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CONTENTS

ESSAYS

- The Great Spousal Verse: The Marriage Metaphor in English Romantic Poetry, *Susan M. Levin* 5
- Bobbie Allen and the Ballad Tradition in *Light in August*, *Mario L. D'Avanzo* 22
- Rabbit Brought Nowhere: John Updike's *Rabbit Redux*, *Kermit Turner* 35
- Thomas Wolfe and Jonathan Swift, *John L. Idol, Jr.* 43

POETRY

- Three Poems by *William Stafford* 3
- Icebound, *Robert Recktenwold* 12
- Minefield, *Stephen Sossaman* 15
- Three Poems by *Sy Kahn* 16
- Two Poems by *Warren Leamon* 30
- Two Poems by *Joan Stone* 33
- Two Poems by *Sister Bernetta Quinn* 55
- Four Poems by *Kathryn Stripling* 58
- Three Poems by *Dannye Romine* 62
- Acceptance in Blue Pencil, *Mardy Murphy* 64
- Two Poems by *Skip Eisiminger* 65

FICTION

- Bo-Cat True to His Gods, *Robert Cochran* 13

CONTENTS—Continued

REVIEWS

<i>Or Else—Poem/Poems 1968-1974</i> by Robert Penn Warren, <i>Sister Bernetta Quinn</i>	67
<i>The Prophetic Milton</i> by William Kerrigan, <i>Robert H. West</i> ..	70
<i>William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual</i> by Panthea Reid Broughton, <i>Linda W. Wagner</i>	72
<i>The Man of Letters in New England and the South: Essays on the History of the Literary Vocation in America</i> by Lewis P. Simpson, <i>Claud B. Green</i>	74
<i>Gnomes & Occasions</i> by Howard Nemerov, <i>Skip Eisinger</i> ..	76
<i>The Ghost on the Ramparts and other Essays in the Humanities</i> by Robert B. Heilman, <i>Ray Barfield</i>	77
<i>Fugitive</i> by Marion Montgomery, <i>Robert W. Hill</i>	79
<i>Swinburne, Portrait of a Poet</i> by Philip Henderson, <i>John LeBourgeois</i>	80
<i>Gallic Salt. Eighteen Fabliaux Translated from The Old French</i> by Robert Harrison, <i>Gerald T. Chambers</i>	81
CONTRIBUTORS	83

THREE POEMS BY WILLIAM STAFFORD*LATE FALL MEADOW*

By day the sun starts home; it has
a path, as we do. Shining and shining,
it is never distracted. Out
in the stars there's a speck
for where the sun is going. Every noon
a shadow ticks across a stone.

By night in the meadow the moon
conducts what doesn't happen: the creek
no longer directs channels of watergrass;
quiet birds have a way to listen
instead of a song; every bush holds
a basket of inner shade.

ONE OF YOUR LIVES

One of your lives, hurt by the mere sight of
cold, you pulled away to tremble
the drama, too afraid to be warm.
But now, this one, hurtled past
zero and still falling, you are clamped where
no shiver can catch up, imagination
left behind by blurred, actual cold
exploding inside your body.

Remember how easy it was, being
afraid?—you look back and yearn
for the distance of terror, how aesthetic
fear was. These fluttering hands now press
hard fingerprints onto a freezing
face, and suddenly you know why it moves,
why you feel it so well:
it is yours.

WHO IS SYLVIA?

One day in the kitchen she grabbed
the knife with the poisoned handle.
Some things are hard to learn:
everything learned to hurt.

While she grew up there came
greater and greater tantrums.
When she closed her eyes the waters
rose, and voices from cupboards.

Remember the day she caught
the bouncing ball at the beach
over and over? She said,
"Sand won't remember long."
All day the tidemarks lasted.

That was the day she said,
"There will be something new
when the tide comes—there will be
patterns, a skip, a slow
rebound." All held still.

The sky was taken from her
because she claimed it so long,
and all remindful of it—
earth, stars, and even the small,
because it is opposite.

She wanted to catch up all
into the crimson light,
into the stove to die,
but leave what she said, to burn,
to dance and burn where we live.

Her part now is nothing.
Afraid, not being sure,
we own where a friend was,
and the shadows in a room.

All day the tide marks last.
The sand remembers long.
In this terrarium
we raise our hands to her.

All the swains commend her.

THE GREAT SPOUSAL VERSE:

The Marriage Metaphor in English Romantic Poetry

SUSAN M. LEVIN

Marriage commonly unites a man and a woman—except in English Romantic poetry. In the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron, men marry mountains, the sea, the moon, and snakes. The mind marries nature. Ideas marry one another, as do giant forms and trees. Now the mind no more marries nature than a man marries a mountain. Marriage is a metaphor for union, the most typical way of expressing union in the Romantic period. Though the prevalence of marriage metaphors in English and German writing of the first half of the nineteenth century has been noted before, some of the most important uses of the term “marriage” and such related words as “wed,” “espouse,” “spousal,” and “bride” should be drawn together to show what is idiosyncratic about the English Romantics’ use of the marriage metaphor.¹

i

All uses of the marriage metaphor in English Romantic poetry cannot be considered here, but in pointing to the most important examples we can begin with Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s celebration of the marriage of the mind to nature. As Meyer Abrams points out, Wordsworth proposes the marriage as the main subject of his great poem, *The Recluse*. His poem is the “spousal verse/Of this great consummation,” the wedding of the mind to nature that leads man back to Paradise. The paradises of Milton and Virgil still exist, are still attainable, not shrouded in mystery, not “a mere fiction of what never was./For the discerning intellect of Man,/When wedded to this goodly universe,” finds Paradise to be “a simple produce of the common day.”² Coleridge also describes creativity and the regaining of Paradise in terms of marrying the mind to nature. In “Dejection: An Ode,” he writes that Joy, “the spirit and the power” that hosts “the shaping spirit of Imagination,”³ comes

¹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York, 1971), p. 31. Abrams observes that “Wordsworth’s holy marriage, far from being unique, was a prominent period-metaphor which served a number of major writers, English and German. . . .”

² *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), V, 4-5, 11. 52-57. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

³ *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford, 1912), I, 362, 11. 67, 86.

from wedding nature. Whether we marry nature or bury her depends on us. "Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!" (1.49). Coleridge tells Asra, to whom "Dejection" was originally written as a love letter, that at one time his life was not easy, but he still retained joy. Now he says, "My genial spirits fail" (1.39). Mario L. D'Avanzo points out that the word "genial" can mean "pertaining to marriage or generation."⁴ Coleridge specifically attributes his lack of creativity to the failure of his "genial" or "wedding spirits."

Coleridge may have felt his own powers failing, but according to Wordsworth's "Stanzas Written in My Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence,'" he continued to inspire Wordsworth, who in this poem describes his own dedication to poetry as a marriage: "But verse was what he had been wedded to."⁵ Marriage denotes not only poetic dedication but is also important as a basis for the best kind of poetry. In *The Excursion*, the deaf man is described with the blind poets who have produced "The highest, holiest raptures of the lyre/And wisdom married to immortal verse."⁶ The deaf man is a familiar Wordsworthian figure, a solitary like the shepherd in Book Eight of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth often describes these isolated figures as married to their environment. The shepherd is a man "wedded to his life of hope/And hazard."⁷ In *The Excursion*, the priest called "the Wonderful" exists in a similar relationship to nature. Adored by his parishoners, he is a spiritual shepherd in "a poor and rugged wild,/Which in his soul he lovingly embraced,/And having once espoused, would never quit" (Bk. VII, 11. 348-350).

Man wedded to his environment is a Wordsworthian positive, but false brides, who lead man into destructive unions, also exist. In *The Excursion*, the solitary secludes himself after the death of his family. The French Revolution in which he places all his hopes brings him out of isolation: "Society became my glittering bride" (Bk. III, l. 735). He contracts a bad marriage that ends in further disillusionment, for as the Wanderer explains, social man is not worthy of so much confidence. Wordsworth found men were much better off espousing the country than the city.

Wordsworth and Coleridge both use the marriage metaphor as part of their own personal myths, to explain themselves. William Blake, on the

⁴ Mario L. D'Avanzo, "Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Genial Spirits," *The Wordsworth Circle*, II, No. 1, 17-19.

⁵ Wordsworth, *Works*, II, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 248, Bk. VII, 11. 535-6.

⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), p. 285, Bk. VIII, l. 253.

THE GREAT SPOUSAL VERSE

7

other hand, uses the marriage metaphor to create a myth of history, an enterprise typical of eighteenth-century system-builders who meant to explain the world. The marriage of contraries *generates progress*; marriage heals the breaks of the Fall. Blake sees regeneration as reintegration. The Four Zoas divide into spectres and Emanations but are eventually reunified in Beulah, Isaiah's married land, reached by marriage of male and female contraries. In both *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, Albion must remarry Jerusalem, his Emanation, to return man to his primal, prelapsarian unity. Blake's most famous marriage unifies heaven and hell. In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the contraries of evil and good, of heaven and hell, can and indeed *must be married—but in a particular Blakean way*. No synthesis occurs. Contraries exist simultaneously and in tension without absorbing one another. Marriage should involve equals that remain equals.

Blake most probably read and was influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft, and his insistence on equality of the sexes does vindicate the rights of women. Yet for Blake, woman can be the devourer of man's genius; marriage can be both the good and the hell of life. In *Jerusalem*, Albion mistakenly marries Vala and thus becomes man trapped in a cycle, man diminished in sexuality. "The frozen marriage bed" in the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* emerges from Theotormon's self-love and jealousy, his desire to master a woman instead of existing equally with her, his desire to negate Oothoon's humanity.⁸

Shelley appears close to Blake in several ways. He, of course, also read Mary Wollstonecraft and in theory preached, "Can man be free if woman be a slave?"⁹ Like Blake, Shelley is interested in creating a myth of history. *Prometheus Unbound* describes the freeing of man's mind and his movement to hope, life, joy and love. The union of Prometheus and Asia at the end of the play is at once the agent and result of apocalypse and regeneration. While Act IV has been called an "Epi-thalamion,"¹⁰ it should be noted that Shelley uses neither "marriage" nor any similar word to describe the final union. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley does write of the marriage of Jupiter and Thetis, and in Act IV the moon calls herself "an insatiate bride," but these are the only allusions to marriage in the play.

⁸ *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York, 1965), p. 49, plate 7.

⁹ "The Revolt of Islam," *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York, 1926-30), I, 286, l. 379.

¹⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (Garden City, 1963), pp. 138-9.

Shelley does use the marriage metaphor in his poems of quest, most importantly in "Alastor" and in "Epipsychidion." In both poems, the poet pursues an ideal in the form of a woman, an "epipsyche," or "a soul within our soul." In the fragment "On Love," Shelley partially explains the epipsyche as a miniature of the inmost self but without "all that we condemn or despise." The ideal is thus a projection of the most desirable self. In "Alastor" the quest destroys the poet. He comes to a grotto where everything is "loving and married." Only he is alone. Parasites (meaning plants) join "wedded boughs."¹¹ The trees are like clouds, the blossoms like stars. Heaven, earth, all parts of nature are unified. Marriage and unity contrast with and mock the isolated hero. In "Epipsychidion" the narrator finds his epipsyche, his ideal, and marries her; she is his "spouse."¹² Now, in practice, Shelley violently disapproved of marriage as an institution. The only marriage he wholly sanctions is this poetic one in which the woman is a projection of the man, his epipsyche.

Keats, like Shelley, describes union with the ideal as a marriage. Several of Keats's poems tell the story of marriage, but as may be expected, not the usual male-female union. Endymion says, "I did wed myself to things of light from infancy,"¹³ and finally marries one of the supreme lights, the moon in the personage of Cynthia. In contrast to the Alastor poet who rejects the human Arab maid, Endymion accepts the Indian maid. With his acceptance comes a dream foreshadowing his fate of how he would "espouse Jove's daughter" (Bk. IV, l. 378). "Lamia" too concerns the mortal-immortal kind of union so common in Keats. In "Lamia," however, Lycius' marriage robe winds into a shroud as Keats shows the impossibility of marrying an ideal dream.

Don Juan does marry an ideal despite Byron's cynicism regarding anything having to do with marriage. Marriage to Haidée represents as much paradise as man can attain, not the conventional "padlocking" ceremony: "Their priest was Solitude and they were wed."¹⁴ Another marriage, based on a Venetian tradition, occurs several times in Byron's work. In Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, Venice's tenebrous present is contrasted with her glorious past, represented by the figure of the Doge. The Doge is described in terms of his marriage to the Adriatic, for on Ascension Day the Doge of Venice wed the Adriatic by dropping a ring into

¹¹ Shelley, *Works*, I, 189, l. 444.

¹² Shelley, *Works*, II, 360, l. 130.

¹³ *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1958), p. 187, Bk. IV, ll. 957-8.

¹⁴ *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London, 1898-1904), VI, 139, Canto II, st. 204.

THE GREAT SPOUSAL VERSE

her waters. In the nineteenth century, "The spouseless Adriatic mourns her lord;/And annual marriage now no more renew'd."¹⁵ The same image appears in *The Two Foscari*, as the wrongly deposed Doge makes way for tyranny saying, "The Adriatic's free to wed another."¹⁶ In *Childe Harold*, Byron extends the metaphor to describe the Bucentaur, the barge on which the Doge's marriage took place, as "rotting unrestored,/Neglected garment of her widowhood!" (Canto IV, st. 11). At one time, "Venice was a Queen with an unequalled dower" (Canto IV, st. 11). Many "sued" for her hand, including Frederick Barbarossa. The Suabian seeking her hand in marriage bespeaks an age of prosperity in contrast to Venice's miserable position under the Austrian reign of Byron's day (Canto IV, st. 12).

ii

Why did the marriage metaphor, used in the ways we have been discussing, become so important during the Romantic movement? Historically, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley each spent a large part of his life thinking about his bad marriage and seeking an ideal mate. Coleridge felt his life would have been beautifully different had his first love, Mary Evans, only married him. Instead he married the pedestrian creature of "The Eolian Harp," who pulls him out of creativity and keeps him thinking conventionally: "And biddest me walk humbly with my God" (l. 52). Byron had his marriage fiasco always in mind, taking time in a letter written several years after his divorce to dwell upon his marriage day as "the most unfortunate day of my past existence."¹⁷ Shelley's first wife committed suicide after he ran off with Mary Godwin. His second marriage deteriorated after the death of their children. Keats's letters show his amazing passion for Fanny Brawne, his desire to marry her, his uncontrollable jealousy, and his awareness that he was going to be dead very soon. Wordsworth and Blake had fairly stable marriages, but their wives could not approach them intellectually and existed more as glorified serving maids than as anything else. The Romantic poet wrote about himself. His deep concern with his marriage naturally found a way into his poetry. Unable to establish successful marriages in real life, the Romantics created magnificent marriages in art.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 335, Canto IV, st. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 189, Act V, sc. i, l. 192. Wordsworth too portrays Venice's freedom in terms of this marriage. In "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic" he writes, "And when she took unto herself a Mate,/She must espouse the everlasting sea."

¹⁷ Byron, *Works*, II, 322.

Another reason for the prevalence of the marriage metaphor in Romantic poetry may be found in a particular problem of the period. During the early nineteenth century, a sense arises that man is a divided creature—divided within himself, from other men, from the world around him. Wordsworth describes his breakdown in *The Prelude* as being cut off from what he once was, from society, and from nature. Coleridge portrays the poet as a cursed being isolated from those around him.¹⁸ Blake describes fallen man as divided. Shelley shows Prometheus undergoing the torture of being divided from his female half. The creative imagination of the Romantic poet uses marriage to show how these divisions are healed, to reveal that man's place in the universe is not one of alienation or disaffection or loss but one of at-homeness and security. Through the union of the mind and nature, or of a lord and a river, or of a man and the moon, the poet describes the creation of a different universe and puts both himself and the reader in a new relationship to the world.

The Romantic marriage metaphor thus relates to a particular Biblical marriage—the marriage at Cana. Here Christ begins his public ministry by transforming water into wine. An analogy may be drawn between Christ at Cana and the Romantic poet. The wine of Cana anticipates the wine of the Last Supper, the wine Christ says is his own blood shed for the redemption of man. As Christ presides over the marriage at Cana, he creates a symbol of his own existence on earth. He is the redeemer, the Word made flesh, He who reconstructs the union between man and God by which man is resurrected into life. Now the process of poetry is that of the poet as Word becoming flesh as his thought becomes a poem. The Cana marriage wine parallels the Romantic marriage metaphor. Each locates the life-giving force of its creator—Christ or the Romantic poet. The art of the poet is to show life. The marriage metaphor of the Romantics is quintessential art, an equivalence in imagination for the necessary union between man and nature, or between man and not-man, man and the Other, that which he must deal with out there. Feeling that eighteenth century rational man had failed to make the union a successful one, the Romantic poets give man back life by presiding over a marriage. The creative imagination marries man to the universe, resurrecting him from the fall into Rationalism. As they preside over their respective marriages, both Christ and the Romantic poet are acting archetypally. Each is the type who does for many, who brings about resurrection.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that in the "Ancient Mariner" a marriage ceremony is used to show community and fruition in contrast to the mariner's isolation.

THE GREAT SPOUSAL VERSE

Filling their priestly functions, each insures a union that will generate further life.

The Romantics' particular cure for their feelings of division and alienation was also caused by a change in the way man saw the structure of the universe. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century threw out old cosmologies; the world ceased to be a structured place. The Romantics had to provide a new order; their scheme relates things in a much more personal way than ever before. Division is cured through marriage. The same change in the way of seeing results in the Romantics' unconventional use of the marriage metaphor. Old images of perfection and continuity were rejected. By the Romantic period, the Great Chain of Being, the circle as perfection, the macro-microcosmic view of the universe, the idea of the world as a machine were no longer acceptable.

In the old ordered view of the world, everything had a specific place. A person or thing could not violate the order by leaping out to join himself to something in an entirely different sphere. George Herbert's poem "Providence" describes this kind of structure in terms of a pre-romantic marriage. "Thy creatures leap not, but express a feast/Where all the guests sit close and nothing wants."¹⁹ There is no gap in nature; every place is filled and everything has a place in which it remains. Herbert continues: "Frogs marry fish and flesh; bats birds and beast;/sponges, non-sense and sense; mines th' earth and plants" (ll. 135-6). Here "marry" means to "act as a connecting link between." Frogs are partly fish but they are also land animals; bats have the characteristics of both bird and beast.

Part of the glory of the Romantics lies in their denial of man's set place. Wordsworth knew that "our home is with infinitude." Man can marry whatever he is capable of joining, as Byron insists in *Heaven and Earth*. The epigraph from Chapter VI of Genesis tells us the play is based on a forbidden marriage: "And it came to pass . . . that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."²⁰ In the play, Noah's sons love Anah and Aholibamah. The women, however, love and are loved by angels, a union forbidden by conventional thought. Noah says, "Has not God made a barrier between Earth and Heaven and limited each kind to kind" (Act I, sc. iii, l. 475). The women, in turn, will not lose the seraphs; they will not accept the established world view; they will not settle for less than the gods. Heaven and earth can marry.

¹⁹ *The English Works of George Herbert*, ed. George Herbert Palmer (Boston, 1905), III, 93.

²⁰ Byron, *Works*, V, 276.

The Romantic poets saw man's limitless potential, a vision that prohibited a comfortable kind of existence. They were, however, able to deal with a chaotic world. The Romantics did not experience the same kind of permanent alienation found later in the century because from division and destruction they were able to draw union and resurrection with their metaphor of marriage.

ICEBOUND

Wolves are walking
Across the iron water of the bay
Hail and ice
The frozen raindrops
Pelt the night.

Meanwhile, you keep at it
Pacing the room
Here where the wind howls
And the walls quake
Shivering,
Scribbling.

ROBERT RECKTENWALD

BO-CAT TRUE TO HIS GODS

ROBERT COCHRAN

Paper use his long name, say Limerick de Lancy, Pin Point negro, nickname of Bo-Cat, kill Catherine his wife on May the 13, 19 and 32, and drop her in deep water off Hell Gate. Say Bo-Cat take her in his boat to Raccoon Key, club her in the head with oar an weight her body down with stones. Send her to shark.

Two weeks after white folks find her where she wash up on shore. Bo-Cat already be in the jail, soon as she reported to be missing.

Peoples in Pin Point all excited. Biggest thing ever happen in Pin Point. Funeral at Sweet Field of Eden is full to the roof, and peoples all round outside. Stand under trees and down the road. Come in from the islands.

Women all say what a shame bout Catherine de Lancy. How she meet her death on a Friday the 13, double bad luck day, and how her body too far gone to lay her out. This on account of how long she in the water, and due to buzzards been at her when she wash on shore.

Bo-Cat aware of all this. This is not news to him. He know what day it is, know what name of Hell Gate is. Bo-Cat know bout power in word.

Peoples say ghost of Catherine de Lancy sure to be out from her grave, be restless an unsatisfied cause of not bein proper laid out an buried.

Preacher too, he say what a shame bout Catherine de Lancy. He say she sister to the Lord, say she die for her righteousness sake. He don't know. Ain't nothin bout righteousness sake. She die on account of she come too close an then deny. She talk too much due to fear. Bo-Cat have to take her off.

Everybody forget bout Bo-Cat. Paper don't know. Peoples in Pin Point don't know. What they comprehend bout Bo-Cat? Bo-Cat don't read no paper. Catherine de Lancy always be talkin bout how she a good Christian woman, don't be doin like this and that round her. What Bo-Cat want with such as this? Bo-Cat is not interested. Good for what? That not for me, he say. Ain't no spot for Bo-Cat in Sweet Field of Eden. Lord ain't no brother to me. Bo-Cat don't read no paper. He free of that shit. He live in a larger place. His power in another sector.

Bo-Cat out every day in the boat. He go from sight of land. He see the white in gator mouth. He dream the claw of crab, wear snakeskin

round his waist. He see storm come, watch wind bow trees to the ground. He listen for lesson of storm, for message of wind he cock his ear. He bring home shark in his boat, put his hand on shark skin. Watch buzzard work, and sun make dead dog swell.

Bo-Cat make use of his eye. His mind in contact with his hand. All the time he pay attention. He range far and wide. Go to the islands. Up Ogeechee into swamp. See water of gold in his hand.

Neither is Bo-Cat unwise due to pride. Bo-Cat been brought to his knee. He wander in wilderness waking and sleeping. He be familiar with fear.

He know his way to pray. Not like Sweet Field of Eden. Bo-Cat have respect for magic of word. Word shark and thing shark, shark that swim like a knife, these are together with Bo-Cat. He say shark right, run it off belly up from his tongue, color white, mouth wide for kill. Put rip in people's ear. Say it swift, with show of teeth.

Peoples be afraid of Bo-Cat, which he know. He got no use for them. They unready for what he know. They glad he gone from Pin Point.

White folks the same. Bo-Cat able to smell they fear. Nobody look him in his eye. Judge try once to make him talk, but Bo-Cat just look at him. Straight in his eye. Judge look away, just like in Pin Point.

Bo-Cat do not turn away. Bo-Cat deal with fear. He gaze upon darkness and live. Live more and more, which he know. Lesson of gator mouth in his eye. Lesson of buzzard and shark. Judge see this, and turn away.

Catherine de Lancy turn away too, but she too late. She come too close, deny too much on account of her fear. Can't rule her fear, got to let it come out an deny. Deny power of shark, magic in dust of bones of snake. She turn too late, too far in Bo-Cat's world. World of buzzard and shark. Prince of air and lord of deep. Sweet Field of Eden is nowhere to be seen.

They turn away too. Brothers and sisters of the Lord. They unready for lord snake, lord sun who make dog swell. Bo-Cat is brother of snake, brother of buzzard and shark. His world too large, too dark for Sweet Field of Eden. For Catherine de Lancy. They turn on account of they fear. Fraid of the dark where Bo-Cat live.

Judge say to Bo-Cat, say Limerick de Lancy you sentence to jail for life. Bo-Cat show him no fear. He far away. Sail up sky with wings out wide. Gavel shake in judge's hand.

He got no use for them. They turn away. Bo-Cat be busy. Ain't no turnin back from where he go. Shark is jealous god, and same with

BO-CAT TRUE TO HIS GODS

15

snake. Bo-Cat got to look to his business, make use of hand and eye at all times. He keep himself ready, tend to his power with care. Bo-Cat do not play cheap. He give himself whole, be on the job full time.

Jail do not bother Bo-Cat. He far away. Bo-Cat be true to his gods. Open his hand to metal and stone. Pray on his knee to brother shark, call out for father storm, see crab claw god in his dream. Night have her angels too, keep watch over Bo-Cat, roll away stone from his door.

He ride up the sky in his boat. Storm is over his head. He lie down clean, step triumphant cross the dark. Bo-Cat be always at home. He welcome where he always live, worship with most care and love.

MINEFIELD

Unhearing outcries and
 deaf to the hand alphabet,
 Ragwoman stickstirs rubble,
 caneslapping, handhefting,
 until, bonebag bursting,
 she thumpcrashes limply
 by mudriver, shorelicking, laplap.

STEPHEN SOSSAMAN

THREE POEMS BY SY KAHN

COMPUTE ME NOT

In the angled air
of the Vienna Airport,
waiting for a flight, I am
approached by a Viennese young lady
taking a survey.

What is your destination, sir,
she asks? I, say I, am
running away from my wife
and children, all seven of them,
and my destination is anyplace
East of here, since only fools
and Englishmen go East of Rome.

I can see from the arched eyebrow
and the flutter of the special
pencil that computes on cards
that I am in a tough category.

Where did you spend last night
in Vienna, she asks, as cool as
wings over the arctic.
On the ferris wheel in the Prater,
I say, going round and round,
like Joseph Cotton and Orson Wells
in third man out, and then, later
I slept in one of the ferris wheel cars
which rocked thru the night amid exotic stars.

Did you enjoy our city, sir,
she persists? As one does
I remark who needs a urinal
and with the relief urgency requires.
I watched the dawn, sitting on
the shoulders of the leatherman
that everyone punches to test
his strength. We found we
had something in common, I confessed.

Oh, you are an American, then,
she said. Americans are so
funny, she permitted herself.
And what is your profession,
she asked? To profess, I said,
I profess poems and plays; I
am a professional professor,
which means, I always tell
the truth. I see, she said.

Can you make a living from that,
she asked? No, I answered, from
this profession you can only
make trouble.

Thank you, sir, she said.
You are helping my company
understand the nature of
the people who use our airline
in order to render better service
to our patrons. We shall
compute this information
in our report. You are welcome,
I said, and I am pleased to help out.

My flight was called, which is
not the moral of this story.
It is this:
Never trust a computer
because it has absolutely
no sense of humor.

BED-CHECK CHARLIE

In East Berlin,
Charlie, looking more Italian than German,
except in his prosperity, helped me thru
some difficulties with the East German fuzz.

"Takes a German," he said bravely,
in the very teeth of the red bear,
"to be a better communist than a communist."

So I thought I liked him,
and because I was grateful for help,
invited him for dinner. He accepted.

Between the tinkling white wine
and the brown schnitzel, I discovered
the course of his life and the direction he ran.

I was sitting next to Bed-Check Charlie,
who used to drop light bombs after dark
on American troops, to harass, sometimes to kill.

Only a boy when Hitler came to power,
Charlie's passion was to fly. Hitler put
real planes in his hands. Why question such a gift?

Luftwaffe pilot, he did what he was told,
and graduated to the earliest jets,
but Allied bombing kept his fuel supply low.

So Charlie, ever useful and resourceful,
flew the bed-check route, and
when he lost the war, served as an interpreter.

Though he didn't know it, he was still doing that,
as he told of his just-married daughter
for whom he provided apartment and refrigerator, both loaded.

Charlie had just returned from Roumania,
closing deals, and still bed-checking,
this time with a girl. He had lots of nude pictures.

He regretted, a little, that she got caught
by the Roumanian police consorting with him,
and could never leave her country. A shame.

But he gloried in how cheap the romance was
for a hard-cash dreadnaught like himself;
the bargain was his ecstasy.

Bed-Check Charlie had \$100 bills
in the snug bed of his wallet, earned
selling American mattresses thru a German firm

to countries in Eastern Europe and South America
that want American goods but not the label.
Mattresses was his game—and all the world wants to sleep soft.

“You got a problem in your country
with the blacks,” he said. “We’ll solve it,”
I said. “Yes round them up. Concentrate them

or ship them out, that’s the way,” he said.
“Like a man I know,” I said, “who put
planes in your hands, blocks in your head.”

“Never mind,” said Charlie, “I’m always needed,
and I’ll always survive—communism, democracy, fascism—
they all need businessmen who can work with the system.”

“Goodnight Charlie,” I said.
“I’ll write to you,” he said, “and you can
correct my English. I’m anxious to learn.”

Still flying low, still bed-checking,
and dropping the bomb of himself on
the small lights of the world,

Bed-Check Charlie circled and landed
smoothly on the runway to his hotel.

IN THE WRITING ROOM OF THE AMERICAN COLONY HOTEL
IN JERUSALEM

Except for the foreign girl reading
Papa Hemingway, I have been alone
all morning, amidst inlaid tables,
Persian ceramic tiles and carpets,
Mirrors in hand-carved wooden frames,
to hold your image firm if not clear,
all under a recessed ceiling of blue wood
and metallic stars. This is the room
where the Pasha once held court,
who owned it all, and a harem of
wives and concubines who lived
in marble recesses along stone
halls that run from his bedroom.

The bedroom now is the best room
in the hotel, at present occupied
by a Congressman from the American
South, and his wife, who sanctify
the Pasha's voluptuous bed.

And now that the girl has left,
taking *Papa Hemingway* with her,
I can stare thru the arched doorway
at the white-arched doorway
across the hall, to the doublewhite
doors of the big, old bedroom,
and wonder if the Pasha was passionate,
or, with all his women, as befits his status,
was merely keeping up with Pasha Jones.

And I am less intrigued, being older,
by any lascivious images of variable
and variant sex, and nightly selections
and commands, as by the dumb idea,
that if the Pasha would appear,
and the hotel disappear,
dissolve back to one gorgeous moment
of his multicolored entrance—
a hash dream of primary colors—
then I would celebrate his coming
with clashing cymbals,
and mighty paeans and poems:

The mighty Pasha has arisen
in Jerusalem, the passionate Pasha,
his body pulsing with colors,
His fingers ringed and flashing—
and Papa Hemingway, I would believe,
could rise too, not between the hard covers
of a book, held in the hands
of a foreign girl, but as the sun
also rises, rise again— and I
could believe I too am a phoenix.

The room in Jerusalem waits
in serious and silent glory.

BOBBIE ALLEN AND THE BALLAD TRADITION IN *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

The character of Bobbie Allen is so realistically delineated that we are inclined to think she is taken directly from a type of woman whom Faulkner observed well. While his imagination is informed by an intimate understanding of people who inhabit his corner of Mississippi (and Memphis, one might add), it is also inspired by literary sources.¹ *Macbeth*, for example, illuminates *The Sound and the Fury*. The purpose of this essay is to explore the artistic ways in which Faulkner uses one source, the famous ballad "Bonny Barbara Allan," in the delineation of character and setting, and in the expression of themes and attitudes in *Light in August*. The study of source material, in short, deepens the appreciation of the craft and meaning of the novel.

It is clear that Faulkner's reading influenced his imagination. He describes the creative process as a borrowing, or "robbing", from other sources in the working out of his artistic vision:

The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the Ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies.²

Elsewhere Faulkner acknowledges his debt to the past in a more refined, less figurative manner, but the avowal is the same: the writer absorbs and uses the literature of the past for his own ends.

Some critics have briefly noted the allusiveness of style and character portrayed in *Light in August*. Hyatt Waggoner describes the novel as "a book filled with suggestive names," as does William Van O'Connor,

¹ Far from being an "American primitive," as Michael Millgate apprises us, Faulkner was influenced by a wide variety of writers, past and present, European and American. "He did not isolate himself from historical literary tradition [but] was more actively aware of American and European literary traditions than any other important American novelist of this century." (See Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* [New York, 1963], pp. 288-292).

² *Aspects of Fiction: A Handbook*, ed. Howard E. Hugo (Boston, 1962), p. 215.

BOBBIE ALLEN AND THE BALLAD TRADITION IN *Light in August* 23

who remarks that all the names are appropriate.³ The name of Bobbie Allen proves to be one of the most allusive and provocative in the novel.

The ballad "Bonny Barbara Allan" provides not only the source for Bobbie Allen's character, but also a number of details for the background, action, and ironies of Joe Christmas' "love" affair. The relationship between the ballad and these early, important chapters of the novel is illuminating, for it shows how deftly Faulkner's imagination dramatizes a modern Barbara Allan and her lover out of old materials. The ballad, in short, determines a large part of the structure of the Bobbie Allen story. These chapters are central to the novel because they determine the character of Joe's mature life; Bobbie Allen solidifies the frustration, hatred, and alienation that McEachern and people at the orphanage initiate. Joe's relationship with Bobbie provides his one chance for deliverance through love. He makes an attempt to break out of the cycle of lovelessness but is betrayed and fails painfully. After Bobbie, Joe experiences a kind of death, a death of the heart forever. It begins in grief from the moment of Bobbie's callous departure—"the final feet, the final door":⁴

Knowing not grieving remembers a thousand savage and lonely streets. They run from that night when he lay and heard the final footfall and then the final door. (192)

His failure with Bobbie pushes him into this lifelong labyrinth of wandering. The ballad of Barbara Allen is one of Faulkner's models precisely because it is a story of failure in love, betrayal, and its tragic consequences.

If, as Walter Slatoff remarks, Joe as Christ is ironic because of "his divergence from an ideal,"⁵ Bobbie Allen can be likewise regarded as an ironic reversal of her namesake in the ballad, and most of the details of the three chapters are an extended irony on the circumstances of the ballad's death of Barbara Allan, her betrayal by her lover, the avowal of true love by him, the suffering and grief, and the death of both.

The popularity of the ballad "Bonny Barbara Allen" in Mississippi would indicate Faulkner's familiarity with its story. The ballad was

³ Waggoner, *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World* (Lexington, 1960), p. 112; O'Connor, *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (Minneapolis, 1954), p. 73.

⁴ *Light in August* (Modern Library edition: New York, 1950), p. 191. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

⁵ Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (Ithaca, 1960), p. 179.

brought to Mississippi with the first settlers and as it was handed down underwent many variations, but the tragedy of love and death remained fixed in its basic details.⁶ A. P. Hudson, in *Ballads and Songs from Mississippi*, has transcribed four variants of the ballad from men and women living in or around Oxford, Mississippi.⁷ Since Faulkner was attuned to the cultural life around him, it seems that he would have heard these songs and retained them in his memory. The details of these four ballads have some revealing ties with the narrative details of *Light in August*.

The different versions of the ballad tell of the love of a young man, "Sweet William," and his love for Barbara Allen, a love so all-consuming that he is dying for need of her. Barbara Allen rejects his pleas, noting that her lover slighted her in a bar-room. He dies, and Barbara Allen, seized with remorse, dies shortly after. They are buried together and out of their grave grows a rose and a thorn tied in a true lovers' knot.

Like her namesake, "Hard-hearted Barbara Allen," Bobbie had "a quality beyond even hardness, without being hard" (150). Bobbie is the *femme fatale* as in the many Southern versions of the ballad that begin in this way:

In Scarlet town where I was born
There was a fair maid dwelling
Made every youth cry well a day
Her name was Barbara Allen.⁸

Seen in relation to the ballad, Joe is described as an innocent "clodhopper," who is corrupted, in effect, in the scarlet town which McEachern warns him to shun. Perhaps this version of the ballad suggested to Faulkner the scarlet woman who would entrap his hero and drive him to the cry of despair over his whore. Bobbie might conceivably be considered a corrupter of youth, being in her thirties when she meets Joe. Joe, like Sweet William, "dies" in the heart's feeling from the moment Bobbie rejects him. His capacity for tenderness is destroyed forever, and that is why Faulkner can speak of finalities and numbness in having Joe hear the "final footfall," the "final door," and "the final feet" (192-193). Bobbie's "dead mouth in a dead face" suggests how devoid

⁶ *A Song Catcher in Southern Mountains: American Folk Songs of British Ancestry*, ed. Dorothy Scarborough (New York, 1937), p. 83.

⁷ In *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, 39 (April-June, 1926), 97-102.

⁸ *A Song Catcher*, p. 83.

BOBBIE ALLEN AND THE BALLAD TRADITION IN *Light in August* 25

of love and life she is as she (like her namesake in the ballad) sputters final words at Joe:

Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. (189)

Joe, of course, has come to take Bobbie away to get married. Asked of his intentions by Max, he states:

What did I come for? I came to get Bobbie. Do you think that I—
when I went all the way home to get the money to get married—
(188)

His “dowry,” or coins stolen from Mrs. McEachern, may have been suggested by the “gifts” which Sweet William passes out when he slights Barbara Allen:

Sir, do you remember the other night
In a gathering over yonder,
You gave your gifts to all around
And slighted Barbara Allen?⁹

Similarly, Joe bends over the immobile, hostile Bobbie, “dragging the wadded mass of coins and bills from his pocket, onto her lap and onto the bed beside her. ‘Here! Look at it. Look. I’ve got. See?’” (189). His “chicken feed” (192) turns out to be a “gift to all around,” as in the ballad, for the people about to vacate the house take the money “*as an installment or a souvenir or something*” (192). Of course, this is robbery. Joe has been beaten senseless for his efforts and “gifts.” His needs and intentions appear similar to those of the dying Sweet William:

And none the better I never will be
Unless I get Barbara Allen.¹⁰

Barbara Allen’s disdain seems to anticipate Bobbie’s, when she replies in the ballad:

Now you are sick and low indeed,
And death is in your dwelling,
No better, no better will you ever be,
For you’ll not get Barbara Allen.¹¹

⁹ *Ballads and Songs from Mississippi*, in *Journal of American Folk-lore*, 100.

¹⁰ P. 98.

¹¹ P. 100.

It is clear that Joe can't get Bobbie either, and he cannot get better. Every subsequent woman is a trauma for him. If the literary Barbara is Faulkner's model for disdainful, rejecting, destructive woman, portrayed in Bobbie, it is understandable that other aspects of the Bobbie Allen story have an affinity to the tragic ballad.

Other parallels may indicate that the ballad provided details by which Faulkner built his sad tale of unrequited love. Both stories are set in the country. In the Child version of the ballad, "Sir John Graeme, in the West Country,/Fell in love with Barbara Allan" "in and about the Martinmas time," or November 11. Similarly, "It began in the fall" (150) for Joe Christmas, who is described ironically by Max as "a rich farmer . . . John Jacob Astor from the cow-shed" (167). The significant action in both the ballad and novel takes place in a tavern, or bar-room and restaurant, in the spring. In the ballad the lover's drunkenness is the cause of Barbara Allen's coldness to her dying lover.

Oh, don't you remember the other night
 When at the bar-room drinking,
 You passed your health to the ladies all around,
 And slighted Barbara Allen?¹²

But in the novel it is the restaurant whore, Bobbie, who in effect corrupts Joe and slights him by telling him what she is doing. In his drunkenness and despair Joe becomes abusive and loud, like the slighting lover in the ballad; but any "slight" has no apparent effect at all on his whore.

. . . he had begun to smoke, squinting his face against the smoke, and he drank too. He would drink at night with Max and Mame and sometimes three or four other men and usually another woman or two, sometimes from the town, but usually strangers who would come in from Memphis and stay a week or a month, as waitresses behind the restaurant counter where the idle men gathered all day. He did not always know their names, but he could cock his hat as they did; during the evenings behind the drawn shades of the dining-room at Max's he cocked it so and spoke of the waitress to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore. (173-174)

¹² P. 101. The Childs version reads:

'O dinna ye mind, young man,' said she,
 'When ye was in the tavern a drinking,
 That ye made the healths gae round and round,
 And slighted Barbara Allan?'

BOBBIE ALLEN AND THE BALLAD TRADITION IN *Light in August* 27

For Bobbie the slighting occurs not in the bar-room, but at the dance where, after McEachern calls her "Jezebel" and "harlot" (178), she repudiates Joe, much as the ballad's Barbara Allan spurns her lover (though Faulkner uses a gritty vernacular).

"And you! You brought me here. Goddam bastard clodhopper.
Bastard you! Son of a bitch you and him too. Putting him at me
that never even saw—" (179)

Joe acts only to protect Bobbie from McEachern, but kills him. One version of the ballad has the lover avowing his esteem of Barbara Allan in the tavern, and may conceivably underlie the aggressive respect Joe demonstrates in the dance hall:

Oh yes, I remember the other night
When at the bar-room drinking,
I passed my health to the ladies all around
And respected Barbara Allen.¹³

The slight and rage that Bobbie feels do not stem from any insult hurled at the dance but from the realization that her business and livelihood are ruined. It is ironic that even when Joe hits Bobbie after a two-week separation, she does not consider herself slighted.

When seen against the ballad, these and other ironies in the story are massive. Bobbie does not die out of sorrow and repentance of her cruelty, as in the ballad. She simply (and extensively) curses Joe and leaves for Memphis and the same life of prostitution. Compare her screaming with Barbara Allen's screaming and crying arising out of guilt and love.¹⁴ Her affair does not finally lead to her death bed, but simply other beds, in Memphis. If in one version of the poem Barbara Allen provides a lesson to all virgins—

fare well she said, ye Virginns all
And shun the fault I fell in—¹⁵

without the faintest thought of the old morality expressed in the ballad, Bobbie Allen pursues her trade elsewhere. She seems an ironic inversion

¹³ *Ballads and Songs from Mississippi*, 102.

¹⁴ P. 100:

The more she looked, the more she sighed,
Till she burst out to crying,
Saying, "Take this lowly corpse away,
For now I am a-dying."

¹⁵ *A Song Catcher*, p. 85.

of the grieving, enlightened, loyal woman who has lost her beloved. She may be considered "unworthy Barbara Allen" of yet another version of the ballad.¹⁶ She is Faulkner's ironic commentary on romantic love, it would seem, in which the ballad is both the reference and origin of that irony. It is, as well, the model for the details of many of the episodes in the story. Thus, when in a Mississippi version of the ballad the lover turned his pale face to the wall, "She turned her back upon him."¹⁷ And when in the Child version, Barbara Allan

slowly slowly raised . . . up,
And slowly, slowly left him,
And sighing said she could not stay,
Since death of life had reft him,

so too does Bobbie leave Joe. She cannot stay because death has come to McEachern, and the law will shortly follow after her. Note too that she departs quickly and in a frenzy, unlike her namesake, whose despondent languor is tinged with remorse. It is Joe who slowly and wearily raises himself and departs, finally, from the scene. In fact the motif of immobility, slowness, and languor that delineates the action and events after the murder scene may be inspired by the descriptions of these qualities in the ballad's stanzas on death.

The death of the lover is marked by the tolling of a bell, which transforms the original Barbara Allan from indignation to grief:

She had not gane a mile but twa,
When she heard the dead-bell ringing,
And every jow that the dead-bell geid,
It cry'd, Woe to Barbara Allan!¹⁸

The bell tolling in *Light in August* marks the retreat of Bobbie from the town, and Joe from home forever: "A clock was striking one somewhere when Joe urged the now spent old horse through the main street of town" (182). But the twist here is that it tolls Joe's woe, for he is about to be rejected and beaten at the end of the horse ride.

¹⁶ P. 84.

¹⁷ *Ballads and Songs from Mississippi*, p. 98.

¹⁸ P. 98 reads:

She was about a mile from town
When she heard the death bell tolling,
And every toll that the death bell tolled
Was a woe to Barbru Allen.

BOBBIE ALLEN AND THE BALLAD TRADITION IN *Light in August* 29

Isolated, loveless, and miserable, the rejected lover of the ballad is sick: "O it's I'm sick, and very very sick,/And 't is a' for Barbara Allan." So too is Joe Christmas sick, during and after his liaison with Bobbie Allen. The next whore mentioned in Joe's life may have something of Bobbie's power to sicken and outrage Joe with the details of a woman's menstrual life. Joe, it will be remembered, vomits in the eerie moonlight landscape of cracked and foul-flowing urns. Perhaps the initiation into the facts of sexuality is Faulkner's adaptation of Sir John Graeme's sickness—"and its a' for Barbara Allan." An ugly world of tarnished ideals may also be suggested in these cracked Keatsian vases. Be that as it may, anything is possible in Faulkner's weaving, labyrinthine imagination as it adapts and accommodates the raw material of the ballad (and other sources) to his own needs and uses. It is interesting to note that the Negro whore, likewise, fills Joe with revulsion and hostility, for reasons that are sexual and racial in base. Perhaps he did not hear Bobbie's castigation of his blackness, but somehow he has been left with a revulsion of miscegenation. It makes Joe sick to learn from the prostitute that she and others will willingly accommodate Negroes, and so he beats her.

He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years. (196)

This sickness suggests a derangement that marks the death of Christmas' emotional life and, I would guess, an equivalent to the death of John Graeme, whom Barbara Allan made sick unto death so that, as the ballad predicts: "No better, no better will you ever be/Because you can't get Barbry Ellen."¹⁹ It is left for Bobbie's successor, Joanna Burden, to know how sick Joe really is over his tragic failure.

¹⁹ *A Song Catcher*, p. 86.

TWO POEMS BY WARREN LEAMON

HOPKINS IN DUBLIN

The terror of this triple night turns
 All England dark within me. All England
 Source and sink of soaring where once
 Birds thrilled me; then flight turned dirtward:
 A grappling with wings, with anxious hands
 That grip the chalice now in holy dread.
 Dark soul, dark town, dark night
 Scheme within this brain where words
 Tumble, fumble for the light of Saxon
 Down and fell, for the light
 That blazed in Essex, Oxford, and when I touched
 Duns Scotus in the North, in Scotland, in Wales,
 When England and myself were one,
 Hawk and sky, plough and earth, and I sang
 No songs to please these somber Gaels.

Plain now, in this Irish night, delight
 I had once in subtle glows: a farmer's phrase,
 A counterpoint, the proper solid words
 For trout or fall. The Subtle One spoke,
 I listened and seven years were seven days
 When I knew silence had an end.
 Heart swung shapes for sounds, brain pitched
 Cow and grass and grove to songs I would hurrah
 For human ears: nun or weeping child
 Or Bishop, whose ring I longed to kiss.

Who knows when scruple first said *Saint*?
 When first I mistook fame scorned
 For holiness, made fame and beauty one?
 I thought, I wrote, I pled, I fell
 Into a darkness where my soul was torn
 By poem and prayer. My soul,
 Source and sink of all my singing now,
 Became a ghost I sought and shrank from:
 Dark soul, darker than these dark souls
 That fill these dark churches wringing
 Their imagined sins before a Lord
 Stern as stone, grey as these awful homes

They've built—a Lord just in more ways
 Than I dreamed when spring stirred in me
 Stark skies, shot through with drifting bones.

Here night rides the ancient sea like Danes
 Into the land, striding bodies down with sleet
 And wind. I ache, I freeze, I sweat,
 I offer naked flesh to naked bed,
 I reckon death and find it sweet,
 Sweeter than that fame I scorned.
 Ah, fame the fisher still reels, still hooks
 My soul, now tugs me toward the wreck
 Of flesh, toward the final irony:
 A poet making God, not books,
 The tool of fame. No, not poet, priest
 With simple words for simple men—

Irish men tormented by an awful lack
 Of carnelian leaf, of beryl lake—
 My words again, my sins.

I have hedged on every sacrifice and now,
 Hedged in by lies, I must unlie the past.
 Robert has my poems; those who read them
 Will make of them their own feeble failures:
 Kilns where human underthought will cast
 Bust of justice, substitutes for faith.
 Remember, at the end I tried to write
 A wedding song and sonnets of despair,
 Tried to mix Duns Scotus and Saint Patrick
 And make wine, not wormwood, of this triple night.

What I have made I drink.
 Taste, sound, color, spinning hawk and rod,
 Thick-faced farmers, quick wind and swelling cloud,
 Speckled wings, springs, seas and dingles rolling
 Sing God, shout God but (my God!) are not God.

BALLAD OF MIDDLE AGE

Here in the middle way I'll make my peace
with gentle Joan and fierce Miranda
and leave all guilt for things I've done
behind me in the trees and flowers, in the sun,
in all that spins and rots; now I'll cease
all search for meaning here in the middle way.

Here between the mountains and the sea
I'll long no more for the eagle or the shark;
nobility and pride are cash for thinkers,
power and deception ghosts for drinkers
while here in the middle way we are free
from freedom and the truth is stark.

Between blood and bone we know that life
is never what we make it and knowing that
all tales delight us, all weather's fine,
all fruit's the same beneath the rind
and little we care for the sharp knife
that cuts beneath the surface to the fat.

Here asides become the final scene,
the crescendo, the slaughter, the last grim colloquy.
Fleshy angels dance with comic devils
in dark delightful autumn fields
between the mountains and the sea
while gentle Joan and fierce Miranda weep.

TWO POEMS BY JOAN STONE*DIALOGUE FOR WINTER*

Welcome to the perpetual project
she smiles, only half the joke she means.
Welcome in with wires that snake back
through walls to no good end,
dangle from cut holes, gape like eels;
behind every outlet something coils waiting.

Come in to whole hollow rooms
where bats kite at random,
mice nest at will,
carpenter ants gnaw lace
in what's left of the beams.
Step up into the jagged dark.

She will light a fire, will light candles.
We will keep close to the flame.
Outside November is a frozen shell;
she has put her faith in the crocus bulb.
Beyond this place the ground is alive with them.
March will say who will be warm.

SHAPE-SHIFTER

I mostly go where light goes
when the switch flips down,

keep house in my own dark pocket,
awash in a sea of silk;

it is black. I have left
a note pinned to my forehead

"Gone" and lean to the form
of light blown out.

Hands slip down
like last love's skin;

slip like silk down
the pink shine of a greased

pig with a coat, with a pocket
full of silk and me bobbing

to hands a thousand gloves deep;
bones, remote as marble

tap out the lie:
"I am here. I am here."

RABBIT BROUGHT NOWHERE: JOHN UPDIKE'S *RABBIT REDUX*

KERMIT TURNER

In John Updike's two novels, *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, the character of the protagonist, Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom, does not change. At the end of the second novel he is essentially the same egoistic, valueless, and basically passive person that he is in the earlier novel, a man who, in the absence of tradition and prescriptive values, tries to live by his impulses and instincts and brings chaos into his life and the lives of those around him.

The thing that may seem difficult to reconcile with this view is that Rabbit has become a family man, worked steadily at a blue-collar job for ten years, and has become something of a WASP in his attitudes. Updike seems to have recognized this possible objection and attempted to answer it in the novel, and in meeting the objection Updike affirms the view of Rabbit that I have suggested. When Rabbit's sister Mim, now a call-girl in Las Vegas, comes back to visit the family in Brewer, she scolds Rabbit: "Everybody else has a life and they try to fence it in with some rules. You just do what you feel like and then when it blows up or runs down you just sit there and pout." Harry objects: "I went to work every day for ten years." And Mim replies, "You felt like it. It was the easiest thing to do."¹

The following day, Mrs. Angstrom seems to corroborate this view of Rabbit's character. Rabbit says to her, "Mim says I've never learned any rules." And his mother replies, "You haven't had to" (p. 373). If one can accept Mim's explanation of why Rabbit went to work for ten years, then the Rabbits of the two novels are easy to reconcile: the older Rabbit has the same kind of boyish charm, although somewhat sullied by his thickening waist-line and his rigid views on race, Vietnam, etc., and he has the same faults. And Mim's explanation is defensible. It is credible that instinct or fear would make Rabbit be a responsible family-man for ten years. It was basically fear that drove him away from and back to Janice the several times in *Rabbit, Run*. The catastrophe of his infant daughter's drowning implanted in Rabbit the dread of being wayward and irresponsible again, and so going to work does "feel right,"

¹ *Rabbit Redux* (N. Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 370. All subsequent references are to this edition.

as Mim says. Even in his seeming responsibility, then, Rabbit has not been guided by values or reason, but by instinctive reaction.

Even Rabbit's ten years of sexual abstinence (or at least severe restraint) with his wife is a kind of instinctive or conditioned response brought on by the death of his infant daughter. When, after confessing her affair with Charlie Stavros, Janice asks Rabbit if he hasn't had other women during the ten years, he says, "You know, ever since that happened to Becky, I haven't been that much for sex. It comes on, wanting it, and then something turns it off" (p. 69). And as he "runs his mind backwards" he can recall only "a skinny, flat-chested girl with a cold" whom he had had intercourse with in a back room at a Polish-American Club during Verity Press's annual party and a time when he locked himself in the motel room and masturbated after being propositioned by a "chunky colored girl" at the Jersey shore (p. 68). This seems a meagre decade for Rabbit, who in his earlier years had a vigorous sex life. If the trauma of his infant daughter's death was powerful enough to block his sexual drive, then doubtless it was strong enough to make him, on the surface at least, a responsible family man for ten years.

Rabbit's behavior after he learns of Janice's affair with Charlie Stavros also seems to be dictated by impulse, rather than by values or reason. He of course does the predictable, instinctive thing: he beats her up because his ego is wounded by the fact that she has had an affair with another man. But afterward he doesn't care, seems indifferent and bored with Janice and her affair. The day after she confesses, Janice says that she is going to see Charlie and tell him that their affair is over, but Rabbit tells her to keep Charlie, or at least not rush into a decision that she may regret later. Rabbit's indifference drives her to tears:

"Aren't you going to stop me?" she brings out at last.

"Stop you from what?"

"From *seeing* him!"

". . .No, see him if you want to. Just as long as *I* don't have to see the bastard." (p. 78)

Immediately following this scene Rabbit goes off to a baseball game with Nelson and Mr. Springer, and while they are away, Janice goes to Charlie Stavros' apartment and moves in. Apparently, after Rabbit's indifference, Janice's pride left her no choice but to go to her lover. Although one can understand Rabbit's motives for refusing to ask her to give up Charlie, still his behavior shows immaturity and irresponsibility. If he cares so little for her, is willing to give her up so readily, why

RABBIT BROUGHT NOWHERE

37

did he stick with her those ten years? Mim's answer seems to be right: it was the easiest thing to do, it required the least effort. Since Janice now has taken the initiative, Rabbit is perfectly willing to let matters take their course; he is not going to try to control events by invoking rules. To do so would be to stand up for a principle and thereby incur responsibility.

Rabbit's acceptance of Janice's living with Stavros indicates another aspect of his character—his passivity. His running in the earlier novel was essentially a passive response, since it was not a grappling with difficulties but rather an attempt to avoid facing them. And throughout Janice and Stavros' affair (throughout the novel, for that matter) Rabbit's attitudes and behavior are essentially passive. As Bernard Oldsey puts it in a review of *Rabbit Redux* in *The Nation*, "Harry Angstrom is too often a mere pincushion receiving the thrusts of others."²

Rabbit's tendency to go along, to have no standards of his own, is exhibited in every situation that he confronts in the book. When he goes to the Negro bar, he is easily persuaded by Buchanan and Babe to take Jill home with him. It doesn't seem to matter to him that it may be wrong or unlawful to shelter a runaway teenager. If this is what other people want him to do, he will do it.

At his house, Jill tells him, "You may fuck me" (p. 142). Although his shyness and boyish charm are somewhat evident on this occasion, Rabbit has no thoughts as to the morality of his having an affair with this obviously troubled girl who is exactly half his age. If an affair is what Jill wants, then he will cooperate. Who is he to say what is right or wrong? This motif runs throughout the novel—a refrain that goes "Why not?"

The truth seems to be that Rabbit is not capable of rational thought or moral choice; he merely reacts on an emotional, visceral, or glandular level. At Peggy Fossnacht's apartment on the night before meeting Jill, Rabbit says during a conversation with Peggy, "I don't think enough to know what I think." Peggy replies, "Oh, you think with . . . your whole person" (p. 110). Whether *think* is the right word at all is questionable, but it is clear that Rabbit's attitudes and actions are dictated by something other than the rational mind—and this something is apparently, as in *Rabbit, Run*, the amoral self unchecked by tradition and values. Rabbit's belief in the right of the self to do what it pleases is shown in his attitude toward his wife's leaving him. Peggy Fossnacht is surprised at Rabbit's mild acceptance of the affair. "You're so *forgiving*, Harry," she

² "Rabbit Run to Earth," *The Nation*, January 10, 1972, pp. 54-56.

says. "Ollie would have *strangled* me. . . ." Rabbit replies, "Well, I don't know if I did such a great job with Janice. She has to live too." "Who'll hold families together, if everybody has to live?" Peggy asks. "Living is a compromise, between doing what *you* want and doing what *other* people want" (p. 109). One would have thought that Rabbit had learned this lesson from his own earlier experience, since he did come back and live with his wife and child. But Rabbit does not learn; he only reacts.

The situation in which Rabbit's passivity and lack of principle seem most culpable is in his failure to stand up to Skeeter. Rabbit knows that Skeeter is trying to destroy Jill by getting her hooked again on hard drugs and that he is trying to degrade her sexually as a revenge on all white people. Jill tells him she is afraid of Skeeter. "What can I do?" Rabbit asks, and "feels paralyzed, by the rain, the thunder, by his curiosity, by his hope for a break in the combination, for catastrophe and deliverance" (p. 252). Again, that amoral passivity. Never in the two novels does Rabbit take a positive action. When he does do something that seems to be positive, it is actually a reaction to something else, a running away.

Rabbit's evasion of responsibility is even more clearly brought out when Nelson begs him to do something to prevent Skeeter from destroying Jill:

". . . she looks *sick*, Dad. She doesn't eat hardly anything and throws up sometimes anyway. Dad, don't let him keep doing it to her, whatever it is. Stop him."

"How can I?"

"You can kick him out."

"Jill's said she'll go with him."

"She won't. She hates him too."

"Don't you like Skeeter?"

"Not really. I know I should. I know you do."

Do I? Surprised, he promises Nelson, "I'll talk to him. But you know, people aren't property, I can't control what they want to do together. We can't live Jill's life for her."

"We could, if you wanted to. If you cared at all." (p. 292)

Although Rabbit's statement about not living other people's lives may sound good, it is really the rationalization for spinelessness and irresponsibility, the alibi of weak, permissive parents. The cycle is complete: Rabbit is failing as a source of authority, just as his parents, Eccles and others failed him when he was younger. But Rabbit's failure is more obvious

RABBIT BROUGHT NOWHERE

39

and more blameworthy. His defense of living one's own life, of the rights of the self, is an argument for chaos and destruction. Rabbit, the victim of permissive society, is now both victim and victimizer. Rabbit's valuelessness is shown throughout the book; his refusal to act is an admission that he thinks there is nothing worth exerting any energy for, much less fighting for—his wife's loyalty, Jill's life, his son's welfare.

Although the attitudes he expresses early in the novel indicate that Rabbit would resist the influence of a person like Skeeter, Rabbit is rather easily seduced. Soon Skeeter is controlling the evening activities of the "family" and Rabbit is obligingly reading to Skeeter and smoking marijuana along with him. Similarly, Rabbit is seduced by Peggy Fosnacht. He doesn't really care about going to bed with her, but since she takes all the initiative he finally obliges. Even his finally getting back together with Janice is an evidence of passivity. Rabbit has never acted as though he wants to be reunited; but since Janice takes the initiative—calls him up, gets him in the car, and finally persuades him to check in at a motel—it seems that he and Janice will be living together again. After all, that is the easiest thing to do. Otherwise, he would have to make a definite refusal, exert his will, stand up for a principle. Who is he to oppose someone who wants to go to bed with him?

What then is Updike doing in the novel? What is the meaning of the title? Rabbit "led back" from what, led back to what? Surely not led back to health, as Updike's definition of *redux* in the front of the novel seems to indicate. Rabbit is even more unhealthy, morally speaking, than he was in *Rabbit, Run*. Is Rabbit supposed to have learned something from his experiences in the novel? It certainly doesn't seem that he has. After Jill has died and Skeeter has fled, he and Nelson go to live with Rabbit's parents, where Rabbit spends a good deal of time "faithfully masturbating" after he has lost his job. This surely cannot be considered positive action, but another form of escapism, another evidence of narcissism and immaturity, a regression to boyish or primitive behavior. Rabbit hasn't gained any insights, any ideas, any new ways of looking at things. Skeeter and Jill did not "educate" him: near the end of the novel he is repeating his old political and social views.

When his sister Mim criticizes his behavior with Jill and Skeeter, Rabbit defends himself:

"What did I do wrong? I was a fucking Good Samaritan. I took in these orphans, Black, white, I said Hop aboard. Irregardless of color or creed, Hop aboard. Free eats. I was the fucking Statue of Liberty."

"And it got you a burned-down house."

"O. K. That's other people. That's their problem, not mine. I did what felt right. . . . I learned some things."

"Anything worth knowing?"

"I learned I'd rather fuck than be blown." (p. 358)

A valuable lesson, no doubt. And worth the price of a burned house, a dead girl, and a possibly further disturbed son. Not only does Rabbit seem to have no values, he also is without a conscience, a sense of guilt, which he at least showed some signs of in *Rabbit, Run*.

But it will not do to be too hard on Rabbit; he still retains some of that old innocence and charm, that disarming boyishness that he had in the earlier novel. Despite all his sexual escapades he is still very embarrassed when his wife asks him to check into a motel in the middle of the afternoon. What will he tell the motel clerk? It will look fishy. "Fishy?" Janice demands. "What's fishy, Harry? God, you're a prude. Everybody knows people screw. It's how we all got here. When're you going to grow up, even a little bit?" (p. 399). One feels like screaming that last question along with Janice. It seems incredible, absurd, that after all the sordidness and tragedy that Rabbit has been a party to he would still be so "delicate" about having someone think he is making love to his wife. Doesn't anything make an impression on him? It is strange how Rabbit's self, in one sense so corrupt, is in another so incorruptible, so impervious to experience.

And, too, near the end of the novel Rabbit shows signs of the idealism of his youth, of his rebellion against the imperfect world. In a conversation with his mother, he jokingly asks:

"Where did I go wrong?"

"Who says. You did?"

"Mom. No house, no wife, no job. My kid hates me. My sister says I'm ridiculous."

"You're. Growing up."

"Mim says I've never learned any rules."

"You haven't had to."

"Huh. Any decent kind of world, you wouldn't need all these rules." (p. 373)

Mrs. Angstrom's optimistic comment that Rabbit is finally, at thirty-six, growing up is belied by his last statement. He is still blaming the "wicked" world for all his troubles and faults. He wants a world where responsibility is not necessary, where there are no consequences, where

RABBIT BROUGHT NOWHERE

41

each precious little self can go its own way, follow its worst impulses, and nothing bad will happen. At this point one is reminded of Ruth's evaluation of Rabbit in the earlier novel: he is chaos, he is Mr. Death, one of those amoral innocents who leave destruction in their wake.

But to the very end of the novel Rabbit's innocence, his boyish charm, continues to sway the reader in his favor. Even after he and Janice are in bed in the motel, Rabbit cannot make love for worrying about having to face the clerk when they leave:

"It'll be so embarrassing. The guy at the desk'll think we've been up to no good."

"He doesn't care."

"He does, he *does* care. We could stay all night to make him feel better, but nobody else knows where we are. They'll worry."

"Stop it, Harry. We'll go in an hour. Just shut up."

"I feel so guilty."

"About what?"

"About everything."

"Relax. Not everything is your fault."

"I can't accept that." (p. 406)

What are we to make of Rabbit's neurotic concern about what the motel clerk will think? He seems more like Holden Caulfield than like a thirty-six-year-old man who has experienced much sex of many varieties. Is his concern just a coverup for the fact that he is impotent from excessive masturbation? This sudden delicacy does not ring true. After all, he wasn't concerned that his son might guess what he was doing while in bed with Jill and Peggy. In worrying about the motel clerk Rabbit shows that whatever sense of decency and responsibility he may have is perversely misplaced.

Still, Rabbit's recurring boyishness has the effect of seducing the reader and blinding him to the hollowness of Rabbit's character. His expression of guilt above, for instance, draws us back to his side. But if we reflect we can see that it must be just a pose he feels like making at the moment. He has not shown any guilt earlier; in fact, he has tried to blame Jill's death on Janice, but she tells him that he can't "pin *that* rap" on her (p. 395). Rabbit is just playing a role: it doesn't feel right to make love to his wife at the moment; it feels right to feel guilty. But we know it will pass, will have no permanent constructive effect upon him, just as none of his earlier experiences have had. He will go on reacting to things, rather than acting, go on doing what feels right; and

if we see him in another novel in 1981, he will be a dangerous, pot-bellied, balding, forty-six-year-old boy.

The only way to take *Rabbit Redux* seriously, it seems, is to assume that Updike is trying to picture the sickness of modern, permissive, secular society and that he is presenting Rabbit Angstrom as an example of the warping effects of such a society. But not just Rabbit, either: all the characters—Jill, Skeeter, Janice, Peggy, Mim—are casualties of this society without traditions and rules of conduct.

The end of the novel does not offer a hope of salvation. Janice and Rabbit are not getting back together because of love or because of any sense of loyalty or duty. They are coming back together because there simply doesn't seem to be anything else for them to do. This time Rabbit would be justified in refusing to go back to his life with Janice, to run, as he did in the earlier novel. But instead he curls up and goes to sleep with her. Perhaps one thing that Updike is showing is that a person who tries to live by following his impulses, by doing what seems natural and never establishing any rules, will eventually end up so tired and empty, so devoid of emotional and spiritual energy, that he no longer will care enough even to run. He will only want to sleep. Ah: sleep. O. K.?

THOMAS WOLFE AND JONATHAN SWIFT

JOHN L. IDOL, JR.

The name of Jonathan Swift appears often in the letters, notebooks, and novels of Thomas Wolfe because Wolfe believed that Swift was one of the moderns, a writer who, like Plato, Rabelais, Donne, or Melville, continued to be of living and vital interest.¹ A study of Wolfe's remarks about Swift reveals his keen appreciation of Swift's personality and an enduring respect for Swift's literary achievements. Even though a few critics and scholars have noted a connection between Wolfe's works and Swift's, no one has adequately examined Wolfe's statements about Swift or explored how allusions to Swift's works figure in Wolfe's writings.² The purpose of this study is to explore the contexts in which Wolfe refers to Swift's name, personality, and works and to indicate some of Swift's artistic practices which Wolfe found relevant to his own needs.

Wolfe first invoked the name of Swift as early as 1922 when, as a student at Harvard, he wanted "a Swift to flay the free versists."³ During the same year, he read Leslie Stephen's biography and saw the possibilities, dramatically, of creating a character resembling Swift. In Swift's character he found an intriguing antithesis—"tremendous humanity" and "savage" misanthropy. He also noted that Swift scorched mankind "with the withering fire of an unequalled satiric talent" (*Letters*, p. 38). And as late as 1937 or 1938, Wolfe again invoked the artistic spirit of Swift to help him state his reasons for breaking with Scribner's.

His invocation led him to try his hand at a mock title page.

A MODEST PAMPHLET

Tending To Prove That Writers (and all
others of their Ilk) Shall be Allowed
To Live and if the Goddamned Sons of

¹ *The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe*, ed. Richard S. Kennedy and Paschal Reeves (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1970), I, 375-76; hereafter cited as *Notebooks*.

² Bruce R. McElderry, *Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), pp. 53-54, 161; Herbert J. Muller, *Thomas Wolfe* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions Books, 1947), pp. 85, 181; William Nolte, "The Satire of Thomas Wolfe," M. A. Thesis. Univ. of Texas, 1952, pp. 28, 52.

³ *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe*, ed. Elizabeth Nowell (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 26; hereafter cited as *Letters*.

Bitches Go Not Too Hardly At The Task
 To Earn A Living and If It Be Not Too
 Much To Suppose Be Allowed to Draw
 Their Breath Occasionally Without
 Agony, Labor, Horror, Death, Damnation,
 And Attendant Abominations In This Home
 of Free People and Free Speech, The
 United States of America

by

Thomas Wolfe ⁴

Another mock title page, more temperate in tone but more pointed in its attack, echoes Swift again; it begins with "A MODEST COMMERCIAL PROPOSAL" and runs on for some eighty words more (*Notebooks*, II, 898).

In between the periods just noted, Wolfe turned to Swift upon several occasions, sometimes merely including his name in his list of favorite authors,⁵ but paying him the tribute of imitation or allusion at other times. His first significant creative use of Swift occurred during the writing of *Welcome To Our City*, which was done at the time he was eagerly reading Swift's works and thinking about a play with a protagonist suggestive of Swift. As he told Edwin Greenlaw, a revered professor at the University of North Carolina, he was reading "voraciously" because he accepted John Livingston Lowe's thesis about how the mind fuses and resurrects "in new and magic forms" all that it reads (*Letters*, p. 30). Sometime during this period or perhaps at Chapel Hill, where Greenlaw had taught the English survey course in which Wolfe was enrolled, Wolfe obviously read some of Swift's poetry. Of the poems he read, the one he now drew upon was "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed." When he wanted to reveal the hypocrisy of a gubernatorial candidate, Preston Carr, Wolfe evidently recalled Swift's graphic account of how an apparently beautiful woman became an ugly hag. In describing Corinna's disrobing in her bower, Swift wrote:

Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair
 Takes off her artificial Hair:
 Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,
 She wipes it clean, and lays it by.

⁴ *Notebooks*, II, 897-98.

⁵ Typical of the lists are those printed on pages 291 and 579 of *The Web and the Rock* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,
 Stuck on with Art on either Side,
 Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,
 Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.
 Now dextrously her Plumpers draws,
 That serve to fill her hollow Jaws,
 Untwists a Wire; and from her Gums
 A Set of Teeth completely comes.⁶

Corinna next removes all the pads and bolsters shaping her decrepit body. This spirited exposure of artifice and corruption perhaps helped Wolfe to achieve the satiric touch he needed to expose the reality behind the handsome, stylish public figure of Preston Carr. When Carr retires (Scene 7) for the night, he locks the door, checks the room for spies, and,

then, he begins to disrobe, or, we should say to dismantle his various parts. First he removes his toupee, folds it with tender care, and puts it lovingly under his pillow. Then he takes out a gleaming set of false teeth, which he washes at the basin, and puts on his dresser. Carr then sheds false soles, thick shoulder pads, and an abdomen supporter.⁷

By the time both Swift and Wolfe end their relentless exposures of their deceivers, they have driven their satiric nails home. They then could turn to other concerns, Swift to Corinna's dreams of past wantonness and reassembling of parts the next day and Wolfe to Preston Carr's overweening ambition. Just as Swift refused to describe Corinna's "Arts/To recollect the scattered Parts" (ll. 67-68), Wolfe left to the reader the task of supplying words to Carr's orisons for success (Scene 7).

If the similarity of scene (a bedroom), action (disrobing), and purpose (satiric exposure) should not be sufficient evidence to indicate that Wolfe was recalling Swift's poem about a prettified whore when he wanted to hold a politician up to ridicule, a second instance makes it

⁶ *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford, 1966), II, 581-82.

⁷ *Welcome to Our City, Esquire*, October 1957, p. [70].

clear that thoughts about Swift's works came to Wolfe at least once when he wrote about politicians. Much later, possibly as late as 1937, Wolfe dredged up from his deep well of consciousness Swift's poems and prose account of John Partridge, shoemaker turned almanac-maker. This later politician, Zack Joyner, who represented the plain folk of the western part of Old Catawba, discovered a way to triumph over the affected people of the eastern half.

Like Swift, when he announced the death of Partridge, . . . his logic was irrefutable: for, as Swift retorted, when Partridge came forward to assert that he was still alive, *if Partridge was not dead, he should have been*—so the country lawyer held to the proposition that the East was dead, or should be.⁸

If Wolfe was not depending on one of the most widespread of literary anecdotes about Swift, he recalled here not only "An Elegy on Mr. Patrige" but also *A Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.* Whether he drew from literary gossip or not, Wolfe clearly found an opportunity to compare the ingenious and inventive mind of Swift with that of a homespun politician who would brook no foolish claims on the part of a candidate descended from the inhabitants of the area William Byrd called Lubberland. Thus, both early and late in his writing career, whenever he had politics on his mind, Wolfe must have found Jonathan Swift a helpful guide and mentor.

But Wolfe's mind was not always on politics. Artistic strategy and a fictional use of personal experiences could also be helpful for a playwright who was just about to become a novelist. Consequently, among his notes on literature (1924-1925) is the observation that "at least two of the captains of invective, Swift and Voltaire, have used the method of infinite enlargement as a telescope through which to look upon their little crawling worlds of men and cities" (*Notebooks*, I, 46). Behind this remark lies a ready explanation for Wolfe's pointed and telling use of caricature in his stories and novels. A few years later (1928), Wolfe thought of Swift again when he attempted to explain the autobiographical basis of *Look Homeward, Angel*. A note intended for the publisher's reader suggests that in "a literal sense" the novel is "probably no more autobiographical than 'Gulliver's Travels.'" Since within the space of

⁸ *The Hills Beyond* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 208.

eight sentences Wolfe adds that he made the book out of his life and presented his "vision of life" to his twentieth year, there is an obvious contradiction here. That Wolfe based much of his novel on literal fact is, of course, notorious. But he was attempting to depict a greater truth than the historical deeds and misdeeds of the Wolfe family and their neighbors in Asheville. For him, "the most literal and autobiographical" element of the novel was the picture of Eugene's "buried life" and its "most exact thing— . . . the fantasy" (*Letters*, p. 130). Without offering these crucial distinctions upon the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe asserted in "To The Reader" that he could not easily imagine "a more autobiographical work than 'Gulliver's Travels.'"⁹ Perhaps, however, Wolfe was uncritically passing along a judgement which he encountered in the Leslie Stephen biography: "No writer has ever been more thoroughly original than Swift, for his writings are simply himself."¹⁰

Although Wolfe's claim that "all serious work in fiction is autobiographical" is patently self-serving, his evocation of *Gulliver's Travels* rather than, say, *David Copperfield*, *The Way of All Flesh*, or *Ulysses* reveals a consistent pattern in his creative life, for he was to think of *Gulliver's Travels* again, as will be shown later, when he turned to the Webber cycle. Several scattered remarks, some occurring as late as 1932, afford a defense of Wolfe's choice of Swift's great fable. Wolfe admired the form of *Gulliver's Travels* and considered that "there's no better fabulist in the world" than Swift. That Wolfe studied the form of *Gulliver's Travels* and other satiric works is apparent from his dictum that "great satire needs the sustenance of great fable" (*LHA*, p. 422). While studying the form of the fable, Wolfe perhaps saw that the structural principle of the fable as developed by Swift would allow him to do two things at once: he could string together autobiographical elements charged with a purpose, and he could add satiric episodes without seriously violating the form. His "Note for the Publisher's Reader" makes this assumption probable. Like Swift, he would try to be inventive, but he recognized that he lacked Swift's power of invention, which he termed "incomparable" (*LHA*, p. 422). Swift's fable, he observed, served a multiple purpose, for Swift used his fable to expose the foibles and vices of the England of Queen Anne and George I, to suggest an ideal society, and to

⁹ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. vii; hereafter cited as *LHA*.

¹⁰ *Swift* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 37. Wolfe owned a copy of the biography. See Richard S. Kennedy's *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 68.

carry the story forward with amusing, adventurous, or satiric incidents. To the degree, then, that Swift's involvement in English and Irish political, cultural, or literary affairs enters into *Gulliver's Travels* the work is autobiographical.

That *Gulliver's Travels* contains autobiographical elements hardly explains, however, why Wolfe should have referred to it rather than to such works as *David Copperfield* or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The element of fantasy in *Gulliver's Travels* gave Wolfe another reason to think of Swift's work. He observed that Swift wrote fantasy in an attempt to penetrate reality. *Gulliver's Travels*, Wolfe said, is not "an escape from reality" but "a savage and inspired" attempt to make a "comment on the real world through a fable . . ." (*Letters*, p. 322).

The fabulous, fantastic elements of *Gulliver's Travels* were appropriate points of comparison as Wolfe thought about the contents of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe once explained that his novel was "loaded with invention: story, fantasy, vision" (*Letters*, p. 130). Eugene imagines himself to be such famous heroes as Bruce-Eugene, the Dixie Ghost, or Ace Gant.¹¹ Eugene's fantasies indicate his potential for creativity. They represent the deepest realities of his buried life, the "powerful creative element trying to work its way toward an essential isolation; a creative solitude; a secret life . . ." (*Letters*, p. 111). It is in Wolfe's effort to penetrate reality through the use of fantasy that *Look Homeward, Angel* has its closest resemblance to *Gulliver's Travels*. Wolfe stated the point clearly when he wrote that *Gulliver's Travels* resulted from "Swift's terrible conflict with the world about him."¹² In his struggle against the forces which might have destroyed his creative powers, Wolfe found much of the substance of his first novel. The importance Wolfe attached to the preservation of Eugene's fantasy-making power is clearly indicated by the title first considered for *Look Homeward, Angel*, "The Building of a Wall."

In one application, Eugene's gift for fantasy is more akin to the imagination as defined by Coleridge than it is to Swift's inventiveness,

¹¹ Included in the manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel* are several fantasies which were cut as the novel was trimmed for publication. In the manuscript, Eugene appears as General Gant, the Scourge of the Greasers, Marshal Gant of the Foreign Legion, Young Gant as the best fullback Yale ever had, and as a matinee idol. See Kennedy, pp. 153, 177, 342, 367, 418 and Paschal Reeves's "The Humor of Thomas Wolfe," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 24 (June 1960), 118.

¹² *Letters*, p. 322. Eugene "was a child who had looked much on pain and evil, and remained a fantasist of the Ideal. Walled up in his great city of visions, his tongue had learned to mock, his lip to sneer, but the harsh rasp of the world had worn no grooving in the secret life" (*LHA*, p. 391).

but, in another application, fantasy functions in much the same way for both Swift and Wolfe. For just as Swift often parodies travel accounts and other types of writing, Wolfe mocks popular novels and pulp fiction whenever Eugene engages in fantasy. Both writers thus at times give fantasy a satiric flavor. Wolfe recognized the difficulties under which he labored since he remarked that "satire (as with Aristophanes, Voltaire and Swift) is a high and subtle art, quite beyond the barnyard snipings and wholesale geese-slaughterings of the present degenerate age" (*LHA*, p. 422).

Once the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel* was behind him, Wolfe did not forget about Swift's art, for in 1929 while he jotted down some topics for a second novel he paused to consider what he called "good scenes from novels." Among a list of scenes by such writers as Defoe, Galsworthy, Joyce, Hardy, and Sterne, Wolfe placed the scene where Gulliver awakens beneath the feet of the Lilliputians who swarm over his face. When he wrote the sketch of his Tall Stranger, Wolfe remembered the scene and wove it into his sketch, which he probably wrote in 1933. Commenting on Swift's use of that portion of his fable, Wolfe said that "the terrific legend of his life among the pigmies becomes the instrument by which another giant [Swift] whipped the folly, baseness, and corruption in the lives of men with the scorpion lash of the most savage allegory ever written." Despite some Swiftian barbs provoked by "the jibes, the jests, the drolleries shouted after him a dozen times a day in the streets because of his great height" and despite the Tall Stranger's acquisition of "a huge and damning accumulation of evidence concerning man's fatal unity, the barren paucity of his invention, the desolate consonance of his wit," the narrator ends by having "faith in man, a belief in man's fundamental goodness, kindness, and humanity."¹⁸ But of course the Tall Stranger had yet to encounter that odious vermin who called himself Hitler. When he did, he would respond much as Swift did when the latter had a thing to tell the world about the suffering of the Irish poor. Thus would Wolfe reveal that he too had an intriguing antithesis in his personality.

During the same period (1933) Wolfe, distraught because of his loneliness, explored the psyches of lonely men. He wondered why lonely men could endure suffering and yet emerge joyful men. As he pondered the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes, he found an answer: "the lonely man, who is also the tragic man, is invariably the man who loves life dearly—

¹⁸ *From Death to Morning* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 135, 141, 149.

which is to say, the joyful man." Together with Sophocles, the writer of the Book of Job, Dante, Milton, and Dostoevski, Swift appears as one of Wolfe's group of men. For Wolfe the writings of these men contained "the real quality and substance of human joy. . . ." Wolfe linked his name with Swift's again when he explained that he could not make Christ's way his way.¹⁴

In the lonely wanderings of Eugene during his odyssey to find a voice and a home for his spirit, there would be occasions to speak the name of Swift again. The first utterance comes from the lips of Bascom Pentland when he launches one of his misogynistic tirades in *Of Time and the River*. Ranting ironically, he poses a string of questions for Eugene, the last of which is, "Perhaps you have been edified by the writings of Mademoiselle Voltaire or Miss Jonathan Swift?" Eugene has the tact not to answer before his aunt. Both of the other utterances of Swift's name in this novel relate to Wolfe's conviction that Swift was one of the greatest prose-stylists. Interestingly, Eugene also offers up the name of Thomas Carlyle when asked by Eddy Murphy, the son of Eugene's landlady, who the greatest prose writer was. Later, after Eugene has left Harvard, Swift's name appears among the list of the authors forming the "living treasures" of the father of Eugene's friend Joel Pierce. Here, "Like a man drunk with joy," Eugene found Swift's works among those of Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Edward Gibbon, Carlyle, and Fielding. His intoxication was not so complete that he could not function as a critic. "There was Burton's marvellous *Anatomy*, his staggering erudition never smelling of the dust or of the lamp, his lusty, pungent, ever-rushing-onward style, and the annihilating irony of Gibbon's latinized sonority, and the savage, burning, somehow magic plainness of Swift's style."¹⁵

It was not so much style as attitude or technique that brought Swift to mind when Wolfe was attempting to shed some of the burden of subjectivity placed upon him by Eugene. While waiting for the more objective George Webber to emerge, Wolfe once more looked to Swift for a way to begin the flow of creative energies. His first efforts were little more than finger exercises. They are, however, significant as markers of Swift's continuing usefulness, for in writing some passages in imitation of "A Modest Proposal" Wolfe began to compose the harsh

¹⁴ *The Hills Beyond* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 191, 195.

¹⁵ *Of Time and the River* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), pp. 143, 587.

notes he would use in the novels published as part of the Webber cycle. Evidently, his proposal would be a plan to curb some of the activities in politics and literature which, in Wolfe's estimate, were a national disgrace. As to the literary life of the country, he wrote,

Let us consider some of the probable benefits of such a system. I shall be suppressed, which would be a national loss and a loss to art, but the Malcolm Cowleys, the Mike Golds, the V. F. Calvertons, the Bunny Wilsons, etc., would also be suppressed which would be a gain to everyone and everything. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press would be suppressed, but so would freedom of Press-Filth, Press-Lies, etc., be suppressed.¹⁶

Fortunately, he never pushed his proposal further than this. His concerns about the literary and political affairs were pressing him to get on with the task of excoriating flaws within the nation while defending the common man against the greedy, nefarious acts of the privileged few. For this task he would need, he thought, a militant Gulliver, not a modest proposer. Wolfe wanted to do a kind of "American 'Gulliver's Travels,'" he said, with a protagonist, an "innocent man," moving through life and making discoveries about people, life, and himself (*Letters*, p. 711). The formula governing characterization, however, in the Webber cycle appears, upon examination, not to be greatly different from that of the Gant cycle. The most significant difference is one of degree, not of kind, for George indulges in fantasy less often than does Eugene. If this observation is accurate, one should be able to see something of the ingénu in both Eugene and George and detect, furthermore, a resemblance to Gulliver, an archetypal naïf. Something of Wolfe, too, is visible, for Wolfe described himself to Maxwell Perkins as an American innocent writing, "I was a child of faith. I grew up in the most conservative section of America, and as a child I put an almost unquestioning belief and confidence in the things that were told me, the precepts that were taught me. As I grew older I began to see the terrible and shocking differences between appearance and reality all around me" (*Letters*, p. 581).

¹⁶ *Notebooks*, II, 832.

A mere ingénu, however, would not do.¹⁷ A character like Gulliver, whose name Wolfe had mentioned to Edward Aswell, would not be complex enough to serve Wolfe's purpose. He needed someone to undergo the adventure of discovering, "through error and through trial, and through fantasy and illusion, through falsehood and his own damned foolishness . . .," that appearance isn't reality. Although *Gulliver's Travels* was foremost in Wolfe's mind, chosen "deliberately," Wolfe confided, he offered *Don Quixote*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Candide*, *The Idiot*, and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as indications of what he wanted the Webber cycle to achieve. Further deliberation brought him to the conclusion that the last of these was a better illustration of his intention than was *Gulliver's Travels*.

These considerations show that Wolfe was rejecting form more than tone, essentially opting for the *Bildungsroman* instead of the satiric fable. Because the cycle would contain satire, Wolfe hoped that the satire would be "swingeing and scalding" (*Letters*, p. 711). If he were to carry out his promise to write a "modern 'Gulliver's Travels' that would make Swift seem all sweetness and light,"¹⁸ he would have ample need for Swift's satiric tone and mode of action.

The voice needed to blast the enemies of the nation and of struggling humanity everywhere should be that of a Voltaire or Swift¹⁹ rather than that of Joyce. One of the flaws of *Look Homeward, Angel*, as Wolfe came to see, occurred because, in George Webber's words,

"My young hero was a stick, a fool,
a prig, a snob, as Dedalus was—as in my
own presentment of the book I was. . . .
It wasn't true autobiography. I've
learned that now, and learned why. The
failure comes from the false personal.
There's the guilt. That's where the

¹⁷ One trace of the innocent abroad does remain in *The Web and the Rock*. When George Webber walked among the massive facades in the great Ludwigstrasse in Munich, Wolfe says "He felt a little as Gulliver must have felt among the Brobdingnagians. He got the feeling at almost every door he entered that he was having to stand on tiptoe to reach up to the knob" (p. 654).

¹⁸ Henry Volkening, "Tom Wolfe: Penance No More," in *Thomas Wolfe at Washington Square*, ed. Thomas Clark Pollock and Oscar Cargill (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1954), pp. 117-18. Volkening reports that Wolfe kept a volume of Swift's writings on a shelf above his working table at Washington Square (p. 110).

¹⁹ Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), p. 435; hereafter cited as YCGHA.

young genius business gets in—the young artist business. . . . It gets in and it twists the vision. The vision may be shrewd, subtle, piercing, within a thousand special frames accurate and Joycean—but within the larger one, false, mannered, and untrue. And the large one is the one that matters.”²⁰

Essentially, Wolfe was to identify with the Irish writer who, instead of finding a way to live in exile, stayed at home and became the beloved champion of the oppressed and wretched. Ultimately, Swift's behavior seemed more heroic and much wiser. As a result of his wider, wiser vision, George Webber could unhesitatingly rebuke the artistic decadence which would place Piggy Logan's circus act above the art and humanity of "Tolstoy, Whitman, Dreiser, or Dean Swift" (YCGHA, p. 223). Thus, with the model of Swift and others before him, Wolfe chose to stand as champion of humanity, as satirist of human foibles and wickedness, and rejected a place among those who made up a Lost Generation. By implication, Joyce and the aesthetic cult he inspired fashioned a coterie of scoffers and snobs. Once he had realized that escapism was the worthless fruit of such scoffing and snobbery, Wolfe, speaking through George Webber, said of his former attitude: "I had not yet learned that one cannot really be superior without humility and tolerance and human understanding. I did not yet know that in order to belong to a rare and higher breed one must first develop the true power and talent of selfless immolation" (YCGHA, p. 722).

However, the novels of the Webber cycle, as published, clearly do not represent a modern *Gulliver's Travels*. Had Wolfe lived to give the cycle the form, substance, and tone he envisioned for it, he would not have accomplished an American *Gulliver's Travels*, for he lacked the patience, artistry, and inventiveness to match Swift's achievement.

On the one hand, therefore, Wolfe did not (and could not) fulfill his promise. His failure resulted less from the kind of feeling needed for the task than from the artistic techniques he used. A simple look at the malevolent greed of Rumford Bland, the callousness and spiritual aridity of the guests at Mrs. Jack's party, and the terrorizing inhumanity of German officials under Hitler shows Wolfe's indignation to be as noble as any satirist's. Like Swift in some paragraphs in Part IV of *Gulliver's*

²⁰ YCGHA, p. 20.

Travels, Wolfe could not (or would not) settle for the undermining functions of irony. Instead, he chose degrading portraiture, bold caricature, and blunt social criticism to do the job. Perhaps these devices are more appropriate for a naturalistic writer, as Wolfe was, than for an allegorist.

On the other hand, Wolfe did find in Swift and those whom Wolfe placed alongside him—Sophocles, Milton, Dante, Dostoevski—a guide and counselor as he accepted the task of being the voice of indignation for his unlettered brothers and the champion of those who upheld moral and ethical values which lead to decency, compassion, and equality.

No doubt Swift would bluntly object to Wolfe's labelling him a modern, though he scarcely could deny that the group within which Wolfe placed him would be worthy of esteem in any era. Swift would also object to Wolfe's failure to acquire a deft satiric touch. Yet, he would surely recognize a kindred spirit at work in the satirist's endless assault on wrongdoing and wrongheadedness. It was for help in his own assault on mankind's failings that Wolfe turned to Swift. And though it is obvious that he was not Swift's aptest student, Wolfe wanted his readers to know that, from the beginning of his own literary career to its end, he considered the satiric mind and art of Jonathan Swift incomparable.

TWO POEMS BY SISTER BERNETTA QUINN, O.S.F.*TWO WEEKS IN ITALY*

I. Under the Ponte Vecchio

There is a world that lives within the water
Brighter and clearer than its genesis.
It is composed of sunlight and of moonlight
With doves that fly when those of Florence fly.
I am at home here in this world of shadows
Shaking a little when the wind goes by.
It shines, as where the feet of God have passed.
I will go on to Venice, but not wholly.
Stay here, O shadow of my dreaming heart.

II. From Florence to Venice

Riding the *rapido* when day was falling,
I watched the vineyards marching row on row
And on the eastern skyline misty shapes
As if one far away should think of mountains.
Bologna and Ferrara stood to welcome
The passengers who stepped to ground with care.
The train gave to small towns a silver stare
Though some were smiling as it whistled by.
Along the little brooks green willows clustered.
At Padova, hydrangeas edged the fence
That kept the railroad out of people's yards.
Nearby was a fiesta of old autos
Piled high beneath the hot Italian sun.
I traveled from Firenze to Venezia
One flawless afternoon in late July.
The cypresses, like candles, burned for sorrow
That men like Pound and Dante have to die.

THE ANGEL STANDING IN THE SUN

After the death, young Trimmer ventured where
 While Turner lived no man had dared to pry.
 What answers did he look for in Queen Square,
 The vicar's son, amidst the piled debris—
 Tubes, brushes, wax, the jars of madder, chrome—
 Secrets of rainbowed water, swirling foam?

What was he snooping for? A Golden Bough,
 A wand among the sables grey with mold,
 The man who catalogued that studio
 Where cats and shadows fled the north light's gold?
 How Turner made the west more west, the sun
 Explode into a crimson eschaton?

So many years the Widow Danby set
 His simple palette, listened to him scold,
 Pottered about the musty wreckage, yet
 She too betrayed him, once his flesh was cold.
 From Paul's the owner could no more protest,
 More silent now than any granite crest.

Danby had tracked him down. Old Puggy Booth,
 The street boys called him; tradesmen, Admiral—
 Because he studied skies. He hid the truth,
 Fearing to shock the exhibition hall.
 She found him dying on the river's slope,
 Beside his bed *The Fallacies of Hope*.

Those final days, he felt again the storm
 Wrapping him tightly in its white despair.
 Again he heard the Houses fall, saw form
 On scarlet form go shooting through black air:
 The fire and storm, from Nature; color, light,
 That *he* invented faded into night.

"Arrangements of remembrance," Ruskin said,
And so his pictures were: the Channel snow
That blazed in stinging rage about his head,
Petworth in summer when the sun was low,
The waters at Calais that West called stone,
Venezia in the pearly flush of dawn.

He asked that he might have his art as shroud.
"We'll dig you up, unroll you!" joked a friend.
But such interment could not be allowed.
When Dr. Price pronounced him near the end
He gave his dreams to England, one request
("Keep them together!") guarding the bequest.

The winter month dragged on, devoid of grace.
Slate-dark the skies. "The sun is God!" he cried,
But grim December stared him in the face.
One day at nine God smiled, and Turner died.
Light ("emanation of the Deity")
Arrived at last to set the painter free.

He could no longer roar the world away.
The Trimmers and the Beaumonts came and went;
"Soapsuds and whitewash . . . tinted steam," said they.
The silence made them fierce and eloquent,
Those hawks his *Angel Standing in the Sun*
Bade to the feast when Turner's day was done.

FOUR POEMS BY KATHRYN STRIPLING

DAYDREAMING

What the view must be like at the top
of that tree on the hill,
at the tip
of the uppermost leaf of that sycamore tree
I can see from the grass
I am lying on,
turning my thigh like a leaf
in the sun! There's

no view at the top of the ridge
itself, save through a space
in the thicket of holly,
and then it's the opposite side
of the river, another
green hill. When I'm restless, I climb
there, still hoping the branches will part
and I'll see what I want. But
they never do. And I don't.

Looking straight up, of course,
I can always see blue.
That's a view.
But to look straight ahead
and see blue
after blue after blue
hill with no interference, that view's
what I want on this Monday,

that clear a vast vision,
though only the smallest things living,
the laceworms
or wandering mountain flies
venture that high, I suppose,
that apart, without bending the shape
of the leaf, risking wind
and the sleek, shiny leafskin itself
they could tumble from.

Wonder what risk I would take,
 what crude bark I would climb,
 suffer what transformation
 to make myself ready
 like wee Thumbelina who sailed off
 to see the wide world from a lily pad.
 Rub-a-dub-dub,
 I sing. Silly

this daydreaming!
 Damn the good weather
 for making me wish I could see
 with a high-flying insect's eye-view
 how the distance becomes
 like a river, the only way
 out of this valley I'm part of.

CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Never since I was eleven,
 the year before my mother uprooted her garden
 thinking to save them from choking
 each other to get to the light,
 have I seen so many chrysanthemums,
 my birthday flower,
 but barely. Five more days

in the womb and I'd have poinsettias
 to try to give meanings to,
 other stars crossing the sky to consider.
 The lines on my palms would map
 somebody else's existence,
 to whom these bright flowers against
 the blue razorback mountains
 would be nothing special, to whom
 I would be, simply, nothing.
 Impossible

to think of one's life being inconsequential!
In four weeks I will be twenty-nine.
I will look at the world with the same awe
that I should be in it

as I looked when I was eleven
through the fall of the dead leaves
at what was my birthright.
That day I laid claim to it, standing
by my mother's full garden
in its last, desperate flowering.

GIRL-TALK

for Virginia

You were telling me something about love,
or the lack of it,
that morning we sat on the sun porch
and the curtains swelled toward us like green sails
bound nowhere. You said

(I remember you said it as though you had stared
down a well and seen nothing
but water), "I want to be madly in love
and to hell with what happens!"
A bird shook the leaves on a branch.
When you looked up, you told me,
"I'm jealous of you."

But perhaps you've forgotten you said it
and that I never answered for watching the wind
tease the skirt from my knees.
After all, it was only an idle remark
at the end of another long summer.
You wouldn't have known how I envied
that girlhood of you by the window,

that waiting,
unwary of deep wells and wind.

HOMECOMING

(After a Visit with My Folks)

Because you wanted to pick blackberries
before the sun rose high enough
to make itself felt even in the big oak's shade
and the neighbors woke up, wanting
for their breakfast what was left along the roadside,
you set out at six o'clock into the fog.

I watched you go, not knowing
what to do at dawn and it a mountain dawn
at that. Cool even for July
I like to tell my kinfolks every summer
when I spend a while in Georgia
where the heat clings to my skin like wet silk
morning, noon, and night.
No better place to be than right here
where I am, I said to you before bed,
just a little drunk from too much celebration.
Now, cold sober on this Sunday morning,
I say it again to no one but myself,

believing that I've almost found a reason
to be happy. I can hear
the river run, a whole foot higher
than last month before I left you here,
and when I crawl in bed to read
until you come home with your bucket full,
the sheets where we lay last night are still warm.

THREE POEMS BY DANNYE ROMINE

PRIMER ON DIGGING

“Memory is the characteristic art form
of those who have just decided to die
and those who have just decided to live.”

—DANIEL STERN
The Suicide Academy

Listen: when you dig
in the garden
expect to be bitten.
Those fish heads you buried
last spring endure beyond seasons
breeding their own subtleties.
Your fingers will encounter
the slow growth of moss,
the spasms of slugs
recoiling from salt.
Go further: one mild earthworm
is not sufficient to measure the world.
Hard by the brick wall
the roly poly unfurls,
a bolus of damp memory
assaulting your nostrils.
Wait. Don't reach for the spade.
You must touch the white root
with your fingers, follow
its search for cool water.
Now that your hands are submerged
notice how the dark treasures
quicken like dreams
beneath your swollen fingertips.

FLIGHT

Cancel this reservation.
There is no city where humidity fits
like remembered kisses in summer hair,
where banyan roots exposed to air
hang slender from their limbs
then linger on the ground
like feverish dreams.

I'll stay
where roots glide underground
away from sun,
where seasons can be properly quartered
like apples on Formica counters.
Here departures are safe,
arrivals certain.
Here no moon tugs at the bay.

INTEMPERANCE

Maybe Emily
could wind the months in balls
and put them each
in separate drawers.
It's understandable:
a snug New England countryside
bleached in snow
from common to common
demands a certain frugality.
But in the South
waiting is unchartered.
Honeysuckle may wander by March
and even asphalt will erupt
along unprecedented lines.

If you were coming in the fall
I would try to be fastidious.
But should winter's buds swell
in an untimely blaze
I must warn you:
my months would unravel
moment by untidy moment.

ACCEPTANCE IN BLUE PENCIL

write me back
that i am the greatest
talent since
the iceburg that ate
the titanic.

send word by a
solid gold pigeon.

announce on the
evening news
interrupt the soap operas:

say those poems are the eggs of
endangered species
say they were the last
wagon train to california.

little lulu just laughed and
laughed, she knew she was a poet
tell me that.
a way to feed the poor in
calcutta
the light at the bottom of
the window shade,

almost *morning*
or almost a full moon,

tell me it was worth it
to have this bulge cut out

at least mention that it might be
remembered

MARDY MURPHY

TWO POEMS BY SKIP EISIMINGER

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: A FOUND POEM

Dear Fred,
I'm returning your story.
It's been ten years since graduation,
but your affection for the ladies hasn't changed;
however, at *Argosaga* we do consider ourselves
a cut above the "tits and terror" rags.
Sure, we're after the blue-collar American male,
and we like his success story,
but your slam-bang porno sensationalism
needs something else to recommend it.
It's entertaining and it passes the time,
but you take us away from the real world.
Study some back issues—
we like adventure with an inside flavor
set against the trouble spots of the world,
tough cops in tight spots,
treasure hunters grappling with angry tribesmen,
and a few involvements with sexy women
thrown in carefully but not too explicitly.
Setting your tale in a crumbling Victorian mansion was clever,
but we prefer exotic vacation spots,
and World War II is as far back as we like to go.
Your hero, despite his performance,
has too many failings;
sure he scores,
but the drug bust leaves him in jail.
Give us the Bigger-Than-Life Personality
sympathetic and triumphant in epic disaster
without the gimmicks.
We're looking for the provocative exposé
and self-help article
done with race-horse movement.

You'll be glad to know
that material not suitable is rejected
the day it's received,
and no rewriting is done in this market,

so the original must be mature
 and professional in first execution.
 It isn't difficult to break into the wonderful world
 of Spartan Publications, Fred
 (the only clique we have around here
 is the cleaning ladies, ha, ha),
 but send us a stamped envelope
 next time out.

Love to the little lady,
 Jake

EPISODE AT RATTLER FALLS

Dropping his wife and children at their church,
 he fled into the cool hills above town
 to wet his mouth and air his folded flesh.
 In his kapok vest proudly pinned with flies,
 he fished the backwater above the falls,
 and after some beer in the sun, he dozed.

The water was white, the sluice full;
 a curling current sipped his line,
 swallowed his float and sucked him towards
 a fanged gap in a fallen pine
 lying across the oily lip.
 Wide-eyed and bent against his pole,
 sliding between the gum-moss walls,
 swilling ballast in every wave,
 he slipped the gap and shot the falls.

Couched in its loft over the pool,
 a rattler rolled a lid to see
 one whose vest the snag had ripped,
 whose chin was red and deeply cleft.

Sunning its scales, its lounging length,
 it eyed a dazzled fisherman
 kneeling in his gleaming boat,
 bobbing in arcs of gold and green,
 borne on the froth of providence.

REVIEWS

Robert Penn Warren. *Or Else—Poem/Poems 1968-1974*. New York: Random House, 1974, 103 pp. \$6.95.

As headnote for *Or Else—Poem/Poems 1968-1974*, Robert Penn Warren has chosen an excerpt from Psalm 78: "He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink, as out of the great depths." The poetry itself here seems like clear water, welling up out of reflections of and on a lifetime. A central theme is the nature of Time, in relation to the way life should be lived, if one is to arrive at the "place where all is real."

This problem of Time, which grows more acute with aging, is introduced in the first of the twenty-five "chapters" which with eight interjections constitute the book. Initially, Time appears as a mirror wherein man can view himself, but the second lyric denies its fidelity, calling it "only a mirror in the fun-house." The long single poem starts with the beginning of man's history as the Bible gives it, with Eve ("the first vagina"). It quickly moves to Warren's own "Natural History," picturing his parents in surrealist vignettes: the "naked old father" a Lear out in the tempest, the mother an Alice in Wonderland character. Now that he is dead, the father at last understands; in contrasting sunshine, the mother counts "golden memories of love." The fact that the father finally understands has caused clocks all over the continent to stop.

In "Time as Hypnosis" an abstraction replaces the mirror as metaphor for Time. The Kentucky of Warren's childhood as it looked after a snowstorm is evoked, an explosion of white light. One significance of the title *Or Else*—emerges, multiple possibilities: the snow may mean (a) a change in the world's name and maybe the speaker's, (b) that its work is only what the speaker is dreaming, (c) that the speaker is a dream the snow is having. World-self-dream are perhaps three faces of the same thing. By day, the snow was a glittering metaphor without a referent, but then having no single referent is what makes an image a symbol rather than a metaphor. By night, it is an intelligent being that dreams a narrative wherein the Kentucky boy is a character. Time, like hypnosis, liberates the consciousness; thus they stand equal to each other.

Knowledge for Warren in "Blow, West Wind" (one of his finest) is remembering, the only mode of existence for past events. The Wyoming kestrel no longer hangs in the red sky, nor does the handful of bright drops still drip from the boy's hand; the father's dead mouth has fallen to dust. Though a western wind still shakes the cedar, the three epiphanies are lost (the evidence), and yet the knowledge they generated survives.

Things cannot be known unless they are detached from the cosmos, like the fragment of crushed rock in "Caveat," which the poet urges a Sunday observer to concentrate on, till it shriek out its being. As he does so, he will be hypnotized, lose time and will, penetrate (at his peril) into the mystery the world is. Why, if Time is hypnosis, we lose it upon being hypnotized is left an unresolved paradox.

The fifth "chapter" renews in a vision a childhood Christmas. In the same sentence, Warren affirms that "There is no Time" and "Do not touch/ That silken and yellow perfection of Time that/ Dust is. . . ." The father's eyeless face, nostril-

flanges "gone tattered in Time," stares at what is no longer there. The rotting fabric of the mother's dress falls away from "the Time-sharpened angle of knees," scarcely concealing the skeleton within. Fresh holly trims the Christmas packages under the very dead cedar tree near the dead hearth. The vision vanishes, leaving the poet in Times Square, in a sunset "yellow as acid"; though it is late summer, the speaker stands in Manhattan and thinks of snow in Montana. The ninth part points up the sense of the whole reverie:

All items listed above belong in the world
 In which all things are continuous,
 And are parts of the original dream which
 I am now trying to discover the logic of. This
 Is the process whereby pain of the past in its pastness
 May be converted into the future tense

Of joy.

This conversion, necessary for the achievement of delight, is possibly the chief labor of life.

The third interjection, "I Know a Place Where All Is Real," recalls in its capitalized abstractions W. H. Auden, for whom mountains are often symbolic, as they are here. In these high altitudes of *interieur* landscape, the fortunate travelers who qualify for citizenship can remain in the real, though some try to return, dying in the attempt. This poem is followed by a ballad (?), set in Kentucky. Time's new identity in the ugly anecdote of race hatred is "that howling orthodoxy of darkness that, like speed-hurled rain on/ glass, streams past us." Violence, as in this account of a lynching, has always been a preoccupation with Robert Penn Warren, perhaps because Time is.

In "Chain Saw at Dawn in Vermont in Time of Drouth," the long meditation on Time continues in "the present/ Murders the past. . . ." The snarl of the buzz-saw serves as metaphor for the present. The speaker wakes out of a dream that is really the past, though at the same time it is the self. The fifth interjection, ahead, will also parallel self (ego), the past, Time, History. Here in "Chain Saw," as in most of these poems, the sun is evil: "The heel of the sun's foot smites horribly the hill." Everything swims in the "dazzle of no-Time" in this lyric as well as in the next, "Small White House," given over to a scene as impersonal as Eliot's in "La Figlia Che Piange."

In the fourth interjection, History has a "benign logic," even though the Vietnam war seems to deny it this. But there is nothing benign about "Forever O'Clock," which returns the poet to the scorching day when he drove a 1931 Studebaker down a dirt road past a naked black child playing with red dust in a desolate farmyard: "I watch a car that I know I am the man driving as it recedes into/ distance and approaches the horizon." Not only the beautiful endures.

"Rattlesnake Country" reintroduces Time, personified, "sadly seeking to know its own nature by following the shadow on a sun-dial." After the details about the half-breed Laughing Boy, ordered to kill the snakes, Warren says: "What was *is* is now *was*. But/ *Is was* but a word for wisdom, its price?" Out of that long-lost summer, some things can be brought back by memory, but some cannot:

REVIEWS

69

I can't remember the names of the others who came there,
The casual weekend-ers. But remember

What I remember, but do not
Know what it all means, unless the meaning inheres in
The compulsion to try to convert what now is *was*
Back into what was *is*.

The poems in the middle of the book, about Dreiser and Flaubert, seem to be less closely connected to the central theme than the rest, but each brings out a writer's discovery of the worth of creation, all evidence to the contrary.

In the first half of "The True Nature of Time" the poet arrives by Channel boat, seacliffs swinging in the blue wind, to be met by his beloved and taken to a quiet place of yellow roses near the sea. This "moment" remains unaltered in an enclave of dream:

Out of the silence, the saying. Into
The silence, the said. Thus
Silence, in Timelessness, gives forth
Time, and receives it again . . .

"Vision under the October Mountain: A Love Poem" continues this musing on his deep attachment to someone with whom he shares "a gold mountain/ in gold/air floating."

In the *New Haven Register* for October 21, 1974, a week before *Or Else*—was published, Warren is reported as saying that his creative process is usually triggered by an experience which prompts him to ask: "What does this mean?" The sixteenth "chapter" derives from a news photo of a Southerner acquitted of murdering a minister active in civil rights. To discover what the trial's end means, he has to go back in fantasy to the Civil War and to Robert E. Lee, who doffs his hat and smiles congratulations. The interweaving of past and present, fact and fiction, as in *Brother to Dragons*, uses the same image of eyelessness as in "Natural History." The method of simultaneity pushes further the inquiry unifying the book.

One of the oldest poems in the collection is "Composition in Gold and Red-Gold," a companion-piece to "Time as Hypnosis" in its focus on bloodthirsty Nature, here shown as a cat kills a chipmunk. It was all so perfect, the smaller animal wriggling its black nose "In the still center of the world of light," and then suddenly, a spoiled Eden, and a child-Eve weeping for the universal doom.

"There's a Grandfather's Clock in the Hall" offers six incidents become eternal through the transmutation of *was* to *is*. The most poignant is that dealing with Warren's last conversation with his mother as she lay on her death-bed. He moves on to memories associated with his father in the wonderful tribute "Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling": in a scene which now happens only in his mind's eye, the father tears up a book the son has been reading, tearing across Time and the world as he does so.

Who, over fifty, does not ask himself "Where/ Have the years gone?" ("Sunset Walk in Thaw-Time in Vermont"). But they have left much. In "Birth of Love," modeled on *La Nascita* by Botticelli, a familiar Venus rising out of the water after

a late-season swim lifts her face "toward the high sky," waking in the man a no-Time joy:

This moment is non-sequential and absolute, and admits
Of no definition, for it
Subsumes all other and sequential moments, by which
Definition might be possible.

The final poem, "A Problem in Spatial Composition," pits knowledge (the gray mountain) against the truth of perception (the blue mountain, as New England heights at twilight appear). That permanent is toward which the book has been advancing is expressed here as "*beyond is forever*." The only "actor" in the composition is the hawk, entering it at left, gliding down to break speed, hover and perch on the great blasted tree jabbing into the saffron sky. Then: "The hawk, in an eyeblink, is gone," and *Or Else—Poem/Poems 1968-1974* is over. Yet this hawk, like the kestrel in "Blow, West Wind," hangs forever in that sky under the skull of the artist, who knows that somehow *is* and *was* are one. "All I can do is offer my testimony" ("Rattlesnake Country"). It is enough.

SISTER BERNETTA QUINN, O.S.F.
Norfolk State College

William Kerrigan. *The Prophetic Milton*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974, 285 pp. \$12.50.

Since World War II, unorthodox criticism of John Milton's work has been interestingly chance-taking, whereas "orthodox" criticism has tended to hew to a well-fixed line of praise-giving. Most informed readers have found Douglas Bush, for instance, a great deal sounder than William Empson, but Empson much more diverting than Bush. In the last few years, however, several books have appeared which, though perfectly orthodox in their steadfast admiration of Milton, have yet been quite chance-taking in their general descriptions and interpretations of Milton's poetry and myth. Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin* is one of the earliest; a later one is Michael Lieb's *The Dialectic of Creation*. Kerrigan's *The Prophetic Milton* is of their company.

Like many an orthodox Miltonist before him, Kerrigan starts with a long and learned survey of the background relevant to his particular enterprise. Jews, Greeks, Romans, fathers of the church, scholastics, humanists, and Protestant controversialists all had something to say about prophecy: why the divine found voice in the human, whether the human instrument was wholly controlled or contributed something on its own, to what extent artistic finish was intrinsic to literary prophecy, how the pagan prophetic mood related to the Christian, and much else. With this material Kerrigan seems at home, and his sketch of it, though sometimes confusingly written, is informative and entirely in the vein of established Milton scholarship.

When, however, Kerrigan gets most of the way through his chapters on "Prophets and Poets" and on "Prophets and Protestants" and begins to consider Milton as Protestant prophet-poet, we find him taking a very bold line. What he has to say with waxing fervor and frankness is that Milton held himself to be divinely inspired in a perfectly literal sense and that he was indeed so, or must be taken to have been so. Kerrigan says that in reading Milton he assumes that he himself "does in fact believe in prophetic inspiration."

REVIEWS

71

Milton was not modest about his inspiration. He thought that heaven gave him his material direct, and he thought that he was worthy to receive it so. If we do assume with Kerrigan that Milton was genuinely prophetic, we necessarily find the poems very imposing indeed. Kerrigan's book has no room for questions such as John Peter and others raise about failures of taste or expression. Kerrigan seems to find nothing but literary success exalted by success in prophecy. What he gives us, then, is such account of the work as will display its prophetic quality. He tries to demonstrate how Milton did successfully solicit, receive, and voice divine illumination. The job is a big one, and he goes at it with a massive, sometimes ecstatic, and often repetitive effort. I would say that he succeeds in showing (to nobody's surprise) that Milton thought of his major verse as in some way prophetic. That it was in fact prophetic and so need not abide question is less evident.

Milton had problems with his prophecy. One, for instance, was to avoid presumption. He must have known of many enthusiast prophets of his time who were very demanding with the Holy Spirit and recklessly confident of its responses. The invocations of *Paradise Lost*, says Kerrigan, are themselves "dangerously ambitious in any context, contemporary or historical," for they "represent a kind of serious play with the many names of God." In the mighty first invocation Milton is asking to receive not only the sort of inspiration that powered Moses but also the sort that distinguished Christ as the second and greater Moses. Temerity indeed!

In describing the hardihood of Milton's invocations Kerrigan is on defensible ground. When he passes on, page after wandering page, to describe how Milton received and used the power he sought, the statement on *Paradise Lost* grows confused and the case thin. Unless, of course, we suppose that the task of following Milton's semi-divine strategies of prophecy is not one for rational discourse, and that Kerrigan has a convincing intuitional way to perform it. I will not try to trace here his discontinuities. But I will confess that they themselves sometimes seem almost inspired in their flashing associations and interpretations.

Plainly if Milton had problems with his status as prophet, so does Kerrigan. Hobbes, Kerrigan says, asked how a prophet establishes his authority. Meditating the problem, Kerrigan does not find any positive way to establish Milton's authority. How can the matter of *Paradise Lost* be both of Milton's choice and dictated? "The poet himself indicates that part of the epic is dictated and part of the epic inspired. . . . Milton is both author and amanuensis. He has both everything to do and nothing to do with *Paradise Lost*." Such paradoxes take a lot of elucidation, but Milton, according to Kerrigan, gives the reader leads never before adequately traced. Certainly they have not been so diligently traced.

Paradise Lost does not figure as largely in the book as *Samson Agonistes* does. Kerrigan finds *Samson* of special interest because, he says, as a dramatic work it is free of authorial pronouncements and ought not to lend itself well to assessment of its prophetic theme. But, acutely viewed, it does in fact do so. Though the keys to the reader are obscure, the force of prophecy is there, nevertheless, and contributes heavily to a special cathartic effect.

Kerrigan's chief effort with *Samson* is to make clear the peculiar nature of time in it. Samson's clock day begins with the morning and ends at noon; but as prophetic, the day's events are wholly meridional. Psychological differences between what Kerrigan calls a "tick-tock" sequence in the drama and less logically ordered passages are not, since Bergson, too taxing a notion for us. But a metaphysical oneness of time and timelessness is still hard to conceive, especially if the reality lies in a

prophetic intimation that a divine unchangingness defeats the plain dramatic sequence. Milton manages in part by the use of long narrations in the mouths of characters who do not themselves understand but enable us to. We grasp, for instance, that Samson's "heroic past is metaphorically another noon" that brings associations with the "tradition of the *daemonum meridionum*, a time of danger and prideful indulgence . . . and also a time of ripeness and maturity, a season for the fulfillment of supposedly destined actions."

Through the maze of such suggestive connections, disconnections, and re-connections Kerrigan works his way with some success. He occasionally offends an elderly reviewer with such strokes as a gratuitous assumption of anal imagery in the prophecy-laden birth of Samson and in the "windy purgation" of his re-birth. But Kerrigan writes with spirit and sometimes with appropriate pace, though repetition and other pains of an almost impossible expository theme sometimes delay him tediously. In detail his expression is as unambiguous as care can make it except for an occasional slip: Milton "feared nothing less than the death of true poetry" when the meaning would seem to be that he greatly feared such a death.

This is a very rich book, though perhaps not all of its wealth will prove negotiable.

ROBERT H. WEST
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Panthea Reid Broughton. *William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974, 222 pp. \$7.95.

William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual is good scholarship. More important, it is a good reading of the Faulkner canon with particular emphasis on *Go Down, Moses*, *A Fable*, *Requiem for a Nun*, *The Reivers*, and to a lesser extent *The Wild Palms*, those novels so often overlooked. As we absorb more and more of Faulkner's intention, we may find that these later books are more central to his philosophy than the remarkable first fiction.

Professor Broughton's study, however, is not simply a reading of the later novels. Broughton attempts to place Faulkner within the modernist milieu, but also to point out those differences in his critical attitudes, and practices, that made him more akin to Tolstoi than to Hemingway. Her first chapter, titled "Milieu," describes the disillusion with abstract thinking that followed World War I. She notes the aesthetic turn to the concrete, championed earlier by T. E. Hulme and the Imagist poets, and practiced most noticeably, in prose, by Hemingway. She then correctly places Faulkner outside that compelling tendency to "'Go in fear of abstractions,'" as Ezra Pound had phrased the dictum.

Although Broughton eventually discusses Henri Bergson's important influence on Faulkner's concepts of time, comedy and tragedy, and motion, her opening chapter is less impressive than the remainder of the book warrants. Fixing all blame for the modernist antipathy toward abstractions on WW I does little justice to the torrent of aesthetic and philosophical principles that broke with this century. It was probably William James's radical empiricism that emphasized the concrete, experience rather than abstraction, long before Hemingway's bitter passage in *A Farewell to Arms*. It was a groping William Faulkner, as Blotner's biography shows so clearly, who revered innovation, especially that of Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and O'Neill, but who also was from the beginning disinclined to sacrifice literal meaning for pure

innovation. In his own skepticism about the Imagist free-form poem, for example, Faulkner was reinforced by the opinions expressed in *The Double Dealer*, the New Orleans literary magazine he read and also wrote for.

Broughton depicts Faulkner—accurately, I think—as a writer who is convinced that his art has a humanistic purpose, “that art has ontological significance; its function is apocalyptic.” To clarify his themes and attitudes, Faulkner employs abstractions frequently and without the embarrassment that sometimes afflicts the modern writer who has been told repeatedly to show things rather than tell about them. Beyond this relatively simple technical difference, Broughton finds that because Faulkner does wrestle with the notion of abstractions, his understanding of life and people is more complex. As she describes one such example of Faulkner’s wide perception:

. . . the elusiveness of truth is a major theme in his novels, not in theirs [Cummings’ and Hemingway’s]. To them truth is abundantly obvious to anyone who opens his eyes. Faulkner, however, is almost painfully aware of how inaccurate is vision, how subjective is experience, how distorted is perspective, how naive is the myth of the innocent eye. Consequently, he does not allow even his most astute narrators to grasp all of the truth around them. Their fragmented understandings must be synthesized finally in the mind of the reader. (34-35)

Once her basic premises have been presented, Broughton then begins the kind of discussion that enhances the book, a random excerpting of appropriate theme and situation from all Faulkner’s novels. Whatever her point, she finds illustrations from the fiction to substantiate the idea and, by so doing, provides an interesting and well-informed coalescence of the entire canon. Here we see Ike McCaslin as the mid-point character he is: a man not committed enough to love, not selfish enough to withdraw, not strong enough to choose. The places in Faulkner’s heaven are reserved, finally, for those characters strong enough to choose for themselves on a fluid, non-codified basis. As Broughton explains, “There are characters in Faulkner’s fiction who do say no to the dictates of a code, who do choose themselves in Kierkegaard’s sense. The runner in *A Fable* who relinquishes his military rank does. Everbe does. Chick Mallison does.” Man *can* make these choices primarily because he is a verbalizing, abstracting animal. In fact, Faulkner finds only in “the vital abstraction” the means to any hope of man’s eventual transcendence.

To reinforce her discussion, Broughton relies heavily on Bergson, Whitehead, Langer, and other modern philosophers, but her use of formal philosophy is more than justified because her point is that Faulkner too was, at his best, a writer intimately concerned with the essence of philosophy—understanding man’s hopes and beliefs, making sense of them, learning from them. Or, as Grandfather Priest tells Lucius at the close of *The Reivers*,

Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It’s too valuable.

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Lewis P. Simpson. *The Man of Letters in New England and the South: Essays on the History of the Literary Vocation in America*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973, 255 pp. \$10.00.

In the concluding essay of this volume Lewis P. Simpson quotes a sentence from Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* about the importance of letters to civilization. Gibbon writes: "The Germans, in the age of Tacitus, were unacquainted with the use of letters; and the use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages incapable of knowledge or reflection." It is the practice of letters by various writers in this country, mainly in New England and the South, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which forms the single most important unifying theme for this collection. It is the concept, shared by many of these writers, of a Republic of Letters which might provide a type of unity and order for the chaos of modernity that many readers will find most stimulating and provocative.

Just as much of New England literature of the nineteenth century was nurtured by the theology of the region, the New England man of letters was often to be found among the clergy. The ministry offered the promise of a rewarding career combined with the opportunity to read and to write. The brief but brilliant career of Joseph Stevens Buckminster, who died at the age of twenty-eight, reveals how gracefully the clergyman and the man of letters could be one and the same person. Graduate of Harvard and minister of the wealthy and liberal Brattle Street Church in Boston, Buckminster preached the funeral of William Emerson, Ralph Waldo's father, and spoke of the elder Emerson's attachment to the literary responsibility of the clergyman as one of the fundamental services he had performed.

In 1809 the principal address at the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa celebration was delivered by Buckminster, whose topic was "On the Dangers and Duties of Men of Letters." Beginning with the problem of the future of letters in a new nation, the author comes to the conclusion that Cicero, the Roman pagan, best illustrates the character of the man of letters in all his virtue. It was only late in his address that Buckminster got around to the relationship between letters and Protestant Christianity. This lecture, so Simpson believes, is the most important statement about the literary vocation in New England before Ralph Waldo Emerson's better known Phi Beta Kappa address in 1837.

One of the most significant services performed by Buckminster for New England letters was his advice about buying books for the newly established Boston Athenaeum. At the time of his death in 1812 he was preparing the lectures which he planned to deliver when he entered upon the duties of the Samuel Dexter Lectureship in Biblical Criticism at Harvard to which he had just been appointed.

Following this introductory essay on Buckminster, Simpson completes his discussion of the New England man of letters with treatments of the Tudor brothers—Frederic who sold Boston ice and William who practiced Boston letters the early thought of Emerson, and the treason of William Dean Howells. Students of the development of Emerson's philosophy will find in Simpson's essay a very helpful and lucid exposition of the crisis in his thought by which Emerson came to recognize that Western man had suffered the loss of wonder in the world and that doubt was now the way to knowledge.

To imply that William Dean Howells was ever capable of treason is to command immediately the attention of the reader. What Simpson has done in this essay on Howells, which may be the most stimulating one in the New England

REVIEWS

75

section of his book, is to document, by reference to the author's later works and events in his life during the last years, the belief which Howells seemed to have, so Simpson thinks, that in the midst of literary success and power he had betrayed the ideal of literary life in America. This sense of betrayal centered in Howells' relation to New England, and the exposition and interpretation of this relationship form a fascinating commentary on Howells' ideas about the meaning of the vocation of an American man of letters.

In the South, contrary to the experience of nineteenth-century New England, the man of letters was seldom if ever found among the clergy. He might be a planter or a lawyer—and sometimes both. But more likely he was a journalist or more particularly a magazinist. Certainly Edgar Allan Poe and Mark Twain—the only two Southern men of letters of the nineteenth century to appear in this volume—arrived at their status in the Republic of Letters, like William Dean Howells, by way of the newspaper or magazine office and the printing shop.

The essay on Poe is concerned with his efforts to found the ideal magazine and his belief, or hope, that such a magazine would give literary order to American letters. Neither the magazine nor the literary center which Poe hoped might bring order out of the chaos of American literature ever materialized.

Simpson's commentary on Twain has been inspired by his reading of Maxwell Geismar's *Mark Twain: An American Prophet*, published in 1970. It is Geismar's unorthodox insistence that Twain's later work and his last years represent a firm belief in the possibility of the regeneration of man, an American literary theme certainly from the time of Crèvecoeur's *Letters from An American Farmer*, which elicits Simpson's most provocative comments.

The last four essays in the Southern section of this volume are about the profession of letters in the twentieth-century South. The first one on "William Faulkner and the Fall of New World Man" is a perceptive addition to the innumerable commentaries which we now have by Faulknerian scholars. In the South, slavery and technology prevented the emergence of the new man in the New World, and it is this Second Fall, following the first in the Garden of Eden, and its portrayal in Faulkner's fiction that give his writing the redemptive power of great art.

In discussing all Southern writing and especially that of what we have come to call the Southern Renaissance, Simpson says: "The Southern writer has tended to be a kind of priest and prophet of a metaphysical nation, compelled in his literary construction of human existence in the South—whether he is historian, philosopher, critic, poet, or novelist—toward representing it as a quest for a revelation of man's moral community in history. The revelation may be ironic, tragic, humorous; it may be all three at once, but it is salvational. The quest for it is an underlying motive in the major imaginative works of the brilliant Renaissance in Southern letters during the past forty years, a flowering that can hardly be said to have ended yet."

Both in New England and the South, the man of letters searched for an order and an authority which an industrial and scientific society prevented him from achieving. But the ideal was worthy of being sought, and this volume speaks eloquently of both the glory and the failure of American literature.

On page 239 the author of the ante-bellum Southern poem "The Hireling and the Slave" is incorrectly listed as David J. Grayson. The first name should be William.

CLAUD B. GREEN
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Howard Nemerov. *Gnomes & Occasions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 79 pp. \$1.95.

Though Howard Nemerov has been Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and winner of both the Blumenthal Prize from *Poetry* and the Theodore Roethke Memorial Award, he occupies a largely unmolested plot in the anthologies. Nonetheless, Nemerov's ninth book of poetry, *Gnomes & Occasions*, deserves attention.

Our attention is rewarded by "September, the First Day of School," surely one of Nemerov's best poems. "My child and I hold hands on the way to school . . ."; both let go reluctantly before the school door. The child must endure alone learning "the alphabet, the integers,/ Three dozen bits and pieces of a stuff/ So arbitrary, so peremptory,/ That worlds invisible and visible/ Bow down before it."

At the heart of this poem is the basic problem confronting every parent: how to give one's charge what he needs without making him overdependent; secure enough to want to leave, not forced to leave for his own good; sure enough to look forward to leaving, yet not afraid to regret it. The parent knows "The shrunken lives that have not been set free/ By law or by poetic phantasy." He also knows the "grinding" that children must endure, and all he can hope is: "may great kindness come of it in the end."

There are other fine poems here, many others, and most of these are satirical. Nemerov, in fact, may be our best living satirical poet. He wields his blade with wit that is never broad or coarse, though "Power to the People" may be an exception: "Why are the stamps adorned with kings and presidents?/ That we may lick their hinder parts and thump their heads." More often Nemerov is a master acupuncturist flicking at his subject with deft strokes which leave the subject intact but subtly altered: "The fisherman on Lake Michigan sometimes,/ For kicks, they spit two hunks of bait on hooks/ At either end of a single length of line/ And toss that up among the scavenging gulls. . . ." One need not read any further to imagine what happens when two gulls hit the bait simultaneously. Nemerov skewers his subject with the pinpoint phrase "for kicks." Without the phrase, the stanza is mere exposition; with it, the whole scene is altered.

Nemerov's satirical prowess is clearly evident in the following Juvenalian epigrams: "How many more this morning are dead of/ The peace I came to bring a sword instead of?" ("Morning Sun") and "This world's just mad enough to have been made/ By the Being his beings into Being prayed" ("Creation Myth on a Moebius Band"). The blunders of a blind President and an irresponsible God only head the list of Nemerov's satirical subjects. Those such as the Lake Michigan fishermen who abuse the gifts of nature receive some of the poet's strongest criticism. Those who abuse the gifts of language bring out the best in Nemerov: his devastating wit and allusive humor. "Even before his book came out/ We knew there wasn't any doubt/ That these was poems forevermore,/ Such as the guy wrote the slogan for:/ They wuz not mean, they wuz—/ Big pear-shaped poems, ready to parse/ In the next Creative Writing Class.// Yeh, he sure fell flat on his ars/ Poetica that time, palpable and mute/ As an old globed fruit." Certainly, only a few of Nemerov's own poems are of the "forevermore" variety. His satirical subjects are often topical, and his language sometimes preaches; more often it's too literal and unmusical. Occasionally his subjects don't matter (as when he tries to give metaphysical significance to a lawn sprinkler) or don't work (as, when eulogizing two poker players in "Myth and Ritual," he refers to the host of the game as

REVIEWS

77

a "sleepy priest"). At his worst, Nemerov is guilty of using philosophical jargon ("teleological rockets") dressed up as verse. Philosophical terms like Will, Mind, and Necessity, which have a questionable place in the poet's lexicon, loom with Teutonic authority. Unfortunately, they are hollow terms. On the other hand, a weak poem like "Above" is often redeemed by a hard-edged, sharp-focused image: a swarm of bothersome insects is sharply rendered as "a smoke of gnats." (Try substituting "cloud" for "smoke," and you'll see the accuracy of his diction.)

At his best, Nemerov is either a satirist working with scientific precision or a scientist recording his experience with a poet's felicity. A prism in Nemerov's hands becomes "an unassuming virtuoso," and the migration of the monarch butterfly is an example of Brownian movement. Listening to a recording of Casals playing Bach, Nemerov moves in to scrutinize the grooves of the record, and then spins out for a cosmic overview of Art and Time.

Nemerov's ability to bridge science and art is his chief appeal and virtue. In our utilitarian age, when engineers demand that the humanities be technical writing courses and humanists curtsy to save their jobs, Nemerov is a poet-naturalist who must be read.

SKIP EISIMINGER

Clemson University

Robert B. Heilman. *The Ghost on the Ramparts and Other Essays in the Humanities*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1973, 179 pp. \$9.00.

In *Hamlet* the tragic hero's perception of his situation is significantly elevated when he discovers, rather late in the play, that he can be—indeed, is ordained to be—both "scourge and minister" to the ills of the kingdom he seems destined to inherit. In his *The Ghost on the Ramparts and Other Essays in the Humanities* (the title alluding to the nocturnal visitations of Hamlet's father to Elsinore's battlements), Robert B. Heilman achieves a similar reconciliation of functions usually held to be opposites. As a distinguished teacher and former chairman of the English Department at the University of Washington, Professor Heilman naturally holds a firm belief in the worth of the humanities, but he finds that most problems besetting his academic area have arisen from within: not chiefly from unsympathetic outsiders' attacks, scientists' antagonisms, or the general public's indifference but largely out of the vanity, elitism, self-indulgent specialization, and fashion-mongering of many who believe themselves the repositories of humanistic values.

Of the fourteen essays contained in this volume, only one, "Verbal Traffic and Moral Freight," appears in print for the first time, the others being drawn from such journals as *College English*, *Sewanee Review*, *Texas Quarterly*, and *Western Humanities Review*. Some were written in the 1950s, but half are from the last decade. Despite their diverse origins (some having originated as invited addresses), the essays are drawn together by recurrent preoccupations, as Professor Heilman promises in his Preface, and by a generally traditional outlook, though not a fossilized clinging to dead attitudes and forms. Having been concerned in other recent books (*Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience*, 1968, and *The Iceman, the Arsonist, and the Troubled Agent: Tragedy and Melodrama on the Modern Stage*, 1973) with the oversimplified oppositions characteristic of melodrama, he shows that the same "good guys-bad guys" divisions create distortions of reality in the humanities. He finds similar corrupting effects in the persistence of clichés and unscrutinized words.

In a time when the humanities are much undervalued outside academe and bloated with self-serving elitism within, Professor Heilman will not allow the usual villains. Science he perceives to be the humanities' natural ally (both having complementary functions and the shared ultimate aim of discovering truth), while "humanisticism," a debased factionalism which pretended humanists have created out of self-interested motives, is as great a danger as "scientism," the equivalent distorting of the sciences by those who would derive unwarranted profits from them. In Professor Heilman's view even schools of Education are unsatisfactory as villains in academic melodrama: "The truth is that Educators do not have bad ideas; indeed they do not really *have* ideas at all. They are a channel for ideas of ours, often hidden ideas, which they carry into the flexible scholastic forms. We must see that they are no more than the agents of a view of life to which our culture is deeply committed and that we cannot wipe out the agents without cleaning up the view of life. We believe in the preeminence of technique or what we fondly call 'know-how' . . . , and we can hardly be surprised if education falls into the hands of entrepreneurs who claim to have cornered the market of educational techniques." If schools of Education have lured promising students from the humanities and raided traditionally sacrosanct teaching territory, humanities professors have unwittingly allowed these losses through complacency, smugness, the pursuit of whim and intellectual novelty, the turning of lecterns into altars for the worship of personality, and the continuing evasion of responsibility through pursuing villains in the oversimplifications of melodrama.

Professor Heilman's solutions—work and honest self-examination, including scrutiny of one's words and the motives behind them—have a familiar ring, but he is a persuasive advocate of duty, obligation to others, and common sense in academic matters. His convincing presentation of his view is abetted by a strong though rather academic wit which relies heavily on puns and wry allusions. Though he writes in and of a contentious time, he remains civilized and coolly reflective, patiently probing beneath the surface of each argument to discover the source of contention and to mark out common ground which true or apparent antagonists might share.

Much of the pleasure to be derived from Professor Heilman's book lies not in its ideas alone but in his method of developing them: reaching out to a variety of literary reference points, aligning them, repeatedly providing a new perspective. If he occasionally inclines toward an obvious conclusion, he more often leads into the statement which ought to be more obvious than it is, the kind of observation likely to produce an "I should have seen that for myself" response in the reader. On the other hand, Professor Heilman occasionally pays the price of timeliness (in that word's narrow journalistic sense), as in what now seems, two years after the book's completion, an unduly alarmed preoccupation with the already-discarded fashion for "relevance." His exposure of "relevance's" non-relevance has the effect of attacking an angel food cake with a baseball bat in an attempt merely to slice and serve it. Yet even this untimely timeliness ironically lends support to one of the book's recurrent ideas: that the humanities have a largely permanent and thus continually relevant body of material to offer. Teachers in the humanities who sacrifice this core to fashion or to boredom do so at considerable risk.

Though teachers, administrators, and others interested in the humanities will find this salutary book worth reading cover-to-cover, habitual or compulsive samplers and those who especially admire accomplished writing will particularly enjoy three

items: the title essay, in which Professor Heilman amusingly assumes the character of Hamlet Senior and advises new English chairmen on the difficulties and pleasures of departmental administration; "Except He Come to Composition," in which the author draws a useful distinction between the kind of written effusion which he labels "ejaculation" and the genuine kind of composition which is, according to the basic meaning of its name, a reconciliation of opposites; and the final essay, "Humanistic Education as Comedy," taking as its point of departure Anthony Burgess's perception of comedy as "acceptance of the world [and] of the fundamental disparateness of all the elements of the world." The second of these should be required reading for all who teach writing courses. Each of the book's essays makes its worthy contribution to the whole, though, and the University of Georgia Press has performed a useful service in bringing the collection together.

RAY BARFIELD
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Marion Montgomery. *Fugitive*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974, 375 pp. \$8.95.

To oversimplify a complex book, let us say that Marion Montgomery's *Fugitive* is about a well-educated city-dweller, Walt Mason, who writes country songs under a pseudonym and who decides to remove himself to Weaverton, the small Georgia town of his ancestors. Mason intends to put behind him all the urban intellectual and spiritual vices that pervert the good country stock which is America (and Georgia) at its best. He builds a home, buys breeding cattle (a \$15,000 bull who won't perform and who is later barbecued for \$2.00 a plate, the volunteer fire department eating free), marries, and becomes mayor. Mason is most directly influenced by two characters: Harry Springer, his agent in Nashville, and Hugh Akers, a Weaverton man who is sensitive, quiet, and accomplished in the masculine graces of rural Georgia—i. e., handywork, hunting, farming, storytelling, etc.

The book's message is ostensibly developed by C. M. Haggard, the town historian, caught up in his own intellectual pretensions, admiring Mason's urban sophistication, but cautious for his own place in small town circles (he doesn't want to appear too educated; only late in the novel does he reveal, as does Hugh Akers, his aspirations to "serious" literary activity). The message is told obliquely in that Haggard's language is continually infiltrated by that of Mason, whose wistfulness about the past, his standing just shy of condescension about Weaverton's folk, informs in Jamesian manner the voice of the narrator. The purpose of this mode may be to suggest that the town (represented by Haggard) is no less affected by the coming of Walt Mason (or his return, as he is of the native Mason family) than Walt is affected by his wholly committed, if not wholly achieved, settling into the rural place so different from his cities or from the world of his literarily (and cynically) wrought Nashville songs.

The novel is admirably complex. However, although we may adjust to and enjoy a complex, puzzling narrator or plot, we might not acquiesce in Haggard's or Mason's or Montgomery's overt philosophizing that falls between us and the life of the novel.

In part, a novelist's function is to make his reader the kind of friend who need not be lectured to or reasoned with about unnameable feelings, but *Fugitive* seems not to trust the reader enough to come to its terms. It tries to fill everything in, so

there is much *talk* about how the *unsaid* (the unfilled "cracks and crannies") is what really matters. To be blunt, *Fugitive* is a book which will please readers already possessed of its Agrarian views but which holds little promise of winning uncommitted souls. The philosophizing is a bit too studied, and the significant concepts—the presence of the *then* in the *now*, and the primacy of the emotional over the rational—might have been better served by fewer words or, preferably, by being left to the implications of Montgomery's best scenes and characters.

At his best, as in the scenes of the fire department's practice run, the fairground hustlers and the children, and the walking times of Hugh and Walt, Montgomery makes dialogue come alive and description turn natural. And, after all, it could be that the abstract philosophizing of the early pages tells us where Mason comes from, while the metaphysics at the end tells us that his concrete experiences in Weaverton are the new ground of language and ideas yet to be delved.

ROBERT W. HILL
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Philip Henderson. *Swinburne, Portrait of a Poet*. New York: Macmillan, 1974, 305 pp. \$10.95.

Swinburne, Philip Henderson laments in his biography, is one of the most neglected of British poets. He suffered with Queen Victoria and middle class morality in the general reaction against the Victorian age that took place after the First World War. In recent years, however, there have been signs of recovery. The Queen is seen less as a simple-minded and puritanical matron and more as a complex and aggressive woman; Victorian morality, once thought horribly square and repressive, is being reevaluated as an antidote to the "permissive" generation. As for Swinburne, Henderson argues that the richness of his poetry and the psychological twists of his personality demand a reassessment of his undeserving reputation as a repetitive versifier and antique curiosity.

Henderson's book is the first serious attempt in more than a generation to write a complete biography of Swinburne. It draws a great deal of material from the voluminous correspondence edited and published fifteen years ago by Cecil Lang. It also relies heavily on the scholarly studies of others. Most importantly Henderson accepts the theory, first argued by John Mayfield and Lang and subsequently elaborated by Jean Fuller, that the principal inspiration of Swinburne's poetry was his frustrated love for his cousin, Mary Gordon. Like many young Victorians of the prosperous middle and upper classes whose contracts without outsiders were deliberately circumscribed, Swinburne's early associations and intimacies were with members of his own family. It was not surprising—nor even unnatural since first cousins could marry—that Swinburne should develop a strong, life-long emotional attachment to the only girl that he ever really had the opportunity to know. Mary Gordon, herself a fascinating character, was no typical Victorian miss. Athletic and masculine, she encouraged Swinburne's interest in flagellation and, in reaction to her, his feminine propensities as well.

Henderson, unfortunately, seems transfixed by the audacious and bizarre side of Swinburne. It is Swinburne's lurid curiosity about whippings, his efforts at pornography, his scatological letters, his alcoholic dysentery, and his flirtations with homosexuality that loom largest in this book. Concentration on these peculiarities

has resulted in a distorted portrait. In comparison there is little serious effort to evaluate the development of Swinburne's poetic aesthetic or his political ideas. It is not enough to refer the reader to John Rosenberg for the former and to ignore the latter. If a book is to be a portrait, it should be well balanced.

The problem of dealing with Swinburne is evident in another way. Excluding the first two chapters which deal with Swinburne's childhood and school years, Henderson devotes eight chapters to the next twenty-three years and only two chapters (one-fifth of the entire book) to the last thirty of Swinburne's life. From 1879 when he recovered from a nearly fatal bout of alcoholism and placed himself in the hands of his lawyer, Swinburne settled down to a quiet and uneventful life in Putney. The fact is that for most biographers, including Henderson, Swinburne lived too long. Yet, as Henderson himself acknowledges, these last three decades of domestic solitude were years of great productivity in which Swinburne continued to write poetry and produced some of his best criticism. Perhaps in the final analysis this biography tells us more about the market for literature than it does about Swinburne. Books must be written about the young and flamboyant, not the old and sedate.

JOHN LEBOUGEIS
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Robert Harrison. *GALLIC SALT. Eighteen Fabliaux Translated From The Old French*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, 427 pp. \$15.00.

The Old French fabliau is one of the livelier legacies of the late Middle Ages. The 150 or so fabliaux that survive are filled with peasant coarseness and low humor and fully justify the broad description "*contes à rire en vers*." Although some have whisperings of social satire and others contain didactic, moralizing elements more commonly associated with the exemplum, laughter is the primary *raison d'être* of the fabliau. In *Gallic Salt*, Professor Harrison gives us a representative selection of eighteen fabliaux, expertly translated into the octosyllabic couplet of the originals. Harrison also provides the best available Old French texts in facing-page format, a note on the pronunciation of Old French, and a general introduction to the genre.

In the introduction, Professor Harrison takes up the question of the origin of the fabliau and objectively considers the most prominent arguments, from the orientalist theory of Gaston Paris to that of Edmond Faral, who proposed a link with Latin elegiac comedy. Harrison points out the short-comings of all the hypotheses and concludes, sensibly enough, that the well-spring of the fabliau is simply a common body of folklore that has been with us in oral form for centuries. The introduction also includes a brief historical sketch of the late Middle Ages in France and sections dealing with the various strata of medieval society.

If there is a general philosophy in these tales, it is decidedly antifeminist/anti-clerical. The standard triangle of lecherous priest-faithless wife-cuckolded husband is most prevalent, but there are wide-ranging variations on the theme. In "The Priest from Bailleul," for example, the priest and the wife trick the husband into believing he is dead, then fornicate in his presence.

Women are commonly portrayed as drunken, lustful, and fiendishly clever as well. "The Widow" speaks of the wiles of women, particularly in fulfilling their

insatiable sexual appetites, and concludes that only regular, harsh beatings can keep wives in line. "The Beaten Track" is the ancestor of the grass-doesn't-grow-on-a-playground joke and contains the pious moral, "Pointed gives are valueless"; here a knight gives his lady a rare comeuppance in return for belittling his sexual prowess. "The Snow Drop" contains another rare instance of a man's outwitting a woman. The husband has been away at sea for several years and comes home to find he has a strapping son. When asked how this could be, the wife maintains that she conceived by swallowing a snowdrop. The husband accepts her explanation, bides his time, and when the boy is fifteen, takes him along on a business trip and sells him into slavery. On returning home, he answers his wife's frantic questions with the statement that the snow-child melted on a very hot day.

For obvious reasons, *Gallic Salt* should prove helpful to many scholars. For whatever reason, be it prudery, indifference, or benign neglect, the fabliaux have for a long time remained unavailable to all those except the most ardent specialist. Professor Harrison's excellent and witty translation not only makes a number of these tales available to the general reader but also provides valuable groundwork for scholarly investigations into the fabliau and for comparative studies pertaining to related genres as well.

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The College of Liberal Arts at Clemson University offers majors in English, History, Modern Foreign Languages, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology. Its minors include Music, Philosophy, Spanish-American Studies, and Speech and Drama. In cooperation with other colleges of the University, it offers minors in Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Fine Arts, Geology, Mathematics, and Physics. Its graduate program grants the degree of Master of Arts in English and in History; assistantships are available for qualified applicants in both areas. The College sponsors the publication of *The South Carolina Review* and *The Journal of Political Science*.