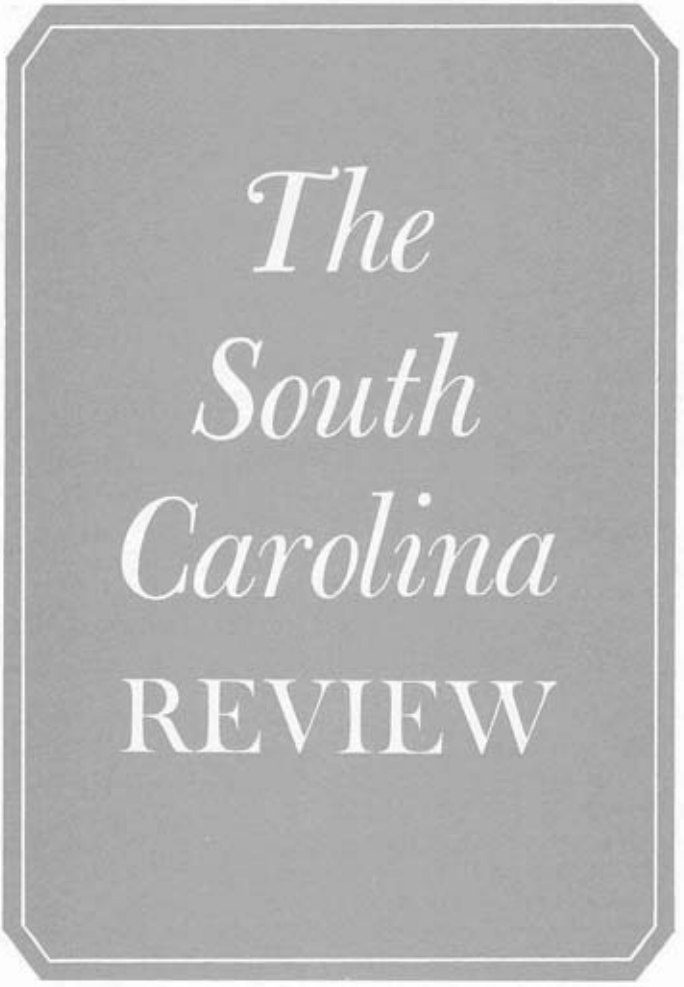

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The Review is edited by a cooperative editorial staff from two South Carolina universities.

The editors solicit manuscripts of all kinds: stories, essays, scholarly articles, poetry, criticism, social comment, and reviews. South Carolinians, native and adopted, are especially encouragaed to contribute.

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The South Carolina Review
DECEMBER, NINETEEN HUNDRED SEVENTY-TWO

The South Carolina Review

Volume 5, Number 1 December, 1972

Contents

The World Is Flush With Saviors

It's the usual story of success:
born of poor but honest parents,
etc. etc.
Like dogs responding
to inaudible commands,
their timing is uncanny.
Down the streets they swagger,
curing idiots, raising corpses.
So many, so many:
things get out of hand.
Even God must be confused
and half-ashamed.
So
if you see another couple
coming up the road,
close the inn
and, for God's sake,
burn the stable.

ELTON GLASER

New Writers of South Carolina

We dedicate this issue to the writers of South Carolina, not those overpraised worthies of the past whom only the scholars now read — Simms, Timrod, and Hayne — but to those new writers who are trying to reflect the consciousness of their age by exploring themes of change, initiation, understanding, and justice, those writers who are trying to cope with contemporary identity problems and with contemporary myths of place and self. We mean, of course, Max Steele and James Dickey, William Price Fox and Elizabeth Boatwright Coker. We mean Harry Ashmore, Louis Rubin, Hugh Holman, and Kinloch Rivers. We mean Barry Hannah and Mark Steadman. To these persons and others, we dedicate this issue.

We also dedicate this issue to those writers who not only participated in this year's writing contest sponsored jointly by this *Review* and the South Carolina Arts Commission but who won cash prizes and acceptance for publication in this issue. All told, we received a staggering number of entries, and we are still bleary-eyed from reading them. We read 570 poems, 80 stories, 20 plays, and 35 essays or scholarly articles. More than 200 persons participated. By far, the best talent lay with the poets, as illustrated by our selecting not only the two winners as originally announced, but four runners-up. The only other genre where we recognized publishable talent was in the short story. There, in addition to the winner and runner-up, we were pleased to recommend revisions to several other works that we could not accept. We were pleasantly surprised that a few of the plays were as good as they were, but unfortunately we could not honor any of them with a prize or publication. We were disappointed, most of all, with the nonfiction prose, none of which had the life or skill we thought existed among scholars and essayists in this state. Because we had no winners in three categories, we divided the announced prize money differently and awarded prizes to the runners-up. In this decision we had the approval of Wesley O. Brustad, director of the South Carolina Arts Commission, whom we gratefully thank for the financial assistance that helped make not only the contest possible but also this issue. We also wish to thank two persons

who generously assisted the three editors as judges: Philip G. Hill, professor of drama at Furman, and James T. Stewart, professor of English at Furman.

CONTEST WINNERS

Short Story

Helen King, Columbia—Winner
Marie M. Deans, Mt. Pleasant—Runner-up

Poetry

Thomas L. Johnson, Columbia—Winner
Dorothy S. Osborne, Union—Winner
Melanie Gause, Columbia—Runner-up
Virginia Linton, Hilton Head—Runner-up
Bennie Lee Sinclair, Campobello—Runner-up
Kregg Spivey, McColl—Runner-up

The Wait Is Over

The wait is over. No more
Intimate raids on your planned
But unwanted privacy. I have finished

Writing the insane little notes.
No more hesitations on stairways,
In hallways. Breathless hesitations.

Telephones may be answered promptly
Without the voices toned down
By nervous effort. The stairway to your office

Won't make me tremble and laugh
With guilt and excitement. But I could never
Walk those stairs without wishing

I could once more go down beside you
Between the library stacks
Trembling with so much guilt.

Melanie Gause

The Visit

Up the cat-curled steps
to his mother's house: a pink Victorian ham
studded with ornamental cloves,
browning in the glaze of orange dusk
they climb together–
her balding banker son and his cancelled wife,
chins at missionary angle.

His mother sits smiling in her gravy-colored gown,
blue eyes impounded
between bronze baby shoes and the snapping fire,
nodding to the rhythms of their logic
as if to lines memorized for school.

With adoptive pride they explain
how Progress, that starveling adolescent,
must not be denied another street
served cafeteria-style: roofs of houses
laid aside like lids of soup tureens,
exposing drafty secrets, mildewed dreams.

She can see the trees he used to climb
ground up like bunches of dried herbs
in every gulletful the Monster gobbles,
every bulging bite of hamburger earth.

"Think it over for a week or so."
His bentwood smile comes across so clinically kind;
but she only strokes the tail-rocked blur of hate
that leaps upon her lap and stares sardonically
into the grate.

DOROTHY S. OSBORNE

It Was Not a Time to Retire

It was not a time to retire. No
Zeitgeist closed the books. Apocalypse
Was not the spirit of the spring. The year
Was young, no season had got old. If leaves
Struck from magnolias with a louder click
Than usual, their strikings simply were
Abundant proof that healthy knocks could still
Be taken, even and precisely at
The time to die. And blossoms on that tree,
Susceptible to brown death at a human
Touch, continued more than ever to
Perfume the sense awake. No ravens could
Outnumber blooms on red crepe myrtles. Searching
Sunlight still broke through the study windows.
Blood pumped steadily away from feeling
Center to the vital organs vitally,
And eyes had not yet veiled with cataracts:
Bifocals only magnified the cobalt
Of unsentimental double vision.
Feet had not descended to a shuffle;
Knees could climb three flights without a twitch.
Reality was not the tower, nor the cellar,
But a correspondence up and down.
The student could encounter students laughingly
Beyond the fire of his yellowed notes;
Could still look colleagues in the eye; could
Gently smile, think clearly, ponder
Hard. It was not a time to retire.

THOMAS L. JOHNSON

The White Ribbon

Helen King

Blanche snuggled farther under her down comforter to shut out intruding light as she clung to the pale darkness before day. Then she was more asleep than awake, and reality was tinged with fantasy. She slid one foot across the cold vacant half of the bed; Martin must have gotten up to make coffee which he would bring her soon. How delicious it smelled! She sat up, awake. Martin was dead, six years now, and would never bring coffee to her again, or warm the empty place beside her. She brushed limp white hair from her eyes and peered across the room at his sturdy chiffonier – at least it was still there. She saw her square dresser, the kneehole desk Martin had given her the first Christmas they were married, and the mahogany gooseneck rocker with her flannel robe draped over it like a praying shadow. Vanessa said the rocker was the only good piece in the room.

She leaned her head against the scalloped headboard, closed her eyes, and thanked God for another night's safety, and for her little private haven with her precious, familiar belongings.

There was a rap on the door and Vanessa pushed into her room with tea and toast.

"Good morning, Mother Graves, you aren't still in bed," she said, and set the tray on Blanche's night table. "Sorry but the coffee gave out so I brought you some tea."

"Thank you, Vanessa." Blanche reached for her robe and got out of bed.

"Mother Graves," Vanessa said, "Marty will take you by the beauty parlor and I'll pick you up, but you'll have to call me. Marty is dressing now and will leave at eight o'clock sharp."

"But my appointment isn't till nine," Blanche said.

"Belle opens the shop at eight-thirty, and she can use extra time giving a permanent in soft white hair like yours." Vanessa turned to go, brushed a crumb of dry toast from her ice-blue peignoir, and pulled the ribbon tighter on her frosted blond hair at the back of her neck. "It's quarter to eight already."

Blanche gulped the tea, took a bite or two of the toast, and dressed in a hurry to go with Marty.

In the car Marty said, "Gee, Mother, I'm sorry you didn't get to eat a good breakfast, and I hate for you to wait at the beauty shop. I wouldn't have left home so early but I have an eight-thirty appointment."

"I don't mind, Marty; it's nice riding with you." Blanche finished buttoning her blouse.

"Vanny's really uptight over this Home Beautiful tour tomorrow," Marty said. "I've never seen her as determined about anything as winning first place."

"I hope she wins, but win or lose, I'll be glad for her when the tour is over," Blanche said. "It's quite a strain."

"Mother, are you sure you're up to getting a permanent? You don't feel weak or anything?" Marty waited for a red light.

"Of course not. Getting a permanent is tiring but I'm fine." Blanche looked at Marty in the rearview mirror. His dark eyes were squinted and his thick brows pulled together below a ladder of small wrinkles. He had his father's coloring for sure, even the cowlick, but the slender cleft chin was hers.

"Here we are." Her son stopped in front of the beauty shop which was located in a white house near the edge of a residential area. "Take it easy, Mother, and don't let anything upset you. Call Vanny when you're through."

Blanche shivered in the morning air and pulled her gray sweater closer. Bronze leaves whipped at her feet, and frostbitten marigolds and other fall flowers were bands of faded color around her. She wondered what Marty had meant by telling her not to let anything upset her; perhaps that they were all "uptight" over the house tour.

After fifteen minutes a key clicked in the door behind her and Belle opened the door. "Good morning, Mrs. Graves," she said. "Come in. Aren't we the early bird! Your appointment isn't till nine."

"I know," Blanche said. "I had to come with Marty. Vanessa was too busy getting ready for tomorrow to bring me, but she's going to pick me up." She sat and browsed through some magazines trying to find one she hadn't read. In hurrying she had forgotten the book she had intended to bring.

"That's all right," Belle said from a booth where she was changing into her uniform. "I'll get started early and finish with you ahead of

time." She came out carrying a colorless plastic box filled with tin rollers, a pile of snowy towels, and a glass bottle of clear permanent lotion. Dressed in white and wearing a platinum blond wig, she looked like a bleached priestess, ready to perform the magic ritual of changing limp white hair for a time into a shining mass of silver curls.

"Guess you're getting prettied up for the tour, Mrs. Graves. Does Vanessa have everything ready?" Belle's deft hands shampooed her hair with a swirl of foamy suds.

"Just about," Blanche shut her eyes tight. "She wants everything perfect."

"She'll be disappointed sick if her house doesn't win first place." Belle dried her hair and started to cut and shape.

It wasn't really Vanessa's house yet, Blanche thought. After Martin's death and her first heart attack she had sold their large two-story place and built a long Colonial one-story home for Marty, Vanessa, and herself. Her large room and bath were in a wing opposite theirs and things had worked out well enough. She had her own friends and books, and she had tried not to interfere with the children's plans. Vanessa, childless, had gone all out to make the house a showplace; she had spent much time collecting and restoring antiques, and had acquired very good taste.

"Did Vanessa ever talk you into getting rid of your furniture and putting antiques in your bedroom?" Belle was rolling her hair and the waving lotion stung her eyes.

"Not at my age," Blanche said. "Old people become attached to their own things. My wing doesn't have to be on display — I've been on home tours where some of the rooms were closed to visitors."

Blanche knew her bedroom furniture was an eyesore to Vanessa, but she was surprised she had discussed it with Belle. It was French walnut veneer trimmed with a gold stripe, Mid Depression, Martin had called it. But they had been so young, so in love, and so proud when they bought it; she and Martin had always shared it so she had chosen it for her room in the new house over finer furniture they had got later.

After more soaking, shampooing, and drying, Blanche's hair was finished. She telephoned home and Vanessa said, "Oh, Mother Graves, do you mind waiting a little longer? Mrs. Conrad Sterling, the tour committee chairman, is here and I can't possibly leave now. I'll come as soon as I can."

Blanche didn't tell her daughter-in-law she resented waiting after three and a half hours in a noisy, stuffy, beauty shop, without having finished breakfast; after all, Vanessa was busy attending to last-minute details. She admired Vanessa in spite of her ostentatious ways, and she and Marty were all she had.

A horn blew outside the beauty parlor. She saw Vanessa waving from the car, and she hurried to join her.

"My, your hair is pretty," Vanessa said. "You look ten years younger. Belle did a good job, and I like the silver rinse." She turned the car around and drove slowly toward home.

"Thank you," Blanche said, and touched the short, sprayed curls. She wanted to scold her daughter-in-law good for making her wait half-an-hour with a splitting headache, but she did not want to make Vanessa mad. After her second heart attack she was not allowed to drive and was much more dependent on the children. Thank Heaven she did not have to go to a home for old people.

"How do you feel, Mother Graves?" Vanessa puckered her brow between eyes blue as steel shavings.

"Oh, all right," Blanche said, "a headache and the usual wear and tear of getting a permanent. It's past lunch time, isn't it?"

"A little." Vanessa glanced at her watch.

"Vanessa," Blanche said, "I'd like to make a suggestion. Why don't you close my wing to visitors on the tour?"

"I couldn't do that." Vanessa's face flushed and she chewed her thin lower lip. "I wouldn't be eligible for first place. It's a strict rule that the whole house must be displayed."

"I didn't know that," Blanche said.

When they got out of the car and into the kitchen Vanessa said, "Mother Graves, I want you to close your eyes. I'm going to take you to a surprise Marty and I have for you."

"What kind of surprise?" Blanche asked, but she obeyed, and she felt her daughter-in-law's strong hand trembling on her arm as they walked down the hall.

"Now open them." Vanessa pulled her to a stop.

Blanche could hardly believe it was her room. Her cherished furniture was gone! A tall mahogany four-poster bed made up with her crocheted spread was flanked by two Victorian marble-topped commodes;

a matching marble-topped dresser, a Hepplewhite highboy, and an English secretary were tastefully arranged in the room. Her only piece of furniture left was the gooseneck rocker.

Blanche thought she was going to have another heart attack. Maybe Vanessa had fixed the room temporarily for the tour.

"Where are my things?" she asked as soon as she could speak. Her face was hot and her breath was quick and short.

"The second-hand furniture man has them. There wasn't room in the attic." Vanessa twisted her rings.

Blanche wanted to slap her. "But they were all I had left of mine and Martin's things." She tried to smile and hold back angry tears at the same time.

"But, Mother Graves," Vanessa said, "they were so out of keeping with the other furniture and the house, of no period at all – just plain tacky. Mrs. Sterling told me last week if I refurnished this room I was sure to win the prize." She scratched her neck; her allergy always flared up when she was nervous.

"You say you and Marty did this together?" Blanche trembled and she sat in the rocker.

"Well," her daughter-in-law said, "Marty agreed with me that your furniture was out of place in this house, and if you ever went to live – somewhere else, you couldn't take it with you, anyway."

"I'm not planning to live anywhere else, Vanessa." Blanche wanted to scream that the house was hers, but she gritted her teeth. Old people were sometimes put in homes against their wills – mentally incompetent, they were declared.

"We don't want you to leave, Mother Graves, as long as we are happy here." Then Vanessa rubbed one of the carved bedposts. "Isn't it a beauty? A hundred and fifty years old at least, and we paid through the nose for it."

"Yes, it is pretty." Blanche wanted to shake Vanessa and tell her she didn't care to sleep in any old bed haunted by strangers' ghosts, instead of the one she had slept in for almost fifty years.

"The marble on the dresser and commodes is Italian alabaster, nearly white as snow and not a flaw in it. And the desk!" She walked over to it and fingered the lead panes in the tall doors. "This is so much roomier than that cheap kneehole thing you had. Now you have a place

for all your books and for your milk glass collection, too. Your papers and clothes are neatly arranged and you have extra room there." She pointed to the dresser.

How dare she go through her personal belongings and put them somewhere else. "You were very kind, Vanessa," Blanche said.

"You do like your room, don't you, Mother Graves? Mrs. Sterling thinks it's one of the house's highlights, and she said I'd get at least fifty points for changing it. You still have your gooseneck rocker, you know."

"Well – of course I like it." Blanche clutched the arms of her rocker and saw prints in the carpet Martin's chiffonier had made, and she hated herself for lying. "The furniture is very fine and you went to lots of trouble and expense. I hope you win first place."

"I know I will. The committee assured me today the prize is mine, but it won't be announced till tomorrow."

"What is this prize you want so much, Vanessa?" Blanche took off her glasses and wiped her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief.

"The tour brochure says it's the white ribbon tinseled with silver." Vanessa scuffed the carpet where the chiffonier had sat so long. "And just think, I'll get to keep it a whole year!"

The Dusty Shuffle

I can't get used to thinking
Of myself as dead—long gone
And six feet down. Dead (as
I now see my father, whom
I had hoped to see, arms folded,
Seated among the elders) Dead. And
Lying in the dusty shuffle of my bones,

Where no light falls,
Where the slow earth slips and drifts
Unheard, among its casual stones,
While goats with white beards
Clamber bouldered mountains
For their grazing. And
Water bugs, on legs as fine as hairs,

Scoot safely over eddies
On the surface of clear streams,
While diamond-patterned snakes crawl—
All instinct and peristalsis—to mate
Among the cacti of the painted desert,
Their thin tongues forking,
Rhythmically and indifferently.

I can't get used to thinking
Of myself as dead, when such
As these will clamber, scoot,
And crawl, until the moon goes
Around the earth for the last time.
And yet, my thoughts
Now often take the shape of graves.

I contemplate the dust.

VIRGINIA LINTON

A Correspondence

Poems folded and refolded between
My most intimate lines begin to lose
Their confidence.
Uncreased rejection slips,
So thin they come two at a time, divide
My hopeful letters.

Dear Sirs: Please accept
These offerings for publication. Please
Read them out of order.
The Editors
Regret that this manuscript fails
To meet their present needs.

Dear Sirs: I am
Submitting the enclosed self-addressed, stamped
Envelope for publication.
We have
Found your envelope self-addressed
And thank you for submitting it to us.
However, our present needs . . .

Dear Sirs: Please
Lose my manuscript.
Yours,

HENRY PETROSKI

The Last Street

Marie M. Deans

Barney gave a push to the handle and watched the small mound of dirt and trash ripple up around the broom, then break and topple into the larger heap. He stuck the broom into its slot on the cart, pulled out the flat shovel, scooped up and dumped the pile into his can. Some of the men would have left the cigarette butt and few leaves that remained, but Barney picked them up.

He blew hot breath into his chapped hands and rubbed his fingers up and down the swollen knuckles. It was getting late now, and cold. He'd have to hurry if he was going to get his cart back in time. Mr. Simpson didn't like it when the carts were late, even if you explained that there was trash along the way.

"That your street, Barney?"

"No sir, but it's on my way and . . ."

"Then what the hell you worried about?"

"It's not I'm worried. It's just when I see it, I pick it up. It's my job to keep the streets clean."

"No sir. It is not your job to keep the streets clean. It's your job to keep your own route clean. It's *my* job to keep all the streets clean and to get those damn carts in here and locked up for the night. You better start worrying about *that*. You make me late for my supper again, and so help me, I'll fire you."

He probably would, too. In the two years Mr. Simpson had been there he'd shown much more interest in getting home on time than he had in keeping the streets clean. It showed, too. Most of the new men he'd hired spent more time in the diners and grocery stores than they did on the streets, and they would push their carts through Lord knows how much rubble to get them in by five. Yeh, things had sure changed since Mr. McCaffrey retired. Barney would never forget him, especially the night he retired. Mr. McCaffrey, himself, had invited Barney to the dinner the City Council had given in his honor. The council had given him a big, gold pocketwatch, and Mr. McCaffrey had joked about it finally being time for him to start being a clock watcher. Funny how people were always giving other people things

they didn't need anymore, giving them something when it was too late to mean anything. Maybe Mr. McCaffrey did use the watch. Maybe he took it out now and then and thought about what he'd been doing at that time ten years ago, or twenty. Maybe he looked through that watch all the way back to the time when he was a young man, healthy, useful, full of promises to himself. Barney wondered what it would be like to be through with everything, to have nothing left to do but look at a watch all day and remember.

He finished the last street on his route and turned into Broad. It must be near five, and today he was going to get his cart back on time. Mr. Simpson would have nothing to gripe about today. The next side street was the last on Lemacks' route. He was one of the old ones, too, slow and almost as good as Barney. Maybe they could walk back together. But Lemacks wasn't there, and he hadn't been there. The street was still littered. Lemacks had a wife and two or three kids. He couldn't afford to have his route look bad, and he couldn't afford to be late. Barney would do the street for him.

He had swept about a third of the way down one side when he heard St. Michael's bells. If he stopped now the trash he left would blow back. Maybe it was only the half-hour. He scooped up a collected pile and dumped it into the can. It could be just four-thirty. Dusk and the cold came earlier now. He stuck the shovel in its slot and started sweeping up another pile. He moved faster now, but the bells continued to bong, once, twice, a heavy five times.

"You better start worrying about *that*. You make me late for my supper again, and so help me, I'll fire you."

Barney clenched the broom handle and watched a candy wrapper blow loose from his pile and move, like a small devilish animal, down the street where he had just cleaned. He couldn't finish this street, not now. He had to get the cart back.

Mr. Simpson was leaning against the gate when Barney got to the yard. "Do you know what time it is, Barney?"

"Right around five."

"It ain't *around* nothing. It's twenty-five minutes *after* five. Twenty-seven to be exact. That means I'm gonna be late for my supper again. You know what that means?" His stomach growled.

The growl seemed planned to Barney, like the noises they used to make on the radio. He giggled. He tried to stop it, then hide it. He wiped his mouth, turned his head aside, but still he giggled.

"Think that's funny do you? Think I'm some kinda damned comedian sent up here to entertain you bunch of no good punks? Well I'll tell you what Mr. Bigshot street sweeper, you're fired. Now you just laugh at that." He grabbed the cart away from Barney and gave it a violent shove. It zigzagged across the yard like a headless chicken, then crashed against the corner of the storeroom and fell over. The broom and shovel were sticking out of the litter like scrawny legs out of ruffled, bloody feathers. Barney ran after the cart, picked up the broom and shovel and started after the trash.

"What're you doing? Get the hell outa here, 'fore I break your god-damned neck."

"I gotta get this mess up."

"You ain't gotta do nothing in my yard. You're fired. Didn't you hear me tell you? Fired!"

"Fired? You don't mean that. You can't. I've only got two years to go for my pension. You know that. Listen, Mr. Simpson, I'm a good sweeper, the best you got, and I won't be late again. I promise you that. I'm a good sweeper, the best." He was furiously picking up the trash.

"You ain't got no pension now. I warned you. Over and over. I'm sick of warning you. I'm sick of you, of all you 'McCaffrey boys'. Now get outa this yard."

It was true. He had been warned. Each piece of trash stood out heavy and useless as he finished picking up the litter. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Mr. Simpson's wingtipped shoes, and he had the crazy urge to reach over and dust them off. He pulled himself up, and without looking at Mr. Simpson again, he got his bike out of the sweepers' shed and left the yard.

Riding home he tried to think out what he would do next, but he couldn't get past being fired. He felt low and ashamed, and there was only one thing that made him feel better. There was no one he had to tell.

Then he remembered Lemacks. He ought to tell him, warn him. But Lemacks lived way out in the country. Maybe Lemacks would be

all right. There were some who could get away with things. He'd seen slackers drift on in their jobs for years, but Lemacks wasn't a slacker, and he had kids and a wife, mouths to feed, people he'd have to tell.

When he got to his building, he pulled his bike under the stairs and went through the back door of the grocery store. It was empty as usual. Sometimes he thought he must be Mr. Thompson's only customer.

"Evening, Barney, thought for awhile you weren't gonna make it 'fore I had to close up."

"Yeh, got held up a bit today."

"What'll be today, beef stew or tomato soup?"

"The stew I think, and I need some bread. Oh, can I get a box from out back tonight?"

"Sure, help yourself, nothing I like to see better than good, clean business competition."

Barney smiled and nodded his head. He always acknowledged Mr. Thompson's attempts at humor. Mr. Thompson was a good landlord. He let Barney cook in his room, and he never raised the rent. Besides Barney felt sorry for Mr. Thompson. "How's the wife today?"

"Bout the same. You know I had an idea last night. I thought come Spring I'd rent a wheel chair and take her out to the gardens. She loves flowers. Used to spend a lot of time in the yard, out there most every day working with her flowers. She's really got a green thumb, you know. Place was real nice. Me, I don't know a thing about the yard. She doesn't say anything, but I can tell it hurts her to see it going to seed. She gets to where she thinks she's going right along with it. Oh, I keep it clean, and I kept the grass mowed while it was green, but that ain't enough. So, anyway, I thought I'd take her out to the gardens. I just know it'll perk her up. What do you think?"

"Yeh, yeh, I think she'd really like that, like that a lot. Oh, thanks. Sixty-four cents, right?"

Upstairs Barney put the bag on the chest of drawers and got some water out of the bathroom for his geranium. The geranium was the only thing he had left to take care of since Miller died. Lord, he missed Miller, but he'd never been able to bring himself to get another dog. Another dog taking Miller's place just didn't seem right somehow.

From the window he saw Mr. Thompson locking up the back. He

carried his supper home in a bag, too, now, his and Mrs. Thompson's. He was so sure his wife would live through the winter, but Barney had seen her and seen Mr. Thompson's sister shake her head, no. No, Mrs. Thompson wasn't going to make it through the year. He imagined a hearse going slowly past the gardens and Mr. Thompson seeing the flowers blooming and knowing he'd thought of them too late, knowing they didn't mean a thing to Mrs. Thompson. Just like Mr. McCaffrey's watch, the trip was going to be something given too late. He pushed the window up and called down. "Mr. Thompson, wait. Wait just a minute. Wait." He took the geranium off the sill, wishing he had it in something nicer than a coffee can.

Mr. Thompson was standing by the back door. "You need something else, Barney?"

"No. I just wanted to give you this. I wanted to give it to Mrs. Thompson. You just put it in a window by her bed and water it every few days. It likes lots of sun. Give her something to watch till Spring comes.

"Why, Barney. I sure do thank you."

"Yeh, and listen. Tell her, you know. Tell her you're gonna take her to the gardens. It'll give her something to look forward to. That helps when you're feeling low."

"I will. I'll tell her tonight, and thanks. Thanks again."

Barney waited until after supper for the downtown traffic to thin before he put on the heavy sweater and wool cap. He picked up his broom and left the room.

Mr. Thompson always left a light burning behind the store to keep prowlers and bums out of the alley. Barney rummaged through the boxes until he found one that was sturdy and the right size. The box was still marked with distended rings from the cans it had held. Even cans leave their mark. Barney had hoped to leave his mark. He'd always thought the sanitation department would remember him as the best street sweeper the city had ever had. He had imagined them holding him up as an example to the men that would come after him, telling them how good he had been, telling them there would never be another like Barney.

He felt awkward carrying the broom and box on his bicycle, but he wouldn't have to carry the box back. If he could get the street swept

before the washers came, nobody would know Lemacks hadn't finished his route. He pulled the bike up on the sidewalk and parked it midway down the block. It was quiet and dark where the street lights didn't meet. He had never been in this neighborhood at night. He'd never had any reason to come here, and now it gave him an odd feeling, not loneliness exactly, more, he imagined, like being in a strange city.

He had to pick up the trash he collected with his hands and stuff it down into the box, and sometimes he couldn't see the piles. He thought he might pick up roaches, and the skin at the back of his head prickled when he thought about them crawling across him. His hands and feet were cold now, and he could hardly feel his ears. He pulled the flaps down from under his hat, but he didn't like the way the night sounds died away, so he pushed them up again.

He was in front of his bicycle, pushing the last pile into the box when the kids came. He was glad to see them. They broke into his aloneness in a good way. He stood up, brushed his hands together, and watched them coming down the street. They were talking, laughing, making a lot of ruckus, but he liked that, too.

They saw him and became quieter. He wondered if he had scared them. They probably weren't used to strangers on their streets at night. "Hello, boys."

They stopped, looked at one another, at him, then started to pass, but one of them broke away from the group. "You say something?"

"Just hello."

"Oh, I thought you said something, like, maybe what you're doing out here."

They were all watching him now, and he seemed to be watching, too. It was like the TV shows when you knew something was going to happen and a force inside your body rushed through you and pressed against the inside of your skin.

Then one of the boys came up close to him, and all Barney could see was the boy with all the faces and strong young bodies behind him. "Where'd you get that bike?"

"The bike?"

"Yeh, where'd you get it?"

"From the police station. The auction every year. All the bikes that ain't claimed, they sell them off."

"When?"

"November. They sell them every November."

"Which November did you get this one?"

"Oh, ten, twelve years ago." Barney could feel the sweat in his hands. They were so cold they hurt, but they were sweating. He pushed the box under one arm, wiped his free hand on his pants, then pushed the box under that arm and wiped the other hand.

"I believe you stole that bike."

Stole! Once before he had been accused of stealing. His dad had beaten him until long, snake-like welts had risen on his back and legs. He was sixteen, and when his dad had finished with him he had walked out. He had never gone back. "I never stole that bike. I never stole nothing in my whole life. You understand that? Nothing. Never."

"Yeh? Well what's in that box?"

"Trash. Just trash."

"Lemme see." The boy yanked the box away and the trash fell out in a messy pile that the boys began kicking around. "For Christ's sake. There ain't nothing in here but garbage."

Barney was on his knees pushing the trash back into the box. He heard the names they called him, their shrieks of laughter, but he didn't care. He didn't think he cared, not about them, not about Mr. Simpson, not even about his job. He just had to get that trash back into the box. Let them call him names. Let them all think whatever they wanted. It didn't matter, not anymore.

Then he heard the bicycle and their whooping getting farther away. They were already at the corner, two on the bicycle, the others running along beside.

He tried to catch them, but the longer he followed, the farther the distance became between him and the bike. Then they turned a corner, and when he turned it, the night was quiet and empty again. He stood looking at the dark street where they had been, where they had taken his bike and disappeared. He felt strangely confused, as if the bike had never existed, as if his job had never existed, as if some gigantic, unthinking hand had flung him down here, and this was all there was or ever would be, just an old man standing alone in the middle of a dark, empty street.

He sat down on the curb and rested his chin on his knees. His

hands weren't sweating now. They were just cold. His ears felt like dry ice against his head. He pulled the flaps down, not caring now about the night sounds. He wanted to go home. In the worst kind of way, he wanted to go home, but there was something frightening about going home, frightening and empty. The room seemed to have dropped out of his mind. He couldn't remember what it looked like or smelled like, where the furniture or the windows and doors were. He couldn't even remember what Mr. Thompson looked like. Maybe there had never been a room or a Mr. Thompson. All his life he had looked forward to being remembered. He'd been the best he knew how. He had stuck to one thing and one place, knowing he could be the best, knowing he would be one thing, a memory. Now none of it was true. Now it seemed he had been flung down here just for tonight, just to do one thing, one first and last thing, alone and unknown, to clean one street for a man whose face he couldn't see anymore, a man who probably wouldn't even notice. Slowly he got up, and because it was the only thing he knew to do, started back to the street.

Thanks for The

Well, we've
finally done each other in.

We called it
love.

How does it feel to be sitting here
in a garden of death

trying to find
one more flower?

We were good –
we made wonderful enemies –

perfect
match –

a woman
and a man.

JOYCE ODAM

I Swing the Axe

I swing the axe,
Clearing the briars and thick
Twisted vines from the land
For my house.

No one's been here for fifty years.
All that time and now my sweat,
The first salt water in fifty million years.

Hardly any sunlight here, the tree canopy
Suits it to bat thoughts and the forces of mold.
I come with malice, steel, and sweat. I am
A violence, a profound insult.

I swing the axe.
The raw sap smell is thick in the air.
Leaf dust clouds the sunshafts.

In this dim corner of His universe,
I destroy the fine works of His mind.
I dig-out the roots of all that is
Creatively rotten. I am anarchy.

I swing the axe
For my house.

KREGG SPIVEY

Peritonitis and Sweet Dreams

In nakedness and pain
I obey the surgeon's command,
struggling to begin
the count backwards, *ten* . . .
as the knife-light becomes
a sun, *nine* . . . *eight* . . . only to turn
into stars, *seven* . . .
and I, *seven* . . .
am etherealized
into six, *six* . . . *six* . . .

Shine, the Wonder Pony, knows three
thousand tricks, travels from town to . . .
like Lash LaRue,
for whom I waited all day
outside the Ritz
near his horse in the new van parked, but he
did not. Shine travels
in an old pick-up, behind his manager's back
will do
an impromptu
hard-shoe

just to see my eyes. But Lash LaRue
did not come. Mayo, the coach's son, said Lash
was in the tank
but he lied, I knew. I knew
those stars who used to come
trailing horses, tricks, that whip
lashing at Mr. Shine, on whose back
the reminding tongue

had left its tattoo. Suppose the incredible Shine
was master of only two
thousand nine hundred ninety
eight, or nine? I still selected to think
that Lash LaRue

would not drink. I could depend
on him, as surely as on that other
odd horse Daddy showed me, composed
entirely of stars
strung up
near the dizzying pole;

growing dim, even then, of his eyes. If only he
were here, on my side
where the fine pain lashes, I know
he could tap them out, these confusing
numbers I cannot . . . it was one
of his tricks . . . and that other star
showed me a pratfall, coming out
of the jail. Mayo was right
about him, but Shine never failed
to appear, and I knew it was not for the silver harness,
applause, or even his huckster's grin
when more than enough was in
for another Florida
winter. Despite all that sparkling,
my father could not make out
the great square, but he knew
where it should be . . . could point out, for me,
that strange catatonic
prance; the bedazzling

horse. I suspect, with his piebald
humor, Shine knew
he was merely a dwarf, with no chance
at Madison Square, but he went on
with his art. I remember his face
turned up for stars he knew
must be there; and that other,
turning away
from the flash, the reporter's cold delight
at a star
caught falling. But Shine
kept dancing his best. If only one child

with one dime appeared,
those little hooves
would strike stars out of dark,
as my father for me
when I was six
and just becoming aware
of this pain, and nakedness.

BENNIE LEE SINCLAIR

Forgiveness

His hands once so quick and strong
to prize a pinch-bar or snap a thong
that did not measure to his haste
or harsh idea that nothing should waste
his time by rot or weakness, now
bend back slightly as he totters along.
He holds them like some priceless evidence
of rocks he's dug, work to make you wince,
out of the Lovewell's Pond road
with crowbar and pick and carried or rolled
downhill to a jetty in the sand
that in twenty years would inch his land
three feet further into the lake.
But no matter how pitiful and weak
they are now, in ominous contrast
to their swiftness in the past
to cuff, seize or beat in furious
rage the first of us
who blundered on his moods
of silence at the endless roads
that rolled away his life like stone,
who can deny at eighty-one
he's had it, no matter what he's done?

P. B. NEWMAN

He's Got a Very Sad Laugh

he comes to our parties
with his supplemental wine

and he sits like a
poured glass of laughter

spilling with private joke
at our saddest poetry

tears come to his eyes
and he shakes his head

and sighs
and laughs again

°

when it's time to go home
to his midnight wife

he looks into the room
from the door

where he busses
the hostess

who is holding the tragedy
back from the light

and as if it meant
something more

he says with
his loneliest voice

good
night

JOYCE ODAM

Of Such Safe Green

I drag some beauty past your eyes,
some little laugh,
some tease.

It is not easy for me.
I am locked within the
anxious habit of our lives.

I've no more newness
in my smile.
My love's a safe place for your own.

•

I want to change the danger of our days.
I try another path –
get lost – turn back –
your eyes are there,
continuing their dark.

You drag a bullet through the air
to kill some bird against the grass.
He flies away.
I croon my sympathy to each of you.

•

I wish I were a stranger to us both,
someone with large commandments,
easy ways,
with eyes that didn't go
so deep as mine.

I give up the charade of trying to please,
undo my happiness
like some flown bird
who left the frightened sound
of such safe green.

JOYCE ODAM

"The Pride of Thine Heart Hath Deceived Thee:" Narrative Distortion in Dickey's *DELIVERANCE*

PETER G. BEIDLER

James Dickey's *Deliverance* has been much praised as an exciting adventure story; it has also been much criticized for being *only* an exciting adventure story. Virtually all reviewers, however, appear to misread the central action scene where the first-person narrator, Ed Gentry, kills the man with the gun on top of the cliff. Typical of these misreadings is Charles Thomas Samuels': "when the survivors reach dry land [after running the first rapids] they discover that the missing rapist is gunning them from his sanctuary on a cliff above. At night, exhausted and terrified, Gentry must scale the cliff, hide in a tree, and drop the hillbilly before he drops them. This he accomplishes . . . ."[1] This account of the plot is simply not accurate. The survivors (Lewis Medlock, Bobby Trippe, and Ed Gentry) do not "discover" that someone is waiting up there to pick them off; they *assume* that he is. More significantly, the man Ed Gentry shoots with his arrow the next morning is not the "missing rapist," but an innocent hunter. The error is perhaps understandable, for the narrator never knows, or at least never admits, that he has killed the wrong man. He tells us enough, however, so that we readers can know. The question of the identity of Ed Gentry's victim is so central to a proper understanding of the narrator's character and to a proper evaluation of the novel that it is worthwhile looking at the evidence.

We should note, first of all, that not even Ed Gentry himself knows for sure who his victim is. He says of the identity of the man he has killed: "I believe that if I could have seen him move I would have known, one way or the other. But I didn't, and I don't" (p. 170 in the Dell edition). Since Ed Gentry himself has reason to wonder if he has killed the right man, surely we should wonder also. I think we shall find that we can interpret the evidence more conclusively than Ed Gentry does, if only because we have less at stake than he does.

There are three encounters with mountain men along the river. The first occurs when the fat man with the white beard and his taller, thinner,

[1] *New Republic*, April 18, 1970, p. 23. Not all of the two dozen or so reviewers I have read make direct reference to this scene, but those who do assume that Ed Gentry has killed the man he is trying to kill. None of them asserts that he is guilty of killing an innocent hunter who is not gunning for him.

toothless companion come out of the woods and assault Ed Gentry and Bobby Trippe. By the end of that encounter the fat man has been killed by an arrow from Lewis Medlock's bow, and the tall companion has escaped. The second encounter takes place later that day when someone, presumably the tall man who had run away, apparently fires at Drew Ballinger when the canoeists are entering the rapids. The third encounter takes place early the next morning. Drew Ballinger is dead, Lewis Medlock has a broken leg, Bobby Trippe is frantic, and Ed Gentry has climbed the cliff during the night to ambush the man he thinks will try to ambush them. As dawn breaks, a man with a gun does come up. Ed Gentry takes aim from his tree perch and kills him with his arrow. Later, after having discovered his victim's name, Stovall, from a card in his pocket, and having lowered the body down the cliff, he ties stones to the body and conceals it in the river.

There is little to be said about the second encounter because none of the canoeists ever sees the gunman who apparently fires at Drew Ballinger. In the first and third encounters, however, our murderer-narrator gets close-up views of his antagonists, and so should have a basis for an accurate identification of his victim. The fact is, however, that he does not wait for an accurate identification before he shoots Stovall. He does not see his victim's face until he is ready to let fly the arrow, and then he sees not so much his face, but only "that he had a face" (p. 163). Ed Gentry does not take the trouble to examine his victim's face until after he has shot him. Then, having tracked the wounded Stovall to the place where he died, he turns him over for his first look at the face. He is utterly shocked by what he sees: "His face came clear. . . . I fell down. . . . My heart moved into my bad side and beat there, trying to throw my blood away any way it could. I put my hands over my face and went wild with terror; I could not look again. His mouth was open, and full of yellow teeth" (p. 170). Those teeth, of course, present a problem, because the "missing rapist," the man who had escaped the day before, had been toothless: "When he moved his jaws the lower bone came up too far for him to have teeth" (p. 95), and when he spoke he was "missing his teeth" (p. 96). No wonder Ed Gentry is shocked when he sees that mouth full of yellow teeth, for it means that he has killed the wrong man.

Ed Gentry tries to find a way out of his guilt. Had the man put his false teeth in since yesterday? Ed Gentry pries at Stovall's gums

with his hunting knife and discovers that his victim has a "partial upper plate." He begins to feel better and so replaces the plate and takes his first "good look" at the corpse to look for similarities to his intended victim. The only similarities that he notices are these: "He was dressed like the toothless man in the clearing; whether *exactly* like him I truthfully couldn't say, but very much like. He was about the same size, and he was thin and repulsive looking" (p. 170). These vague coincidences in appearance, however, cannot offset the dental evidence. The plate was a *partial upper* plate, which means that the dead man had some of his own upper teeth and, presumably, all of his lower ones, since Ed Gentry did not find even a partial lower plate in his mouth. (A "partial" plate can be used only on a person who has some of his own teeth left to attach it to.) Even with the upper plate gone, Stovall would not have been able to close his jaws as the toothless man had done the day before. We can accept, I believe, the accuracy of Ed Gentry's observance of the tall rapist's toothlessness the day before, for he had been very close to him at least twice, and he says that "my time close to him in the clearing was burned in my mind" (p. 170). At any rate, Ed Gentry himself never questions his observation of the rapist's total lack of teeth, and so we have no right to either. We must conclude, therefore, that Ed Gentry has shot the wrong man.

This dental discrepancy is the major piece of evidence for Ed Gentry's mistake, but there is other evidence also. For one thing, the tall rapist had had "yellow-tinged eyeballs" (p. 95) while Ed Gentry's murder victim has "clear blue" eyes (p. 172). For another thing, Stovall does not act like a man who is about to ambush three canoeists. He is relaxed, makes no effort to conceal himself from anyone who might be on the river, and seems not about to shoot anyone: "A man was walking forward onto the sand with a rifle. He had one hand in his right pocket. . . . He was looking up the river and standing now with both hands on the gun, but with the attitude of holding it at his waist without necessarily thinking of raising it to his shoulder. There was something relaxed and enjoying in his body position, something primally graceful" (p. 161). He acts more like a hunter enjoying a good view than a vengeful ambusher. Then, too, there is that card identifying him as an honorary deputy sheriff named Stovall. Even though it may be true, as Ed Gentry rationalizes, that "everybody in the hills, or just about everybody, was an honorable deputy sheriff" (p. 173), it seems

highly unlikely that the murderous rapist of the day before, who acted more like an escaped criminal than a deputy sheriff, would have been one. Finally, there is Bobby Trippe's reaction when he sees Stovall's body. The body had fallen the last thirty-five feet after the rope had broken, and had landed face-first on a rock, crushing the face beyond recognition. Even so, Bobby Trippe sees enough to be suspicious. "Are you sure . . . ?" he asks. Ed Gentry replies, "No. I would say it was, but I'm not that sure" (p. 180). By now, we are even less sure than Ed Gentry is that he has killed the right man. Indeed, it seems all too clear that he has made a terrible mistake, and that he has murdered an innocent man.

What, then, has happened to the intended victim, the toothless rapist of the day before? We do not, of course, know, for the limited point of view will not let us find out. We may probably assume, however, that Bobby Trippe had been right when he had suggested earlier to Ed Gentry that "I still think that maybe he's just gone away" (p. 133). Having run away from danger once, and having then avenged his friend's death with a safe shot at men who could not fire back because of the rapids, would he then have been courageous enough to try again, in calm waters, even if he did think that the others could have survived the rapids? Under the circumstances, he might well have just gone away.

Who, then, is Stovall, and what is he doing there on the cliff at dawn? Stovall, apparently, is doing no more than Ed Gentry had done the morning before: hunting in the woods near the river at daybreak. Probably he is "Benson" (p. 223), that missing brother-in-law of deputy sheriff Arthel Queen. Queen's sister had called him to report that her husband had gone out hunting alone and had not returned. If Benson Stovall is the deputy sheriff's brother-in-law, that fact, of course, would explain how he might have come to own an honorary deputy sheriff's card.

If *we* can put the pieces of the puzzle together so neatly, then why is Ed Gentry not able to? This, of course, is the central question, and takes us to the heart of *Deliverance*. Ed Gentry does not *want* the puzzle to fit together in this way because he does not *want* to think of himself as the murderer of an innocent man. He can justify the killing of the rapist, for that is revenge against an apparently worthless and perverted murderer. To have killed an innocent hunter, however, is something

he could not live with for the rest of his life. He would rather suppress the truth than face the reality of his own mistake.

It seems to me that Dickey's supreme accomplishment in *Deliverance* is that he is able to characterize his narrator so carefully as the sort of man who can believably act as he does, the sort of man who can not only convince himself that a faceless man is the man he wants to kill, but who, even after he sees the face of his murdered victim, can suppress his error. Ed Gentry lives apart from reality in a world he has created for himself, and he plays a role in a drama of which he is the sole director.

Dickey has carefully prepared us early in the novel for Ed Gentry's response to his imagined "enemy" on the cliff. For one thing, Ed Gentry is an advertising layout man: "If there was one thing I felt a reasonable certainty about, it was my ability to get the elements of a layout into some kind of harmonious relationship. . . . I liked harmoniousness and a situation where the elements didn't fight with each other or overwhelm each other" (pp. 19-20). His job is to impose harmony on potentially conflicting elements, and he does so on top of the cliff also. The night before, when he stops for a rest as he climbs that cliff, Ed Gentry sees the view of the river with his eyes shut: "What a view. *What* a view. But I had my eyes closed. The river was running in my mind, and I raised my lids and saw exactly what had been the image of my thought. For a second I did not know what I was seeing and what I was imagining; there was such an utter sameness that it didn't matter" (p. 145). On top of the cliff the next morning he again makes the image of his vision match the image of his thought, and seems to think that the distinction between what he sees and what he imagines doesn't matter. That night as he climbs he even sees in a rock in the river the shape of a face: around the rock "a thread of scarlet seemed to go, as though outlining a face. . . . The rock quivered like a coal, because I wanted it to quiver. . . . It might have looked something like my face. . . . My face: why not? I can have it as I wish" (pp. 146-47). Ed Gentry can make a rock in the river look like his face, if he wishes to; surely it will be no large task for him to make Stovall's face look like a rapist's, if he wishes to.

Ed Gentry has a way of getting caught up in his own fictions. When, back in civilization, he tells his made-up story of Drew Ballinger's death, he actually comes to believe it himself: "As I went through some

of the story that Bobby and I had rehearsed on the river . . . it was hard to realize that [these things] had not taken place in the actual world. . . . They became part of a world, the believed world, the world of recorded events, of history" (p. 199). Later, "my lies seemed better, more and more like truth" (p. 215). And later still, "my version of things . . . was strong. . . . It had become so strong in my mind that I had trouble getting back through to the truth" (pp. 227-228). It is not surprising that a man with such a capacity for obscuring truth with fiction could talk himself into believing that there is no need to tell even Drew Ballinger's wife the *real* truth about her husband's death and burial. After all, all she could hope for was revenge against the murderer, and Ed Gentry had already taken care of that: "no electric chair, no rope or gas chamber could avenge him better, or as well" (p. 231). This is true, of course, only if Ed Gentry has shot the right man. He seems to have forgotten here that even he is not sure. Actually, by executing the wrong man, he has left two deaths unavenged.

No careful reader can fail to notice the narrator's numerous references to movies and acting. I have counted over twenty such references. Gentry seems to have a tendency to see real life as a reflection of movie life. The old man who runs the Texaco station in Oree, for example, "looked like a hillbilly in some badly cast movie" (p. 51). Ed Gentry is inexperienced in paddling a canoe, but "movies . . . gave me a general idea of what to do" (p. 66). Lewis Medlock, naked in the water, looks like "Johnny Weismuller in the old Tarzan movies" (p. 90). And when one of the rapists levels the gun at his chest, Ed Gentry "half-raised my hands like a character in a movie" (p. 97). Now, this is all harmless enough. When an ordinary man for the first time sees or experiences the extraordinary, it is natural that he would be reminded of his previous sources of information about such things. The difficulty begins, however, when Ed Gentry begins imposing the plots of movies on his own real-life adventure, and begins playing Hollywood roles which do not fit the real situation. The movie argument is a crucial element in Ed Gentry's decision to climb the cliff and wait in ambush. He says to Bobby Trippe, "What I mean is like they say in the movies, especially on Saturday afternoon. It's either him or us. We've killed a man. So has he. Whoever gets out depends on who kills who. It's just that simple. . . . We can start out with the assumption that he's going to kill us" (p. 131). It may be just that simple in the movies, but it is not so in real life,

for the assumptions Ed Gentry makes about the toothless rapist turn out not to be true. "We were cast in roles," Ed Gentry thinks as he plans his ambush. "The whole thing focused, like an old movie. . . . We were all acting it out" (p. 148). Ed Gentry is so caught up in the world of movies, probably his only previous experience with adventure, that he superimposes Hollywood plots on real life, and the result is tragic. He has cast himself as the good guy, the toothless rapist as the bad guy. Then he becomes so caught up in his heroic role that he refuses to face the truth, even after he has seen evidence that he has killed the wrong victim, and perpetuated rather than punished evil.

Dickey, then, has given us a narrator who has an unusually highly developed capacity for imposing his own patterns on reality. It is this capacity which makes believable to us a literary character who could convince himself that an innocent hunter is a vicious murderer, and who then, after seeing evidence that he has made a mistake, could mentally suppress that evidence. Dickey has given us, in the tradition of Henry James, an unreliable narrator through whose distorted and self-serving perspective we must separate the true from the false, the strong from the weak, the innocent from the guilty.

If I am right about the murderer-narrator of *Deliverance*, then the novel deserves to be defended against several unfavorable criticisms which have been based on a misreading of its central action. Too often the novel has been criticized for failures which disappear when we have come to understand what has really happened. Too many readers have mistakenly accepted the narrator's version of reality.

For example, Benjamin DeMott finds the novel to be *only* exciting adventure: *Deliverance* is simply "entertaining, shoot-'em-up mindlessness, . . . an emptily rhetorical horse-opera played in canoes."[2] The focus of the novel, however, is not on explosive action, but on explosive action as seen from the point of view of a man who wants to think that he is the hero of an adventure of explosive action. What may look like a horse-opera is, if anything, a parody of the horse-opera, and of the kind of man who sees real life as nothing but a second-rate movie.

Others are dissatisfied with what they take to be the theme of the novel. Christopher Ricks, for example, thinks "*Deliverance* is too patently

[2] *Saturday Review*, March 28, 1970, p. 38.

the concoction of a situation in which it will be morally permissible – nay, essential – to kill men with a bow and arrow,"[3] and Richard Patrick finds in the novel "a positive infatuation with violence, an easy acceptance and justification of killing."[4] Surely, however, if the victim of Ed Gentry's bow and arrow is an innocent man, then the novel can scarcely be said to come out in favor of violence and killing as morally permissible. If anything, the theme is precisely the opposite, for the novel shows what a monster a man becomes when he takes upon himself the roles of prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, and executioner.

In a similar vein, John Alfred Avant finds that the novel "doesn't work thematically either. It seems to be an attempt at a celebration of manliness and an examination of masculinity in contemporary society, but we don't believe a line of it."[5] Indeed, we don't. How can a novel be said to be an attempt to celebrate manliness and masculinity when its most manly character is put out of commission half-way through the novel, and his replacement bungles his one important manly assignment by murdering an innocent man? If Lewis Medlock is Tarzan, then it appears that Ed Gentry's murder of Stovall is motivated in part by a desire to imitate his mentor's arrow-murder of a rapist so that he will be able to say, by the end of the story, that he is the son of Tarzan (p. 225). There is a double irony in this, however. Not only is Tarzan's kind of manhood, at least as interpreted by Lewis Medlock, little to be admired in this novel, but Ed Gentry never even measures up to it. He is more like Tarzan's chimp than his son. "You damned fucking ape," the Sheriff calls him in his final speech (p. 225), reinforcing what the two rapists had called him: "a goddamned monkey" and a "fuckin'

[3]*New York Review of Books*, April 23, 1970, p. 40.

[4]*Novel*, 4 (1971), 192.

[5]*Library Journal*, March 1, 1970, p. 912. See also Carolyn Heilbrun's very recent article on "The Masculine Wilderness in the American Novel," in the *Saturday Review* for January 29, 1972, pp. 41-44. She finds *Deliverance* to be the "apotheosis of manliness" in the American novel tradition, just "one more version" of "the woman-despising American dream." The point is, however, that Dickey undermines rather than supports this dream. He gives us a narrator whose unconscious desire to escape from women is one aspect of his refusal to face truth and reality. The dream of a wilderness without women is Lewis Medlock's and Ed Gentry's; Dickey shows that dream to be a nightmare of self-deception.

ape" (p. 98). Ed Gentry's manliness turns out to be a little more than a Cheetah-like imitation of a mindless masculinity.[6]

Several reviewers have found the narrator to be unsatisfying. Calvin Bedient's remarks are typical: "Only swift action frees both the novel and the narrator from the drag of his commonplace, unironically presented point of view"; Bedient thinks that "the pleasant narrator" is little more than "a spare tire of fat" on an otherwise "lean" novel.[7] Surely, however, Ed Gentry is neither commonplace nor particularly pleasant, and the novel, far from being encumbered by him, is made magnificent by him. His character and the complex irony of his point of view are what keep the novel from being that horse-opera played in canoes.

Bedient also objects to the pointlessness of the epigraph from Obadiah, since it seems not to apply to any of the characters, including the narrator: "Plastered here and there on *Deliverance* are little arrows that, though intended to point to profundity, really point nowhere, since they pierce nothing given flesh in the book itself. Typical of these is the epigraph from Obadiah, which rumbles and warns that the high of heart will be brought low. . . . As for the narrator himself, his experience is rather of a kind to puff him up than bring him down: after all, it is he who saves the day."[8] Ed Gentry saves the day, perhaps, but only from an imaginary enemy. The "little arrow" of the epigraph from Obadiah does point somewhere – straight to the deceiving heart of Ed Gentry. It is worth quoting the epigraph, if only because the Dell paperback has omitted it and so cut off millions of readers from its relevance:

> The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee,
> thou that dwelleth in the clefts of the rock,
> whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart,
> Who shall bring me down to the ground?
>
> Obadiah, verse 3

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[6]There is even some evidence that the narrator may be sufficiently unmasculine as to be something of a homosexual. See Samuels' remarks in *New Republic*, April 18, 1970, pp. 25-26.

[7]*The Nation*, April 6, 1970, p. 408.

[8]*Ibid.*

There can be little doubt, I think, that the inscription refers at least in part to the narrator. He had stayed for some moments in the "crack" or "crevice" in the high rock cliff which he had climbed, and morally he seems to stay there permanently. The warning in the Bible is directed to the "Edomites," and the narrator's name is "Ed." Edom (originally Esau) was, like Ed Gentry, an unusually hairy man. Ed Gentry's assailant tells him, "you're hairy as a goddamned dog" (p. 101; cf. Genesis 25:25 and 27:11). And, of course, if my reading of the narrator's character is correct, then the pride of Ed Gentry's heart *has* deceived him, for it prevents him from seeing the truth about his victim, and about himself. He is too proud of his hero's role to see that he is a villain.

A later verse or two from Obadiah may also be relevant, further reinforcing the appropriateness of the epigraph. We are told, for example, that "upon mount Zion shall be deliverance" (verse 17), but there is some question whether this deliverance will apply to Ed Gentry: "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever" (verse 10). Is there a rare moment of honest realization when, just after concealing Drew Ballinger's dead body, our normally self-deceptive narrator says, "we were free, and in hell" (p. 187)?

The most perceptive objection to *Deliverance* has been made by the reviewer who has come closest to an understanding of the central action in the novel. Paul Edward Gray is the only reviewer I have read who acknowledges that the narrator "is not even certain that the man he killed was the one he suspected of trying to kill him and his companions," the only reviewer who seems to be critical of the narrator's attempts at "avoiding responsibility for the carnage, the senseless, violent deaths, that he and others have wrought." What bothers Gray about the novel is that he is not sure that Dickey *wanted* him to be critical of Ed Gentry: "Here Dickey's choice of first-person narration, so effective in conveying the immediacy of experience, offers only tenuous support to the reader who suddenly wishes to distance himself from Ed Gentry, who feels that Gentry's triumph, no matter how intensely rendered, is earned by a callousness that is the antithesis of heroic. The reader wants to know whether he is meant to share with the author an ironic apprehension of Gentry's behavior or whether he and the author have parted company, and the text simply does not offer sufficient evidence on this

point."[9] It seems to me that if we are aware, as Gray was not, that the narrator murders an innocent man who is *definitely* not, rather than *perhaps* not, the intended victim, then the text does make clear that Dickey was aware of Ed Gentry's callous lack of heroism, and wanted his readers to be aware of it also.[10]

Gray's argument, however, raises an important question which cannot so easily be answered: how effective *is* the point of view? If virtually all readers have missed, because of the narrative point of view, the identity of the victim on the cliff and the unreliability of the narrator, must we not charge Dickey with clumsiness and even failure in his handling of his narrator? There is no doubt that Dickey is taking great risks with his readers by so distorting the narrator's vision. Wayne C. Booth has suggested that there are three potential difficulties with "impersonal narration," difficulties which can easily lead to what he calls "confusion of distance." First is a *"lack of adequate warning that irony is at work."* If a writer does not warn his readers in one way or another that his narrator is unreliable, then the readers, through no fault of their own, may miss the irony entirely. Second is *"excessive complexity, subtlety, or privacy of the norms to be inferred."* If an author's own beliefs and feelings are different from those of his narrator, he must find ways to communicate that fact to his readers. If his own "norms" remain private, the reader will have missed the point of the narrative. Third is *"vivid psychological realism."*[11] An unreliable narrator can often become so vivid to his readers that they lose their ability to judge his actions, and so take as virtues qualities which are really faults, and admire where they

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[9] *Yale Review*, 60 (1970), 105.

[10] The "intentional fallacy" notwithstanding, it is interesting to notice Dickey's statement, quoted by Walter Clemons in the *New York Times Book Review* for March 22, 1970, p. 22: "There are men in those remote parts that'd just as soon kill you as look at you. And you could turn into a counter-monster yourself, doing whatever you felt compelled to do to survive." Ed Gentry, doing what he thinks he has to do to survive, has become a kind of "counter-monster," no less guilty than the two rapists. The recently released movie version, for which Dickey helped prepare the script, and in which he has a small part, seems clearly to demonstrate Ed Gentry's lack of true heroism. See Stephen Farber's film review in the *New York Times* for August 20, 1972, Section 2, p. 9. Farber accurately describes the film as "a serious and meaningful challenge to the belief in rites of manhood," but feels that this challenge is not found in the book. I contend, of course, that the film version reflects rather than departs from the themes and characterizations of the novel.

[11] *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 316-323. All italicizing is in the original.

should condemn. Dickey has clearly taken a chance with a narrator like Ed Gentry, and he may have failed, for most readers seem to have missed the irony in the point of view and the unreliability of the narrator.

I prefer, however, to blame Dickey's readers rather than Dickey. At the very least, they must share the blame. Dickey *has* warned his readers about the narrator in several ways: by showing Ed Gentry's propensity for imposing his special vision on reality, by showing his uncertainty about the identity of his victim in the face of clear evidence, by showing his refusal to feel *any* concern for Stovall's wife or to accept even potential responsibility for her widowhood. Then, too, Dickey's "norms" are not entirely private. In this novel violence is senseless and leads to nothing but more violence and human misery. Deception is bad and leads only to self-deception. Murdering innocent men accomplishes nothing. These "norms" are all clearly enough represented in the novel, even though they are not those of the narrator. Finally, the psychological realism is not so vivid that we cannot distance ourselves from Ed Gentry enough to see that he has made some mistakes and that his response to life is in many ways the wrong response. Or, to put it positively, Dickey has created a narrator who is portrayed with such vividness and with such psychological realism that we can at once identify with him – for we all hide from certain kinds of truth about ourselves – and condemn in him those things which we ought to condemn in ourselves.

By giving his book a first-person narrator like Ed Gentry, Dickey has ensured that we will care about him as well as condemn him, that we will see more about ourselves in him than Ed Gentry can bear to see about himself.

different cases

(for W.M.)

So many bachelors write,
brood on their solitary, prowling ways,
stride, pad like panthers in the skull,
and claim to be acquainted with the night.

I brood in different way—the children fall,
tumble from the corners
Zack, Helen, Chris, and Dan will call,
soups simmer, parents phone,
students' essays drop like leaves.
I never am alone.

Meals upon meals, cats, dead birds, ailing fishes,
burnt out bulbs, nooks full of twine,
minutes pouring hours into time
so even as I try this poem—
most unpoetically—I'm not alone.

Of course
I know as well as you alone could be in crowds,
skulk, thin paced, through a web of friends
and scratch his thumb nail down your spine
after the party ends,

but there are some (again I know) who say
they will not suffer end of day
and, rhyming flatly, light the light
and miss their friends who stalk the night.

PETER F. NEUMEYER

Reverting, Reconverting

In season or out,
a green iconoclast, can I outlast
the ever again
outbreaking past?
I know I'm easily enough put out,
but, waking amid prohibitions, I raise
rebel banners in paradise.

Set back, I avoid surprise,
Morning, and birdson – neither's begun
because of me (nor the old Adam that I
resolve into, and multiply.)
Incompleteness, seen with a shifting eye,
seems to nerve the world axis. Gray turns
from a yellow to a white
dandelion sun,
and my weed wealth grows.

This good morning this morning is, I suppose,
good enough. High light
assigned to me is yet
merciful, not mercy's fall.
This, an old Adam may forget
in his counteraction, his late light-taking.

Lo, a rose
of waking is overtoned
by birds' arpeggios.

SAM BRADLEY

The Harmony of Bestiality in James Dickey's *DELIVERANCE*

DONALD J. GREINER

If best-seller sales and a National Book Award nomination are acceptable standards, then James Dickey's *Deliverance* achieved both a popular and critical success when it appeared in 1970. One reviewer after another hailed the novel as a worthy successor to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Faulkner's "The Bear," pointing to the suspense which Dickey successfully establishes for yet another confrontation between man and impenetrable nature. The *New Yorker's* L. E. Sissman, for example, reminds us of "The Thirty-Nine Steps" and "The Wages of Fear" and then lauds *Deliverance* as "a suspense story – that transcends its genre" (May 2, 1970). But in addition to the praise generally accorded the novel, some serious reservations were also expressed. *Time's* anonymous reviewer wondered if the accumulation of the various spectacular actions is "just a bit too much" even though "no single action is impossible to believe" (April 20, 1970). And *Saturday Review's* Benjamin De Mott, in a biting criticism, puts down the novel as "entertaining, shoot-'em-up mindlessness" and as an "emptily rhetorical horse-opera played in canoes" (March 28, 1970).

The point here is not the relative worth of these observations but rather the mistaken emphasis. For regardless of a pro or con point of view, nearly every commentator on *Deliverance* points to the thrilling action, the exciting evocation of big woods, or the violence as the areas of major concern. Dickey himself may have unintentionally encouraged these readings when he said, "I'm tired of reading novels in which nothing happens. Books like that are really rehearsals for some imagined literary display" (*Time*, April 20, 1970). Taken at face value, this statement might invite the unsuspecting reader to concentrate upon the novel's big action scenes – the homosexual rape, the murders by bow and arrow, the climb up the cliff – scenes in which things happen. But read on these terms, *Deliverance* is little more than the glorified horse-opera which De Mott accuses it of being.

It is not enough to counter De Mott's observation by arguing, as Sissman and others do, that the novel exposes the unpredictable violence in America. Most assuredly *Deliverance* depicts the ease with which

civilized man slips into violent man, but to limit the violence to a comment upon contemporary America is to miss the point. Rather, Dickey documents the menace and hostility in all men in all times. The novel's big scenes – those events which, as Dickey notes, make the reader realize that something is happening – are indeed as gripping as "The Wages of Fear" and as thrilling as a superior suspense tale, but they should be read as a means to illustrate Dickey's more significant concern: bestiality. In *Deliverance,* Dickey goes beyond the violent action and the he-man acrobatics to suggest that each of us harbors in the deepest recesses of himself an unknown part which we are afraid to face because we might be forced to acknowledge our own bestiality. And he provides an additional turn of the screw when he places the narrator Ed Gentry in a situation which calls for not only acknowledgment of his own bestiality but also encouragement, even cultivation, of it.

The novel's shock value, then, results not from what happens in the specific, isolated scenes mentioned by every critic but from the more general suggestion that survival might depend upon an ability to shed the veneer of civilization and call forth the monster within us, to meet our buried selves face to face and willingly revert to the animal brutality we thought to be mastered. Ed must first find the level of the beast within himself before he can persuade himself to kill. In so doing, moral considerations give way to the strongest instinct of all – survival. Bashed by the Cahulawassee river and threatened by an unknown assailant, Ed flounders out of his moral depth, clinging to the determination to survive as his only reliable life preserver.

Because Ed is the sole character to experience the necessity for bestiality, he is the only one who is convincingly changed by the adventure. Dickey purposely sketches Lewis, Bobby, and Drew as flat characters in order to direct attention to the more complex narrator. Lewis's pursuit of immortality, Bobby's weakness, and Drew's goodness are finally less important that Ed's search for what he calls "harmony." He tells us, "I liked harmoniousness and a situation where the elements didn't fight with each other or overwhelm each other" (*Deliverance,* Houghton Mifflin, 1970, p. 19). Whereas Lewis believes in madness, Ed seeks to live by "sliding." In other words, he prefers a gentlemanly, civilized, non-violent approach to life's little hurdles. But the adventure in the big woods teaches him that the hurdles are not always so little and that animal-like violence is often necessary. More importantly, he

learns another kind of harmony. He comes to realize that self-awareness means an acknowledgment of and a harmonious relationship between the two sides of his nature, the bestial and the human.

It is significant that at the beginning of the adventure Ed suspects the existence of a dimension within himself just the other side of wakefulness, but as yet he cannot define it. All he can do is generalize it as "a point, a line or border": "There was something about me that usually kept me from dreaming, or maybe kept me from remembering what I had dreamed; I was either awake or dead, and I always came back, slowly. . . . Something in the world had to pull me back, for every night I went down deep, and if I had any sensation during sleep, it was of going deeper and deeper, trying to reach a point, a line or border" (p. 25). Ed soon makes explicit the connection between his experience while sleeping and the trek down the river when he tells us that upon first feeling the urgency of the river's current, he remembers the "moment of losing consciousness at night, going toward something unknown that I *could not avoid*, but from which I would return" (p. 73, my emphasis). That night in the woods he takes the initial step toward defining the point, line or border. Knowing that there are creatures near him with one forepaw lifted, he opens his eyes and sees "the dark in all its original color" (p. 87). He witnesses the "blackness of darkness," but he does not yet understand what he is seeing. And it is during this same night that he first identifies with something undeniably wild — the owl on his tent. Imagining that he is one with the owl, hunting in the dark woods, Ed begins the process of recognizing his bestial side.

This process remains dormant until the four men encounter their first moral dilemma which follows the homosexual rape of Bobby and the murder of the mountain man: should they agree with Drew and notify the police, or should they agree with Lewis and bury the body? The point is that suddenly they are out of their moral depth. Instead of the potential challenge of currents and rapids, they now face the reality of murder and revenge. Stripped of an opportunity to use the familiar props of easily discernible right and wrong which they rely on in the city, they find that they do not know how to act. Only Lewis, the one who claims to believe in madness, as opposed to harmony, is convinced that the body must be buried. It is significant, then, that the identification between wild animals and the city men is made explicit

only after they accept Lewis's plan and elevate the urge to survive over the moral considerations involved in killing.

Describing their movements as they hide the corpse, Dickey gives us a sentence so simple that it is often missed because of the tension generated by the overall scene: "Lewis went up the far bank like a creature" (p. 133). A few pages later the simile shifts to Ed because he has helped Lewis dispose of the body: "I got on my back and poured with the river, sliding over the stones *like a creature I had always contained* but never released . . . . over the stones I slid over like a moccasin . . ." (p. 144, my emphasis). This simile, so unobtrusive as to be overlooked, provides the key to the rest of the novel, for it is here that *Deliverance* changes from a rip-snorting adventure tale into an investigation of the relative ease with which man becomes bestial. Note that Ed attains his goal of sliding, but he now slides with the facility of a water moccasin instead of with the avoidance of friction dictated by a gentlemanly code of manners. Immediately after they hide the body, Drew is apparently shot from the canoe and killed by the dead man's buddy. Struggling to right the canoe, Ed thinks of himself not as an unprepared man from the city but as an "out-of-shape animal." While Ed has now discovered the bestial side of his nature, he must cultivate and release it before he can deal with the bestiality in his unseen antagonist, the second mountain man. He knows that an out-of-shape animal might not survive. Thus the true terror in *Deliverance* comes not from the rape and subsequent killings. These events, though shocking in their own right, are Dickey's primary means to suggest something even more horrifying: the ease with which bestiality surfaces, and the probable need for it when survival becomes more important than conventional morality.

Ed's climb up the cliff and pursuit of the remaining mountain man illustrates Dickey's theme, for it is during this sequence of events that Ed literally begins to enjoy the challenge. Totally isolated in what he calls "the most entire aloneness that I had ever been given," he thrills to the idea of life and death confrontation in which the eventual survivor will have to exhibit superior animal-like instincts (p. 161). What is so crucial here is that Ed is fully conscious of what he must do. Whereas earlier, while burying the body, he recognized that his sliding into a creature-like pose was gradual, now he deliberately cultivates his bestial nature because he realizes his need of it for survival. Accordingly, he

clings to the cliff like a "burrowing animal," "like a creature born on the cliff and coming home" (p. 177). His description of the plan of pursuit once he gains the top of the cliff clearly suggests his awareness and acceptance of what has happened to him: "When I finish that, I'll make a circle inland, very quiet, and look for him like I'm some kind of animal. What kind? It doesn't matter, as long as I'm quiet and deadly. I could be a snake" (p. 174).

All along, of course, Ed has known, however vaguely, that somewhere within his dreamless sleep rests "a point, a line or border" which seems to beckon. But he cannot determine the meaning of the ambiguous point or line until he purposely unleashes the creature within and begins to stalk his prey. He knows now that the line represents the border between humanity and bestiality. It is not, he explains, that he is "turning evil," but that, like an animal, he has become indifferent to killing: " . . . an enormous physical indifference, as vast as the whole abyss of light at my feet, came to me: an indifference not only to the other man's body scrambling and kicking on the ground with an arrow through it, but also to mine" (p. 180). Once he makes up his mind to become a beast, he finds that he develops the extra-sensitivity of an animal. A heightened sense of touch, for example, aids his climb up the cliff, and a new sense of taste tells him that a pine needle has "the right taste." As Ed notes, "There had never been anything in my life remotely like it" (p. 184). His detection of where the mountain man will be and the best angle to shoot him from testifies to his new-found cunning. Dickey makes it clear that, unlike Lewis, Ed is totally unprepared for such desperate action. His success is not due to long hours of lifting weights, taking target practice, or sharpening his woodsmanship as would be the case if Lewis were in Ed's predicament, but to his ability to summon his bestiality and exploit all of its ferocity. The highpoint of his animal-like sensitivity occurs when he slashes the man's jugular vein with an arrow. Dropping on all fours "like a dog," he tracks the wounded man by smelling the blood on the ground.

If Dickey had ended *Deliverance* shortly after Ed's victory, he would have written little more than De Mott's horse-opera played in canoes. But, happily, he never lets us forget the always implied contrast between the moral considerations which regulate city life and the code of survival which determines life and death in the woods. Ed is immediately aware of the contrast once he gets a good look at his victim:

has he shot the right man? From the standpoint of his animal instincts, the correct identity does not matter. But from the point of view of his own humanity, the question of identity is crucial. Equally important, and equally ambiguous, is the question of whether or not Drew was killed by a bullet from the mountain man's rifle. If he was not, then Ed has no reason to kill anyone. The ambiguities point to the heart of Dickey's theme. In a court of law, be it in Ed's large city or in the mountain man's crossroads town, these unanswered questions would be of the utmost importance. For without the distinctions between self-defense and murder, and between accidental death and premeditated killing, the moral considerations which measure the civilized state Ed is used to would break down. But in an area bordered on the one hand by rugged woods and on the other by a wild river, these fundamental distinctions are negated, and the niceties of various kinds of killing are rendered meaningless: death is death. Dickey places Ed in a situation where a prolonged analysis of the morality of his acts could result in his own death. Ed thinks that he must kill to avoid being killed. He could very well be wrong, but he believes the circumstances demand action instead of analysis. Moral distinctions might serve city dwellers, but only animal instincts can benefit man when morality is ignored. Ed's life, says Dickey, depends upon his ability to release these instincts.

Though he returns to his regular life-style with its standard morality, Ed is obviously a changed man. Fully aware of what he has done, and admitting that he has found a strange kind of joy in freeing the creature which he has always contained, Ed must violate another law of civilized mores when he refuses to tell the true story to either the authorities or his wife. He, as well as Lewis and Bobby, will base the rest of his life on deception, on a lie so large that it can find credibility only in what he calls the "land of impossibility."

When reading *Deliverance*, we should be reminded of more than tough-guy stories of the outdoors and violent tales of revenge. This is not to deny the excitement of the novel's memorable scenes, for the suspense clearly works in Dickey's favor. But the theme of bestiality with its suggestion that domesticity must, in certain circumstances, give way to savagery should call to mind Dickey's own poem "Madness" or Djuna Barnes' masterpiece *Nightwood*. In both of these works the borderline between civilization and bestiality, between the daylight and

the nighttime worlds, is very fine indeed. The title "Deliverance" is Dickey's final irony, for his characters have been delivered from a nightmare of bestiality and murder into unspoken memories and a lie that will last a lifetime. Ed finds his harmony, all right, but not the kind he had hoped for. Planning at first to live by "sliding," he learns that from now on harmony will mean maintaining the balance between his animal nature and his human personality.

Russians in Belgrade

Russian women walking by
visitors from Kiev
collective farm workers.
They plod onward
thin fading dresses
fat legs and arms
solemn expressions.
    Look closer
among the cows a gazelle
thin, tall, walking erect
fluid motion in her dress
she walks in a dream.
Did someone decree
that she should do farm labor
shoveling manure, hoeing potatoes
that gazelle among the cows.

JOHN TOMIKEL

The Consistory

A. M. Pauley

"The Bishop is here, Father –"

"Show him in . . . ."

Was it milk now or was it cream? Mrs. Bloomgartner set the tea tray by the window. TWO pitchers, damn her! She knew he never remembered such things, and still she–

"How are you, Richard?"

"Your Excellency!" He knelt to kiss the outstretched hand. The cold ruby burned his lips. He pulled away and continued to stare at the ring. Cream. He was almost positive. But . . . suppose it was milk?

"I hear you've been working hard on the project –" The Bishop sat down with a flourish of his gown, sweeping the side forward.

"Yes . . . ."

"Well, now, that's good news." He leaned forward slightly. "But I hope you have been taking care of your health. Last time, you remember –"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that!" His mouth twitched into what he hoped was a kind of smile. "I've never derived so much satisfaction out of anything – " A strange expression came into the Bishop's eyes. "Oh, nothing like that!" he added quickly, crossing his hands tightly in his lap. "Not like last time." God! If only he could say straight out what he meant!

"Good. I was afraid my being away for three weeks might – "

"I kept busy. So much to do!"

"Well, then! Tell me about it! You promised to keep me informed, remember? Three weeks is a long time – " he added, in answer to his frustration.

He looked up. Mrs. Bloomgartner hovered by the window, waiting to pour the tea. The Bishop followed his gaze.

"Milk or cream, Excellency?"

"Black, please. Coffee should be taken strong and unadulterated. As it was meant to be enjoyed."

He swallowed in panic. What more proof did he need, that fat bitch! Why hadn't she brought coffee in the first place? He watched her move surreptitiously to the door and out of the room.

"Mrs. Bloomgartner will have coffee in a minute – "

The Bishop turned in his seat. "You needn't bother." He settled back in his seat. "Tea is fine."

"No, no. The tea is . . . for me." He hated tea. Though less the tea itself than the necessity of having it forced on him like this.

"You musn't go to all this trouble when I drop in, Richard. Remember?"

"But it's no trouble at all, Your Excellency. Only, I HAVE been meaning to speak to you about . . . . " He held up his hands as if to ward off the obvious conclusion. "I'm not complaining, you understand. She's efficient enough – " Damn her! "But she does get in the way . . . and more than once I have found her – " The Bishop raised his eyebrows and glanced toward the door. "You gave me your solemn promise, Richard – "

"Yes, yes, yes. But you must listen. Before she comes back."

"You won't get all excited . . . like last time – ?"

Nothing like that! Today was a new beginning. He had thought it all out very carefully. Vita nuova. He wiped his palms on his cossack, as though rubbing his legs. Were those really his legs? They felt so thin thin thin. The Bishop was touching his arm.

"Is something wrong?" He felt himself swaying and sat up very straight.

"No, no." But it always began with lies. With his trying to cover up. He tried to remember the last visit, three weeks before. But . . . the Bishop had had tea then! Was he trying to confuse him?

Mrs. Bloomgartner returned with a second tray. He felt a wave of hatred reddening his face. The Bishop looked away.

"That's fine, Mrs. Bloomgartner," he said slowly, taking the proferred cup and handing it to the Bishop. He must stop her before she poured for HIM, or she would certainly give him away. "I'll have lemon, instead of cream," he said distinctly. Was there a trace of a smile on her lips?

The Bishop was savoring the coffee, his eyes half closed. Mrs. Bloomgartner handed him the tea.

"Ah, pine cookies. My favorite." The Bishop reached over to pick up a *cookie from a silver tray. She HAD remembered something.*

"That will be all, Mrs. Bloomgartner," he said firmly. She seemed surprised, but when the Bishop looked up and smiled, she turned abruptly and left. "Thank you," he remembered to call after her. But the door had already closed. He set down the cup. "It's quite impossible, you see." He gripped the sides of the chair, determined not to lose control. The Bishop sipped his coffee. "I know I promised not to bring it up again. Not without being absolutely sure. Now I am. I have . . . proof! There. He had taken the plunge. In medias res. No more lies. Already he felt better.

"Proof?" The Bishop studied the silver tray for several seconds before he scooped up a handful of loose *pignoli* from the bottom. "You are absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely sure." He glanced uneasily at the door, then drew the heavy chair closer to that of the Bishop. "You see, she's Jewish."

The Bishop studied the pignoli in the palm of his hand.

"WAS. We've been all through that, Richard. She WAS Jewish. But you yourself have given her communion. She is with us in the body of Christ." He picked up one of the nuts and transferred it slowly to his mouth.

"That's precisely what she wants us to think! Oh yes! She takes communion! She eats the wafer, so what? If you don't believe it's the body of Christ, why you can wipe your ass with it for all it's worth!"

The Bishop sighed, put the rest of the nuts into his mouth, then wiped his hands on a clean handkerchief which he refolded neatly and put into a hidden pocket on the side of his cossack. "Richard, nothing you have said can be construed as proof. So far, you are merely indulging in the same unfounded – "

"I've caught her at it . . . going through my report!" He sat back flushed with excitement. "Spying on me when she thought I wasn't looking. I've seen her going through my letters, my . . . my wallet even." The Bishop nodded gravely. "I let her do it, thinking it best not to arouse her suspicions. You should have come sooner – "

"I came to you, first. I haven't even unpacked yet."

"It's urgent, you see. If my report gets into enemy hands – "

"Enemy hands?" There, he'd said it.

"She's Jewish."

"No, Richard. She is no longer Jewish." The Bishop reached out as if to touch him, but changed his mind. He moved back, slightly. "And even if she were, it wouldn't make her the enemy. The Jews are not our enemy."

Again he reached out, this time touching his arm. "How can YOU, of all people, be so unkind? Don't you realize where this can lead?" Was HE with them? Had he been wrong about the Bishop too? " . . . and does so much for you. She is wholly dedicated to you."

"Exactly!" The words took their own course, careless of his intention. "Just what they want her to do! Don't you see?" The Bishop scooped up the remaining *pignoli* at the bottom of the tray.

"All right." He crossed his legs. "What could Mrs. Bloomgartner possibly want with your report?" Under the red robe, Richard spotted thick white socks. Had the Bishop been playing tennis? The question became obsessive. White socks. Why white socks? "And you will agree that I have cooperated with you in every way," he was saying. The Bishop uncrossed his legs and picked up his cup again. "You don't doubt my interest in all this, do you? Because if there is any doubt in your mind – "

"Oh, no!" Was he lying? He must avoid lying.

"You've had access to the library, to the microfilm collection, to the rare book room . . . we even requested books for you on interlibrary loan . . . why we even wrote to the Vatican for photostats of – "

"And I'm grateful!!"

"Well then!"

"Bloomgartner."

The Bishop put down his cup. "All right. Get on with it." He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair. "I'm listening."

"She's a spy."

"So you tell me."

"I have proof."

"You did say something about that."

"You sound . . . skeptical."

"No, Richard." The Bishop smiled half-heartedly and opened his eyes. "Shall I be the devil's advocate for a minute?"

"I DO have it, you know – "

"Yes, now that's important. What exactly do you have?"

"I told you. I practically caught her at it. Going through everything."

"In court, Richard, in court . . . that would not be admitted as PROOF. You know that."

"We must do something!"

"Very well. Since you feel this strongly about it–"

"It's not what I FEEL, Your Excellency. I must insist on that point!"

"Of course. I only meant – "

"It's FACTS."

"I was about to say, all things considered, it might be wise to replace her – "

It was as though the ocean had come crashing through the window. For a moment he couldn't see anything at all. The pounding in his head was a noise and a pain and a blackness.

"That's not what I meant . . . . That's not what I meant at all – "

The Bishop spread out his hands in a helpless gesture. "What else can we do?"

"Not that. Not that." Through a red mist he saw the Bishop watching him. "It would give everything away. And it would expose others. She's very subtle. No, no. She musn't know that we suspect her!"

"Ah, so we DO agree – " The Bishop patted his arm.

Did they?

"We'll watch her, naturally, and when the proper moment comes – and you WILL let me be the best judge of that, won't you Richard? –when the right moment comes, we'll take action–have her transferred. Or whatever seems best." He frowned. "You do trust me, don't you?"

Did he?

"In the end, of course, such decisions must rest with me. But I

would want you to go along willingly. You must have confidence in my judgment—"

Would he?

The Bishop rose and crossed over to the window, a dark blot against the Irish lace curtains. He stood staring out for a minute, then turned, his hands behind his back. "I was hoping, Richard — to be perfectly truthful — I had hoped you would have your report ready for me today. It's been almost five months now. And, although I HAVE neglected you — oh, not intentionally, but I HAVE been away for almost a month — you have had ample time to work." He stroked his chin. "I may be able to expedite things for you once the report is in my hands." His head was a black sphere against the gray afternoon outside. Dark wings seemed suddenly to sprout from the top of his shoulders and gently gently his whole body rose and fell with some mysterious cadence. ". . . better for all of us." It was only the sound of the Bishop's voice. Only the lace curtains moved. "A word from me now can open up all sorts of doors for you. Are you listening to me, Richard?"

The uneasiness inside him suddenly curled up into a knot of fear. "Yes, Your Excellency." He added quickly, "Whatever you say."

"You will give me the report then?" He came back to his chair and sat down. It was ready. He could see the edges of it under the tray, under the newspapers, where he had put it just before the Bishop's arrival. But . . . . What?

" . . . must let her have free access to everything. As though nothing had happened. That way she will incriminate herself, you see."

"It makes sense, yes."

"Meanwhile the report will be safe with me."

Mrs. Bloomgartner was at the door. Why hadn't she knocked? She stood aside, glancing back over her shoulder.

"The Holy Father is here, Excellency." The Bishop rose.

"I wanted to surprise you, Richard." He helped him out of the chair.

"You ARE pleased I hope?" He fought back his frustration. The timing was so wrong. Everything. A large gray-haired man was approaching them. Mrs. Bloomgartner had retreated, closing the door behind her.

Was it really shut tight? He fought an almost irrepressible urge to try it. Instead, he fell on his knees in front of the newcomer, who was robed in a long white coat and wore a silver beaded yamulka. He looked like Yul Brunner.

"Father, I – " He clutched the outstretched hand. " . . . never expected . . . . "

The newcomer helped him to his feet.

"I've been meaning to stop by." He turned away. "Is there some coffee left?"

The Bishop looked toward the door, hesitating. "No, don't bother calling the woman. I'll pour it myself."

"No, no. Let me."

"Thank you, Richard." Dear God, what would he put in it? The Holy Father rescued him. "Not too much cream. And one sugar."

"Try the cookies. They're home made. Richard's aunt sent them."

The Holy Father took the cup from Richard and glanced down at the tray of cookies, uncertainly. "You've picked all the nuts off, as usual – "

The Bishop looked embarrassed. "There's still . . . . " His voice trailed off.

The Holy Father laughed. "We're all sinners . . . . "

"Except the saints – "

"Even the saints, Richard, before their sainthood."

"And Luther. Was he a sinner?"

"He said he was." The Holy Father laughed again. "Why should WE doubt it?"

"Ah, but was he really?"

"The greatest sinner of all. He sinned in thinking he did not sin."

"And Mrs. Bloomgartner?"

They exchanged glances.

"What about Mrs. Bloomgartner?"

If only St. Augustine were here. He always had the right answers. He knew just how to cope with the hierarchy. The red tape. The formalities. Protocol. All that nonsense. The white robes and the red. The

red and the black. He would cut across budgets and official memos *to the heartbeat, the reality buried under the masks of authority.*

The Holy Father came up close. "Now, what's all this? Morris tells me –"

The Bishop, just behind him, cleared his throat.

"Richard has finished the report."

Who was Morris?

The Holy Father put down his cup and fingered the heavy chain around his neck. Something was wrong. He was good at sensing shifting moods, atmosphere, emotional tension.

"She's Jewish, you see," he said weakly, punctuating the unexpressed argument. The Bishop moved nervously across the room and stood for a few seconds by the door. "Richard thinks Mrs. Bloomgartner bears watching. He saw her going through his reports."

"Ah."

"She's a Jewish spy."

"I told Richard," said the Bishop, moving away from the door, "that the best thing to do was to carry on as though we didn't suspect. For a few more days at least." The Holy Father nodded approval.

"It is possible, of course. A spy among us. Still, the odds are so very much against it . . . . "

Something was definitely wrong.

" . . . substantial evidence. We musn't give anything away until we have it. Am I right, Father?"

It was impossible! But why was he sweating like this?

" – out of reach . . . . "

But they were part of it too!

" – safe in our hands."

"Yes, Richard. You must let us have the report. We can't run the risk now of letting her get it."

Yes, it was all painfully clear. They couldn't make out the report from Mrs. Bloomgartner's appraisal of it, so they would now work on him. But he KNEW. He would be careful.

"There's very little there, I'm afraid."

"But you said you had finished it."

"Ah, but it's in code."

"We can have it transcribed. Just give us the code."

"No, no. I must do that for myself. You see, I change the code every three days. It's all here." He pointed to his head.

"May we see the report?"

Well, why not. They couldn't possibly decode it.

"Excuse me." He moved the tray slightly to one side and picked up the sheets that he had placed there earlier in the afternoon. The Bishop reached out and took them. He examined first one side then the other, going through the same routine for each of the seventeen sheets of paper in his hands. Then he handed the sheaf to the Holy Father. There was a curious expression on his face.

"Are you sure you will remember the code this time?"

"Oh, yes." He smiled happily. Well, relieved at least.

"But – " The Bishop put a hand on the Holy Father's arm.

"You needn't be tactful. I know what it must seem like to you. Blank sheets. Right?" The Bishop nodded. The Holy Father looked up puzzled. "Do you want a secretary to help you?"

No. "That's very kind of you. . . ." He thought quickly. Well, why not? It would certainly make it difficult for Mrs. Bloomgartner to carry on. That in itself was a kind of victory. "Yes, I would appreciate that." The telephone rang. The Holy Father picked up the receiver. "Yes?" His voice suddenly turned cold and harsh. "Damn you, Hartley," he said in a hoarse whisper. "What did I tell you about calls?" He lowered his voice even more. "Well, get Dr. Ainsley! I'm not the only saint on duty!" He glanced over his shoulder and then away. "No, there's no need. Everything's under control. And I hope it's the same there! And Hartley. It's All Saints Day. So stay off the stuff. Why . . . you son of a bitch!" He hung up with a bang and stood leaning against the desk for a few seconds. "I'm sorry," he said, turning back to them with a smile. "The Chancery is always tracking me down. One has to be firm. Where were we. Oh yes. Someone to help you prepare the report."

"I'll need more books too."

The Bishop picked up a pad of paper and a pencil from the desk. "Shoot."

"An Armenian Bible. An Arabic dictionary. If possible, Jerome's commentary on the Psalms. And Paul. Paul Goodman. And *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. There are some interesting parallels between – " He stopped short. Why should he give them even the slightest lead?

"Is that all?"

"For now, yes." His head hurt terribly and he stroked it gently, starting from the nape of his neck upward toward the top, in slow circular strokes. He reached the top of his head, where the hair had been shaven off when he had taken on the monk's garb. "Oh, one more thing."

"Do you want some aspirin?"

He almost laughed. "No. But my hair has grown in. I really need a barber, wouldn't you say?"

"I'll see to it." The light had grown dim and he could scarcely make out the features of his guests. "We want to help in every way, Richard."

It was almost over. Soon they would leave.

"But you must not give in to those horrid imaginings. Just remember that Mrs. Bloomgartner is going to be under constant surveillance. You can rest easy about everything. The important thing is not to give in to frustration. We all have fears . . . . The point is to deal with them efficiently. Without destroying the good things we build each new day. Now take Mrs. Bloomgartner – "

"NO!!" Was he shouting? The light was dim and he couldn't tell. "I will NOT have her!" He leaped from his chair and looked desperately for escape. "She's probably out there right now – " pointing to the door – "listening!" Were they Jewish too? He could scarcely make out the contours of their heads. A hard and rasping sound reached him. It was his own voice. "Don't you think I KNOW? Oh, yes, you're awfully good at it, both of you. And HER!"

Mrs. Bloomgartner walked in, as though drawn there by some terrible nemesis. The Holy Father switched on the light. He looked annoyed.

"I told you to wait outside!"

"I have as much right to be here as you do!"

"Damn you, can't you see – "

What were they chattering about in a huddle? His throat was

dry and his eyes were swimming in some murky well. If only they'd leave!

The Bishop had joined the others near the door.

"I hope you know what you're doing," said Mrs. Bloomgartner, turning her head to him.

"It's my responsibility."

"We are all involved!"

There was a quick angry exchange, inaudible.

" – may succeed this time! And then what? What will you do with your responsibility then?"

"It MUST run its course."

"Bullshit!"

"I agree. I think we should take action right now."

What were they shouting about? Everything had been settled.

"Your Excellency . . . ." They stopped and stared at him in surprise. The Bishop recovered first. He buttoned the top two buttons of his cossack, hiding the paisley tie from view. The Holy Father adjusted his robe and moved forward toward him.

"Yes, Richard. I'm sorry. We were having . . . a conference."

"About the secretary." He must get them out of his room.

"Of course, Richard. We agreed it was all right." The Bishop came to the desk and retrieved the pad and pencil on which he had written earlier.

"Who would you like me to send you? Thomas? John? Let's see. Who came last week?"

He made a show of considering the suggestions.

"I'd like Judas. Yes, send Judas." He smiled in the dim light. He could see Mrs. Bloomgartner staring at him. Was the light on? But maybe they had misunderstood, He had to make sure –

"Judas." The Bishop patted his shoulder. "Very well. You'll have him in the morning. Judas Iscariot."

So. He had won. They had not suspected for a moment what he had in mind. That he could destroy the whole project with one thrust, break the careful pattern he had so carefully worked out for months to keep them guessing. He had. He had won.

"Wait." They turned near the door.

Maccabeus, not Iscariot. That was the whole business in one word. Judas Maccabeus.

It was not his voice at all. It was drums and thunder and jungle rain. The oracle in the empty temple and the devils inside him struggling to be free. And as the long tunnel of light rushed through him, the sound of his own betrayal pierced his eardrums. For a split second he saw the Bishop and the Holy Father transfigured. He passed Mrs. Bloomgartner on the way down, and there was love in her dark face.

Review

Barry Hannah, *Geronimo Rex*. New York: The Viking Press, 1972. 337 pp. $7.95

Each time the literary pundits pronounce, in gravid tones, that the Southern Renaissance has at last petered out, new talents have a way of sky-rocketing: James Dickey and A. R. Ammons, for example, in poetry. And here of late, South Carolina has been stealing the show: witness George Garrett's *The Fox*, William Price Fox's novels, and Mark Steadman's superb collection of stories, *Macafee County*. (There is a mini-renaissance in itself.)

And now twenty-nine-year-old Barry Hannah explodes on the literary scene with an apprenticeship lark, *Geronimo Rex*, a dazzling *tour de force* that has the energy of *The Ginger Man* and the comic genius of a William Fox – though Hannah is closer to Black Humor than to the Mark Twain tradition of Dixie humor. But, no, he isn't close to or like anything else under the sun; he is his own man, and *Geronimo Rex* is a magician's performance that leaves you weak with laughter and filled with admiration (and envy) for a marvelous fresh talent.

Mr. Hannah obviously cares nothing for novelistic structure; what we have here is a hilarious, massive chunk (22 years, plus) out of the anti-heroic life of Harry Monroe, from his pimply highschool days at Dream-of-Pines, Louisiana – with its papermill stench and mill-town mores – through his entanglements with music and displaced Southern belles in New York, a Bible-belt college and med school in Jackson, Mississippi, and, finally, graduate study in Arkansas. (In the background, helping to toll the years, is James Meredith, the shooting of Medgar Evers, and other such peaks in Southern history.) If there is a central theme it is Harry's erratic and febrile search for identity; along the way, there are glances at alienation, ecology, the drug scene, racial bigotry, etc. Harry the musician – poet – sexual athlete and wealthy goof-off identifies himself with Geronimo, the old Apache renegade, who appears, like Bogart in "Play It Again, Sam," to shore him up in moments of crisis:

> What I especially liked about Geronimo was that he had cheated, lied, stolen, usurped, killed, burned, raped, pillaged, razed,

> trapped, ripped, mashed. . . . I thought I would like to go into that line of work.

And go into it Monroe does, with a vengeance, setting off firecrackers, shooting his pistol at organ players and racists, falling in love with a cottonmill whore, then an ignorant cracker girl at college who beds down with her insane uncle. He decides to become a trumpet player, is kicked out of a symphony orchestra, and fails in a jazz combo. (The author is a musician, and all the passages dealing with music are superb, for example:

> He stood up playing the hell out of a trumpet. He could make that sucker scream, and the drummer was laying down something thick and Latin behind him, and the ferris-wheel lights were shooting out off the brass of his horn so it looked like and sounded like he was holding a wondrous rainbow bird with a golden throat in his hands.)

Later, he is booted out of med school, works in a lab testing the effects of nerve gas on dogs, finally marries and begins graduate study in English at the University of Arkansas, shedding roles as easily as his acne, beard, or "sinister reptilian coat."

During this comic odyssey toward self-hood, Harry encounters more freaks and grotesques than you'll meet this side of Truman Capote-land. They are too numerous to list, but the gallery includes his Catholic landlady who wears a dead lady wrestler's shoes, a racial bigot who has been in an asylum, a music teacher who threatens to wave his naked member at his students, and other assorted half-cracked classmates. For good measure, there are some real freaks at the State Fair. Perhaps the most normal person in the novel is Harvey Butte, Harry's Negro friend and band conductor – but then he's crazy about band music.

But the appeal and, yes, delight of this novel is neither in plot nor the gallery of original freaks. It is in the language. Barry Hannah sprays newly-minted words and phrases at you the way Charlie Birdland Parker improvised on his sax. (In fact, this whole novel has the freshness and spontaneity of an improvisation.) His interest, his obsession with words is almost Joycean (the silo-like tower Harry lives in at Mother Rooney's obviously squints toward *Ulysses*). Just as Harry's range in music goes from Vivaldi and Mozart to Cannon Ball Adderly and Fats Domino, so does Hannah's diction draw on everything from the Jamesian

literary to the redneck talk of Catherine Wrag, to high school and college slang ("barf," "roach," "headline toad") to pure folk speech ("scalding me to blister a slut" or "cut the mustard"). His ear for backwoods talk is as fine as Faulkner's or Flannery O'Connor's. And on almost every page he offers sentences like "His left hand was hanging down . . . like a punctured udder . . . " or "Then he'd cough like somebody raking out an iron tomb."

Most of the faults of the book are on the side of generosity. The novel is much too long; it covers too wide a time span, and whole chapters could easily come out. There are too many freakish characters to keep separated. Further, the violence connected with the racial bigots is too often repeated and, perhaps, the narrative sags once Harry gets married and starts work on his PhD. in English. Occasionally, but this is rare, the language spurts out of control and calls attention to itself: "Her voice was as thin as ill-poached egg thrown against the treble strings of a harp. . . ." On the other hand, when Harry becomes a poet, you believe it – because the novelist is obviously a poet, too.

But never mind the quibbles. *Geronimo Rex* is a rare and brilliant novel. It is vulgar and in dubious taste – and comes alive on every page. Barry Hannah may well have written the best comic novel of the Seventies. In any case, his book deserves an honored place on the shelf beside Mac Hyman's *No Time for Sergeants* and William Fox's *Southern Fried.*

GUY OWEN

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