Tennyson’s, feels that life is dreary and not worth living. She is afraid to venture into the world alone, and her refusal to get over her fears is tantamount to a death wish: “I go a little way; but soon come back again. Better feel lone by hearth, than rock. The shadows hereabouts I know — those in the woods are strangers” (PT, p. 16). So she remains at the house, slowly wasting away, victim to her own fears.

She is not entirely to blame for her situation. Like the Tartarus maids, Marianna is to some extent a victim of her society; her fears are partly a result of society’s limitations of females, of the designated and regulated roles that women are obliged to play. Also like the Tartarus maids, Marianna is “A pale-cheeked girl” (PT, p. 12) drained of all vital energy. She feels chained to her role as woman: “mine is mostly but dull woman’s work — sitting, sitting, restless sitting” (PT, p. 16). She is not expected to be venturesome, and so she remains where she is, stagnating and dying in body as well as spirit.

Yet the story of Marianna is only partly an indictment of society’s role-making. There is something within Marianna herself — as there is within Hunilla — that keeps her from taking a more active part in her own survival and fulfillment. She recognizes that it is not the environment that “wearies” her; “it is not the view,” she admits, “it is Marianna” (PT, p. 12). Something within her own system is contributing to her disintegration as an active human being. She is the human counterpart of the Chinese creeper seen earlier by the narrator near his home. Although newly burst into bloom, “if you removed the leaves a
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little, showed millions of strange cankerous worms, which, feeding upon those blossoms, so shared their blessed hue, as to make it unblessed evermore—worms, whose germs had doubtless lurked in the very bulb which, so hopefully, I had planted” (PT, p. 8). Beneath the radiant appearance of the fairy scene that had first attracted the narrator and beneath the enchanting—albeit pallid—Tahitian face of Marianna, are cankerous flaws.

“The Piazza” offers us an interesting contrast between the flawed person who gives in to her weariness, Marianna, and another who takes action to overcome his ennui, the narrator. It is the woman who gives in to her condition and wastes away; it is the man who is inquisitive, who determines to cure his weariness and overcomes his cankerous worms by going out into the world. The narrator is eager to seek out new discoveries about his environment and his perception of that environment. While Marianna, who has a similar wish—“Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house” (PT, p. 17)—never really tries. The narrator saw Marianna’s cabin from afar and made up his mind to travel to it. His house was equally visible to her. It appeared through the mountain haze “less a farm-house than King Charming’s palace” (PT, p. 12), and though she wonders about the house’s occupant, she does not journey there; she lacks the inner strength. There is in Marianna the same suicidal passivity that one finds in Hunilla and the Tartarus maids. She resides, as Stein says, “in an emotional wasteland,”23 and perhaps no journey, not even one to King Charming’s house, would save her.

There are women in Melville’s writings who do not submit quietly to authority. Some of his portrayals are polar opposites of the Marianna-Hunilla figure. The irrepressible Annatoo, Samoa’s wife in Mardi, is probably the best example of the independent and active Melville woman; and the Widow Glendinning, mother of Pierre, is a study in haughty imperiousness, a far cry from a pale Tartarus maid. But what the reader finds objectionable in the neurotic submissiveness of the Marianna types, he finds equally objectionable in the psychotic authoritarianism of the Glendinning figures, for linking these two extremes of characterization is that great emotional wasteland wherein all Melville’s women reside.

The wife in “I and My Chimney” is the non-passive woman in Melville’s shorter tales. She has drawn praise from some critics, most especially Browne, who calls her the extreme of “a sensible point of view”24 and sees her as a symbol of Young America. But she is actu
ally a self-centered shrew, quite in keeping with Melville's two other similar female characters, Annatoo and Mrs. Glendinning. The wife wants the chimney removed so that she can have a fine entrance hall in its place. She is as persistent as the wives in *Omoo* who were constantly nagging their husbands to obtain sailors' sea-chests for them. "How often my wife was at me" (SW, p. 384) muses the narrator in "I and My Chimney." "[S]he puts down her foot" with the same energy that she "puts down her preserves and pickles" (SW, p. 386). Like Annatoo, "she overflows with her schemes" (SW, p. 386), determined to have her own way. And there is no suggestion of a heroic quality as we find in Bartleby. She is not above plotting against her husband. "More than ever now I suspected a plot" (SW, p. 404), the besieged narrator complains. Her actions to have the chimney dismantled against his will, especially when she contrives to have it taken down while he is away, are, to say the least, sneaky: "Not more ruthlessly did the Three Powers partition away poor Poland, than my wife and daughter would fain partition away my chimney" (SW, p. 405).

Merton Sealts sees this story as allegorizing a physical and mental examination Melville was persuaded by his family to undertake. The wife in the story is actually modeled after Melville's mother: "It is significant that Melville's mother is said to be the original of the character in 'I and My Chimney' who instigates the examination." Considering Melville's portrayal of Mrs. Glendinning as a mother-wife figure for Pierre, this suggested transposition of mother and wife in "I and My Chimney" helps to establish the true temperament of the narrator's wife.

Whether by wife or mother, the narrator, comparing himself to King Lear, is "stripped by degrees of one masculine prerogative after another" (SW, pp. 387-388). The chimney is a part of himself, an extension of his heart and mind, and he won't have that stripped away. "To break into that wall would be to break into his breast" (SW, p. 406), he says, referring to his father who built the chimney, though actually speaking of himself. John Bryant tells us the chimney "is the speaker's alter ego and endures with him the onslaught of old age, impotence, and domesticity." The narrator and his chimney "smoke and philosophize together" while his wife, "like all the rest of the world, cares not a fig for my philosophical jabber" (SW, p. 406). Despite her readings in history and her study of French, she is shallow. Her failure to understand the narrator's feelings for the chimney, her
lack of sympathy for an object of such importance to him, is as telling as Mrs. Glendinning's attack on Delly and later on Isabel. Both Glendinning and the narrator's wife are lacking in sentiment, that most humanizing of all human ingredients.

Without the virtue of sentiment, his wife is like the machine in Tartarus, never ill, always on the go, caring for nothing but her own insatiable desire to function. She is the embodiment of progress that Melville satirizes in "The Tartarus of Maids": "Whatever is, is wrong; and what is more, must be altered; and what is still more, must be altered right away" (SW, p. 385). She is the "monsoon" that blows "a brisk gale" over his life (SW, p. 387). In the name of improvement and progress, she ultimately destroys. The wife's "terrible alacrity for improvement," Melville writes, "is a softer name for destruction" (SW, p. 406).

We find, then, in Melville's short stories, females who consciously or unconsciously destroy themselves: slaves like the Tartarus maids who dare not rebel, weaklings like Huniilla and Marianna who cannot withstand the adversities of life. Or we find shrews, like the wife in "I and My Chimney" whose lack of sentiments threatens the well-being of those around her. We can only speculate about Melville's purpose in portraying women in this fashion. To some extent his female characters, like his male protagonists, embody a particular side of human nature, some passive and enduring (what we might call the Billy Budd type), others violent and unpredictable (the Ahab type). As allegorical figures, they instruct us about the extremes of the human condition. There is, though, a biographical element in many of Melville's stories, beginning with his first novel, Typee, and especially notable in Pierre and some of the short stories, i.e. "The Piazza" and "I and My Chimney." In this regard we might remark on Melville's seeming lack of empathy with and sympathy for women. No matter how we view the portrayals, there are no heroic women or even women of the middle ground in his stories; just the slaves and the shrews, the one suicidal, the other homicidal—not a very endearing picture of women.

NOTES

1 (Minneapolis, 1959), p. 123.

2 This controversy has been well documented and need not be reproduced here. The major positions are stated below: Herbert Ross Brown in The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1880 (New York, 1940, 1970) not only states that the novelists believed in the efficacy of love, but that the
sentimental novel relied upon a belief “in the spontaneous goodness and benevolence of man’s original instincts” (p. 176). Wasserstrom in Heiress agrees with Brown and sees the American novel representing the success of love. Leslie Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1966), writes convincingly from the opposite point of view. To him the American novel represents the failures of love; women are either angels or vipers, and men are emasculated by them. “Fiedler is brilliant but wrong,” writes Wasserstrom on page 131 of Heiress.

3 Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life (Evanston and Chicago, 1968), p. 32. Jane Mushabac in Melville’s Humor: A Critical Study Hamden, Conn., 1981, has some telling commentary on Typee: “As he himself tells us in reference to the purser’s steward in White-Jacket, humor just come up quietly and straight-faced on the reader, or else, with waggery and high jinks, take the reader by storm. In various incidente like that of the popgun war, or of the two ladies early in the book, Melville is straining for comicality. With regard to the later, however, perhaps these incidents suggest Melville’s clumsiness with male-female comedy. Although with Fayaway Melville transcends his usual self-consciousness about ladies, when he speaks of other women in the novel, he seems to be rebelling too hard or giving in too slavishly” (p. 49).


6 Ibid.


10 Charles Knight, Mind Amongst the Spindles (Boston, 1845), p. 37.

11 Browne, p. 229.


13 Leon Howard, Herman Melville, A Biography (Berkeley, 1951), p. 208. He also states: “Bartleby, Merrymusk, and Hunilla were all products of the same ferment which stirred him to reread Spenser” (p. 211).
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14 Berthoff, p. 102.

15 Browne, p. 165.


18 Browne, p. 294.

19 See especially Leon Howard: "The story was a parable of what Melville called, in The Confidence Man, 'the mystery of human subjectivity'" (p. 230).


21 Howard, p. 230.


23 Stein, p. 331.

24 Browne, p. 266.
