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Arthur Hobson Quinn, Son of Pennsylvania

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Dr. Quinn was approaching his seventy-fifth birthday when I met him in my first year of graduate study at Pennsylvania in the autumn of 1949. He stood to greet the class with his vigorous voice, his shock of white hair and bristling white mustache the only indications that he was more than middle-aged. He introduced his course, "Forms and Movements in American Literature," with a comparison of John Smith's *General History of Virginia* and William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation,* and we were off on an excursion into the American literary experience that led us, each Saturday from 11:00 to 1:00, from the colonial period through George Henry Boker's *Francesca da Rimini* in the fall semester, and from the literature of the Civil War to O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* in the spring. It was this course, modified by time, that Dr. Quinn had first offered in 1905, the year that the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago gave the first graduate courses in American literature*.

The class met in College Hall, where Arthur Quinn had come as a fifteen-year-old freshman in 1890. That venerable building, still the center of the University campus, was then the focal point for all undergraduate activities; and Dr. Quinn had many reminiscences about class fights up and down the stairs, of raids and skirmishes after the Penn-Princeton football games that continued into his early teaching years. He joined the faculty as an instructor in mathematics when he was graduated in 1894 at the age of nineteen. Mathematics was not his forte, but he said that he managed to stay two steps ahead of the class. To his great relief, he became a member of the English Department the next year, beginning an association that continued throughout his career, from his Ph.D. degree in 1899, his thesis supervised by Dr. Felix E. Schelling, to a full professorship in 1908. In 1939, he was named the John Welsh Centennial Professor, a chair which he held until his retirement in 1945. When we met him in 1949, he was still giving his graduate lectures on Saturday mornings, a practice that continued until 1954.

When Dr. Quinn began his teaching career, American literature in academia was a poor cousin to English studies, with at best a condescending nod toward Emerson and Hawthorne, and at worst a neglect that reflected Sydney Smith's tiresome "In the four quarters of

the globe, who reads an American book?" That comment was made in 1820; by 1920, certainly, the American quarter of the globe was reading American books. Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Atherton, James Branch Cabell, Theodore Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, Ellen Glasgow, William Dean Howells, Jack London, Frank Norris, and Edith Wharton were proving that the American reader enjoyed the work of native writers. But that was the response of the reading public, not the subject of lectures in graduate schools.

Dr. Quinn remarked that the neglect of American writing in colleges had resulted partly from a provincial subservience to English letters. Acquaintance with established British authors marked the educated man who had been trained to think Washington Irving was for children, Poe was a writer of mystery stories, and Longfellow had done a nice job with "Evangeline." Certainly I could add my own grammar-school experience, when we were bombarded with Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott. My first clear memory of directed American reading occurred in the fourth grade from an advanced teacher who taught us to parch corn while she read "Hiawatha" to us. Dr. Quinn, whose Philadelphia childhood had not included introductions to Indian fare, was pleased to hear that we had preferred the poem.

Another cause for the ignoring of American literature as a suitable discipline for academic attention, according to Dr. Quinn, was that the literature had been approached as though it were in a vacuum, divorced from unique historical and economic conditions which had produced it. In all of his lectures, in his discussions with colleagues, in his persistent appeals to college administrations for the recognition of American studies as a legitimate course of study, Dr. Quinn emphasized the necessity for an historical approach to the subject, as well as for critical judgments based on the intrinsic quality of the literature.

Dr. Quinn's persuasion, aided by recognition of his scholarly achievements, and the efforts of other pioneers such as Jay B. Hubbell, Kenneth B. Murdock, Ralph L. Rusk, Howard M. Jones, Robert E. Spiller, Stanley T. Williams, and E. Sculley Bradley, Quinn's colleague at Penn, succeeded in establishing the American Literature Group within the Modern Language Association at the meeting in Cleveland in December, 1929. Dr. Quinn was elected chairman of the group who gradually won the desired recognition on their several campuses.

Dr. Quinn's devotion to American studies had resulted in his pioneer courses in the American novel, first given in 1912, and in

American drama, first introduced in 1917. Most of us in that "Forms and Movements" class in 1949 were in the American Civilization program so attractive to many students interested in the broader scope of American culture that the program provided, in cooperation with the departments of Literature, History, Fine Arts, and Sociology. Dr. Quinn had been instrumental in the establishment of the curriculum that began in the graduate school in 1939 and in the undergraduate school in 1942. The lecture and seminar courses in literature were conducted by Drs. Quinn, E. Sculley Bradley, and Paul Musser. The History department was represented by Drs. Roy F. Nichols, Richard Shryock, Arthur Whitaker, and Arthur Bining. By the time of my entrance into the program, the curriculum had expanded with courses in fine arts with Dr. David Robb, philosophy with Dr. John Adams, and further participation in literature with Drs. Robert E. Spiller, Thomas P. Haviland, and visiting lecturers.

Those were exhilarating years with an active graduate student group, many of them veterans of World War II and foreign students attracted to the new discipline. In those Saturday classes with Dr. Quinn, I most enjoyed his discussions on Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, and the poetry of the Civil War. He had a resonant voice, and when he recited "By the rude bridge that arched the flood, Their flag to April's breeze unfurled," or "We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more, From Mississippi's winding stream and from New England's shore," it was to hear trumpets blow, drowning out the clatter on Woodland Avenue of a passing trolley, usually with one flat wheel.

The lectures on Edgar Allan Poe, however, were what we eagerly anticipated. Dr. Quinn's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* had been published in 1941, and he still remembered clearly the many adventures in research that had produced the volume. Both his anecdotes in class and the voluminous correspondence among his papers in the library of the University of Pennsylvania bear witness to the indefatigable resourcefulness that he employed to unearth and interpret the life of the poet, to find original documents, to excoriate the shade of Rufus Griswold, and to illuminate obscure events and correct old assumptions concerning Poe. Dr. Quinn explored every possible avenue of information, thereby giving us valuable insights into the labyrinth of scholarship. He had even written to Albert Einstein in the summer of 1940, asking, "if in your opinion, considering the time it was written 'Eureka' merits any attention as an early attempt to

theorize in a useful way concerning the subject of which it treats?" Einstein replied that he had not previously read "Eureka" and found it on the whole a bad disappointment. He thought the beginning witty and remarkable, but "the whole presentation shows a striking resemblance to the scientific crank-letters I receive every day." Dr. Quinn was not impressed.

There are scores of letters to and from Dr. Quinn concerning his work on Poe, correspondence with researchers in Virginia, with libraries across the country, with other Poe scholars, with Appleton-Century, the publisher of *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography,* concerning corrections and proof-reading. None of them indicates more clearly Dr. Quinn's devotion to his subject or the humane aspects of his scholarship than one file in the Quinn Collection.

In 1945, Dr. Quinn received a letter dated February 16th, "Somewhere in the Marianas Islands," from Robert Whyte, sergeant in the U. S. Army Air Force, in which the former Penn student said that he was greatly in need of something to take his mind off some of the unpleasant aspects of war and that for him literature was a natural choice. He had looked forward at one time to taking Dr. Quinn's course in Poe, but the war had intervened. Realizing "that nothing can compare to being present at your lectures on Poe, I am embarrassed to mention a 'correspondence course'." After he was exhausted by working for twenty-four hours loading bombs in the B29s, he found relaxation and mental stimulus in reading Poe. Would Dr. Quinn consider guiding him in his reading and permit him to submit written work for the professor's criticism?

Dr. Quinn lost no time in replying in early March that he had discussed the matter with Dr. Glenn Morrow, Dean of the College, and credit would be given for satisfactory work from Sergeant Whyte. The letters that followed included reading lists, orders to Scribner's, Ginn & Co., and Appleton-Century for Poe volumes to be sent to the south Pacific (occasionally at Dr. Quinn's expense), and detailed comments about Whyte's papers on Poe's arabesque and ratiocinative tales. Sergeant Whyte submitted a final examination which Dr. Quinn assured Dean Morrow had been completed with scrupulous attention to ethical conduct.

On August 1 (August 2 in the Marianas) the largest air strike of the war sent thousands of bombs shattering Japanese cities. On August 3 Whyte wrote that as the tempo of the attack on Japan increased, the crews on Tinian Island in the Marianas had little time

left for anything but a bath and bed; but when free hours did come, he turned with pleasure and relaxation to his study of Poe: "Today all of us were granted a holiday in regard for and in celebration of the record smash made by our bombers against the Empire yesterday. It is somewhat of a paradox that I have been able to devote a day to literature in reward for my share in causing the greatest destruction ever known." Three days later, at 8:15 in the morning, the *Enola Gay* dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima.

In the first week in September, Sergeant Whyte submitted his sixteen-page handwritten paper on Poe's poetry, reflecting his careful reading of the Quinn biography. In the covering letter, he said that they had been busy parachuting food and supplies to interned prisoners of war in China and Japan. "We considered it a worthy job to be doing on V-J Day" (August 25).

After reading this correspondence, I was anxious to know the outcome of Sergeant Whyte's experience. A call to the Alumni Records Office revealed that he returned to the University and graduated in 1948. An inquiry to his present address brought a prompt response, expressing his appreciation for Dr. Quinn's efforts in his behalf. Mr. Whyte writes: "I have all the Poe textbooks (including, of course, Dr. Quinn's) that he so carefully packed and sent out to me (to Tinian Island in the Marianas). I cherish them—and still read them."

In 1950 I took Dr. Quinn's course in American fiction; and, as we catalogue his papers in the Rare Book Collection, it is refreshing to review his notes for those lectures which followed generally the order in his *American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey* (1936). I have been grateful, in this age of specialization, that Dr. Quinn called our attention to some of the less-known American writers who frequently reflected their time and environment with greater fidelity than the masters of the craft. Without his guidance, I doubt that I would have encountered the fiction of Catherine Sedgwick, Robert Montgomery Bird, Rebecca Harding Davis, S. Weir Mitchell, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Kate Chopin, or F. Marion Crawford.

Certainly Dr. Quinn was at his peak in lectures on Hawthorne, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Ellen Glasgow. He had a penetrating appreciation of their artistic skills; nevertheless, he could offer critical insights into structural inconsistencies. He was also not afraid to go against the popular currents of literary criticism; in fact, he enjoyed crossing swords with proponents of the revival of interest in Whitman and Melville. When he was a senior in the College in 1894, he

published "Walt Whitman and the Poetry of Democracy" in *The Red and Blue,* a literary periodical of the University, in which he denied that Whitman was the poet of democracy, on the grounds of Whitman's vocabulary, excessive cataloguing, and lack of metrical competence, concluding that "the first criterion of Poetry shall be that every line shall mean something to the average thinking, feeling, intelligence." In some fifty years, he had not altered his view of Whitman, at the same time that graduate students were enthusiastically enrolling in a concentrated seminar on that poet, directed by one of Dr. Quinn's stellar graduates, Dr. E. Sculley Bradley.

Dr. Quinn found a "chronic disorderliness of style" a stumbling block to an appreciation of Melville; on one of the occasions when I drove him home from the Saturday class, after some comment of mine concerning Melville, he responded with a smile, a sniff, and a twitch of his mustache: "You know, Mrs. W., I never liked sea stories!" This was the same semester that some of us were deeply engrossed in a seminar on Melville and Dreiser, conducted by another former Quinn student, Dr. Robert E. Spiller. At least, we had the benefit of divergent approaches to literary history.

The last meeting of the class in American fiction was devoted to twentieth-century authors, and here Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, James T. Farrell, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner met their match. This is not to imply that Dr. Quinn's comments were spiteful or the unreasoning diatribes of an old teacher, calculated to bring patronizing smiles to the faces of his modern audience. He simply found little to admire in their characters or their style, and he was quick to point out improbabilities in plot that even devotees of these authors have had difficulty in justifying. He felt that modern criticism "seems obsessed by the fallacy that if you turn the spotlight on any small town in Indiana or Michigan it will reflect a masterpiece." To him, these authors were social historians, or, at worst, chroniclers of social and moral decay that boded ill for the future of American literature. His defense of his point of view can be summed up in the last sentence of his *American Fiction:* "There is one law, however, [the artist in fiction] must obey: his conception and his execution must have beauty as their aim, that beauty which moulds facts into truth, which draws hope from terror, and which clothes the weaknesses of humanity with the charity that turns them into power."

On those rides home on Saturday afternoons, Dr. Quinn often spoke of his administrative experience at Pennsylvania. His first such

venture occurred when he was a Junior in the College in 1893 and an assistant to the Secretary of the University in charge of the University's exhibit at the World's Fair in Chicago. He accompanied the exhibit of mummies from the University Museum and other artifacts to Chicago, "acquiring a distaste for world's fairs which has lasted me ever since."

In 1904 Provost Charles C. Harrison conceived the idea of a summer school, and Dr. Quinn was its first director and served until 1907. His comments on the propriety of a summer school in Philadelphia's notorious July heat were illuminating. He expressed admiration for the sacrifices of the faculty, some of whom taught for about forty dollars for a scorching six weeks, just to get the program started.

When the undergraduate schools were reorganized in 1912 and divided into the College, the Wharton School, and the Towne Scientific School, Dr. Quinn was made Dean of the College and served until 1922. I enjoyed his anecdotes of struggles with a suddenly voluble faculty, a conservative administration, and the Board of Trustees, some one of whom told him, concerning changes in curriculum, specifically the dropping of Greek from the required courses, that he had made up his mind on all educational matters when he graduated in 1860 and had never seen any reason to change it.

Dr. Quinn saw his university disrupted by two world wars; in World War I he was Dean of the College and had to cope with contradictory orders from the War and Navy Departments who assigned some 2500 students to the University under the Students' Army Training Corps. The Depression of the Thirties put great strains on the teacher-employment situation, and Dr. Quinn told me that during those times he took great satisfaction in finding positions for some eight instructors who had to be released because of budget strictures. By 1949 we were recovering from World War II, and I remember Dr. Quinn's special greetings to returning veterans, many of whom had been his students and were now renewing their academic programs after the disruptions of the war.

Dr. Quinn was justly proud that in 1917 at Pennsylvania he had taught the first graduate course in American drama offered in an American university, and it is fair to say that drama was his first love. As a boy, he had frequently been taken to the theater by his father, and those early exposures to the imaginary world of the stage were some of his fondest memories. His published works on the theater, principally *The History of the American Drama, from the Beginning to the Civil*

War (1923), the two-volume *History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day* (1927), his collections of *Representative American Plays,* first appearing in 1917 with following editions until the seventh of 1966, and his publications on individual playwrights established his reputation as the dean of historians of the American stage.

He was sure of "two on the aisle" for any play which he wished to see in Philadelphia or New York. In his collection there are some three hundred playbills, from the 1930's through the early 1950's, many bearing his comments. Lest one think that his love of the theater produced undiscriminating adulation, it is refreshing to find some pungent comments. Of *Strange Fruit* by Lillian Smith: "I still think it is unfortunate to have this subject written about so much, but if it has to be done this play is a pretty good bit of evidence that the White and the Negro should not love each other." On *Caviar To The General* by George and Leontovich: "This is about the worst play that has appeared in Philadelphia. It is so banal that it is idle to even attempt an analysis of it. If the dialogue could have been heard, it might have been even worse."

Dr. Quinn's various writings on the drama resulted in voluminous correspondence now in his collection at the University. There are informative and appreciative letters from Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, Marc Connelly, Rachel Crothers, Moss Hart, George Kaufman, Percy MacKaye, Eugene O'Neill, and Augustus Thomas, among others.

Dr. Quinn's collection of annotated programs for plays by Eugene O'Neill dates from the early 1920's. Correspondence between them began in the same period. O'Neill respected Dr. Quinn's judgment and in turn the professor's admiration for O'Neill's innovative dramatic skills was exceeded only by his awareness that the playwright was "the concrete expression of the greatest principle in art, that of freedom, freedom to choose one's subject anywhere, to treat it in any manner, provided always that the characters are great figures and the treatment is sincere." Dr. Quinn's article from which this quotation is taken, "Eugene O'Neill, Poet and Mystic" [*Scribner's Magazine,* 80 1926), 368-372] was expanded to include biographical data which O'Neill had provided for Quinn's *A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day* (New York, Harper, 1927), 2:165-206.

By the time of the publication of that volume, O'Neill had already

risen to preeminence as America's most promising dramatist. He had been twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama, in 1919-1920 for *Beyond The Horizon,* in 1921-1922 for *Anna Christie,* and was soon to receive the award in 1927-1928 for *Strange Interlude.* The *Complete Works,* consisting of twenty plays up through *Desire Under The Elms,* had been published by Boni & Liveright in 1924. O'Neill's reputation could not be said to rest on a "discovery" by Dr. Quinn. Nevertheless, his perception of O'Neill's motivations and artistic integrity was a strong force in their friendship and equally influential in calling scholarly attention to the playwright.

By 1949, when Dr. Quinn's lectures on Eugene O'Neill were the highlight of his discussions of twentieth-century American drama, the superiority of the dramatist was not in question. The lectures were enhanced by Dr. Quinn's reminiscences of the early O'Neill and his unassuming, appreciative replies to inquiries from the dramatic historian.

Dr. Quinn's sense of the playwright's artistic purpose exceeded that of other early critics, and he was justly proud of the response from O'Neill in the mid-twenties, quoted at length in the chapter on O'Neill in the second volume of Quinn's *History of the American Drama...to the Present Day:* "But where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself—as a bit of a poet, who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't...and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives."

A great debt is owed to Dr. Quinn for his research on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American stage. He was brilliantly resourceful in following faint trails of theatrical history as he demonstrated in his work on Poe, and his students profited from his meticulous and imaginative investigations. His lectures on Thomas Godfrey, Royall Tyler, Robert Montgomery Bird, and George Henry Boker brought those dramatists to life and illuminated their work in the context of maturing dramatic art.

It is largely because of Dr. Quinn's enthusiasm and persuasive skill that Pennsylvania acquired many early American plays at a time when collectors and collections were still concentrating on English drama. Morris L. Clothier was encouraged to give the funds necessary to purchase the incomparable collection of Joseph Jackson, Philadelphia newspaperman and historian. In our collection there are

two copies of Tyler's *The Contrast,* one of which belonged to William B. Wood, early manager of the Chestnut Street Theater. A copy of the play would now bring $10,000. A copy of Mercy Warren's *The Adulateur* was purchased many years ago for $145; the market value today could be as high as $5,000.

There are innumerable episodes involving discoveries of manuscripts that Dr. Quinn unearthed for his lectures and publications and to enrich the possibilities of research for future students of the drama. For many years it had been thought that the manuscript plays of Robert Montgomery Bird did not exist. They had never been published, probably because the actor Edwin Forrest, for whom some of them had been written, wanted to keep for his exclusive use two of his greatest successes, *The Gladiator* and *The Broker of Bogota.* A trunkfull of material, however, was found in the possession of Bird's grandson who generously gave the whole lot to the University.

In preparation for the two-volume *History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day* (1927) Dr. Quinn got in touch with the family of James A. Herne, author of *Hearts of Oak, Shore Acres,* and *Margaret Fleming.* As a result of his interest in this nineteenth-century actor and dramatist, Herne's widow and daughters gave Dr. Quinn for his use, and ultimate deposit in the library, personal and family correspondence, manuscripts, scrapbooks, and playbills, useful not only for a study of Herne but for a broad examination of the post-Civil War theater.

One of Dr. Quinn's regrets was that apparently the manuscript no longer existed of Richard Penn Smith's *Caius Marius,* written for and produced by Edwin Forrest in 1831. There were tantalizing contemporary references to the play, considered by his associates to be the best of some twenty dramas by Smith, the gifted grandson of the Rev. William Smith, the first Provost of the University.

By happy chance, the manuscript turned up at auction in 1956, and we were able to purchase it for the University. Dr. Quinn was delighted at the lucky find, and indeed it turned out to be even better than we could have hoped. The bound text in Smith's hand with alterations and stage directions by Forrest included correspondence between the playwright and the actor, playbills for performances and for the revival in 1858, and pictures of Forrest and Richard Penn Smith.

An edited edition of the play was the subject of my doctoral dissertation under Dr. E. Sculley Bradley. I told Dr. Quinn that I

wished to dedicate the work to him. The play was published in 1968, eight years after Dr. Quinn's death, and the dedication stands as he had requested: "To the memory of Arthur Hobson Quinn, a lover of American drama."

* I acknowledge the sharp eyes of my colleague, Dr. William E. Miller, Emeritus Assistant Curator of the H. H. Furness Memorial Library and former Editor of the *Library Chronicle,* in the proofreading of this essay.