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This is the first of two special issues of SCR commemorating the tenth anniversary of its publication. Our spring issue will feature a re-examination of South Carolina's leading resident writer, James Dickey, as poet, novelist, literary critic. Articles on Dickey are invited. Deadline: December 15.

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ROBERT LOWELL 1917-1977

As a young poet Robert Lowell used his rich modernist style and the "mythical method" of Joyce and Eliot to dramatize a confrontation between Puritan past and Boston present. As a Lowell he seemed to have special authority to do this. But his most significant contribution began in his forties with *Life Studies*. His new direct style definitely seemed as well written as good prose and discarded the impersonal persona of modernism for a new, seemingly confessional mode. We know now that Lowell had not only transformed his own style but that of contemporary poetry as well.

No one wrote better poetic epitaphs. Through his poems we knew the deaths of his father, his mother, his cousin, his uncle, his grandparents and those of his peers in poetry, Theodore Roethke, Randall Jarrell, Delmore Schwartz, and John Berryman—those poets, including Lowell himself, once known as "the middle generation of poets." Robert Lowell's epitaph might simply be that the death of the third Lowell poet is an even greater loss to our generation than that of the first two to theirs.

RJC

FICTION AS HISTORY, HISTORY AS FICTION: THE READER AND THOMAS PYNCHON'S *V.*

DONALD J. GREINER

One of the pleasures of reading contemporary fiction is that we often find ourselves involved in the fictive process itself. Not content with the generally passive reader perusing the traditional "well-made" novel, many current authors fracture novelistic conventions to force the reader into an active role. We have to determine plot, character, and theme as best we can, and the resulting confusion is part of the fun. And when the novelist involves his characters in the same dilemma, we can only feel caught between authorial manipulation and character ignorance. Denied the traditional reader comforts of the author's guidance or the protagonist's example, we are left to fend for ourselves. The reading experience becomes part of the novel.

Thomas Pynchon is a master of this kind of fiction because his novels are more than literary games. His enticing the reader into the fictive process results in significant statements about both the nature of the novel and the definition of history, matters which I should like to discuss in this essay while suggesting a reading of his first novel, *V.* (1963). Confused by the author's technique in *V.*, and frustrated by the main character Herbert Stencil's bewilderment, we find ourselves witnesses to violence and delusion in both historical event and novelistic method.

Pynchon poses an interesting question: what if *we* are Herbert Stencil? Stencil's efforts to impose a personal notion of pattern upon the wars, bombings, conspiracies, and genocide of the twentieth century cause the abstraction of his sense of self and the forfeiture of his individuality. With his need to see plot in what may be sheer accident, he does nearly as much violence to himself as the brutal events of this century do to their victims. Born in 1901, the year Queen Victoria died, he grows up as "the century's child." The horrors of his time are enough to startle any sensitive observer, but Stencil refuses to accept the premise that "any cluster of phenomena can be a conspiracy." Determined to track down clues which would prove the reality of a historical plot, he becomes not the cliché of a man in search of identity but rather the quest itself: "The only trouble was that Stencil had all the identities he could cope with conveniently right at the moment: he was quite purely He Who Looks for V."[1]

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[1] Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (New York: Bantam, 1968), pp. 209-210. Further references will be in parentheses.

The joy of reading this massive, funny, exasperatingly complex novel is that we find ourselves playing Stencil's game. Even if we accept history as a fiction, as a creation more bizarre than the zaniest novel, we nevertheless join Stencil in wondering about the possibility of cause and effect between one verifiable massacre and another. For example, does General von Trotha's extermination of Africans in 1904 prefigure Foppl's desire to do the same twenty years later? A young German scientist named Mondaugen ponders the relationship after hearing Foppl's tale in 1922; Stencil is convinced of a connection in 1956; and, finally, the reader at least accepts the possibility as long as he watches Stencil go through his paces. *V.* is such a difficult novel that we must keep track of the foreshadowings, cross-references, and allusions if we hope to withstand the weight of the nearly overwhelming mass of details. To spot possible connections between one vague hint and another is to play the role of Herbert Stencil, a man who attempts to take notes on the entire twentieth century. And yet Pynchon suggests that all is accident, that hallucination may equal truth.

Consider the numerous reminders that everything is fiction. The anonymous narrator tells us, for example, that by the time Benny Profane hears of Father Fairing's descent to the New York sewers to convert rats, the stories may have been apocryphal: "at no point in the twenty or so years the legend has been handed on did it occur to anyone to question the old priest's sanity. It is this way with sewer stories. They just are. Truth or falsity don't apply" (p. 108). Readers who wonder if the same disclaimer applies to *V.* may find support in the following description of Mafia Winsome's novels: "Her novels—three to date—ran a thousand pages each and like sanitary napkins had gathered in an immense and faithful sisterhood of consumers. There'd even evolved somehow a kind of sodality or fan club that sat around, read from her books and discussed her Theory" (pp. 112-113). *V.* is not a thousand pages long, but its profusion of fun and games indeed draws readers together who wish to discuss Pynchon's method. Upon a first reading of *V.*, the reader may echo Evan Godolphin's complaint: "Here we are, in the thick of a grand cabal, and we haven't the slightest notion of what's going on" (p. 177). And finally, hoping to understand this complex novel, the reader may want to join Stencil as he leaves Malta for Stockholm, pursuing "the frayed end of another clue" (p. 425). Faced with these and other statements while trying to solve the puzzles of *V.*, we may be excused for suspecting that we are secondary characters in an involved plot. Truth or falsity does not apply; the reader wonders what is going on; and he is asked to turn the following

page in order to track down the next clue. Part of the joke is on us as we stumble after Stencil, witnessing, as it were, such outrageously funny scenes as alligator hunts in sewers and the religious conversion of rats. Historically verifiable events and created action begin to merge in a way which emphasizes the factitiousness of both history and fiction. The violence seems random and apparently purposeless; the comedy is painful and clearly absurd. In spite of the wealth of accumulated detail, nothing in *V.* can be accepted as "real."

Pursuing the frayed end of the next clue has produced what amounts to a critical industry on Pynchon's novels. I, for one, agree with Edward Mendelson: "Whatever one thinks of the early products of the Pynchon industry, the novels certainly deserve the attention they receive. Pynchon's fiction is engaged in nothing less than an encyclopedic synthesis of the origins and the condition of the modern world: not an especially 'literary' or esoteric synthesis, but one with a breadth of scale and intensity of feeling enjoyed by few writers in any age."[2] The lure of the next clue and the suspicion of being involved in a cabal without knowing what is going on are not as pointless as Pynchon's more negative critics insist.

More will be said later about the complexity of *V.*, but we should note here that even while laughing at our struggle to solve the puzzle, Pynchon offers a choice between connection and randomness. In the words of his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, we and the characters are faced with "another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none." Acceptance of succeeding modes of meaning may induce paranoia; dismissal of all connections may negate purpose. The greatest temptation is to look for relationships among the parts, even to the extreme of creating them. Accepting man's inability to direct the world, Pynchon discusses how the individual reacts to a world which manages him. He creates a sense of the world in extraordinary depth: politics, history, fashion, pop culture, thermodynamics, geography, philosophy, religion, and aesthetics all contribute. A word commonly used to describe Pynchon's fiction is "encyclopedic," something Mendelson has in mind when he comments on the difficulty of analyzing these novels: "The test of criticism is always its adequacy to its subject, not its thematic coherence, and Pynchon is one of the rare subjects who makes that test a more difficult one than many critics care to endure."[3]

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[2] Edward Mendelson, "Rainbow's Corner," London *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 June 1975, p. 666.

[3] Mendelson, p. 666.

Not every critic agrees, even those willing to endure the difficulties. Commenting primarily on *Gravity's Rainbow,* but phrasing his remarks to touch on all of the novels, David Thorburn dissents. He argues that the acclaim conferred upon Pynchon says more about our literary culture than about our fiction, and he refuses to be impressed by encyclopedic novels. "But the claims made upon us by good novels, not to say great ones, surely differ from the claims put to us by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* and we do well to be suspicious of reviewers who think to win our regard for Pynchon's book by offering us elaborate inventories of its literary allusions or by expressing wonderment over its compulsive inclusiveness concerning historical and scientific lore."[4] Thorburn raises a point which bothers many readers: can Pynchon control his art if he is limited by a compulsion to multiply his designs and to vary his plots "long since extended and clarified"? The comic exaggerations, eccentric language, and parallel themes finally do not advance the fiction but merely create repetitions, and the reader's understanding gives way to confusion and to the suspicion that Pynchon cannot check his imaginative vigor.

These are serious charges, carefully considered and calmly stated, but I doubt that Pynchon fails to control his imagination. The point is that Herbert Stencil cannot contain his. One of Pynchon's primary concerns in *V.* is the imagination generating creations which finally ensnare the creator. Stencil fashions plots which do not enlarge his experience but surely enslave his mind. In the end, his fantasies produce only more and more imaginings. Some readers would extend these comments to include the author. They argue that although Pynchon allies himself with Profane, Stencil, and Fausto, characters who hope to avoid the inanimate, his method seems to place him on the side of the Lady V. He manipulates his characters within the demands of his narrative scheme so that verisimilitude is denied. If they are not puppets of coincidence, they are at least victims of the author.

It seems to me that not Pynchon but the reader and the characters are especially susceptible to the extremes of an overly fertile imagination. The weird plots first entrap the characters and then the reader who must commit himself to the maze if he hopes to follow the novel. Do not arguments in favor of multi-dimensional characters, and the resulting tendency to dismiss authors who do not create them, reveal more about the critic's general concept of a novel than about the spe-

[4] David Thorburn, "A Dissent on Pynchon," *Commentary,* 56 (September 1973), 68.

cific fiction discussed? [5] The unreality of the characters in *V.* comes not from Pynchon's perversity or from his questionable skill but from his untraditional method. Uninterested in analyzing personality or detailing behaviorial states, he conceives of character in terms of culture, science, politics, and history. The reality of a character is irrelevant when an author insists upon the factitiousness of his own inventions.

Like his peers John Hawkes and Kurt Vonnegut, Pynchon liberates the novel from standard forms, but unlike his contemporaries, he parodies many of these traditional forms in one book. Examples of spy thrillers, romance novels, science fiction, historical novels, and political tales appear in *V.* in such abundance that some readers find themselves admiring the range and knowledge while simultaneously wondering if the profundity is fake. The profusion of activity, parallels, puns, formulas, plots, historical references, and myth propels the reader to the status of armchair investigator as he begins to pursue leads which spring up in nearly every sentence. The question is not whether the reader's game is fun but whether it is worth the effort. *V.* is both clever and authoritative, tedious and brilliant, apparently random and surely unified. Always funny and violent, it takes pleasure in undercutting the ostensible meanings of symbols, images, and concepts which the reader has painstakingly worked out, only to turn around and reveal a subtle unity among the many parts. Pynchon, of course, has no intention of revealing the meanings. Instead he supplies enough hints to invite us to determine significance as we find it. Whitney Balliott's comment is appropriate. Praising *V.* as a comic novel whose author does not take his art too seriously, he advises that *V.* should be read at least twice or left alone: "even its difficulties are difficult to spot." [6]

We should not take ourselves too seriously, either. Part of the joke is on those who over-zealously try to track down the allusions. Since exasperation remains a key reaction which Pynchon both expects and encourages, the charge of boredom is often directed at fictions like his which disturb the complacent reader. Expectation is upset to such a degree that the reader does not know how to react. Overindulgence in repetition of bizarre formal arrangements and deliberate stretches of mannered prose often take the place of what we call plot and action.

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[5] See Irving Feldman, "Keeping Cool," *Commentary,* 36 (September 1963), 258-260. Feldman believes that characters should have a "serious existence," but that in *V.* they are rendered nearly anonymous by the author's insistence that he controls the game.

[6] Whitney Balliott, "Wha," *New Yorker,* 15 June 1963, p. 113.

Richard Poirier notes the disappearance of "reticent" literature in the twentieth century, that is, a literature which does not offer so many handles, tease with so many allusions, entice the alert reader with so many puns and patterns.[7] Accompanying the decline in traditional fiction is a corresponding rise in analytical interpretation as a literature of puzzles and solutions gains respectability.

The results are not surprising. Focus on character and verisimilitude shades away to permit a spotlight on style, form, and pattern. Rather than respond to significant issues and then take appropriate action, Pynchon's characters react to technology, pop culture, and bureaucracy in ways which may extend their life spans but do not enrich their lives. Herbert Stencil cannot decide if the reality which shapes him has an objective existence prior to his own or is the product of his own speculative imagination, but the reader knows that in this case the creation controls the creator.

In mocking Stencil's need for order, his compulsion to organize the disparate elements of his life into a manageable whole, Pynchon prepares his point for us in the guise of a literary trap. Yet playing games is not his primary concern. I doubt if he wants us to emulate the earlier critics of, say, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* and then congratulate ourselves for spotting the slightest nuance. Rather than track down allusions and historical parallels, we might better ask the purpose of these designs. *V.* is not only an intricate game invented to entice the ingenious reader but also a serious investigation shaped to question artificial yet venerable notions of order. Nevertheless, with Benny Profane, Herbert Stencil, and Fausto Maijstral, Pynchon shows that delusions of order are necessary. Even while *V.* parodies patterns and plots, it reaffirms that another mode of meaning is better than none at all. The problem is one of extremes. Paranoia or nihilism, too much pattern or too little, confronts characters in and readers of *V.* alike. Those looking for a balanced reaction might heed McClintic Sphere's calmly stated advice, "Keep cool but care." Yet Pynchon never offers McClintic's expression of concern as a means to negate the violence of paranoia and nihilism. The novel does not turn on his statement. Like nearly every detail except the omnipresence of the Lady V., his comment is lost on characters caught within the labyrinth of history, myth, and intrigue, just as the reader, overwhelmed by the mass of Stencil's design, similarly tends to forget Sphere's plea.

[7] Richard Poirier, "The Politics of Self-Parody," *Partisan Review*, 35 (1968), 344.

Making fun of its own elaborate design, *V.* remains Pynchon's laugh at historical plots and plotted novels. The strands and clues which pop up here and there throughout nearly 500 pages are coherent if we accept Stencil's compulsive need to define a plot, but the coherence which he creates at such great cost to himself is finally so fantastic that we laugh rather than affirm his manufactured solutions. How can one love, or keep cool and care if he wastes time participating in fabricated intrigues with imagined historical importance? Or is it better to join Benny Profane and drift along with the chaos? Why accept the responsibility of verities like friendship, love and commitment when the fabrication of design lingers around the next corner, under the street in the sewer, or within a set of dentures? Stencil prefers anonymous manipulation to personal commitment, and Benny prefers Nothing at all. When Benny rejects Rachel's declaration of love for Brenda's seventy-two pairs of bermuda shorts, he has nothing left but to yo-yo his way down to the sea. Since he is looking for nothing, the sea is there to absorb him. Conversely, Sidney Stencil, a man who rejects plot in favor of accident, drowns in a V-shaped waterspout, while his son Herbert crosses the ocean in pursuit of the next clue.

The sheer enticement of a plot of possible universal scale lures Herbert away from even his own personality. Not only does he speak of himself in the third person, he no longer cares who V. may be. Concerned with "not who, but what: what is she," he ignores all suggestions that the letter V may be open to any interpretation but finally identified with none (p. 43). Thus Stencil is his own victimizer, submitting not to a malign, impersonal plot but to a design of his own creation. And the meticulous reader, the only appropriate reader of Pynchon's fiction, finds himself in a similar predicament, gleefully complicating the reading experience by stopping to unravel entanglements which will surely ensnare him as easily as the characters. Aware that separate personality in *V.* means nothing apart from the plot which defines it, he must also realize that his involvement with the fictional design determines his response to the novel. Pynchon plays his game so that the too-enthusiastic reader is in danger of joining the Lady V. and SHROUD (synthetic human, radiation output determined) as the ultimate examples of inanimateness. Plot is all.

But is history itself part of a larger plot? Pynchon raises the interesting question of whether one's definition of direction in his own life involves him in the processes of history. Benny needs individuality with a purpose; Stencil needs a purpose which does not absorb his

individuality. Both lack a legitimate sense of order. *V.* poses such enormous problems not because of its encyclopedic knowledge, nor because of its long stretches of unusual antics, many reaching the limits of boredom, but because the novel challenges the traditional assumptions on which many of us base our lives: that humanness is automatically the opposite of the inanimate, that reality has objective definition, that fantasy is unreal, and that history is truth. Again and again Pynchon suggests that the so-called processes of history do not constitute an acceptable definition of order. Violence may be the rule of the twentieth century, but randomness, not pattern, hovers in the background. Two quotations will illustrate the implicit criticism of Herbert Stencil's reaction to history. The first is in the voice of the anonymous narrator. Following a comment on the 1955-56 Mideast crisis, Pynchon writes:

> The spring thus wore on, large currents and small eddies alike resulting in headlines. People read what news they wanted to and each accordingly built his own rathouse of history's rags and straws. In the city of New York alone there were at a rough estimate five million different rathouses. God knew what was going on in the minds of cabinet ministers, heads of state and civil servants in the capitals of the world. Doubtless their private versions of history showed up in action. (p. 209)

God, of course, does not know what goes on in the minds of civil servants and heads of state who believe they are directing history with decisions which usually erupt in violence. Nor does Stencil know. Making the mistake of attributing objectivity to history, he ignores his status as an artist figure, as a man who literally creates a grand cabal of historical progression:

> But spent his days instead at a certain vegetation, talking with Eigenvalue, waiting for Paola to reveal how she fitted into this grand Gothic pile of inferences he was hard at work creating. . . . What this mission was, however, came no clearer to him than the ultimate shape of his V-structure—no clearer, indeed, than why he should have begun pursuit of V. in the first place. . . . To go along assuming that Victoria the girl tourist and Veronica the sewer rat were one and the same V. was not at all to bring up any metempsychosis: only to affirm that his quarry fitted in with The Big One, the century's master cabal. . . . If she was a historical fact then she continued active today and at the moment, because the ultimate Plot Which Has No Name was as yet unrealized, though V. might be no more a she than a sailing vessel or a nation. (pp. 209-210)

Stencil knows nothing about V., not what she is, who she is, or if she is. But rather than admit the probability of randomness, he first gives V. historical factuality and then creates a Plot Which Has No Name to account for the coincidence that violence breaks out each time she appears in the twentieth century.

Although Stencil considers himself the century's child, born as he is in 1901, he does not come alive until 1945 when he discovers the reference to V. in his father's journal. The Ultimate Plot sustains him, freeing him from the time when he considered sleep one of life's "major blessings." Thus in creating his historical account of the twentieth century, he creates himself. Little wonder that he fears completing his search. To write the last chapter of his history would be to annihilate his sense of self: He Who Looks for V. His guiding principle understandably remains "approach and avoid," and his fear of uncovering something other than the history of the twentieth century is genuine. Unaware that he has created the Ultimate Plot in historical terms, and unwilling to stop the quest, he reveals his desperation at the end of the novel: "V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth. Whose emissaries haunt this century's streets, Porcépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Maijstral, Stencil fils. Could any of them create a coincidence? Only Providence creates. If the coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something far more appalling" (pp. 423-424). Caught between paranoia and Nothing, Stencil chooses paranoia. He never knows if the mass of historical detail is fact or fact enriched by invention, but we learn that what we call history is just one more conglomeration of random events on which man in his passion for order imposes interpretation and chronology—in short, pattern. History is not a force to be felt but a fiction to be created. First the author, then the characters, and lastly the reader himself must fashion past events in terms of individual needs. Since the pieces, sections, and facts do not explain themselves, participants in history and readers of *V.* interpret the puzzle subjectively. The interpretations may not be wholly wrong, but surely they will never be completely right. Always elusive, history and the novel *V.* finally meet: the processes of one reflect the methods of the other.

Sidney Stencil has always accepted what his son Herbert has persistently ignored. Conscious plots on a universal scale do not exist. Meeting another possible personification of the Lady V. on Malta in 1919, Sidney muses:

> Don't act as if it were a conscious plot against you. Who knows how many thousand accidents—a variation in the weather, the availability of a ship, the failure of a crop—brought all these people, with

> their separate dreams and worries, here to this island and arranged them into this alignment? Any Situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human. (p. 455)

Despite man's effort to the contrary, purpose and meaning do not apply to the universe. Sidney's acceptance of the inappropriateness of logic thus marks him one of the wisest characters in *V.*: "The inert universe may have a quality we can call logic. But logic is a human attribute after all; so even at that it's a misnomer. What are real are the cross-purposes. We've dignified them with the words 'profession' and 'occupation'" (p. 455).

Old Sidney should know what he is talking about, for he is the first to identify V-ness. Unlike his son, he knows better than to try to define the Lady V. That task, if it is to be done, must come from us, even at the risk of falling into the trap which Pynchon sets for Herbert.[8] Like the characters, and apparently like Pynchon, we are lured by the fascination which V. promises, for her great power is the ability to enthrall and then destroy the imagination which creates her. Yet unlike Herbert Stencil, we understand the horror which accompanies the lure. V. is evil. She seems so horribly malign because she straddles both the real events of history since 1898 and the fantasies of history's participants. Embracing both fact and fiction, she apparently hopes for full control of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, Sidney Stencil's dismissal of logic in the "inert" universe does not satisfy the yearning for meaning. Although the reader soon suspects that he, too, is a victim of the novel's plot, that his passion to track down clues allies him with Herbert Stencil's mad pursuit for order, he cannot help putting together the parts of the literary puzzle which Pynchon forces him to acknowledge on almost every page. Things are connected, but whether by accident or plan is the question. If we refuse the challenge, we become Benny Profane, a yo-yo turning the pages of a difficult novel, a dabbler in chaos. If we accept, we become Herbert Stencil, a quester chasing clues through a massive fiction, a victim of paranoia. Form is a primary topic of *V.*, but the more

[8] See Josephine Hendin, "What Is Thomas Pynchon Telling Us," *Harper's* (March 1975), p. 85; and Stephen Koch, "Imagination in the Abstract," *Antioch Review*, 24 (September 1964), 260. Hendin describes V. as "female serenity, the clean, eternal balance of emotional control." Arguing that V. is a victim of "all male threats," she suggests that the Lady V. returns the attack when she abandons traditional female roles of mother, lover, and protectress and assumes the stance of "vulnerability conquered." Perhaps so, but I wonder if this definition views V. too much from the angle of feminism. Stephen Koch's phrase may be more acceptable: the Lady V. is "a dream made horrible by history."

we define it the quicker it disintegrates. The point, and the joke, is that we are manipulated by Pynchon as his characters are manipulated by "they." The crucial difference is that we know we are reading a novel, participating in an invention, whereas many of the characters are convinced they are involved in reality. To us, the parallels and analogies are part of a fiction which instructs us about violent history; to Stencil, the apparent order is a matter of life and identity which teaches him about Nothing.

Herbert does not realize that the absence of plot reflects his unwitting parody of it. Thus he refuses to admit that *any* apparent conspiracy can assume significance and eventually "reality" if it seems universal in appeal and ubiquitous in appearance. He must insist upon the reality of the Lady V. and the seriousness of her cabal because he cannot admit the world itself as he knows it is an invention created by politicians, historians, artists, and anyone else—even God—capable of impressing upon the populace a subjective definition of order. Discontent with his true status as Herbert Stencil, son of Sidney, born in 1901, he invents himself in 1945 after reading his father's journal. Pynchon suggests that, like Stencil, our greatest inventions may be private concepts of self, in this case, perhaps, He Who Reads *V.*

The reader may finally be the only source of order. Preferring the threat of conspiracy to the possibility of meaninglessness, Stencil gives a weird kind of positive value to paranoia. We know, however, that while we should put together the clues if we hope to experience *V.* as more than random set pieces, we must simultaneously dodge the imprint of Stencilization when the puzzle of the novel entices us to impose too heavily the security of form. Involved in an apparently endless labyrinth, frustrated as much as Stencil in trying to juggle the countless parts, the reader distinguishes between legitimate interpretations and those resulting from the lure of allusion as the novel's astonishing vitality invites him into the maze. Meaning and meaninglessness turn out to be no more than two sides of one certainty: life is disorganized. Perhaps our role is to supply a measure of objectivity, not to the extreme of becoming an uninvolved Benny Profane, but at least to admitting the connection of the parts without insisting the reality of conspiracy.

Pynchon shows that the line between known and unknown is undefinable. How can knowledge be authenticated when its sources are suspect? To his despair, Herbert learns from Fausto's confessions that even cause and effect are fictions:

> We can justify any apologia simply by calling life a successive rejection of personalities. No apologia is any more than a romance—half

> a fiction—in which all the successive identities taken on and rejected by the writer as a function of linear time are treated as separate characters. The writing itself even constitutes another "character" added to the past. So do we sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments. It isn't so much to pay for eyes clear enough to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with "reason." (p. 286)

What hurdles for characters dedicated to organizing plots and for readers involved in determining cross-references! Continuity, cause and effect, and "reasonable" history are all fictions. Insisting upon the unreliability of his own novel, Pynchon hints that the world itself is unknowable and perhaps unreal.

One result of this authorial stance is that artifice has as much validity as fact. Fictionalizing history in terms of personal needs helps one survive a world of possible malevolence and certain disorder. Indeed, Stencil's reaction to Porpentine's tale has merit: "He'd only the veiled references to Porpentine in the journals. The rest was impersonation and dream" (p. 52). By the time we reach the novel's epilogue, the one chapter which should be free of "Stencilization" since Herbert has already left for Sweden in pursuit of another clue, we suspect its apparent objectivity as one more laugh on those who insist upon the reliability of historical fact. Impersonation and dream, veiled references, frayed ends of the next clue—these join to make up both the Lady V. and the novel *V.* And of all the characters involved in this incredibly violent fiction, only Fausto Maijstral understands the truth of these artifices.

Not everyone agrees that Fausto's confessions counter Stencil's obsessions. Christopher Ricks, for example, argues that Maijstral's story "comes to little more than pretentious maundering." [9] But it seems to me that Pynchon's continuous challenge to the objectivity of any narrative reaches a kind of climax in this chapter. Fausto offers a significant discussion of the value of metaphor, but he also realizes that even his personal account of the dismantling of the Bad Priest (V. herself) is suspect. His experience with V. definitely occurs during a verifiable historical moment, the bombing of Malta in World War II, yet his recollection of the event is, as Herbert Stencil learns, "half a fiction." Fausto's salvation is his recognition of the value of artifice, what he calls metaphor. Unlike many poets, he does not champion metaphor as a means to impose order. Along with Pynchon himself, Fausto would agree

[9] Christopher Ricks, "Voluminous," *New Statesman*, 11 October 1963, p. 492.

that creation of metaphor cannot imply a structured reality which is definable and coherent. Metaphor is not a substitute for reality; it is, indeed, no more than a fiction.

Fausto illustrates the difference between useful and deceptive metaphor when he discusses the ways adults and children deal with the daily bombing raids on Malta. Suffering constant fear, the adults shore up their courage by viewing the war as a cosmic struggle between Good and Evil, home and the devil. But the children realize that "only the bomb wins." Thus they convert the daily brutality into a fiction, into a game of British Spitfires vs. German Messerschmitts. Fausto explicitly praises their use of artifice to ward off the psychological effects of violence:

> But the siege created different burdens and it was impossible to say whose world was more real: the children's or the parents'. For all their dirt, noise and roughnecking the kids of Malta served a poetic function. The R.A.F. game was only one metaphor they devised to veil the world that was. . . . One wonders if our grown-up attitudes, hopelessly tangled as they were with love, social forms and metaphysics, worked any better. Certainly there was more common sense about the children's way. (p. 311)

Adept at metaphor, the children survive as "poets in a vacuum."

Their common-sense approach to metaphor and violence distinguishes them from Herbert Stencil. The contrast is important because Pynchon hints that Fausto and Herbert are symbolically brothers and perhaps even Sidney's sons by different women.[10] Herbert's reaction to V. is limiting. Literally traveling the world, he constructs the parts and pieces of his quest into a plot dominated by V. Fausto's account of the children's response to the Bad Priest shows them reacting sensibly. Rather than create a myth, they dismantle the person who inspires it. They pick at her rags, mock her sermons, and giggle at her injuries. Herbert, of course, does not realize that V. illustrates the human drift toward the inanimate, but the children immediately recognize her mechanical properties. To them, V. is not the inspiration of violence but a thing to be taken apart: the wig, the wooden foot, the glass eye, the false teeth, and most of all the sapphire navel.

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[10] Many readers speculate that V. is Herbert Stencil's mother, but the point is ambiguous. Victoria Wren seduces Sidney in 1899, but Herbert is not born until 1901. Yet late in the novel (p. 460) Sidney mused on his "old love" of eighteen years ago and Herbert's age of eighteen.

Observing the children, Fausto learns that artifice enables one to confront almost any situation as long as the fiction is not confused with reality. He thus moves through a series of transformations or personalities, as he calls them, in order to survive his plunge into history. But Stencil loses his sense of self because he adopts metaphors and masks as the real thing. Misusing fiction, he wears clothes which disgust him, eats food which makes him gag, and lives in unfamiliar surroundings. Drifting closer to the inanimate, he becomes an object even to himself while Fausto approaches humanity. Maijstral knows that his latest mask—Fausto IV—is not the real man but only the latest change in his life span. Fausto IV is no more definitive than Fausto II or III. His adoption of different selves is thus a convenient device, like metaphor, which helps him live in a world of artifice. Aware that history is a fiction and that memory is a traitor, Fausto learns the poet's great function in a century of violence: to lie, that is, to create metaphor. Children and poets use artifice to cloak inanimate events so that people can soothe themselves that all is not random mindlessness. In what must be one of the most vital passages in *V.*, Fausto ponders the importance of those who use delusion consciously:

> Living as he does much of the time in a world of metaphor, the poet is always acutely conscious that metaphor has no value apart from its function; that it is a device, an artifice. . . . Fausto's kind are alone with the task of living in a universe of things which simply are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the "practical" half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie, confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they. . . . It is the only useful purpose they do serve in society: and if every poet were to vanish tomorrow, society would live no longer than the quick memories and dead books of their poetry. (p. 305)

The novelist as fabulist—Fausto joins Thomas Pynchon and, one hopes, the reader as people who know the value of invention even while they expose the fictitiousness of their own art. Readers who call for verisimilitude can only have missed the point.

Herbert Stencil never learns Fausto's secret. Determined to push his way into a past history "he didn't remember and had no right in," he joins a long list of humans drifting toward the inanimate SHROUD. Only his compulsion to keep moving saves him from certain entropy. Sidney, Fausto, Pynchon, and perhaps the reader accept what Herbert

must ignore: that history may have a plot, but probably fictionalized and surely unknowable. In the words of his father: "Short of examining the entire history of each individual participating; short of anatomizing each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation?" (p. 443). None. Herbert would much rather use his imagination to edit the scattered references to V. than to discover either her dismantling or her identity. Content with being an unreliable reconstructor of V.'s history, he leaves Malta for Sweden at the end of the novel in order to trace "one Mme Viola" who is reputed to have a glass eye. But we can be sure that Pynchon will beat Stencil to Stockholm in order to obscure this clue and prepare the next. The novel could go on forever. Herbert's final words suggest his fate: "Is it really his own extermination he's after?" Perhaps he has committed himself to a dream of annihilation. His father has warned: "Any Situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human." Eigenvalue has said: "Cavities in the teeth occur for good reason . . . But even if there are several per tooth, there's no conscious organization there against the life of the pulp, no conspiracy. Yet we have men like Stencil, who must go about grouping the world's random caries into cabals" (p. 139). And most of all, Fausto has defined life's single lesson: "that there is more accident to it than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane" (p. 300). Stencil dismisses each bit of advice. Plot is all.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF MALINDA ARGENBRIGHT

JAMES LOTT

Though Miss Malinda Argenbright died, at the age of 74, over three weeks ago, I only heard it yesterday. It was my mother who gave me the news, and, though she didn't say it in so many words, the tone of her voice indicated that in her estimation Miss Malinda got what she deserved. I didn't point out that 74 years hardly add up to an untimely death. After all, Mother herself is 72. Despite her years, though, she manages to keep up: in fact, she calls me once a month to make sure I'm all right and to tell me what's going on back in St. Clare. She's done that for the past twenty years, ever since I married Lucile and moved to Baltimore. Lucile says she thinks Mother has never understood that I'm married now and even if she did understand wouldn't trust Lucile to keep me healthy and fed well. She says that our marriage has never seemed real to Mother because we don't have any children and therefore I'm no different in her eyes from a bachelor and I ought to be living at home and helping her meet expenses. I always agree when Lucile says that, but what can I do? It's difficult being caught in the middle like that, between a rock and a hard place, you might say. Not that either Mother or Lucile is really hard, of course. Just now and then a little firmer than I personally find comfortable.

"She had a tumor in her kidney," Mother said, and her voice dropped an octave, the way the wife of some sans-culotte might have announced the death of Marie Antoinette. "They told her before the operation that they were hopeful they could get it all, but when they opened her up, they found she was *eaten up with it.*" She hit each word as if with a little oral hammer. "It had spread all over her. All she could do—with all her money—was go home and die. She only lasted *six weeks.*" The hammer beat out the appropriateness of the death sentence.

There wasn't much for me to say about it, and anyway Mother moved on to the next news item, about her roomer's phlebitis and how her roomer's three children never wrote her or seemed concerned about her. But I couldn't really concentrate on what she was saying. I hadn't seen Miss Malinda since right after the war when I'd gone by to call on her, but the news of her death still moved me. I wondered how people in St. Clare had reacted to it—I'm not sure whether Mother's reaction was typical of everyone's, though it probably represented her circle of friends. I wondered what the minister of St. Peter's Episcopal Church had said about her, but then I recalled that the Episcopal funeral service, unlike the Methodist and Baptist ones I was used to, didn't call for a eulogy.

Even if he had talked about her, I'd bet my month's paycheck that he hadn't mentioned the big event in her life, though I'm sure that everybody who knew her either remembered it or had heard about it.

I only met her because I happened to be available—though, like everyone else in St. Clare, I had always known who she was and had seen her now and then when she came into town. She lived all her life in the "new" Argenbright place, built by her father in 1893, a huge gothic pile of stone designed to look like a castle, complete with two turrets and a captain's walk from which we could imagine old Mr. Argenbright pouring boiling pitch down onto the heads of anyone who attacked his front door. There wasn't a moat, though there should have been, nor were there holes in the walls for mounting cannon, but to my friends and me it was as grand and foreboding as Mont St. Michel would have been. It certainly stood several cuts above the St. Clare County Court Building, though the latter did have the advantage of being capped by a bronze statue of Justice, blindfolded and holding out her scales.

The Argenbrights, who had controlled St. Clare since the middle of the 19th century, revolved in circles far above my parents and their friends, though my father worked at one time for young Mr. John Argenbright—Miss Malinda's brother—and I always felt touched by some special hand of providence whenever he passed us on the street, always tipping his hat to Mother if she was with us, and said to Father in impressive tones, "Nice day, Herbert." Our encounter always ended there, since the observation hardly invited discussion, but Father always managed to say, "It certainly is," or sometimes, "We can't complain at all," which seemed to me much the profounder reply, and we would continue walking, buoyed by a sudden sense of the rightness and the order of things in general. Miss Malinda, unlike her brother, rarely came out of the house. There were stories around which tried to explain that: one version had it that she had been in love with the Randolphs' eldest son who had been killed in the closing days of the war in Europe and that she had shut herself up to mourn for him the rest of her life. But on the few occasions I saw her, she looked happy enough. It seemed to me that if the story were true, she would wear black veils and faint occasionally in public. It also occurred to me that she ought to appear at sunset on the captain's walk and gaze towards the east or maybe hang a lantern in one of the turrets. Father said that the stories were nonsense and that she stayed inside because there wasn't anything for her to do outside. But he was the exception.

Early in 1933, when I was twelve, I managed to get a job delivering the St. Clare *Endeavor* to the homes in the neighborhood surrounding

the Argenbright place. The Argenbrights themselves—by this time old Mr. Argenbright was dead and Miss Malinda and her brother lived there alone—took two papers, one to be delivered at the front door for the owners, one at the back door for Florrie, the Irish cook, and her husband Dennie who served the family as houseman and yardman. No one else in town had imported servants, and it was Florrie and Dennie, therefore, who helped set the Argenbright household apart from the other good families. One morning in April, Dennie, a thin sallow middle-aged man whose looks and actions denied everyone's image of Irishmen, was waiting for me on the back steps.

"Miss Malinda wants a boy to help her in the garden." He pronounced it "gaarden," but with a sullen slur which sounded inauthentic compared to the voice my father used whenever he told one of his Pat and Mike jokes. "It's a quarter an afternoon she's offering, two afternoons a week. She wants to know would you be interested?"

A quarter twice a week was in those days and at my age a magnificent salary, as much as I made a week delivering papers every day, Saturday and Sunday included. So I have to admit that my primary motivation in accepting the offer was greed. The thought of the money caused me not to consider at all that I was at the same time being given the chance to meet—to actually work for—Miss Malinda Argenbright, the mysterious Miss Malinda who cloistered herself in her father's castle, who exposed herself to the public eye rarely more than twice a week—once when she walked to St. Peter's Church on Sunday, once when Dennie drove her to the Ransoms for dinner on Wednesday, Abigail Ransom having been her closest friend from childhood, the only friend, in fact, she seemed to have. It should have struck me more, for she *was* a recluse and merely staying at home had given her an air of mystery, as I've said. But that was before I had become totally romantic, and the money—or the thought of it—blotted out everything else.

Both my parents agreed that I was right to accept the offer. My father thought that, if it turned out that I had to work more than two days a week for the Argenbrights, I should give up my paper route, but Mother declared that I could do both, especially since we didn't know how permanent my gardening job would be. She added that, on the other hand, there was always the possibility that if I made a really good impression, Miss Malinda, seeing that I was a bright promising boy, might "do something" for me. "After all, she has no one but her brother, and she's well past thirty and, living all locked up the way she does, she's not likely to ever get married and have her own children. Why wouldn't she maybe do something for Richie?"

"Stranger things have happened," Father said, "but less strange things have not happened. Let's not count on it just yet." He looked at me for a second and then crossed his eyes to make me laugh. After he left the kitchen to wash up for supper, Mother, ladling the soup into bowls and nodding her head like an angel who's in on the will of God, whispered confidentially, "Stranger things *have* happened. You do your best and then just wait and see."

Though I had every intention of doing my best, my first afternoon in Miss Malinda's employ didn't start well. My best friend, Dewey Walker, was the son of a dentist who had always wanted to travel but who instead had married Dewey's mother, had Dewey and three other sons, and taken out a subscription to the *National Geographic*. Once a month it came with pictures of balloonists, maps of cities of dead civilizations, and photographs of natives of Africa, South America, and the South Seas. And often—quite often—the women in those pictures were naked or, at least, as Dewey and I phrased it in our struggling modest way, "bare of bosom." So when Dewey pulled me aside at lunch and said, "The *National Geographic* came. Polynesian beauties," I forgot all about Miss Malinda. After school I went home with Dewey. When I *did* remember—half an hour after our appointment time—I ran the six blocks to the Argenbright place. She was already at work with a shovel and mattock, doing the work which had obviously been designed for me to do. I could usually get away with things like that by blaming Dewey, but my stammering apology didn't go very far with Miss Malinda. I soon discovered that she believed deeply in promptness but that she was a thorough skeptic when it came to excuses.

"Young man," she said, turning over the earth with incisive stabs of the shovel, "we agreed through our mutual friend Mr. O'Neil that you were to be here at 3 o'clock to help me garden." (Unlike Dennie, she pronounced it "gyarden," and for some reason that made me more uncomfortable, as though she were making fun of me.) "If you wish to continue under the terms of our agreement, you will arrive promptly. Otherwise, I shall look elsewhere for assistance. Is that clear?" As she asked the question, she looked at me and smiled, then stepped out of the flower bed. I murmured a quick "Yes ma'am," took the shovel from her, and began digging as if I had entered a race.

After a few minutes of silence, she interrupted me. "Young man, you are working in my flower garden. We shall plant today these twelve peonies which I have arranged here in order. We shall not—today or any other day—bury a body. Or perhaps you thought yourself to be digging a well?"

I looked down and saw to my horror that in fact, while I was furiously trying to make up for lost time, I had dug a trench almost two feet long and a foot deep. The dirt was spilling out of the bed onto the perfectly groomed gravel walk which ran beside the garden.

"It can be rectified," she said, "but do remember, 'All things in moderation,' even holes in the ground." Then she laughed, not a real laugh actually, but a sound like someone singing in public under her breath because she wants to keep it to herself. I think I fell in love with her at that moment. At least, it's that picture of her which—except for one other—is most vivid to me even now. She had on a straw hat—not a little one with ribbons like those that women wore when they were pretending to work—but a heavy plain one, worn to keep the sun off in earnest and extending floppily out on both sides over her shoulders. She had turned up the front of the brim, and her forehead was smudged where she had drawn the back of her gloved hand across it. Years later—the last time I was to see her—she would grow fat and her features coarsen and blur, but at that time she had only begun to grow plump, and her smile, to my eyes, had a softness, even a sensuality, which her gardening costume—sweater, bulky print dress, heavy black shoes that an older woman might have worn—could not neutralize.

"Yes ma'am," I said, but this time I felt good saying it, and began to repair the damage. The afternoon went smoothly and quickly from that point. I dug up the hard ground, carried peat moss and manure, helped her to space the peonies, and at the end of the afternoon she handed me a fifty-cent piece. But it was the image of Miss Malinda which I really carried home with me that evening, and it was surprising, almost shocking, when Mother said, "Fifty cents! What did I tell you? She's going to do something for you. Maybe provide for your education even."

As it turned out, except for giving me a half dollar twice a week for the remainder of that spring and half the summer, Miss Malinda never did do anything for me in the way Mother hoped for, and when I did finally get to college it was thanks to the United States taxpayers, who were so grateful that I had saved them from the Nazis that they paid my way, more or less, to Florida State University to study social work. In return for that favor, I have been serving the citizens of Maryland ever since by keeping only the proper people on their welfare rolls. But my life—at least after 1946—has nothing to do with Miss Malinda. It has been a normal life, dull and routine for the most part.

One day in mid-July I arrived late in the afternoon: on the really hot summer days there was little to do in the garden except repair work—keeping ahead of the weeds, checking the rose bushes for beetles and

blight, watering—and Miss Malinda had suggested starting late in the afternoon and working until shortly before dinnertime. As we worked, she would talk to me— I had become "Richard" rather than "Young man" by then—asking me about my family, my friends, my plans for the future. It was never particularly probing conversation, since she had a sense of privacy which extended even to children, and I can remember it only in the vaguest detail. But it was inevitably pleasant, going over the same comments and questions and responses as the garden week by week changed around us, jonquils and tulips giving way to iris, columbine and peonies, and they in turn giving way to lemon and orange day lilies, summer chrysanthemums, dahlias, and roses (which Miss Malinda scrupulously referred to, not as roses, but as Harison's Yellow, Lareine Victoria and Chapeau de Napoléon).

When I arrived that day, Miss Malinda was sitting on one of the white wrought-iron chairs which studded the lawn, and at first I thought she was talking to herself, leaning back against the chair and fanning herself with a handkerchief. Then, however, I saw someone else—a man—sitting to her left in the shade cast by the huge lilac bushes which marked the border of the garden area. He was dressed entirely in white—a panama suit and white shoes—except for a bright blue and red tie which revealed itself to me whenever he turned to look at Miss Malinda. He was drawing complacently on a cigar, occasionally flicking an ash onto the lawn. I noted with disapproval that he was slouching in his chair. Now and then he would smile, or nod his head, or murmur a word or two, but she was doing almost all the talking. And it was that which struck me immediately, even more than the fact that she was wearing a gauzy blue dress obviously not suited for gardening: she seemed flushed, excited, almost irritable in her words and motions, turning her head with every other sentence to look at him, then fanning herself, then looking towards the windows of the house. Even her laughter had changed. It was louder and more explosive, and it was unpleasant, like glass breaking. For the first time in that place, I felt like an intruder, but because Miss Malinda had not told me to stay home that day, I found it impossible either to announce myself or leave. So I stood there waiting to be noticed, examining the laces in my tennis shoes and counting the bricks in the low wall which ran around the patio, now and then glancing towards the couple in the garden. Finally, it was the man who saw me.

"Well, who do we have here?" His voice was jovial and commanding. He was obviously accustomed to being paid attention to. Although he left no doubt that he expected an answer, I couldn't reply, not because I was embarrassed, as I had been that first day in April with Miss Malinda,

but because I was frightened and, more than that, confused by the inappropriateness of his presence there. Looking back, I think it was his cigar which seemed most out-of-place, especially the careless way he waved it as he spoke and twisted the fallen ashes into the grass with the toe of his white shoe.

"Richard!" Miss Malinda called. "Why, it's Richard. Come and meet another friend of mine. Richard, this is Mr. Hugh Mannis from Alexandria. He's in St. Clare visiting the Ransoms and has been kind enough to drop by this afternoon to ease me of the dullness of this hot day. He has been greatly admiring our handiwork, and I have been telling him what a great help you have been to me and how fortunate my brother and I have been to find such a fine young man with such a green thumb."

She paused, and in the silence Mr. Mannis looked at me and winked. I stared back without blinking, but I couldn't believe what I had seen: he was making fun of her, I was certain of that. But she—it was inconceivable to me that she could talk that way, giddily and awkwardly. Hearing her made me want to cry, because I knew that, all the while she was speaking to me, she was flirting with him. Years later, when I was in high school, I dated a pretty red-haired girl named Harriet Morgan, who had a nasty-tempered little Pomeranian. One day when his yipping had become particularly insistent, she scooped him up in her arms and stroked his ears: "Is wittle Wu-Fu angry because Richie is sitting in his chair? Wu-Fu shouldn't be like that because Richie *woves* him, just like Harriet does, isn't that so?" I realized then that my affair with Harriet had gone as far as it was going to go. I stopped going by to see her and phoning her. I heard that she was angry and wanted an explanation, but how could I explain that my decision had less to do with her than with Miss Malinda and Mr. Hugh Mannis?

To Miss Malinda I said sternly, "I just came by to tell you that I can't come by today."

"But you silly little thing! Isn't that funny, Mr. Mannis? Richard says he can't come by, but he *has* come by. Now, Richard, we are just sitting here waiting for Florrie to bring us down something cold to drink. It's much too hot to work this afternoon, so you just stay right here and have some lemonade or whatever she is fixing to bring us."

But I couldn't have stayed there if she had offered me a Fourth of July picnic with fireworks and carnival rides. Mr. Mannis was looking at the rose bed and running his hand slowly up and down his lapel, but every few seconds he would cut his eyes towards me and I knew he was inviting me to laugh with him. Finally, he dropped his cigar and gouged it into the grass with his heel.

I felt angry and betrayed. I said that my mother had been taken sick and needed a steady hand to nurse her, and I ran across the patio, up the stone steps and around the side of the house. Mr. Argenbright was standing on the front steps talking to Dennie, who was shaking his head back and forth as if he were agreeing to some terrible truth. When I reached the front lawn, Mr. Argenbright called me.

"Boy! Is Miss Malinda in the back?"

"Yes, sir."

"Aren't you going to help her today?"

"No sir. She . . . she has a visitor."

"Oh? Well, it's hardly polite for *me* to ignore my sister's friends, is it?"

He turned back into the house, and I found myself looking at Dennie. "Well, go on now. There's no sense in your being here when you're not needed. Get along with you."

Mother, of course, knew all about Mr. Mannis. He was in the hardware business in Alexandria and, while not wealthy, he was "comfortable." He was a friend of the Ransoms' cousins and had met the Ransoms at Christmas the year before, had been invited to visit them, and had come to spend a week or two in St. Clare. Mother understood him to have had some brush with scandal: "Nothing like divorce or anything even more disreputable. The Ransoms wouldn't have invited him in that case. But there was a lady, from a very old family, who they say gave him her promise, only to be thrown over." It was Mother's understanding, too, that she had later, out of remorse and the agony of a broken heart, married beneath her, which was the Protestant southerner's equivalent of entering a convent. I determined to have nothing more to do with Miss Malinda until she came to her senses. I felt guilty about that decision, especially since I thought she ought to be warned about the Bluebeard who was threatening her, but I couldn't decide how to do it: writing an anonymous letter seemed cowardly, yet I wasn't brave enough to confront her directly. Besides, she had hurt my feelings. I decided not to go back to the Argenbright place until she sent for me. If she made the first move, then I would forgive her and warn her about the danger she was in. It was my first experience being jilted, and I prided myself on my nobility.

Within a week, however, my problem was solved in what seemed to me for a little while an eminently satisfactory fashion: Mr. Mannis packed up his cigars and his white shoes and returned to Alexandria. But I had no time to relish my pleasure before I heard the story, which Mother confided to Father and me that night at supper, that Miss Malinda had been "thrown over, just like that lady in Alexandria." That, of course,

changed everything. Like some hideous ogre, he had come leering and slavering into Miss Malinda's life and had destroyed its peaceful innocence, while I had stood idly by. I had not protected her when she needed my protection. I resolved to appear before her the next day, confess my failure, and beg for a second chance. I rehearsed the scene over and over as I lay in bed that night, and I did not go to sleep until I had satisfied myself that the dialogue was perfect.

The next day was a Thursday, one of our regular gardening days, but when I arrived at the appointed time, Miss Malinda was not in the garden, where our scene of reconciliation was supposed to be played. I knocked on the back door and Dennie answered. "Miss Malinda says to give you her regrets and to say that she will not be needing your help anymore. And to give you this." He handed me a ten dollar bill.

Three nights later I was sitting on our front steps pretending to whittle and trying to figure out what I could do to get to talk to Miss Malinda. Despite the fact that the sun had gone down, the temperature still hovered in the 90's, and I found it hard to come up with anything original. I had just struck on the scheme of pretending that I had seen a swarm of beetles over the town (though I wasn't sure they traveled in swarms) and had rushed over to warn her to do something to protect her roses when Dewey Walker came running up the street shouting.

"Richie, come on! You've got to see it! Miss Argenbright!"

By the time I reached the Argenbright place, I had outdistanced Dewey by a block. There was a large group of people—twenty or twenty-five of them—standing in the street looking up towards the top of the house. At first I thought it must be a fire, but then I heard the music: the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies." And there in the windows of one of those huge stone turrets, like some exotic fish performing behind the glass of an aquarium, was Miss Malinda, illuminated by a lamp which she had covered with red paper, dancing. She held her arms out straight from her shoulders as she moved forward, then brought them up to form a tent over her head as she pirouetted before dancing back in the opposite direction. She had loosened her hair so that it hung around her shoulders and she had placed a flower—it looked from that distance like a red dahlia—behind her ear. A long scarf, either white or pink, trailed behind her as she glided around the circular room. When the music ended, she stopped, walked to the window, where she had set a record player on the table, made a downward motion with her hand—it looked like part of the dance—and the music started again. This time it was the "Habanera" from *Carmen*, and she began a sedate flamenco, clapping her hands above her head and then snapping her fingers in imitation of castanets. Halfway

through the aria, she removed the dahlia from behind her ear and put it lengthways between her teeth. When the music ended a second time, she repeated the downward motion of her hands, and we heard the Tchaikovsky again as she placed the flower behind her ear and began again her graceful pirouettes. What was most surprising—what I am convinced kept everyone in the crowd from laughing—was that she was naked from the waist up.

At 10 o'clock sharp the music ended for the last time—she had apparently timed it perfectly—and she turned off the light. It was over.

I was proud of her, so fiercely proud that even Dewey must have sensed it, for he didn't joke about her dancing or her being naked, which ordinarily would have been a perfect subject for Dewey's wit. All he said was, "Jesus, can you beat that?" "It was just like Lady Godiva," I said. I wanted to add that she was also like a princess in a tower, but I knew that I couldn't trust Dewey's sense of humor, which had been under pretty much of a strain that night, so I kept quiet.

The performance was repeated three nights running. Mother—like most of the rest of the respectable people in St. Clare—was incensed, not so much because Miss Malinda had done what she had done, but because the authorities allowed her to continue doing it. The authorities —that is, Mr. Martin, the police chief—said everything which *could* be done *was* being done and that Mr. Argenbright, who was frantic himself, had promised that it would be taken care of. But each night the crowd grew larger and Miss Malinda floated in her red light while her Victrola swelled scratchily with ballet music which was vaguely reminiscent of Christmas and with the Spanish song which announced in French that love is a rebel bird. On the fourth night, the music was muffled behind closed windows, and the windowpanes themselves were covered with white paint. But the crowd still gathered, knowing that up in her turret Miss Malinda, blocked off from public view, continued to move around and around, in perfect time.

One week later even the music stopped. A few die-hards kept showing up two or three nights after that, but finally even the most faithful had to admit that the spectacle was over.

After that, of course, Miss Argenbright never came out, not even to church or to the Ransoms. Nor, in the years which followed, could I ever think of any reason to go by to see her. Then the war came, just in time for me. My father died of a heart attack only two weeks before I had to leave for camp. In 1942 Mother wrote me a letter telling me that Mr. John Argenbright had died of a liver ailment: "You have no idea how much he drank," she observed. "None of us did. You *never* know."

After my mustering out, I returned to St. Clare for the summer before heading for Florida and higher education. Out of whim, or out of some undefined need, but still without any real reason, I went—again on a July afternoon—to the Argenbright place. A new maid, a black woman in a white dress which I at first took for a nurse's uniform, answered the door. The O'Neils, who had stuck out what everyone called "the Argenbright scandal," had finally left during the war, seduced by the money offered by a munitions plant in Tennessee. When I gave her my name, the woman let me in at once, as though I were expected, but she seemed to think that I was up to no good, and she told me to stay in the entrance foyer while she went to announce me. I walked to the rear of the foyer, which ran the length of the house, and looked out the window to the garden. It was not exactly as I remembered it—there seemed to be more boxwoods and azaleas and fewer summer flowers—but it was in perfect order. I was disappointed, for I had expected that it would have fallen into disrepair. I walked back to the middle of the cavernous room, and as I looked around, I saw my reflection in the gilt mirror over the fireplace. I was fascinated with that vision of myself, with the green and white wallpaper, the white wainscotting, and the 18th century painting—a Constable-like landscape—serving as background. I felt like the principal figure in a painting myself, "Young Man in Drawing Room" perhaps. Or like an illustration in a best-selling novel: "Nonchalantly he waited for her to enter the room." Noticing that there was an ashtray on one of the tables, I lit a cigarette and watched myself inhale and exhale the white smoke. As I smoked, I experimented holding the cigarette in different ways, between my first two fingers, pinched between my thumb and index finger, dangling from my lips.

"Richard!" Miss Malinda's voice made me drop the cigarette on the Oriental rug I was standing on. By impulse I stepped on it to put it out, then realized what I had done. I bent over to pick it up and tried to rough away the small hole. Miss Malinda seemed not to have noticed what had happened. "Vanity may not be the worst of sins, but such immoderate self-admiration can be catastrophic. I am certain that you have heard of Narcissus."

I thought at first that she meant the flower, and I could see her for a moment in her straw hat holding up a bunch of the tiny white and yellow blossoms, but almost immediately I understood what she meant and the illusion vanished and I was looking at a short, very stocky lady in a brown dress. Had I seen her anywhere else, I would have recognized

her still as Miss Malinda, but only by her smile and the slow, dignified movement of her hands.

She took my arm and led me into the large front parlor of the house. Feeling her hand's pressure made me realize that I had nothing to say to her—a plain, middle-aged lady who smelled of starch and lavender. But that made no difference: she had something to say to me. As she spoke, in fact, I began to think that she had memorized it, that it was a set piece prepared for my return to the castle. But only the first part referred to me and our relationship; the rest could have been spoken to anyone, and I wondered how many times she had repeated it. She sat with her hands folded, primly.

"I have been waiting for you to come to see me, for I wish to release myself from two debts. First, I do owe you an apology for terminating our business contract without granting you a personal interview. My brother always said that the cardinal rule of good business, and of friendship, was to deal with people openly, face-to-face. Second, I wish to tell you, because you were in a way involved, that I was not 'abandoned' by Mr. Mannis, as public wisdom would have it, nor did I voluntarily end our relationship. My brother objected strongly—extremely so, I might say—to our proposed engagement. I have never insisted that my desires should take precedence over those of my family." She paused. "It is often difficult to do what is right, but I believe that one should always attempt to do one's best. To do what is required."

And that was all she said about it. Though my visit lasted twenty minutes or so, we talked, as we used to do that spring and summer of 1933, only about inconsequential things: how I was feeling, where I had been during the war, what I was planning to study in college. Now and then, I felt a horrible impulse to say something about dancing or ballet or the naked truth, but I didn't, of course, and I now think that it wouldn't have bothered her if I had.

When I said good-bye to her, I promised to try and get around to see her again before the end of the summer, but I never went back. Too much had changed. I had to admit to myself, furthermore, that I had gone there, partly at least, out of curiosity, and I realized that I would never understand precisely what had caused her to invite public ridicule, as she must have known she was doing all that week. I did see, because of what she told me, that everyone had been wrong in assuming that her dancing in the window was a result simply of sorrow at having been betrayed. I had been right to feel proud of her, because her act was one of defiance, directed both against her brother and the

rest of us. But there was more to it than that: she must have been telling us something, something different from what her words ever said to me, or to anybody else.

As I walked down the front steps, I thought of Miss Malinda's virtues as a gardener: she was ruthless in ripping out or digging up flowers which didn't "do." "We are after the total effect," she always said. Once in that brief summer, though, one of the columbine plants which she had had brought over from the Ransoms as white turned out to be purple—heavy, dark, almost breathing purple. "It will not do in the midst of this pink and white," she said. "But just this once we shall let it bloom." And so we did. It bloomed wildly, out of place and assertively. But when the flowers had faded, she had me dig it up and throw it away. "It *is* beautiful. It really is. But it must go, Richard, so that the rest may flourish."

Today I received a letter from Miss Malinda's lawyers. Lucile was waiting with it in her hand when I got home from work. Though she tried to hide the fact, I know that she was disappointed when I read it to her. I was informed that all of Miss Argenbright's estate had been left to St. Peter's Episcopal Church, with two exceptions. As soon as I fill in the proper forms and return them, I shall receive her Victrola and the gilt mirror which hung in her entrance foyer.

THE POET AS HUMANITARIAN: RANDALL JARRELL'S LITERARY CRITICISM AS SELF-REVELATION

JANET SHARISTANIAN

Reluctantly providing "Answers to Questions" posed by John Ciardi in his 1950 anthology of *Mid-Century American Poets*, Randall Jarrell irately asserted that "To write . . . about one's own poetry is extremely unpleasant and unnatural."[1] He was willing to say something about his audience or about the oral quality, subjects, imagery, and meter of his poems, but regarded a request to make a statement "about the ethical-philosophical relation of the poet to his writing" perfectly superfluous, since "My poems show what this relation actually is for me; what I say it should be matters less." In fact, despite the considerable amounts of criticism which Jarrell published—three collections, and approximately fifty additional essays and reviews—and in contrast to the close attention which he turned to the work of other writers, he rarely wrote about his own poetry. His one detailed piece of self-analysis is his extremely useful account of "The Woman at the Washington Zoo," which is printed in Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*.[2] And one can hardly fault him for otherwise refusing to be a self-critic, since his analyses of other writers implicitly attest to his understanding of the distinction between stated and achieved intention. At the same time, however, a reading of his literary criticism shows that in discussing and, especially, in evaluating the work of other writers, Jarrell was expressing his own ideas about the nature and uses of poetry. For Jarrell, whose criticism is committed and opinionated rather than coolly detached, writing about other writers was an informal and implicit way of working out a poetics of his own, and one in which "the ethical-philosophical relation of the poet to his writing" was of supreme importance.

In criticism early and late—whether he writes about favorites like Whitman, Frost, Yeats, Williams, and Ransom, discusses poets such as Auden and Stevens about whom his opinions shifted drastically, or deals with a writer like MacLeish for whom he harbored disdain—Jarrell sounds over and over a note very important to his own work: one of the modern poet's most important subjects should be real, that is, *ordinary*

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[1] *Mid-Century American Poets* (New York: Twayne, 1950), p. 184.

[2] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, eds., *Understanding Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 531-38.

men and women, and their "everyday affairs of life and death." [3] Robert Frost, whose acceptance as a serious poet was largely precipitated by Jarrell's 1947 and 1952 essays on him, was for Jarrell "the greatest of the American poets of this century" [4] precisely because of his fidelity to such affairs. Delivering a lecture on "Fifty Years of American Poetry" at the National Poetry Festival in Washington, D. C., in October, 1962, and speaking in terms which echo the earlier Frost essays, Jarrell declared that

> Frost's virtues are extraordinary. No other living poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary men; his wonderful dramatic monologues or dramatic scenes come out of a knowledge that few poets have had, and they are written in a verse that uses, sometimes with absolute mastery, the rhythms of actual speech. It is hard to overestimate the effect of this exact, spaced-out, prosaic movement, whose objects have the tremendous strength . . . of things merely put down and left to speak for themselves. . . . Frost's seriousness and honesty; the bare sorrow with which, sometimes, things are accepted as they are, neither exaggerated nor explained away; the many, many poems in which there are real people with their real speech and real thoughts and real emotions—all this, in conjunction with so much subtlety and exactness, makes the reader feel that he is not in a book but a world, and a world that has in common with his own some of the things that are most important in both.[5]

It is no surprise to hear Jarrell praise Frost for dramatizing the "actions of ordinary men," "the rhythm of actual speech," and the acceptance in "bare sorrow" of "things . . . as they are" in poetry that is more like "a world" than "a book," for these are as central to Frost's poetry as they are to Jarrell's. What is perhaps more pertinent is that in writing about poets quite unlike Frost, Jarrell tends to praise or condemn on the basis of similar preoccupations. He is particularly concerned with stressing a poet's allegiance to commonplace existence and his recognition of the very limited power which men and women have over their lives. Thus Jarrell praises John Crowe Ransom's poetry for being "not 'modernist' poetry at all," [6] and finds it "remarkable how much narrative, dramatic,

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[3] From Jarrell's review of Eleanor Ross Taylor's *Wilderness of Ladies*, in his *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 216.

[4] "Fifty Years of American Poetry," in *The Third Book*, p. 300.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Poetry and the Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 92.

non-lyric, not-highbrow [sic] interest the best poems have." [7] In the poems of William Carlos Williams, as in Ransom's, Jarrell looks for "generosity and sympathy, . . . moral and human attractiveness." [8]

These terms, with others like "tenderness," "pity," and "affection," appear frequently in reviews and essays in which Jarrell is enthusiastic about his subject (he is never merely indifferent). They have very little to do with a concept of the poet as rebel, seer, or creator of artifacts, but much to do with a definition of the poet as humanitarian and representative spokesman of his age. Jarrell titled one essay "The Development of Yeats's Sense of Reality," and in it concentrated on this aspect of Yeats's work almost to the exclusion of his symbolism, belief in the occult, concept of the mask, or visionary creation of his Sacred Book of the Arts. For Jarrell, Yeats's greatness lies in the fact that

> he discovered a philosophical and historical system by which history itself, the universe itself, *made* the present change into the past. Now, instead of rejecting or escaping from the modern world, the process of history; instead of accepting it under compulsion, full of doubt and hatred; he could fully accept it, urge it violently on. History, politics, the modern world became enormously meaningful for Yeats, became materials that he could accept and use as finally important. And it was in this way that Yeats escaped from the greatest weakness of modernist poetry, the modern poet's highly specialized relationship to contemporary life: his rejection of the present, his inability to write about the life of his own times (which is, in the end, his only material) as anything but a special case, an aberration, a degeneration.[9]

The praise, while accurate, is couched in terms which many readers of Yeats would find startling. They would argue that Yeats's creation, in *A Vision*, of a cosmology which allowed him to "accept and use" modern history, not as "an aberration" but as part of an inevitable pattern of universal cyclical change, is the *result* of his "highly specialized relationship to contemporary life."

What "the modern world" in general means to Jarrell is clear from other essays. Implicitly comparing himself with Theodore Roethke in the 1962 National Poetry Festival address, Jarrell says that Roethke's reader "is struck by what the world of his poems is full of or entirely

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[7] Ibid., p. 93.
[8] Ibid., p. 226.
[9] *Southern Review*, 7 (Winter 1941), 665.

lacking in; plants and animals, soil and weather, sex, ontogeny, and the unconscious swarm over the reader, but he looks in vain for hydrogen bombs, world wars, Christianity, money, ordinary social observations, his everyday moral doubts."[10] Later in the talk Jarrell generalizes again in similar terms. Most poets, even good ones, he says, "no longer have the heart to write about what is most terrible in the world of the present: the bombs waiting beside the rockets, the hundreds of millions staring into the temporary shelter of their television sets, the decline of the West that seems less a decline than the fall preceding an explosion."[11] For Jarrell what is "most terrible" is what is most important, and what is most important is the large-scale social and historical circumstances which affect us all, rather than the joys and obsessions which may engage us only as private individuals. In effect, Jarrell is asking Roethke to write different poetry, poetry about Jarrell's own favorite subjects: war and a peace that is unfulfilling; soldiers and typically American, middle-class, middle-aged men and women.

Jarrell's reactions to Wallace Stevens are also instructive. In his 1951 essay "Reflections on Wallace Stevens," a quite hostile and witty overview of the poetry between *Harmonium* (1923) and *The Rock* (1954), he decried Stevens' tendency to be "philosophical, abstract, rational. . . ."[12] "Poetry is a bad medium for philosophy," Jarrell says, and goes on:

> When the first thing that Stevens can find to say of the Supreme Fiction is that "it must be *abstract,*" the reader protests, "Why, even Hegel called it a *concrete* universal"; . . . Stevens had the weakness . . . of thinking of particulars as primarily illustrations of general truths, or else as aesthetic, abstracted objects, simply there to be contemplated; he often treats things or lives so that they seem no more than generalizations of an unprecedentedly low order. . . .
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> As a poet Stevens has every gift but the dramatic. It is the lack of immediate contact with lives that hurts his poetry more than anything else, that has made it easier and easier for him to abstract, to philosophize, to treat the living dog that wags its tail and bites you as the . . . "cyclindrical arrangement of brown and white" of the aesthetician analyzing that great painting, the world.[13]

Jarrell's vehemence and verbosity are revealing. For him it is important that the poet dramatize modern history as it is lived on a daily basis

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[10] *The Third Book*, p. 326.
[11] Ibid., p. 333.
[12] *Poetry and the Age*, p. 129.
[13] Ibid., pp. 128-29.

by quite commonplace people; "The World Is Everything that Is the Case," he called one section of his *Selected Poems* (1955). Consequently he suspects generalizations, aesthetic or otherwise, because they imply considerable distance between poet and subject, while a sympathetic and "immediate contact with lives" should reveal itself in details, particulars, the opposite of the abstract. For Jarrell, an abstract generalization is tantamount to ignorant and elitist condescension.

None of this means that Jarrell's concern for the ordinary automatically includes praise for it. In the first place, Jarrell saw human life as essentially unheroic and limited: a matter of powerlessness, solitude, and a constant need for change, for escape from the destructiveness and meagerness of one's existence. This need for change is never satisfied in actual life (except perhaps ironically, as when the life-long cry for transcendence is finally answered by the decline into old age), but is answered only temporarily, in dreams, memories, myths, and in the contemplation or creation of works of art. In the second place, despite his interest in and sympathy for them, Jarrell recognized with wry understanding that the people he wrote about in his poems, though in the main products of universal education, are not people who read his or anybody else's poetry, or if they do, read it for the wrong reasons. He knows that they are rarely touched by genuine art of any kind, but instead rely upon the distractions of *kitsch*, middlebrow entertainment, and a massive consumerism which even they often recognize as meaningless and insufficient.[14]

For Jarrell, unlike many other writers, this constitutes a genuine problem. His subject and his audience should be one, yet they are not. Jarrell puts the problem in poetic terms in "A Conversation with the Devil." It takes "uncommon" readers, the speaker knows, to recognize that the poet's best function is "To see things as they are, to make them what they might be." The "artful, common, unindulgent others" are readers who want to be able to say of a work of literature, *"Not like a book at all. . . .Beats life."* [15] Such readers demand that the poet dramatize or narrate a complacent and flattering acceptance of people and events.

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[14] Jarrell parodies universal education in the dialogue called "The Schools of Yesteryear" from *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket: Essays and Fables* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 43-63. See also "A Girl in a Library," "The Night before the Night before Christmas," "Next Day," "In Montecito," "Three Bills," and the second of two poems called "Hope" in *The Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965).

[15] *The Complete Poems*, pp. 29-33.

They correspond to what Jarrell defines as the audience for "Instant Literature," which—"whether . . . a soap opera, a Broadway play, or a historical, sexual best seller—tells us always that life is not only what we wish it, but also what we think it." [16] Comparing Jarrell's essays with his poem, one sees a paradox emerging. Intelligent readers, the only ones worth writing for, are "uncommon" and "few." The more numerous, "common . . . others" see no line between literature and life; or, rather, the less line they see, the better they like the literature. Yet in his criticism of other poets, Jarrell uses as a standard of judgment fidelity to precisely the same commonplace multitudes whom he criticizes in this poem. And in praising Frost for making the reader "feel that he is not in a book but a world, and a world that has in common with his own some of the things that are most important in both," Jarrell himself skirts dangerously close to saying of Frost's work that it is *"Not like a book at all. . . . Beats life."*

How clearly Jarrell recognized this paradox is not clear. What is clear is that he expressed over and over again, in verse and prose, his unqualified dismay at the diminution of the reading public in modern America, and the consequent disappearance of the poet. His sense of the poet's invisibility is stressed in some of his best-known essays, such as "The Obscurity of the Modern Poet" and "The Age of Criticism" in *Poetry and the Age* (1955); or "The Intellectual in America," "The Taste of the Age," "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket," and "Poets, Critics, and Readers," in *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (1962). Reflecting on the tale of the philosopher Diogenes being visited by Alexander the Great (the latter asked if there was anything he could do for Diogenes: " 'Yes,' said the philosopher, 'you can get out of my light' "), Jarrell comments: "when our age, our country, listens to the story of how Alexander stood in Diogenes' light, it asks perplexedly: 'What was he doing *there*?' Why should a statesman, a general, make a sort of pilgrimage to a poverty-stricken philosopher, an intellectual of the most eccentric kind? We wouldn't. Most of us distrust intellectuals as such: We feel that they must be abnormal, or else they wouldn't be intellectuals." [17] In a less humorous vein, he sums up his position in "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket": "Mass culture either corrupts or isolates the writer. . . . True works of art are more and more produced away from or in opposition to society. And yet the artist needs society as much as society needs him: as our cultural enclaves get smaller and drier, more hysterical or academic, one mourns for the artists inside and the public outside." [18]

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[16] *A Sad Heart,* p. 26

[17] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[18] Ibid., p. 84.

While Jarrell's preoccupations in his criticism can in part be traced straight to what he defines as the reality of "our age, our country," some of them are more dependent on his perception of human existence as a whole. That he saw human life primarily in terms of limitation rather than potentiality (which he called "the greatest single subject of the romantics")[19] is demonstrated again and again in his prose. "Recognition of the essential limitations of man, without denial or protest or rhetoric or palliation"[20] is one of the characteristics which he praised in Frost. "Without denial or protest" but with sympathy and understanding, one assumes. Thus in his satiric academic fable, *Pictures from an Institution* (1954), one of the charges which the poet/teacher/narrator levels against Gertrude Johnson (Mary McCarthy?), the devastating lady novelist, is that "she was far more of a moralist than Spinoza. Did he not say that he had *'labored carefully not to mock, lament, and execrate, but to understand'*? Gertrude had labored carefully to mock, lament, and execrate—to condemn utterly; and to do so it had also been necessary for her to understand, for her to have at the tips of her fingernails the Facts."[21] For Jarrell, the primary Fact is that "Reality is what we want it to be or what we do not want it to be, but it is not our wanting or our not wanting that makes it so";[22] but this was not one of the Facts that Gertrude Johnson understood. The definition of reality appears in a review of Malraux's *The Voices of Silence* (1953), in which Jarrell objects on philosophic grounds to Malraux's tendency to arrive triumphantly at an explanation for every artistic phenomenon he writes about. Jarrell writes, "if someone has a good enough eye for an explanation he finally sees nothing inexplicable, and can begin every sentence with that phrase dearest to all who professionally understand: *It is no accident that. . . .* We should love explanations well, but the truth better; and often the truth is that there *is* no explanation, that so far as we know it is an accident that. . . ."[23]

Jarrell's belief that man is basically a limited creature who cannot understand his world because he cannot control it (rather than the possibly more hopeful reverse) is one reason for his strongly worded denunciations of Archibald MacLeish and Yvor Winters. In reviewing MacLeish's radio play, *The Fall of the City,* Jarrell castigates the author for being "an extraordinary case of arrested development. . . ." He is "a

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[19] *Poetry and the Age,* p. 88.
[20] Ibid., p. 39.
[21] (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), pp. 132-33.
[22] *A Sad Heart,* p. 191.
[23] Ibid., p. 180.

survivor from an almost extinct past," says Jarrell: "there is something consciously neo-primitive about his eager adoption of the optimistic voluntarism of frontier days, when . . . plenty of people thought that you can if you think you can; that the world is what we make it; that there's no limit." The result, Jarrell believes, is not only philosophic superficiality but artistic inferiority, since, he states, a "tragic view of life" is "the point of view of any great dramatist—who is, necessarily, a specialist on limits; who knows that the world is, at a given moment, what we find it; who understands well enough to accept, with composure even, the inescapable conditions of existence. MacLeish passionately dislikes any determinism, even an optimistic one; his response to any inescapable condition is to look strong and deny that it exists." [24] Consequently, Jarrell sees MacLeish's play as an easy, cheap avoidance of "Fate or Necessity." [25]

Similar language marks his almost parodic review of Winters' *Maule's Curse* (1938), which he bluntly calls "simple-minded" because for Winters

> there are few questions unanswered, and none unanswerable. If ours is not the most rational of all possible worlds (for even Mr. Winters sometimes entertains the doubt), that does not excuse any confusion about it on our part; we *have* absolutely valid standards, both adequate and relevant, by which the universe can be understood and evaluated; if we are unfortunate or foolish enough to disregard these, we must take the consequences—which are disastrous. He writes as if the last three hundred years had occurred, but not to him. . . .[26]

Both writers, then, though in different ways, commit what is for Jarrell the cardinal sin of reducing complexity to simplicity, of exchanging the open-ended, uncontrollable, and pessimistic thing that is the world for a simple, satisfying, but faithless substitute in which life is "what we think it." [27] Defending Whitman's refusal to be consistent, in "Some Lines from Whitman" from *Poetry and the Age*, Jarrell summarizes: "When you organize one of the contradictory elements out of your work of art, you are getting rid not just of it, but of the contradiction of which it was a part; and it is the contradictions in works of art which make them able to

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[24] *Sewanee Review*, 51 (April-June 1943), 276.
[25] Ibid., p. 277.
[26] "The Morality of Mr. Winters," *Kenyon Review*, (Spring 1939), 213.
[27] *A Sad Heart*, p. 26.

represent to us—as logical and methodical generalizations cannot—our worlds and our selves, which are also full of contradictions." [28] A similar inconsistency is another admirable quality which Jarrell finds in Ransom's poetry, along with its sympathy and tenderness. He explains with an anecdote:

> Once I took a little girl to a Tarzan movie; and as each new actor, each new cannibal, each new leopard and monkey and crocodile came on the scene, she would whisper to me desperately: "Is that a *good* one? Is that a *bad* one?" This great root-notion, this imperative at the bottom of our beings, is ill satisfied by Ransom's poems, anomalous things that keep whispering to us, "Both"—that keep whispering to us, "Neither." [29]

The distaste for moral absolutism which is evident in Jarrell's judgments on Winters and MacLeish is expressed even more passionately in his review of Alex Comfort's book of war poems, *The Song of Lazarus* (1945). Here, Jarrell is abrupt and irate. He grants Comfort "both courage and individual judgment" in becoming a conscientious objector, but asserts that because Comfort served out his term as an interne in a London hospital, instead of as "a laborer in some concentration camp in the country," [30] he was insulated from the truth of war. As in so much of the criticism I have been quoting, Jarrell takes the side of the average, anonymous millions against what he sees as Comfort's supercilious and wrong-headed condescension:

> . . . he is the isolated, pacifist, individualistic anarchist who tells the truth about things to the deceived homogeneous mass that is everybody else. . . . Mr. Comfort believes in conscientious disobedience: if no one obeys the government there will be no war. . . . The poet's irritation at the stupidity of the corpses weakens his pastoral and generalized grief for them; besides, these are the wholesale deaths that happen to other people. . . . And he never wonders: how does it feel to be a dupe?
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> Between Mr. Comfort and the soldiers there is a final barrier: he is right and they are wrong; and he cannot share the . . . unwilling identity in which all their differences are buried. . . . It is hard for him to feel for one of them an unmixed sorrow, since he can't help thinking, "He'd have been all right if he'd only had sense enough to

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[28] *Poetry and the Age*, p. 116.
[29] Ibid., pp. 91-92.
[30] Ibid., p. 141.

disobey." But he means, *if they'd only all had sense enough to disobey;* though he seems to think he is making plausible political proposals, he is actually making impossible moral demands." [31]

The misgivings about free will and easy ethical judgments which are evident in these reactions against Comfort's poems are clearly related to Jarrell's disappointment in and distrust of Christian belief. Indeed, if one were to characterize Jarrell in religious terms on the basis of either his critical prose or his poems (e.g., "The Night before the Night before Christmas," "In the Ward: The Sacred Wood," "Burning the Letters," "A Camp in the Prussian Forest"), it would have to be as what the Middle Ages would have termed a Manichean. For Jarrell the modern, however, the duality of good and evil is not based on the conflict between spirit and the material world, but on the gulf between transcendence and inevitability. Writing on R. P. Blackmur's *The Good European* in 1948, Jarrell defined the subject of Blackmur's poems as "evil: evil as such, a real and final evil; so they are not Christian poems at all." Real evil, he goes on, "surely is what is arbitrarily *so* in the universe, all that is undeserved and irremediable," and the definition corresponds precisely with Jarrell's own description of Fate or Necessity as synonyms for reality. As Jarrell recognizes, Christian belief is based upon a monistic universe, and an insistence on the free will of the individual. Still discussing Blackmur's poems, he says, "so long as *we* are to blame for evil, so long as God is free from it—free to save us from that evil which we are and have deserved to be—real evil, final evil, does not exist." [32] But real evil, defined in these terms, *does* exist in Jarrell's world, where "free will" is only a specter. Thus, in a lengthy and extremely capable analysis of "Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry," Jarrell is able to get at the cause of some of the pious profundities in Auden's Christian poetry:

> Remembering some of the incredible conclusions to the later poems—*Life must live,* Auden's wish to *lift an affirming flame*—the reader may object that this sort of thing is sentimental idealism. But sentimental idealism is a necessity for someone who, even after rejecting a system as evil, finally accepts it—even with all the moral reservations and exhortations possible. The sentimentality and idealism, the vague abstraction of such prayers and exhortations, is a *sine qua non*: we can fool ourselves into praying for some vague general change

[31] Ibid., pp. 141-42.
[32] Ibid., p. 152.

> of heart that is going to produce, automatically, all the specific changes that even we could never be foolish enough to pray for. When Auden prays for anything specific at all; when he prays against the organization of the world that makes impossible the moral and spiritual changes he prays for, it will be possible to take the prayer as something more than conscience- and face-saving sublimation. . . .[33]

Jarrell recognizes a similar problem in a very different writer, Kipling, and relates it to the role of Kipling's parents in the misery of his young life. "If Father and Mother were not to blame for anything," Jarrell says in his 1961 introduction to an anthology of Kipling's stories, "yet what did happen to you could happen to you—if God is good, and yet the concentration camps exist—then there has to be *someone* to blame, and to punish too, some real, personal source of the world's evil. But in this world, often, there is nothing to praise but no one to blame, and Kipling can bear to admit this in only a few of his stories."[34] In the poetry of Jarrell the humanitarian, on the contrary, the fact that often "there is nothing to praise but no one to blame" is admitted to again and again. The questions of where, how, and with what degree of success, can only be answered by a reading of *The Complete Poems;* but Jarrell's "amusing, high-spirited, accurate, original, and humane"[35] critical prose offers some important clues to his vision and values.

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[33] *The Third Book,* p. 124.

[34] *A Sad Heart,* pp. 134-35.

[35] R. W. Flint, "On Randall Jarrell," in Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, and Robert Warren, eds., *Randall Jarrell 1914-1965* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), p. 77.

LENGTHENING

I think of the metaphor that is
the mind as it lays grace
upon the hard sitting maple
blooming in the teeth of this
winter once more
present and I take its length through the
supple niches of light in which
the spreading grasses
at the trunk are called to life, to my
vision from the darkness; and
throughout the image of the world
I'm versed in, the strength
of the mind is its resiliency,
its wisdom in
stretching to meet itself coming.

At the other hand are the maple blossoms sensing
the spring while the ice is lowered upon them
and I've heard the peach trees
have arrived too soon, also given themselves
up to the
failing light that is the sun
and I know neither the world above
nor within me will hold, will
break loose from the wobble of
these seasons and the drawn line
between thaw and sleet
is all that we have before or behind
us, all that the mind and
nature unspoken for has to look for;
but the metaphor anchors the world
at this moment,
clings to the loss the maple
feels as another wind
climbs through the basins and lands
crackling on its limbs.

Doug Abrams

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

D. J. Cohen

Paul, Fran and I go to a rally at the hockey rink. There are No Smoking signs but people light up cigarettes and pipes in defiance of the Establishment. A smokecloud hangs over the uniced rink, where the speakers' platform is.

People talk about the Panthers, the War, New Haven's slums, the responsibilities of the University, the demonstrations planned for Mayday. The best speakers are black. An enormous black woman in a house dress—the head of some local coalition—hoists herself up on a table and speaks, thickening her accent to mock our expectations:

"Folks tell me they call it Mother Yale. Well, your Mama Yale's been wipin' your noses and your *be*-hinds for a long time now but one a' these days you gonna have ta grow up and leave your ol' Mama. Now, we don't have no mama takin' care of us but we's still gonna get what we want. We's gonna have what we are being *de*-prived of and it don't make no difference ta us who's tryin' ta help us or hurt us 'cause we's gonna get what's ours in the end."

We're all impressed. Fran chuckles appreciatively. Leaning over the railing to get a closer look, Paul says:

"She's great! Isn't she great? I'd love to be that woman."

* * * *

The fact that Paul and I are different physical types has kept our friendship going, that and sharing the miseries of graduate school. Each of us sees the other as slightly exotic; each is flattered by the other's interest. Paul is blond and slim, taller than I am, with pale blue eyes that don't tell me much. People will still mention his boyish charm when he's forty. He makes me think of Cokes down at the corner store, a basketball hoop over the garage, dates with the blondest cheerleader (Paul claims he was too shy to ask). I'm stocky and swarthy, linked in Paul's mind to all that semitic suffering and intellectual passion, which he has collectively labeled *Kulturschmerz*. Lately, though, Paul has been the sufferer. He wraps his hands around his coffee cup and mopes, looking like the one who dropped the pass that lost the big game. He and Loretta are having problems. Loretta is a secretary in the English office. Blond, with a girlishly pretty face, she looks like the cheerleader he didn't ask out in high school. They've been married for two years.

When Paul sees Fran he perks up. She's dark too. She flirts with him, calling him "the beautiful boy," and her husky sexiness makes him

giggle. Fran has a reputation for being unhappy as well as brilliant but I've never seen her when she wasn't enjoying herself. At *Charlie's* she goes from table to table getting signatures on a petition—Free Bobby Seale—and we can hear her deep laugh across the room.

Whenever Paul and I badmouth doctoral theses she puts her hands on her hips and leans back away from the conversation. She's serious about hers, which she thinks will be very good. Undoubtedly it will.

* * * *

Two fellows talking in the dining hall:

"What I mean is there's no reason I shouldn't take a knife and stab you in the heart."

"You'd go to jail."

"There's no reason I *shouldn't* go to jail. There's no reason I shouldn't be a convicted murderer instead of a doctor. On the other hand there's no reason I *should* take a knife and stab you in the heart. There's no imperative either way, if you see what I mean. It doesn't make any difference what you do."

"Bullshit."

* * * *

Professor F. tells us that essays late by reason of political involvement will not be penalized. He begins the seminar on the sincerity of *Lycidas* with an outline of the critical debate. During the silence that follows, he takes off his glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose. He looks tired. He always looks tired. Five years ago he burned the manuscript of a book he had been working on for a decade and a half, a new theory of criticism that didn't pan out, and his fatigue seems a direct result of the act of feeding his typescript to the flames. Paul is full of admiration:

"He's made himself an emblem of failure, a tragic hero."

I'm curious about the immolation scene itself and wonder whether there was more pain or pleasure in it.

Professor F. says:

"If your work here is worth doing at all it's worth doing now, when its value is being questioned and its existence, to some extent, is threatened."

Carla Handman starts the discussion. Her specialty is unearthing fraud and pretension and now she badgers Milton for a while: the poet is more concerned with himself than with the supposed friend who died.

Benson raises a pale hand and defends the poem:

"I think one of the most important things literature can do is find dignified forms for sloppy feelings."

Benson's comments always sound prepared. I picture him alone in his room surrounded by unwashed dishes and piles of books, trying out his phrases on a tape recorder.

° ° ° °

Someone did a job on the library steps during the night. The word "Unite" has been painted over and over again on both treads and risers, in black, twenty-eight times in all:

UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE
UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE
UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE
UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE UNITE

° ° ° °

Paul and I have coffee at *Charlie's,* which has been open for a year but looks like an old college hangout. The walls are woodpanelled, covered with posters for films and art shows and photographs of old varsity teams in white sweaters and white trousers posed against a backdrop of painted elms. The wooden tables are bumpy with graffiti: phone numbers, names and dates, verbal and pictorial obscenities, "Frodo lives!," "Professor B. reads Classics Comics." The day *Charlie's* opened they offered free coffee and donuts to people who would come in and carve up the tables.

It's crowded all the time now. A few days ago they put up a sign: "We want you to eat here, not live here." But the sign had no effect and this morning it's gone.

"Someone liberated the sign," Paul says.

He runs his finger along the rim of his coffee cup.

"Gratitude is no basis for a marriage," he says. "We don't have a word to say to each other."

I change the subject because I can't think of anything to say that won't offend him. Paul probably knows that he's spoiled and that being spoiled is part of his charm. (*Et moi*? I refuse to be charming—that's part of my charm. Phrasemaker.) I tell him that the National Guard has taken over the schoolyard across from my apartment. There are jeeps and troop carriers parked on the basketball court and armed guards standing just inside the fence.

"Afraid the third graders will rise up and topple Tricky Dicky," he says.

He looks down.

"A crisis should bring people together but it makes me want to grab whatever I can."

"Or whomever."

"Bastard," he says, smiling.

When I offer to pay for the coffees he whips the check out from under the ashtray.

"*Nein, mon pauvre étudiant.* Loretta gets a real salary."

° ° ° °

Benson comes out of the library as I'm going in. I hold the door for him and we nod. He's wearing black as usual, though it's a warm day: black shoes, black dress slacks, a black long-sleeved shirt. Pale, serious, black-clad, he looks like Hamlet, the kind of brooding, romantic Hamlet that Professor K. calls a serious misreading, an emasculation of the play. Carla thinks Benson's the one who cleared the library's Milton shelf at the beginning of the course: no one's been able to find any of the books on the list Professor F. handed out.

° ° ° °

"Proudhon?"

"No."

"Bakunin?"

"I've heard the name."

"Kropotkin?"

"I don't know. A Russian."

"A Russian, he says. Very good. Terrific. You're right, he is a Russian."

"If it's so important to know who they are why don't you educate me?"

"It's too late for you. You can't jump on the bandwagon now that it's rolling."

° ° ° °

The walls enclosing the library courtyard are pseudo-gothic, yellow stone and narrow leaded windows with bits of stained glass in them, gifts from graduating classes. The fountain in the center is a square grayish basin embossed with leaves and grape clusters, with spouting dolphins at the corners. Cards affixed to each side, white with red letters, say:

POISON!
LEAD BASIN
DO NOT DRINK!

Sitting on a bench reading *The Prelude* ("And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat/Went heaving through the water like a swan") I am suddenly afraid of snipers. I see the headline: GUNMAN SLAYS FOUR. I search the surrounding roofs. There's a fellow lying on the grass, an easy target, and some Japanese tourists taking pictures of each other in front of the fountain ("Actual Photo of Mr. Watanabe Taken Seconds Before his Untimely Death"). When the tourists leave I watch to see whether the door opens into the courtyard or into the building. Into the courtyard. I see myself zigzagging to the door, the rifle cracking above me, bullets punching holes in the fountain and whomping into the grass. Too late to help that poor bastard swimming in his own blood. I yank open the door and dive inside: safe.

* * * *

Cullen has been on the English faculty for two years but he likes to sit with the graduate students at *Charlie's*.

"After the Revolution," he says, "they'll make me teach Eldridge Cleaver."

"After the Revolution you won't teach anything, you'll dig ditches," Carla says.

"Why does everyone talk about ditchdigging? As if there's suddenly going to be this tremendous demand for ditches."

"For the bodies," Paul says.

Paul gets up to go to the library.

"How can you leave us?" Fran says, opening her arms and tilting her chin up, as if waiting for a kiss.

The rest of us suddenly turn into spectators and pretend that there's nothing to watch.

Hand on heart, Paul quotes:

"The intellect of man is forced to choose perfection of the life or of the work."

He throws a kiss at Fran as he leaves. She sees Carla's frown and shrugs her shoulders.

"I know what I'm doing," she says, then smiles and adds: "I think."

Cullen says:

"I don't believe Yeats makes sufficient allowance for half-assed indecision."

* * * *

I try to work on an essay, a comparison of *The Prelude* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "Stephen's epiphanies are more personal, more self-centered. In *The Prelude* Nature reveals *itself* and in doing so defines the poet. In *Portrait*. . . ."

I want something to happen outside so I'll have an excuse to get up. Anything: a fire, a car accident, an assault on the schoolyard across the street, a UFO setting down on Whitney Avenue.

° ° ° °

The Crazies stay up most of the night, then sleep anywhere. At nine AM Paul and I find three of them lying shirtless outside Professor F.'s office. On their backs, heads together at the base of a magnolia tree, they look pastoral and significant, like characters in a fairy tale. One stretches and stands. "Hi folks," he says to us, broadsmiling and rubbing the air with an open palm—his Eddie Cantor number. He springs up and chins himself on a tree limb, showering his hair and his sleeping friends with pink and white petals.

° ° ° °

An undergraduate I don't know sits next next to me in the dining hall. He's tanned all the way up his arms; his shirtsleeves are rolled to his shoulders. He takes a cigarette out of a black pack, breaks it in two and puts the half I turn down behind his ear. He tells me he's just come back from Cuba: a shipload of them went for three weeks of work and fellowship. He describes driving to and from the fields in the backs of trucks, learning the Cubans' songs, sharing their food. Everyone's equal there, he says. There are no bosses, no special privileges. Everyone works with his hands, even Castro. Everyone builds houses, everyone farms. And there's no theft, no jealousy, no unhealthy competition. Those evils are products of capitalist society. I express doubts and talk about human nature, annoyed by his dogmatism but also annoyed to see myself in my father's role:

FATHER: A dictator is a dictator.

ME: But Batista was a dictator.

F: Not a communist dictator. You young people think you can change human nature.

"I was there! I saw it!" the undergraduate says. I think he has tears in his eyes.

"Do you know Spanish?"

"I learned some while I was there. You don't need Spanish to know what people are like."

We argue some more, then he stands, his eyes hurt and angry. He's got my number: after the Revolution I'll get what's coming to me.

* * * *

Another rally at the hockey rink. A black speaker says:

"If everyone here tonight will go out and off just one pig. . . ."

There are a few cheers and war whoops but more boos and a general grumble of disapproval. He is furious, curses the audience, breaks off and leaves the platform, a bodyguard of four men closing around him.

A young white man in a suit and tie gets up to speak. For two minutes he says nothing but holds our attention, sweeping the stands with his eyes and leaning towards the microphone several times, as if just about to speak, then grinning mischievously and pulling away. Finally he does speak. Using the same passionate, heroic style we've been hearing all evening, he starts complaining about his father, how mean his father is, and something about warning him that this would happen.

A man approaches the platform and says, "This boy needs help."

The young man shouts, "No! You're the one who needs help!" but allows himself to be led away.

* * * *

Cullen, in the middle of a circle of undergraduates, says:

"The faculty understood the American racial situation long before the students knew there was one."

* * * *

When Carla is with Fran she looks small and tense. In general other women don't like Fran. Carla advises her not to get involved with Paul.

"There are other men around," she says, and then tells me it's all right if Paul finds out what she said.

"You're happily married," Fran says. "You don't know what the world is like."

"I could tell you things. You don't have to be single to suffer. You don't have to be black. You don't have to be poor."

Fran confesses that she sometimes needs a bottle of Scotch to get through the day.

"The couple who own the liquor store I go to told me I shouldn't drink so much. They *made* me have dinner with them last week. They asked me to think of myself as their daughter."

Fran, it seems, is frequently befriended by grocers, landlords, shoemakers, waiters, old couples who own liquor stores, laundries, coffee shops.

"I don't believe you need much help getting through the day," Carla says.

"I've been trained to hide my feelings," Fran says, smiling, as if laughing at herself.

"Who hasn't?"

"I know I'm not the only one," Fran says, smiling again, "but that doesn't make it any easier."

They both look at me, as if waiting for me to pick a winner, which I wisely decline to do.

° ° ° °

Dinner at Paul's apartment is not pleasant. He and Loretta must have had a fight before I arrived because now they are not talking to each other. Loretta serves briskly, smiling at me, not looking at Paul. Ignoring her, Paul talks energetically about the latest rumors: that there are paratroopers in the suburbs, that the Weathermen will storm the courthouse with stolen guns, that stores near the campus have had their insurance policies cancelled. When Loretta talks to me Paul looks up at the ceiling, waiting for her to finish. She describes Professor B.'s attempts to seem absentminded, how he likes to wait until he's late for class or a meeting and then fling his papers together and run. She does a pretty good imitation of Professor B., hunching forward and saying in a weary growl: "Loretta, when am I going to learn not to get so wrapped up in my work?" Then she straightens up and laughs, surprised at having done it so well.

"How can you talk about trivialities at a time like this?" Paul says.

Loretta looks angry, then hurt, but says nothing.

When I leave, Paul insists on walking me down. We walk back and forth in front of his building. The maple trees are just coming into leaf. From a distance the branches seem to be enveloped in green haze but life (history), and fiction, and it demands our close attention.
close up the leaves are distinct, each a perfect miniature of a maple leaf, moist and translucent.

I tell Paul I'm sick of graduate school. If it weren't for the draft, I would quit.

"Why?" he asks.

"I don't want to be a scholar, I don't want to be a teacher. I just drifted into it."

"What do you want to be?"

"A doctor, a fireman, a lawyer, a truckdriver, a shrink, a bricklayer, a chef."

"Don't we all," he says. "Well, flatten your feet. Chop off your big toe. Treat yourself to a tattoo: 'Victory to the V.C.' across your belly."

"I've got to go," I tell him.

"I don't *want* to be like that," he says. "She brings out the worst in me."

We shake hands.

"Stone walls do not a prison make," he says.

He turns and walks to his apartment with a comic slouch: the inmate returning to his cell.

* * * *

There's a meeting in one of the dining halls. The University has offered free meals and a place to sleep to demonstrators who come for Mayday. A group of radical students argue that the oppressor cannot be allowed to disguise itself as a benefactor. Their principal spokesman, a fellow with a leather band across his forehead, says:

"Know your enemy. That's rule number one."

A student talks again and again about solidarity with the workers. After every three or four speakers he repeats his plea for a union of students and workers at the City's rifle factory. Throwing his arms out and down for emphasis, he looks like an umpire saying, "Safe!"

The meeting goes on for a long time. Someone stands on a chair and shouts, "Enough talk! Talk won't free Bobby! Talk is shit!"

A young man with black-rimmed glasses reads from a prepared speech:

". . . volunteers whose names shall be drawn at random each day that the trial is allowed to continue, the selected individuals to sacrifice their lives on the courthouse steps by the method of their choice, one each day until this fascist oppression of our Panther brothers is halted."

At 2:30 AM the Dean says:

"We're keeping that good man away from his home and family."

Everyone looks toward the door, where the college custodian leans against a wall, waiting to lock up. He waves like a sports star greeting his fans. We look and admire: here's a genuine worker, wearing paint-spotted shoes and gray overalls with wrenches and screwdrivers sticking out of the pockets. The meeting ends. People straighten tables, push in chairs and file out.

* * * *

Fran is a member of the Graduate Student Strike Committee and has been appointed student assistant to the Dean of Graduate Studies for the duration of the crisis. She has a folder full of lists, schedules and phone numbers. People stop her on the street to ask questions which

she answers clearly and forcefully. The pay phone in *Charlie's* rings, the first time I've heard it. It's for Fran. She's excited, a warm blaze in her eyes. She drinks her coffee standing, one hand on her hip. Looking down at Paul and me, she tells us about being propositioned by a truck driver:

"He said he'd give me fifty dollars to get in the back of his truck with him."

She laughs.

"I told him I didn't have time."

° ° ° °

The National Guard has occupied the north side of Park Street. A single line of them is strung out across the fronts of apartment buildings, a Christian Science church, a gift shop, a photographer's studio. It's a warm afternoon. Overdressed in helmets, boots, guns, battle fatigues, pockets and pouches, they look ponderous, frightening but ridiculous too, like deepsea divers out of water. On the other side of the street is a crowd of students and faculty members. We watch each other as much as we watch the soldiers, afraid that someone may start something. Paul and I talk about how stupid it would be to be shot down on Park Street.

"What a blow to the future of literary criticism," he says.

But we feel obliged to spend a certain amount of time across from the soldiers. It's our responsibility.

Cullen crosses the street and goes up to one of the Guardsmen.

"I'm Dr. Cullen," he says. "Is there anything I can do?"

Eyes front, the soldier says:

"Go home, Doc. What you can do is go home."

° ° ° °

People brag about how little sleep they've had.

A student napping in Charlie's raises his head from the table and smiles happily.

"I haven't slept since Monday," he says, and puts his head down again.

° ° ° °

A phonecall from my father.

"What's going on up there?"

"Meetings, a lot of talk. It's all right."

"Your mother and I think you should come home this weekend."

"No."

Ten seconds of dead air. Someone in the apartment below mine is clumping around. It sounds like a pegleg: maybe Long John Silver has moved in.

"Where do you stand on all this?"

"I'm sympathetic but sensible. Don't worry, I'll take care of myself."

Yes, well, I'm against poverty, discrimination, war and cruelty to animals. I'm for clean air, Chavez's grapepickers, Bobby Seale's freedom if he's innocent, bloodless annihilation of the grad school.

I go out. It's a mild evening. I can smell grass and warm soil. Two soldiers are in the schoolyard guarding their jeeps and trucks. Walking by, heading for the quiet streets out near East Rock, I imagine what would happen if I ran at them, waving my arms and screaming.

° ° ° °

The windows of the shops on Chapel Street, York Street and Broadway are being covered with sheets of raw plywood. All morning long the hammers bang and there's a faint, sweet lumberyard smell in the air. *Charlie's,* boarded up, is dark inside, subterranean, a noisy cave.

I find a seat next to Kramer, who's in my modern fiction course. The only time I've heard his voice was when he read his paper in class: the usual cautious juggling of critical opinions of some book or other. He glares at me. When I ask him what he's going to write his thesis on he explodes. Theses are shit, he tells me, books are shit, no book ever taught anyone anything, people who say they like to read are liars, books shouldn't exist while people are hungry and the jails are full of political prisoners. I feel as if I've been attacked. I ask him why he's in graduate school.

"I have my reasons."

"What are they?"

"You'll see. You'll be hearing about me."

° ° ° °

There's a Mayday Eve party at the Handmans'. Mike is a lawyer. He wears mutton-chop whiskers and three-piece suits and enjoys using his deep voice. Carla is always poking him in the side and saying, "Stop trying to sound like Perry Mason," but he hardly seems to notice. They are proud of their apartment, which they say is furnished in Contemporary Scavenger. In the livingroom are an old couch without cushions, a barber's chair, a yellow "school SLOW children" sign hung on the wall. The kitchen has a drugstore scale—your weight and fortune—and a traffic light sitting on a cabinet flashing red and yellow. It seems very big indoors. Its size and drab metal color make it look like a weapon.

The tombstone in the bathroom is their prize possession. It's an old one, tablet-shaped and about two inches thick. The inscription is blurred, the face of the stone covered with a patina of lichens, rusted and dark

green. A girl from the Milton seminar tells Mike, "You shouldn't have taken it."

"Yes, it was a pretty crazy thing to do. I could have been disbarred if I was caught," he says solemnly, but he's smiling.

The bedroom, where we pile our jackets and sweaters, is free of large *trouvailles* but there's a sign over the bed that says, "Sorry, We're Closed. Please Call Again."

Some of the girls make spaghetti. The steam billowing out of the noodle pot is red-yellow because of the traffic light. Fran scoops out noodles with a slotted spoon and dumps them on paper plates. She wipes the sweat off her neck with a dishtowel. Hovering over her, Paul says:

"I didn't know you were so domestic."

There's spaghetti, wine, scotch, beer. People are determined to get drunk. They begin to act drunk almost as soon as they start drinking.

"Mayday! Mayday!" someone shouts.

The girl from the Milton seminar who told Mike that he shouldn't have taken the tombstone tells me that the whole problem is that everyone wants a house of his own and his own backyard: suburbia is eating the country alive. In Germany, where she spent a summer, people live in neat little towns and go out to the country together on weekends, all in the same bus.

A girl I don't know is talking to Paul:

"I don't know you very well but I know Loretta and I just can't stand the idea of your not getting along."

Loretta sits on the cushionless couch next to Cullen, combing her hair with her fingers. Cullen tells the "Go home Doc" story on himself and Loretta laughs and asks him what help he expected to give the National Guard. Was he planning to calm the students with excerpts from his thesis? Cullen looks dismayed but Loretta, reckless tonight, keeps laughing.

Someone talks to me for a long time about peace.

"But it's not cement," she says, "none of it is cement enough." I nod, trying to catch on, and realize finally that she means "concrete."

Paul puts his arm around my shoulder.

"See? If you quit grad school you'll miss out on all this."

He waves his drink at the crowded room.

"Maybe I'll stay and be a fifth columnist like Kramer" (I've told him about Kramer's outburst in *Charlie's*). "The enemy within."

Paul says:

"When we get to the department chairmen we can change the system." It's a grim joke we frequently share.

Carla tells me that she and Mike go diving in the Sound every Saturday even though they can't see anything but murk.

"After the Revolution we'll have to turn in our scuba gear," she says.

She's had a lot to drink and her usual expression, a you-can't-put-one-over-on-me smirk, has melted into a bland smile.

"Where were you five years ago, when I needed you?" she says.

"I've often asked myself that very question," I say, laughing.

Paul and Fran disappear into the bedroom. Everyone knows, even Loretta, to judge by the way she chatters at Cullen and puts her hand on his forearm when she asks him to refill her glass. The party devotes itself to the single purpose of avoiding a scene between Paul and Loretta. Everyone laughs a great deal. Fifteen minutes later Paul comes back to the livingroom, drinking from a can of beer. Then Fran comes in with a plate of spaghetti. Nothing happens. I'm disappointed, not relieved. Feeling guilty, I find excuses for myself: human nature, etc.

"You're a bad boy," I tell Paul.

"*Carpe diem*," he says, and then: "You don't drink enough, you cautious bastard."

Benson arrives, even paler than usual and trembling with excitement. He reports clashes between students and Guardsmen on Chapel Street and describes the teargas floating over the freshman campus. Someone else says he heard that a bomb exploded at the hockey rink. Firecrackers or what sound like firecrackers go off outside.

Benson sits in the barber chair, his beercan on the chrome armrest, his head back as if he's waiting for a hot towel. Without irony he says:

"We're the custodians of the culture. We have a responsibility, like the monks of the Middle Ages."

FAULKNER: NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOTIONS OF RACIAL MIXTURE AND THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY IMAGINATION

WALTER TAYLOR

Since George Marion O'Donnell's "Faulkner's Mythology" (1939), most critics have accepted as gospel his belief that the "Southern social-economic-ethical tradition" is the "one principle" which "holds together" Faulkner's work. But O'Donnell announced another principle in that essay that has stayed with us just as tenaciously. "Mr. Faulkner possesses" that tradition "naturally," O'Donnell decided, "as a part of his sensibility";[1] he made no effort to push backward toward literary influences.

That tendency to ignore Faulkner's reading has been all too familiar in Faulkner criticism. "No general survey of Faulkner's reading," Richard P. Adams observed in 1962, "has ever been published," and he was at a loss to understand why. "There should be no need for special emphasis," he protested, "on the obvious fact that Faulkner's apprenticeship involved an enormous amount of reading"; the quality "of work Faulkner did between 1928 and 1942" clearly required "the hardest kind of study, thought and labor."[2] In a lengthy essay, Adams set out to do something about that problem, and more recently Michael Millgate, Mark Gidley, Jean Weisgerber, and Joseph Blotner have supplied significant additions;[3] but it remains one of the remarkable facts about Faulkner criticism that his debt to the writers who created the literary "Southern social-economic-ethical tradition" remains to be assessed with any kind of precision. Gidley's remark that "it is still quite commonly believed that . . . [Faulkner] was an untutored genius of the sort the Romantics are said to have popularized" is as true today of his debt to the literary South as it was in 1970 of the "extra-literary reading" Gidley studied.[4]

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[1] O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), p. 82.

[2] Adams, "The Apprenticeship of William Faulkner," *Tulane Studies in English*, 12 (1962), 113.

[3] Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1966); Gidley, "One Continuous Force: Notes on Faulkner's Extra-Literary Reading," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 23 (Summer 1970), 299-314; Weisgerber, *Faulkner et Dostoievski: Confluences et Influences* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1968); Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974).

[4] Gidley, p. 299. What happened during Faulkner's 1957-58 classroom sessions at the University of Virginia is typical. Names like John Pendleton Kennedy, William Gilmore Simms, even Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, are notable

That debt is a basic one, involving not only Faulkner's choice of themes but also the manner in which his imagination operated on those themes. No aspect of Faulkner's work reveals this more clearly than his efforts to dramatize the problems associated with racial mixture.[5] The literary Southern plantation was largely the product of two eras: an ante-bellum period dominated by the abolition controversy, and a post-Reconstruction period dominated largely by apologists for segregation. This literature was by definition a literature of race. The arguments of both factions centered on two issues: the immorality of slavery and segregation, and the possible dangers of social mixing of the races. In either case, they turned inevitably to the problem of sexual relations. One phase of the discussion centered on the alleged improvement or degeneracy involved in the combination of racial strains; another upon the ambiguous social status of the individual of mixed blood.

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in their absence from the index of Blotner and Frederick L. Gwynn's *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959); so are the names of Northern writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Richard Hildreth, and J. T. Trowbridge, who also contributed to the literary plantation legend. Faulkner himself was not very helpful at Virginia; questioned about Paul Hamilton Hayne and Sidney Lanier (p. 136), he gave a generalized answer that did not mention either writer. The tendency continues in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968). Blotner's biography offers little more help. We learn (p. 102) that Faulkner's mother introduced him to Poe, and (p. 94) that he owned a copy of Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), that (p. 1806) he was fond of reading aloud Irwin Russell's "Christmas Night in the Quarters." In addition to Dixon's novel and Russell's poem, Blotner's *William Faulkner's Library: A Catalog* (New York: Random House, 1964), reveals only Joel Chandler Harris' *Sister Jane* (1899). In *Faulkner at West Point*, eds. Joseph L. Fant, III and Robert Ashley (New York: Random House, 1964), Faulkner indicated his familiarity with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (p. 104).

There have, of course, been numerous assessments of the influence of the historical and social South—as opposed to the literary South—on Faulkner's work.

[5] Of the problem of assessing Faulkner's literary antecedents, Ward L. Miner has written as follows: "Because Faulkner happens to be the kind of writer he is—a storyteller using twentieth-century techniques and modes with an acute sense of man's tragic condition—he makes difficult the task of the student of influences. More widely read than he pretended, he usually modified whatever he might have borrowed from his reading—and we have not the data to make this precise—to suit the story needs of a particular work. Tracking down influences therefore demands a more sophisticated, less mechanical approach than normally found in Faulkner criticism. Fuzzy as they might be, ideas together with the contexts of characters and physical situations, instead of the usual juxtaposition of parallel texts, must be the primary tools of the student of influences on Faulkner." Review of Weisgerber, *Faulkner et Dostoievski*, *American Literature*, 41 (January 1970), 612.

"Mulatto" is a word blacks seldom use. Black Americans generally have some white ancestry, and that term connotes little to them except the familiar talent of whites for mislabeling them. But in the propaganda wars the term has had a long history. The "tragic mulatto" who lacks social identity in a partitioned society was a favorite theme of abolition polemicists. Harriet Beecher Stowe,[6] Richard Hildreth, J. T. Trowbridge and their associates used this stereotype—as Sterling Brown sums up the matter—"partly to show miscegenation as an evil of slavery [and hence to militate for abolition], partly as an attempt to win [white] readers' sympathies by presenting central characters who were physically very like the readers." Despite their obvious good intentions it was a crude kind of racism. If "their near-white characters are the intransigent, the resentful, the mentally-alert" among the fictional slave population of the period, "it is for biological, not social reasons."[7] As Penelope Bullock assesses the stereotype of the abolitionists' tragic mulatto, he bears an obvious resemblance to a number of Faulkner's figures:

> From . . . [the abolitionists'] novels emerges in bold, simple outline a major, stereotyped figure. He is the son or daughter of a Southern white aristocratic gentleman and one of his favorite slave mistresses. From his father he has inherited mental capacities and physical beauty. . . . Yet despite such an endowment, or rather because of it, his life is fraught with tragedy. What privileges and opportunities he may enjoy are short-lived; for he is inevitably a slave. Suffering the degrading hardships of bondage, he becomes miserable and bitter. The indomitable spirit of his father rises up in him and he rebels. If he is successful in escaping to freedom he becomes a happy, prosperous, and reputable citizen in his community. But if his revolt against slavery fails, he meets a tragic death nobly.[8]

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[6] Asked at West Point (p. 104) about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Faulkner sounded as though he had been ruminating a long time on Mrs. Stowe's version of the plantation legend. His Southern commitments were showing. That book "was written out of violent and misdirected compassion and ignorance of the author," he said, "toward a situation which she knew only by hearsay." But Faulkner was willing to grant Stowe certain things. Writing that book "was not an intellectual process," he thought, "it was hotter than that; it was out of her heart." What Stowe was interested in was "telling a story of Uncle Tom and the little girl"; that was "a story which moved her, seemed so terrible and so hot to her that it had to be told."

[7] Sterling A. Brown, "A Century of Negro Portraiture in American Literature," *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature*, ed. Abraham Chapman (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 570.

[8] Bullock, The Mulatto in American Fiction," *Phylon*, 6 (First Quarter 1945) 79.

Northern writers sentimentalized the mulatto and called him "tragic"; Southerners feared him and conjectured that he was sub-human. He became the center of an interminable debate over the genetic consequences of racial mixture. This pre-Darwinian argument, largely scientific and pseudo-scientific, not literary, was clouded by the pioneer state of contemporary knowledge. "From the colonial period on," writes William Sumner Jenkins, "the inferiority of the Negro was an assumption made by the slaveholder for which he required little or no demonstration." The black was a "lower order of man," and hence "there could be no alternative to a system of slavery, except a condition of race conflict which would . . . eventuate in the extermination of the inferior race." [9] Predictably, the spectre of interbreeding between two different "orders of man" gave birth to fears of the genetic results: that mixture would result in lowering of the "superior" race to the other's level, or worse, that the weakest characteristics of each race might combine to produce an inferior people.

William Gilmore Simms's "The Morals of Slavery" (1853) typifies such speculation. On the face of it, Simms was far from dogmatic; racial "purity," he felt, was not always a blessing. "Perhaps the very homogeneousness of a people is adverse to the most wholesome forms of liberty. It may make of a selfish people . . . a *successful* people—in the merely worldly sense of the word—but it can never make them, morally, a great one." Creation of superior mental and physical specimens, he felt, required "strange admixtures of differing races"; such was "the history of the Saxon boors under the Norman conquest—a combination, which has resulted in the production of one of the most perfect specimens of physical organization and moral susceptibilities, which the world has ever known." If the Irish had come in mass to America and enslaved the Indians, one of Simms's characters speculates in "The Wigwam and the Cabin" (1848), they might have produced "the very noblest specimens of humanity, in mental and bodily stature, that the world has ever witnessed."

Defending slave owners against charges of immorality, Simms disparaged miscegenation as a serious problem, basing his arguments on his assumption of high moral standards among whites and, in the instance of occasional aberration, on the strength of parental feelings. But he could not bring himself to believe that black-white interbreeding would result in the foreseeable future in anything but a degeneration of both

[9] Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), pp. 243-244.

blood lines. Mulatto slaves "are not liked," he warned, and although he himself looked upon blacks as "inferior beings," he felt that mulattoes "are a feebler race than the negro, and less fitted for the labors of the field." [10]

For the Southern propagandist, such conjectures offered a questionable defense of separation of the races into master and slave classes. Despite his protests, he was open to the obvious argument that a combination of the stronger characteristics of the two might produce superior individuals. More embarrassing was the equally obvious fact that whatever racial mixture went on was generally conceded to result from the master class's immorality. Southern apologists, accordingly, tended to avoid the question of miscegenation before the war.

After the Reconstruction a new group of writers—Tourgee, Chopin, Chesnutt, Cable, Clemens, Howells—revived the tragic mulatto to attack the mores of segregation. But if the abolition novelists had won the day in their own time, their more artful successors were predestined to popular failure. Riding the crest of a new, national wave of racism, politicians like Pitchfork Ben Tillman and James Kimble Vardaman preached a doctrine of white ascendancy and revived fears of racial mixture. Their chief fictional spokesman was Ku Klux Klan apologist Thomas Dixon, Jr., whose *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) were runaway best-sellers.[11] Dixon and his associates insisted that black social equality would inevitably result in "amalgamation," and employed villainous characters of mixed blood as arguments that mulattoes are inevitably the inferior of the "pure-blooded" of both races. They foresaw a terrifying future: a yellow nation which would lose the ascendant position to which its Anglo-Saxon virtues had carried it. The vision was apocalyptic. "If you ask . . . [the black] to your house he will break bread with you at last. And if you seat him at your table he has the right to ask your daughter's hand in marriage." For the nation to "become mulatto . . . is death." Hence, "The beginning of Negro equality . . . is the beginning of the end of this nation's life. There is enough negro blood here to make mulatto the whole republic." [12]

If research has mercifully written the scientific epitaph on this kind of conjecture, the concept of mixed "blood" remains a suggestive met-

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[10] Simms, William Harper, J. H. Hammond, and T. R. Dew, *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Philadelphia, 1853), pp. 268, 281, 283, 179. Emphases are Simms's.

[11] Faulkner's copy of *The Clansman* was one of his oldest possessions; it was given to him in 1905 by Miss Annie Chandler, his first grade teacher.

[12] Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1902), p. 242.

aphor for the union of cultural heritages. It is a metaphor which Faulkner has virtually made his own; it is, truly, impossible to think of him—or his work—without it. In achieving this he has drawn freely on materials from both Northern and Southern versions of the plantation legend. As he presents the situation, the mixing of "blood" lines may have results reminiscent of either of the two possibilities Simms suggests. As in the case of Charles Etienne Bon, grandson of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), it may produce an individual *psychologically* inferior to both Africans and whites in the sense that the white and Negro elements in his blood are suggested to be constantly at war with each other, robbing him of a racial, and hence of a social, identity. As in the case of Lucas Beauchamp in *Go Down, Moses,* it may produce a result similar to what Simms calls the "noblest specimens of humanity," an individual whose blood lines fuse harmoniously. In either case, the mulatto is likely to be tragic; an anomaly in a segregated society, he has no genuine source of personal identification. Faulkner never implies that the effects of interbreeding are easily assessed; his mulattoes generally display in some degree the best as well as the worst effects of their breeding. In almost every case, however, the attitudes of the old nineteenth-century propaganda wars underlie these characterizations; that is, Faulkner's mulatto characters are portrayed as succeeding or failing as human beings through the operation of "blood" as a metaphor for the manner in which the strains of their heritages combine to produce their personalities.

Faulkner's concept is seen more clearly, perhaps, if we move away from the question of race for a moment. A white person may also be tragically caught between two heritages; such is the case of Sarty Snopes of "Barn Burning" (1939). In his deepest consciousness, Sarty rejects the paranoia of his pyromaniac father, Ab. But he is bound to Ab by stronger ties: raised in the belief that family duties are stronger than social ones, Sarty is circumscribed through most of the story by feelings that are almost mystical: feelings that Faulkner describes as "the old fierce pull of blood."[13] Though his conscience tells him Ab is tragically wrong, he is able to reject his father only after a fierce inner struggle.

Sarty's struggle is between an unconscious "pull of blood" and a moral intelligence. But an individual who carries the blood of two races may be more tragic still: may be "pulled" in opposite directions by opposing strains in his blood, a passive victim, that is, of a war at the

[13] Faulkner, "Barn Burning," *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 3.

deepest levels of his consciousness. This belief is suggested in *Go Down, Moses* in "The Old People" through Cass Edmonds' conjectures about Sam Fathers: since Sam has "not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which . . . enslaved it," his doom is to be "himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat." [14]

But Faulkner conceives the opposite possibility as well: a harmonious blood combination which produces a rare superior individual. This concept is perhaps most clearly visualized in the fyce which fearlessly attacks Old Ben in "The Bear." This "nameless and mongrel and many-fathered" little dog which is instrumental in helping Isaac learn the virtues of humility and pride, is one of the important symbols in that story. Faulkner once explained his concept in an interview: the fyce represents a species that "has coped with environment and is still on top of it" because "instead of sticking to his breeding and becoming a decadent degenerate creature, he has mixed himself up with good stock where he picked and chose." [15]

These two attitudes in some way underlie all of Faulkner's major mulatto figures. Faulkner uses Gavin Stevens, for instance, to suggest the idea of warring factions in the blood of Joe Christmas. Christmas, it will be recalled, breaks free after his arrest for the murder of Joanna Burden, and is chased down a large ditch on the outskirts of Jefferson by Percy Grimm. Dodging into a black's cabin, he discovers a pistol. But instead of shooting Grimm, he eludes him and runs to the home of Gail Hightower, the defrocked minister—where, Stevens conjectures, he hopes for some kind of sanctuary. Apparently changing his mind, however, he knocks Hightower to the floor and hides in his kitchen. There—making no effort at his own defense—he allows himself to be apprehended, shot, and emasculated by Grimm. It is, of course, one of the subtleties of Christmas' characterization that no one—including Christmas himself—knows whether or not he really has African blood. Stevens, who like everyone else assumes that he has, explains Joe's actions as follows:

> ". . . [Christmas] must have run with believing for a while; anyway with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would

[14] Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 168.
[15] Ibid., p. 396; *Faulkner in the University*, p. 37.

> not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand." [16]

In the crisis of his break for freedom, in short, Christmas appears to one of the town's better-educated whites to have been paralyzed by the opposing "pulls" of his blood, tragically unable to reconcile a divided inner self.

Similarly, in *Go Down, Moses* Faulkner uses Roth Edmonds to suggest in hard-headed, independent Lucas Beauchamp the harmonious combination of blood lines symbolized by the fyce. Observing this aging mulatto McCaslin kinsman whose life seems in important ways more successful than his own, Roth analyzes Lucas' success in this fashion:

> . . . it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. He didn't even need to strive with it. He didn't even have to bother to defy it. He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, nonconductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seetheless, unrumored in the outside air.[17]

For Roth Edmonds, as for Stevens, there is no question that the black and white bloods (the "toxin and its anti") are inimical; but for Roth,

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[16] Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), pp. 393-394.
[17] *Go Down, Moses*, p. 104.

Lucas is a rare combination. A stalemate is not a war, and with his bloods not in conflict, Lucas can be himself: "simply . . . the composite of the two races which made him." The point is significant. For Faulkner, only rarely do the opposing bloods fail to fight each other, and when such a "stalemate" occurs, there is still no more than a fair chance that the individual will be in any way superior. Human improvement through racial mixture is a remote, though not impossible, potentiality.

These ideas fit snugly enough into Faulkner's scheme of a curse which his Southerners inherit. Miscegenation is fundamental to the curse's operation. The mulatto's very existence makes him, like Charles Bon, the mulatto son of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*, a living symbol of the father's immorality, and hence a punishment of the father, and recalls, strikingly, the sentence of the Old Testament God, extending his vengeance to the third and fourth generations. Faulkner's speculation moves, at that point, from the individual to the society. The mulatto's mixed blood, largely as a metaphor for his mixed cultural heritages, becomes a basis for speculation on the possibilities of moral improvement or degeneration of the human race as a whole. The self-defeating combination of racial traits, as in the case of Bon's idiot grandson, Jim Bond, suggests a cancer impacted deep in the social body, portends the doom of both races. But a harmonious combination, as in the case of Lucas Beauchamp, suggests the possibility that the evils associated with the "pure" blooded may be transcended, suggests hope of eventual freedom from the curse.

Thus in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner uses Shreve McCannon, the unsympathetic Canadian, to suggest the kind of white Southern horror at the destructive potentialities of such mixture played on by Thomas Dixon. With a kind of willfully perverse mathematics, Shreve "proves" to the unwilling Quentin Compson that even though "it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen," there is still "One nigger Sutpen left." What that means to Shreve is that "in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere."[18] Or again, Faulkner uses the aging Isaac McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* to suggest a similar eventuality. In the "*deswamped and denuded and derivered*" Delta, amid "*usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth*," a plethora of races, "*Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares.*" For this octogenarian lover of the wilderness, who is nearing the end of a lifelong penance for what he looks on as atrocities of miscegenation committed by his grandfather, such changes suggest that the doom Shreve Mc-

[18] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Modern Library, 1951), p. 378.

Cannon foresees has almost arrived. "No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution," he muses. "The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge."

But Faulkner does not allow Isaac the only word on the subject; he uses Roth Edmonds' mulatto mistress, who is also Roth's and Isaac's cousin, to suggest those harmonious possibilities symbolized by the fyce. Her affair with Roth, it develops, is for her no perverse thing; when the wifeless, childless Isaac intimates that it is, she asks him, "Old man, . . . have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew about love?" She is, it appears, one of the few characters in the novel capable of giving themselves in love; hence Isaac's instinctive desire to touch her, to feel "for a second the smooth young flesh where the strong old blood ran after its long lost journey back to home."[19] She has, perhaps, passed beyond the point where her bloods are at war, risen, like her cousin Lucas Beauchamp, to the point at which she is "simply . . . the composite of the two races which made" her. Isaac's decision to give the hunting horn, symbol of his wilderness heritage, to this woman's child—on her side at least a child of love— is more than just a concession that the boy is the last male McCaslin. Despite his fears, even such a pessimist on miscegenation as Isaac can hope that an occasional human, like the fyce, "instead of sticking to his breeding and becoming a decadent degenerate creature," might mix "himself up with good stock where he picked and chose."

Not only Faulkner's understanding of the mulatto, in short, but his elaborate vision of American history as well, is centered upon his understanding of the problem of racial mixture—an understanding which employs for its basic metaphorical structure an archaic attitude toward race based on the pseudo-genetics and paranoia of another era. That he should give such importance to an archaic mode of thought is most suggestive. It affirms, for one thing, that as far as Southern literary and social tradition are concerned, he was, as Gidley reminds us, "no untutored genius." But what is at stake here is not merely the fact that Faulkner's intellectual roots were planted so firmly. There is also the question of the quality of Faulkner's imagination, its manner of creation, and there is no gauge of its nature more accurate than his handling of the question of racial mixture.

In this regard one important, and obvious, consideration is that in curious fashion, Faulkner's speculations about miscegenation become a means of avoiding a direct approach to black characterization. Where a

[19] *Go Down, Moses,* pp. 362-364.

dual genetic inheritance exists, Faulkner's choice in every significant instance is to visualize the mulatto's motivation in terms of the *white side* of his heritage. The choice is frequent enough to be called a major mannerism. That his mulatto figures are those who think of themselves not as blacks but as whites or Indians robbed of a social heritage by the accident of African blood is of course no compliment to blacks—nor is it possible, under such conditions, truly to speak of these as black characterizations. This must stand as a distinctive—virtually a crippling—weakness in Faulkner's fictional realization of black American life.

Still, many critics, black and white alike, have found qualities in these figures which transcend their stereotyped origin. For one thing, in an important sense, the shortsightedness of Faulkner's observers—through whom the reader's understanding of his blacks is usually filtered— is not necessarily Faulkner's. Such racism as can be seen in a Shreve McCannon or a Gavin Stevens is generally revealed so as to reflect ironically on these white characters. Similarly, the dissatisfaction of the Bons and Christmases with what they conceive as the black portion of their heritage is no more a reflection of the author's outlook. Often enough it is their rejection of *both* lines of their blood that makes these figures tragic.

A familiar reaction from both black and white critics, furthermore, has been that although the origins of Faulkner's characterizations are often in stereotypes he seems able to push beyond these to what he himself has called "truths of the heart." This, at least, is the thrust of such analyses as those by Irving Howe, Sterling Brown, Charles Nilon and Ralph Ellison.[20] Ellison, for example, writes that Faulkner "has been more willing perhaps than any other [white] artist to start with the stereotype . . . and then seek out the human truth which it hides." [21] I do not believe this statement to be true of all of Faulkner's major black characterizations; but his handling of figures of mixed blood reveals clearly what Ellison and others are pointing toward. The mulatto's divided heritage, and the kind of mathematical potential for progress or regress visualized in polemical conjectures on racial mixture, presented Faulkner's imagination with precisely the kind of nourishment which suited it best.

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[20] Howe, *William Faulkner: A Critical Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), pp. 116-37; Brown, "A Century of Negro Portraiture in American Literature"; Charles Nilon, *Faulkner and the Negro* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1965); Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," *Images of the Negro in American Fiction*, eds. Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 115-31.

[21] Ellison, p. 131.

In this connection, Walter J. Slatoff's theory of the "polar" quality of Faulkner's thought is most suggestive. Though he never attacks the problem of Faulkner's debt to the Northern and Southern architects of the literary plantation, Slatoff's thesis indicates the significance of that heritage. Faulkner tends, according to Slatoff, "to view and interpret experience in extreme terms and to see life as composed essentially of pairs of warring entities"; in particular, he "seems fascinated by that especially tense sort of antithesis in which the opposed entities remain in a state of deadlock where they can neither be separated nor reconciled." [22]

Plantation literature, born and bred in a briar patch of such shibboleths as "amalgamation," "intermixture," and "miscegenation," provided the essential vessel for this kind of antithesis in the ambivalent heritage of the mulatto, carrying with him as he did the whole tragedy of the abolition and Jim Crow controversies: in Faulkner's words, "not only the blood of slaves but even . . . the very blood which has enslaved it; himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment, and the mausoleum of his defeat." This, I think, is the essence of what Ellison and others are suggesting when they speak of some kind of passage through the stereotype to attain "the human truths which it hides."

For Faulkner to have visualized the race problem through the stereotype of the tragic mulatto, a notion so indigenous to his own literary heritage as a white Southerner, is predictable. But to have seen behind this cliche the mind-shattering ambiguities of a Sam Fathers or a Joe Christmas or a Charles Bon: that is the quality of mind which, as Slatoff reminds us, "accounts in large measure for the peculiarly compelling and disturbing power of his works"; because, he adds, it recalls "the similar schizophrenia within ourselves." [23] If the tragic mulatto is a questionable representation of black American life, this archaic figure becomes in Faulkner's hands a suggestive metaphor for a tragedy of a more universal nature.

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[22] Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 79, 83.

[23] Slatoff, p. 252.

EDWARD'S OBJECT

WARREN LEAMON

It was smaller, smaller even than most marbles with a rough, reddish-brown surface and hard as a pebble. How it got into his chemistry set he did not know but he did not doubt that it was what he had been told it was, though he could not remember who had told him. It was a mystery of science: like chairs which were actually billions of little spinning balls, this object was not what, in its ordinary surroundings, it appeared to be, but smaller and harder. He kept it wrapped in an old cloth and hidden behind a row of bottles on the top shelf; he examined it under the microscope only when he knew he would not be surprised by his mother, who was sure to know what it was.

"He's fourteen years old. He's too old to be playing with chemistry sets," his father said, but of course he no longer played with the chemistry set. It had been over two years since he had exploded a test tube and put the stain, which was still there, on the ceiling of his room. Now the chemistry set was simply an excuse for examining the curious object. The rest of the time, other than when he was sleeping and eating, was taken up with school, basketball, and a couple of things which like the object were mysterious.

One of them was Vicki Maloney, two years older than himself and the only other person he had allowed to see it. She was tall and thin and had reddish-brown hair. Because she was a Catholic and attended the girls' convent school, he saw her only in the afternoon and in the spring and summer after dinner when the children in the neighborhood played until dark. One afternoon he smuggled it and the microscope out of the house and let her examine it in a nearby vacant lot.

"It's just a rock," she said.

He smiled knowingly.

"That's all it is," she insisted. "I know. We've been studying rocks in science."

He kept on smiling and said to himself, what else would they tell her in a girls' school? And a Catholic school, too. She became furious and called him "silly" and "an idiot," but nothing could change the fact that she was not allowed to wear make-up or go out with boys (she had even had to sneak off to the vacant lot) even though the girls her age in the public school were already dating in cars. Edward was aware of this and not above taking advantage of her humiliation and naivete.

"I'll bet Virginia knows what it is," he said. Virginia, who lived next door to Vicki, was always going out with boys, even though she was Vicki's age—two months younger, in fact.

Virginia was part of the other mystery, Virginia and Vicki's brother Johnny, who was seventeen and wild. While the other boys broke street lamps with rocks and air rifles, Johnny did it with a .22 rifle—his own rifle, given to him on his birthday by his father. Edward, like the other boys, both admired and feared him, finding his wildness both romantic and—something he sensed but could not comprehend or express—irrational. "That boy's crazy," his mother said. "Don't his parents know that? And then to turn around and give him a gun." *Crazy*. What did the word apply to? The way he drove his father's car at breakneck speed up and down the quiet neighborhood streets? The way he treated Virginia, tossing her about, mussing her hair, teasing her with words Edward only vaguely understood? Or did *crazy* have something to do with what he saw at the lake?

The lake was two blocks from his house, small, man-made, probably built only to enhance the scenic beauty of the houses that dotted the small hills around it. They were large houses, mostly white and separated from the lake by great expanses of grass, huge old oaks and elms. In the spring the surface reflected the glaring sunlight and the weeping willows were as still as the water they tumbled into. Often, as he fished for the fingersized bream and perch, Edward could hear the slam of a screen door a block away, the crying of a baby farther away than his own house. So it wasn't surprising that he heard the murmur of voices in the small patch of woods between the two creeks that fed the lake, that he feared, as he inched toward the voices, that the sound of the grasshoppers leaping away from his feet would give him away. But as he came closer the tone of the voices—the urgency of the pleading, the confusion and uncertainty of protests broken by heavy breathing—told him he need not fear being noticed. And then he could see Johnny and Virginia lying in the high grass.

Somehow it did not fit. What he read about his object—a book checked out of the Buckhead branch of the Carnegie library—was full of facts pertaining to the importance of it: it had always to exist within a certain range of temperature; one hung slightly lower than the other lest they crush each other when a man sat down; it was essential to "procreation," which seemed to mean that without it—or them—one could not have babies or rather cause a woman to have babies. What did all that have to do with what he had seen in the high grass? He read another

book, *Biology for Christians,* in which the author devoted little space to it except to say that the perfect design and function of it was further proof of the existence of God. That had an authoritative ring to it since Mrs. Magee, his English teacher, had told him that one could find God in a grain of sand. But as he held it in his hand and rolled it on his fingertips he wondered how God and what he had seen in the high grass could both be bound up with the hard rough object.

"It's just not healthy," Virginia's mother, Mrs. Simpkins, said to his own. They had come together at the fence and each stood with a trowel in her hand, talking. Around them the earth they had been turning was damp and glistened in the May sun. "Sticking a girl off in a . . . convent that way."

His mother nodded gravely.

"I mean, co-education is best."

"Lord knows, he doesn't hide his son away," said his mother.

Mrs. Simpkins leaned forward. "O, *he* can explain that." The *he,* Edward knew, was Mr. Maloney, a somewhat notorious character in the neighborhood. "He says, 'Girls are helpless. You have to protect them. But you just give boys their head and let them go.' Now I ask you!"

"They're Catholic," said his mother.

Mrs. Simpkins nodded gravely. "Put them all together, I say. Do away with the double standard and you know what you'll find? That girls are by nature pure. It's hiding them away that turns them bad."

Double standard. Edward was vaguely familiar with the term, his mother having hurled it at his father once or twice. Still, he wasn't sure what it meant, though most certainly poor Vickie was a victim of it. He resolved to be nicer to her but found it difficult since she was so ruled by the double standard. Her mother did not seem to worry much, the reason being, as he overheard her say to her husband one day, "Edward's so young. There's no danger in their seeing each other." And the father even relented a little so that Edward could walk with her to the drugstore or sit in the front yard and talk to her.

But there were limits. Once they wandered off to the lake together and were sitting by the water when a car roared to a stop and Mr. Maloney leaped out. As he rushed toward them Edward considered diving into the water to escape, but his fear of the murky depths balanced his fear of the man. Mr. Maloney grabbed Vicki by the arm and glared at him for a moment before he dragged her away to the car.

The glare was filled with something which froze Edward's blood—the opposite of what he had felt on seeing Virginia and Johnny in the high grass when his blood roared wildly and caused his heart to pound. Suppose Mr. Maloney ever discovered that he had shown his object to Vicki, the same object so mysteriously bound up with his son Johnny and Virginia?

It was all very confusing and on Sunday the preacher didn't help much. Edward's mind was still filled with what he had heard that very morning, that Johnny had "finally got himself thrown in jail," as his father put it. Virginia, in a pink and white dress which she continually looked down at, sat across from him on the other side of the balcony and Dr. Swinton said, "The skeptic cannot deny that there are things we all are certain of. In philosophy this feeling is called 'spontaneous certitude.' What are these things? Love, devotion, honor, duty. And, yes, hate, envy, lust, greed." *Spontaneous certitude.* Things we know automatically, without thinking. But what if these things contradict each other?

After church as he and his family walked down the Baptist side of the road (because the Baptist church was on that side, the Catholic on the other), he looked across and saw on the Catholic side Mr. and Mrs. Maloney and Vicki with a scarf over her head, her eyes on her feet, and behind them Johnny, large, expansive, grinning, waving to people on both sides of the road. In jail last night, obviously bailed out by his father, now coming from church. It struck Edward that Johnny's life must be one spontaneous certitude after another and he found himself longing for one—just one—a longing somehow bound up with the way he could not take his eyes off the obviously embarrassed Vicki, though he could not comprehend what the connection was.

But whatever it was, it grew stronger when school turned out for the summer and he spent more and more time with her. During the hot, molasses-like summer afternoons he sat with her in her backyard. Her father was at work and her mother was often at the church doing various kinds of committee and social work. Johnny appeared sporadically, always loud and moving rapidly about, occasionally opening and gulping down bottles of beer. Of course, Edward was not supposed to be there, but they knew Johnny would not tell and even Mrs. Maloney, when she found them, did not seem concerned. Only when Mr. Maloney, who was a salesman of some kind, came home unexpectedly, did Edward have to scramble for the bushes at the back of the yard and sneak away.

Edward sensed that Vicki allowed him to come only because she was trapped, isolated. He was a living being, someone to talk to, to

listen to, a relief from book after book, from watching the birds and occasionally working in the flower beds. She patronized him unmercifully with her superior knowledge, exerting her age and maturity, but Edward knew that he admired not so much what she said as the way she turned her head, the slender lines of her neck, the way her long legs gave shape to her jeans and merged in some kind of exciting perfection with her hips. He also saw how in the midst of her youthful pedantry and condescension she became suddenly confused and bewildered by his eyes and since he was at those moments confused and bewildered himself, they often lapsed into a mutual sensual dalliance: the older girl so totally ignorant of physical realities, the younger boy stirred by feelings he understood only from the words of others, from what he had seen that afternoon in the high grass, from what he had read about his mysterious object. It was only natural, desperate as he was by the time July was plodding to its end, that he seize upon his one advantage and one afternoon he took object and microscope and went to see her. But Johnny was there.

"Don't you two ever go anywhere?" he asked.

"I can't," his sister said. "You know that."

"O Dad won't be home for hours and Mom's at church. Here." He reached in his pocket and took out some coins. "Go to a movie. There's a good one playing at the Buckhead."

Vickie leapt at the opportunity but at the same time despaired of having the daring to take advantage of it. "I can't leave the house."

"Sure you can. Go on. Both of you. Look, it starts at two thirty. It's one now."

She looked eagerly at Edward and he could not deny her. He nodded.

"All right," she said. "We will."

"Good!" He gave her the money.

She wanted to leave right away, but Edward pointed out that it would take only fifteen minutes to get there, so they had an hour and fifteen minutes to kill.

"Of course," she said, "you probably won't understand the movie."

"I will too."

"No, you're too young."

"I know more than you do."

She tossed her head back and laughed. She was not being purposefully malicious; she was merely excited and happy. Yet her indifference

to all save her own excitement aroused something in Edward and with mixed feelings and pounding heart, he fired back at her, "Then I suppose you know what this is." He opened his hand and revealed his prize.

"O that rock."

"It's not a rock."

"Yes it is. I'm tired of that game."

"No it isn't. It's . . . it's a testicle."

"A what?" All the excitement in her eyes changed instantly to uncertainty.

What followed was a long, awkward description of what Edward called sexual intercourse, a description which grew naturally from his attempt to explain the function and purpose of his object. Vickie gulped, nodded her head from time to time and listened. For Edward the tables were turned, he was patronizing her, but his delight was tempered by stirrings within himself, for he felt that his little lecture was simply words skimming on the surface of something deep and unfathomable. He hesitated. He trembled. "Let's go in the house where we can see it through the microscope," he said.

She hesitated. "The movie," she said softly.

"We have lots of time." Actually it was already past time.

"All right." She turned and he followed her into the kitchen, where she stopped. "We can use the table in here." The shining white walls, the immaculate cabinets, the glistening sink and spotless glaring tile floor, the gas range with its burners, the refrigerator—why did such surroundings seem hopelessly inappropriate? But they did, and he could think of no convincing argument against her suggestion. In fact, he could think of nothing, not even what he would do—or was supposed to do—at the next moment. He put the microscope on the table and they both peered through it and discussed the outrageous capability of such an ordinary object. She picked it up and held it out in her open hand; he reached for it and their hands met and closed around it.

The front door slammed shut.

Their hands tightened together so that Edward felt the object pressing painfully into his palm. They were caught, both seemed to say, so what's the use? Then they heard Johnny's loud voice, Virginia's high pitched giggles. They heard them move through the living room and up the stairs—to the bedrooms. The loud talk, the giggling gave way to a deep silence broken occasionally by a barely audible whisper, a low laugh, mysterious thumps on the floor, the unmistakeable sounds of movement on a bed.

Edward saw Vicki's eyes narrow and harden and he did not know how to interpret the effect the intrusion had had upon her, but he feared the worst. Yet even as he despaired (of what? he still did not know) he felt Vicki's hand drawing him toward her. After that the glare of the kitchen became a swirl of light, the sharp clean surfaces hazards as they moved awkardly against one another, depending upon spontaneous certitude (the phrase ran idiotically through Edward's reeling brain) to guide them. The precious object fell to the floor and rolled bumpily several inches—the sound of it an echoing thump and roar. He was dimly aware of noises overhead, shouts, laughter, the sound of running feet. But only dimly. They fumbled with one another, amazed that failed experiments did not deter the wild desire that drove them on. The tile was cold against his body. Her blouse was undone, her jeans half off, his own caught by a new physical phenomenon he struggled to overcome. He knew *what to* do, he had told her *what* was done—they were trying desperately to work out the *how* (he saw the ridiculous distorted reflection of their two half naked bodies in the sparkling surface of the oven door) when a loud explosion filled the air.

Her father has come home and shot me, he thought, and in his mind's eye he saw the man standing in the kitchen door, a gun smoking in his hand. They rolled apart. There was no one in the doorway. They waited. A scream echoed through the house, followed by another and another. They sat up but remained next to one another, their legs spread in front of them, their hands on the floor behind their backs, their shoulders touching; and stared first up at the ceiling and then at each other. They heard noise on the stairs, the sound of a table turning over in the living room; and then the doorway was filled with Johnny, clutching his left shoulder with his right hand, his face dazed, bewildered, the left side of his body covered in blood which dripped on the shiny aluminum floor strip between the tile of the kitchen and the carpet of the living room. Overhead, Virginia was screaming again.

Not surprisingly, Vicki recovered first. As she started for the telephone to call the hospital she shouted back to Edward, "Get Virginia out! And get yourself out! Quick!" perhaps sensing in her new awareness of reality that what the neighbors, who were sure to come streaming in, were about to discover would look very much like an orgy. Edward was up the stairs in a flash, even though he dressed as he ran, and he found a pitiful naked Virginia sitting on the bed, Johnny's .22 rifle lying at her feet. She seemed not to see him, so hysterical she was. She screamed

and screamed and screamed and Edward said, "To hell with it" (his first natural, unself-conscious use of swearing), and flew back down to the kitchen, past the groaning Johnny. One thing was sure—he was going to get out; the picture of Vicki's father with the gun was still quite vivid in his mind. As he crossed the kitchen, snatching up the microscope as he went, his bare foot was painfully stung by something. He looked down and saw that he had stepped on his precious object, but what he really noticed was that he had no shoes on. He found one by the refrigerator, the other by the sink, and holding them in one hand, the microscope in the other, he ran out the backdoor, over the chain-link fence, and into the bushes. Virginia was still screaming, and all up and down the street he heard the noise of screen doors slamming shut.

Only after a large crowd had gathered round the house and Mr. Maloney had gotten home (he was selling something or other nearby) and Virginia's mother had discovered her screaming, naked daughter and the wail of the ambulance coming from town filled the air—only then did Edward creep up to the edge of the crowd. Somehow Virginia's mother and Mr. Maloney had confronted one another on the raised front porch and their words and actions became a scene played out on a stage for the fascinated audience on the front lawn.

". . . ought to be in jail!" the woman screamed. "Or an insane asylum!"

"She came here!" he shouted back. "She was in my house! If you looked after her, this wouldn't have happened. You don't see Vicki . . . ."

"O yes, keep her locked up. Like you do. No, I trust my neighbors and friends. Or I used to. Let me tell you something, you haven't heard the last of this."

"Probably not, if you let her keep running around."

"You son-of-a-bitch!" She swung at him but he caught her arm. "She's under age! She's only sixteen. I'll have you up for . . . ."

"For rape?" Mr. Maloney roared with laughter. "Then I'll have her up for attempted murder."

"She was defending herself."

He laughed again. "Five minutes ago you said he shot himself. That it was an accident."

By now two neighbors had put their arms around the woman and were drawing her away. "I'll get you!" she shouted. "I swear I will!"

"The trouble is," a woman near Edward whispered as Mrs. Simpkins was led through the crowd, "they don't teach sex education in the schools."

The ambulance arrived. Two aides carried a stretcher into the house and a few moments later they came out, half-rolling, half-carrying a somewhat somber Johnny.

"Just a surface wound," someone said.

"And only the shoulder. He'll be all right."

The police arrived and told everyone that it was "all over" and to go home. Gradually the crowd broke up and very few remained when Vicki came out on the porch. She caught Edward's eye and motioned him around to the backyard. She went through the house and met him there. You've got to say you were here," she said, her voice full of dread.

"But . . . why?"

"I don't know. It's the police. They . . . they claim they have to have proof that Johnny didn't . . . didn't make her come in."

"But you were here."

"No, I'm his sister. They say . . . ."

"You *told* them."

"Only that you were here playing."

"But your father."

She looked down.

Filled with fear which bordered on panic—stunned, in fact—he followed her toward the kitchen; but before he was well into the room Mr. Maloney half-shouted, "Were you here when all this happened?"

He was standing next to the table and off to one side were the two policemen. Recovering from the initial onslaught, Edward said (so loudly he surprised himself), "Yes."

Mr. Maloney's face went blood red but Edward, who in the last hour had learned more about reading faces than he had in the last fourteen years, saw in the eyes the glare of the trapped animal, uncertain as to what to do, how to escape.

"We'll do the questioning," said one of the policemen, his voice full of weariness. "Were you here when Mr. Maloney's son came in with the girl?"

"Yes."

"Did he force her into the house?"

"Well, I didn't see them. Vicki and I were here in the kitchen looking at . . . something through a microscope. But I heard them. She was laughing and he was joking and . . . no, he didn't force her in."

"All right," the policeman said, his tone reflecting that Edward had simply confirmed what he already knew. "I don't suppose you saw the shooting."

"No, I only heard it."

He nodded. "Okay, that's all."

"Why did you run, you little bastard?" Mr. Maloney hissed.

"What?"

"Why did you run if you were only looking through a microscope?"

"I was afraid. I mean, the gunshot and all."

"You lying son-of-a-bitch. I ought to kill you.' '

Edward, however, had turned his eyes from the man to the floor. At first Mr. Maloney probably thought he was afraid; but soon he realized that Edward was simply looking around.

"What is it?" asked the policeman. "I said you could go."

"My rock, I'm looking for my rock."

Mr. Maloney exploded and lunged toward him, but the policemen grabbed him and held him back. "Get out, son," one of them said softly.

He went out through the back door and paused in the yard for a moment to look around, but he saw no one. The neighborhood had returned to its summer silence. He walked around the house and as he was passing the side of it he heard his name. He looked up and saw Vicki at the window.

"Here," she whispered, and she tossed him his object. He caught it.

"You'll come back, won't you?"

"Vicki!" her father shouted from the kitchen. She pulled her head in and disappeared.

He stood for a long time by the side of the house before he hurled the object high in the air and watched it arch gracefully into the bushes at the far side of the next yard. Around him the neighborhood lay in silence; the afternoon sun beat down unmercifully on the trees, the flowers, the grass, the imperturbable houses, everything which made up the world as he had always known it. "You'll come back, won't you?" Yes, he would. That was most assuredly a spontaneous certitude.

RICHARD III AS PUNCH

JOHN J. MCLAUGHLIN

There is a sure-fire show stopper in the *Punch and Judy* show: Punch takes his stick to one of his victims—usually Scaramouche—swings mightily, and the puppet's head is knocked clear off its shoulders. When Buckingham asks of Richard III, "Now my lord, what shall we do if we perceive/Lord Hastings will not yield to our complots?" Richard's reply is a Punch-line: "Chop off his head." It has the finality of Punch's stick; we can almost see the head topple. Our delight at the sudden audacity and directness of Richard's answer is equal to a child's joy at watching Punch's victim lose his blockhead. Edmund Kean, we are told, delivered the line with a laugh,[1] and Laurence Olivier, in his filmed version of *Richard III* gave it with a sardonic grin and a malicious twinkle of the eye. The audiences in both cases could be expected to laugh appreciatively, for Richard, like Punch, is a comedian-villain.[2]

There is nothing new in the notion that villainy can be played for comedy. The comic rogue and the melodramatic villain are often the same character in different kinds of plays, and any villain, if played too broadly, can trip into comic bathos. Open aggression, especially when it is unmotivated as it is with Richard, is always very close to comedy. If aesthetic distance and the rhetoric of the joke are present, aggression and cruelty easily become comic.

One of the archetypal comic villains of English popular drama is the hunchbacked puppet hero Punch, a character who represents the distillation of centuries of theatrical practice. Punch rules over a microcosmic comic world not only where murder is frequent and hilarious, but where violence emerges triumphant. The character was originally a puppet version of the *commedia dell'arte's* Pulcinello, quite a different comic type. In the eighteenth-century puppet theater Pulcinello was a comic henpecked husband, the receiver of blows. The metamorphosis of the

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[1] A. C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors* (London: Russell, 1944), p. 99.

[2] G. B. Shaw was one of the earliest critics to recognize the resemblance between Richard and Punch. "Richard," Shaw wrote, "is the prince of Punches: he delights Man by provoking God, and dies unrepentant and game to the last. His incongruous conventional appendages, such as the Punch hump, the conscience, the fear of ghosts, all impart a spice of outrageousness which leaves nothing lacking to the fun of the entertainment, except the solemnity of those spectators who feel bound to take the affair as a profound and subtle historic study." Quoted in Edwin Wilson, ed., *Shaw on Shakespeare* (New York: Dutton, 1961), p. 164.

character from a comic victim to the assassin Punch came about when the elegant puppet theaters of London declined and the puppet show was thrown out onto the streets where it was operated by a single person using gloved hand puppets. On the streets, the only criterion for the puppet showmen was laughter, and the character of Pulcinello, the victim of abuse, was transformed into Punch, the gleeful murderer.[3] Clearly, what entertained audiences was an ever-increasing display of aggression on the part of the play's hook-nosed, hump-backed protagonist. The final *Punch and Judy* play as we know it today has a single-minded unity of action: Punch disposes of a series of characters by beating them into insensibility with his stick.

Both Richard and Punch are assassins—premeditated scoundrels intent on clubbing their way to dominance. Both are also crowd pleasers who have proved their endurance on the popular English stage. Burbage made his reputation as Richard, and other Shakespearean actors such as Cibber, Kean, Booth and Irving won fame in the role. Although the play has been a favorite with audiences for several centuries—especially in Cibber's version which makes it a star vehicle—only in recent years has it received favorable critical attention. We are much more sympathetic to the violence, psychological pathology, and theatricality of the play than were earlier critics. Dr. Johnson summed up the objections: "That the play has scenes noble in themselves and very well contrived to strike in the exhibition, cannot be denied. But some parts are trifling, others shocking, and some improbable."[4]

Trifling, shocking, and improbable—an apt description of the *Punch and Judy* show. Many of the problems of *Richard III* and its leading character clear up if we consider Richard, not as a character from tragedy, or even from melodrama, but as a comic rogue intent on Punch-ing his way to dominance. It is true that this theatrical interpretation ignores some of Richard's other dimensions, particularly the psychological questions raised by his inability to find satisfaction through conquest and achievement, and the moral and political contexts provided by his conscience and by Margaret's curses. These have been dealt with elsewhere, but the raw theatrical power of the character, especially his comic verve, though often noted, have been less frequently analyzed.

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[3] A scenario of the Punch play is in Philip John Stead, *Mr. Punch* (London: Evans, 1950). George Speaight's *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1955) is a scholarly study of the subject.

[4] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., ed., *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 93.

The essential Richard is already characterized in the second and third parts of *Henry VI*. His only pleasure is power and therefore he sets his sights upon the ultimate goal:

> Then, since this earth affords no joy to me,
> But to command, to check, to O'erbear such
> As are of better person than myself,
> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
> And, whiles I live, to account this world but hell,
> Until this mis-shaped trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown.[5]

His method will be to dominate through role; he will become a Protean shape-changer, a master of mask and costume, a superhuman actor, a veritable Punch:

> Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
> And cry 'Content' to that which grieves my heart,
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions.
> I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
> I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
> I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
> Deceive more slily than Ulysses could,
> And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
> I can add colours to the chameleon,
> Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
> And set the murderous Machievel to school.
> Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
> Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.
>
> (182-195)

Richard had found complete fulfillment in war where he expressed his will to power in the most direct way, through slaughter. But as *Richard III* opens we find Gloucester an alienated man; peace has settled upon the land and the conflicts of battle have given way to the conflicts of love, and in this contest there is no hope for victory. In the court of Edward he is merely a grotesque hunchback incapable of attracting either admiration or love. He has been reduced from a vicious fighting machine

[5] Hardin Craig, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (New York: Scott Foresman, 1961), *3 Henry VI*, III. ii. 165-171. Subsequent references to Shakespeare's plays are to this edition.

capable of striking terror into the heart of an opponent to an ugly, ineffectual cripple. But Richard is unwilling to accept inferiority; he makes an existential choice:

> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain . . .
> (*Richard III*, I. i. 28-30)

He chooses no second-rate goal, but the highest known to man, kingship, and sets out to get it with all the resourcefulness and vitality at his command. Like the rogues of comedy he leaps nimbly from role to role as chance or his imagination dictates. One of the roles he plays is the comedian. We see him perform in the opening scene of the play when he meets his brother Clarence as he is being conducted to the Tower. Richard makes jokes at the expense of the king's mistress, Jane Shore, one of them a punning *double entendre* on the word "naught":

> *Glou.* Naught to do with Mistress Shore!
> I tell thee, fellow,
> He that doth naught with her, excepting one,
> Were best to do it secretly, alone.
> (I. i. 98-100)

But the cruelest joke is his offhand quip upon leaving Clarence:

> Go, tread the path that thou shalt
> ne'er return.
> Simple, plain Clarence! I do love thee so
> That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven,
> If heaven will take the present at our hands.
> (118-120)

This is the voice of Punch chuckling over the victim he has just clubbed into insensibility. The effect of these lines is to allow us to relish Richard's villainy without moral inhibitions, to sidestep the censor that might ordinarily tell us that this is a man we must condemn. The sardonic jest of doing his enemies a favor by sending them to their reward in heaven is a favorite one with Richard and he uses it in one of the most audacious scenes ever written into a play—his wooing of Lady Anne.

Characteristically, Richard's decision to become a wooer is a daring one, for he chooses the most inappropriate time possible to declare himself—when Anne is preparing to bury the corpse of Henry VI whom

Richard has killed, even as he has slaughtered Anne's husband, Edward. His timing is utterly irrational; however Richard is not led by reason, but by his daemon, and by his driving need to bend others to his will, even against insuperable odds. Indeed, the improbability of success acts as an incentive to Richard, for like many of Shakespeare's characters he is a gambler and the greater the risk the greater the reward in emotional ecstasy when he has triumphed. To win against the greatest odds—"all the world to nothing"—is the most triumphant victory.

The wooing scene has often been condemned as one of the most improbable ever written by a playwright. Coleridge refused to believe that Shakespeare wrote it. It is indeed improbable if we consider it as a serious drama, but if we look at the scene for what it really is—high comedy—then it becomes a wit combat to match that of Beatrice and Benedick, with one important exception.

In the wit battles of Beatrice and Benedick and those of the Restoration "gay couples" the underlying motivation is sexuality, but in Richard's wooing of Anne the driving force is naked aggression. The scene demonstrates Richard's ability to bend Anne to submission with nothing more than the unyielding weight of his will. Against what appears to be hopeless odds, Richard seizes each line of Anne's spitting denunciation and turns it spider-like into the web that will enmesh her. The sallies between them are no less clever than those of Beatrice and Benedick. But Anne's wit never permits her to gain equality with her adversary as does that of Beatrice or Millamant:

Anne. O' he was gentle, mild and virtuous!
Glou. The better for the king of heaven, that hath him.
Anne. He is in heaven, where thou shalt never come.
Glou. Let him thank me, that holp to send him thither,
For he was fitter for that place than earth.
Anne. And thou unfit for any place but hell.
Glou. Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.
Anne. Some dungeon.
Glou. Your bedchamber.

(I. ii. 104-111)

The exchange only appears to be a contest; in reality Anne is no match for Richard, because the underlying issue is really not sex. Richard's eye is not on Anne's bedchamber as he claims, but on the crown, and therefore Anne does not have sex, that great equalizer, in her arsenal.

When Richard draws his sword and offers it to Anne to run through his bared breast, an act that appears to entail the greatest danger of all,

there is really little risk involved. He has already submitted her to his will and the rest is mere theatrics. In this gesture Richard is the master showman. He prevails for the same reason that the high wire aerialist prevails, because of daring, nerve, and unlimited self-confidence. Shakespeare's villains—Aaron, Richard, Don John, and Iago—all possess to some degree this talent for breathtaking showmanship.[6]

When Richard dismisses Anne after dominating her completely, he is once more the ironic comedian gloating over his victory. The soliloquy which begins, "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?/Was ever woman in this humour won?" (I. ii. 228-229) anticipates Ben Jonson's Mosca, who preens, "I fear I shall begin to grow in love/With my dear self and my most prosp'rous parts. . . ." Richard, too, is filled with a bubbling, narcissistic self-love:

> I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,
> And entertain a score or two of tailors
> To study fashions to adorn my body.
> Since I am crept in favour with myself,
> I will maintain it with some little cost.
> (256-260)

Both Mosca and Richard seethe with the power that accompanies skill in aggressive behavior. The boundless energy with which they deceive, flatter, and cajole is exceeded only by the bursting, self-satisfied rejoicing at their success. Here is Mosca, Jonson's comic servant:

> . . . your fine, elegant rascal, that can rise
> And stoop, almost together, like an arrow;
> Shoot through the air as nimbly as a star;
> Turn short as doth a swallow; and be here,
> And there, and here, and yonder, all at once;
> Present to any humor, all occasion;
> And change a visor swifter than a thought.[7]

And Richard:

> What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father,
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,

[6] For an excellent discussion of Richard as showman see Robert B. Heilman, "Satiety and Conscience: Aspects of *Richard III*," *Antioch Rev.*, 24 (Spring 1964), 57-73.

[7] Alvin B. Kernan, ed., *Ben Jonson: Volpone* (New Haven: Yale, 1962), III. i. 23-29.

With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
But I no friends to back my suit withal
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
Ha!

(231-239)

These are two masters of their craft glorying in their skills. Their infectious, effervescent good humor is readily transmitted to an audience which can experience vicariously the triumph of malicious superiority.

If Richard the wooer is high comedy then Richard being wooed is pure farce. I refer to the scene where Buckingham and the citizens come to offer Richard the crown and he accepts it with feigned reluctance. The scene is staged by Buckingham and Richard like a prep school theatrical. Richard, flanked by two clergymen, is following Buckingham's stage directions for accepting the crown: "Play the maid's part, still answer nay and take it" (III. vii. 51). He is the chaste virgin, innocently at prayer, being sought for seduction and coyly yielding to it. When Richard refuses the crown, Buckingham and the citizens start to leave, with Buckingham's "Zounds! we'll entreat no more." Richard, who has just had Hastings' head lopped off, replies: "O do not swear, my Lord of Buckingham." So well does he play his part that he almost overplays it; he is forced to give Catesby a panicky "Call them again," to bring the citizens back.

The entire action is an outrageous example of how the comic rogue attains mastery through role. When the role is played broadly, as it is here, it becomes farce; it is difficult to act the scene any other way. Shakespearean actors have enriched the comedy with various pieces of comic business. Olivier, in his filmed version, for example, borrowed an effective piece of stage business from the nineteenth century American actor Richard Mansfield: Richard enters between two clergymen with a prayerbook in his hand. He appears to be piously absorbed in the book, but when no one is looking he suddenly does a double take and turns the book right side up. At the end of the scene Olivier also included a piece of business originated by Colly Cibber—now that the prayer book is no longer needed, he simply throws it away, tossing it high into the air.

The rich comedy of the wooing scenes is certainly not sustained throughout the play. Once Richard has attained the ultimate prize—the

crown—once his will to power has been satisfied, it is as if a source of energy has been lost. With no further victims to crush, no further risks to run, no further roles to play, Richard grows petulant and ill-humored; he loses his ironic turn of phrase and his cynical wit. Without the lust for domination he is no longer comic. Then, on the eve of battle he is stricken by conscience in the form of the ghosts of those he has slain, and this makes lightness and laughter impossible—for him and for his audience. Only when Richard enters onto the battlefield and once more faces the challenge of a competitor does he regain his old gaiety.

Richard III represents an extreme example of what happens when a playwright bedecks villainy with lightness, wit, hyperbole, and a drive for mastery. The character, with a little nudging by either actor or audience, becomes comic. In Richard's case, too much of the comedian is visible to be accidental. Punch-Richard is the portrait Shakespeare painted—a comic psychopath, a master of both gallows gag and executioner's earnest, the topsman's top banana.

INTERCEPTED COURIER

In the end, the responsibility for cracking the code
fell on us, since we're assigned to breaking down the couriers
and with the enemy better trained all the time, it's no easy task.
Though we keep up with the latest techniques
and constantly refine our methods,
it still boils down to a matter of time and patience.
The old ways prove the best.
The last one took fifteen days to crack
and even then it wasn't a complete confession,
just enough fragment to suggest a whole.

We began by stuffing him with drugs like a Christmas goose,
then flaying skin off his most sensitive parts.
We charged him with electrodes and burnt him with chemicals.
We told him the country had surrendered and his leaders
confessed or that we were his leaders and wished to honor him.
We alternatingly starved him and gorged him
offered him women and men.
Twice his heart stopped, but we revived him,
and told him he had died and led him through
a phantasmagoria of tortured souls and angelic choirs.
We told him we were God.
And though he bent down to kiss the hem
of our laboratory coats, he wouldn't confess.
Confess! we ordered. But then he thought we were the devil.
Damn the unpredictability of drugs!
At last, we resorted to the oldest trick:
dressed one of our agents in women's clothes and told
the courier we had his mother and that we were
interrogating her in an adjacent room.
He begged to see her. But when brought to her side,
she hurled the foulest curses at him.
"Why do you let them do this to me?" she screamed,
"You alone can make them stop."
With his last strength he crawled into her arms,
sobbed for forgiveness and fell asleep.
We hadn't the heart to pull him away, besides we had what we wanted:
he let go in his babbling the last few clues needed to figure out the rest.

He died some hours later, an ancient, wrinkled man
who had been two weeks before so beautiful a specimen.
On him we focused our brutal need to know
which though the code is changed at the end of the month, is no less real.
Our own men, on the average, last but a few days more.

DAVID BERGMAN

HOMECOMING

for G.

The bend in the river was me coming up behind it
a great man and his lady were sunning on a rock
the love between them plundered the beauties
all around them dwarves splashed the water
with long poles to warn I was upstream
merely walking when I didn't have to swim
not coming toward them I moved in their direction
they had spirits they had smoke they had oils
linen and a chest piled with water frozen in
shapes of block upon their faces flashed dark glass
throwing off the sun I saw orchards and stables
on that rock and heard the call of a hundred
people who didn't know what to do that didn't
disturb the words he and she exchanged looking about

RALPH ADAMO

SENSIBLE CONFUSION IN FROST'S "THE SUBVERTED FLOWER"

ROY SCHEELE

. . . The present
Is too much for the senses,
Too crowding, too confusing—
Too present to imagine.
Frost, "Carpe Diem"

In "The Subverted Flower" we are shown a curious species of courtship. It is one in which—to paraphrase the poem—a young man's sexual feeling finds its focus in the flower that he offers to a girl, an act which elicits some fumbling advance on his part that she in turn rejects. It is clear that the flower has a symbolic dimension, and that in rejecting the boy's advances the girl repudiates her own sexual identity as well, with results that are immediate and real: the boy reduced to a state of bestiality, the girl to a frothing caricature of desirability, a "poor thing" whose hysteria we are made to witness in the poem. Small wonder, then, that this is a poem Frost shied away from in all those years of performing from the platform, or that the poem has found its way into few discussions of his work and into fewer still anthologies.[1]

For it *is* a curious poem, as Frost himself acknowledged in his famous reply to the perhaps apocryphal woman who once asked him what it was about. "Frigidity in women," answered the poet[2]—and one is tempted to imagine the leer of rascality he might be supposed to have summoned for the occasion. To begin with, there is the curious epithet of the title ("subverted," from the Latin *to turn from under*), which we would ordinarily take in a political context of propaganda and one's loyalty to the state. Here the context is established closer to home by the root meaning of the word, with its moral connotations of force and corruption, of being forced out of one's deepest identity, one's integrity; thus the flower may be "subverted" here by the girl's refusal to recognize

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1 Of some twenty-odd anthologies of modern poetry on my shelf, most of which include Frost, I find the poem reprinted in only two: Van Nostrand and Watts, *The Conscious Voice* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), and Sanders et al., *Chief Modern Poets of England and America*, 4th edn. (New York: Macmillan, 1962). The poem's most auspicious reprinting has been in F.O. Matthiessen's *Oxford Book of American Verse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

2 Interview with Richard Poirier, in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, second series (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 26.

(or perhaps her inability to see) her own sexuality in terms of it—the flower becomes the sign of a passion which, it may seem to her, has sought her out entirely gratuitously. Read in this way, the poem's entire surface of intense physical detail depends from the title as a kind of dramatized symbol of rejection. The epithet points to another curiosity about the poem, one which has nothing to do with etymology; and that is, how unlike the traditional flower poem this "subverted" flower is.

To the reader nurtured on the typical flower poem of the English tradition, "The Subverted Flower" may, in fact, seem an outright perversion. We are all brought up as readers on the traditional formula, and doubtless we do expect it to provide either a philosophical lyric set to *carpe diem* (e.g., Herrick's "To Daffodils") or a courtship poem in which a girl's beauty finds its symbolic locus in a given flower, with her virtues enumerated like so many ravishing petals (say, Burns's "O Were My Love Yon Lilac Fair"). Much of our pleasure in the latter sort of poem, I suspect, lies in overhearing such lavish terms of praise. And when the two strains are combined, as in Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose," the result is sometimes doubly memorable. The tradition is more than capable of cloying, of course, as much of the flower verse of Herrick and Crashaw will attest; it has its darker side as well, with Blake's "The Sick Rose" coming immediately to mind. By the time of the Romantics, we sometimes find a flower serving a poem as springboard to some loftier sentiment, giving impetus to efflorescent pikes and half-gainers, so that a contemporary like Clare, who worked largely inside the older, more decorative conventions, seems out of place in their company. And as a footnote to more recent literary history, it is not all that long ago that Gertrude Stein's catchy little circular saw, "A rose is a rose is a rose," showed how exhausted the descriptive and metaphorical possibilities of the tradition had become. The Stein one-liner would seem to be one of those few poems by his contemporaries that Frost ever retorted to in a poem of his own ("The Rose Family"), though his emphasis there, like Stein's, is on identity, individuality, or as he put it elsewhere, "sex not grex."

What startles the reader who first comes to "The Subverted Flower," I think, is just that—the poem's explicit treatment of the theme of human sexuality. That is unusual ground for the poet to have tread on. When one compares another Frost poem of courtship, "Meeting and Passing," he is liable to be struck by the tentative nature of the encounter of the pair who shuffle and look down and "mingle great and small/Footprints in summer dust. . . . "Even in the poems of married love, from the early "Going for Water" to that late small masterpiece "Happiness Makes Up

in Height for What It Lacks in Length," there is no more than an occasional glimpse of sexual feeling, as in the "blazing flowers" of the latter poem. Only in "The Discovery of the Madeiras," a long narrative lyric based on Hakluyt which contains an inset story of two doomed black lovers who become "their own marriage feast for the shark," is there anything like the intense physical passion of "The Subverted Flower." In both poems the passion turns to horror, though in "Madeiras" it is somewhat muted by the narrative structure as we see the situation partly through the eyes of the crew.[3] The structure of "The Subverted Flower," on the other hand, while ostensibly narrative, is really dramatic, and there is no escaping the girl's terror or the boy's shambling frustration; we are carried by the poem's incidents and made part of them. There is no room here for the argumentative mode of presentation familiar to us from the flower poems in Palgrave, no strategy, no pretty language, so that the poem seems isolated not only from its own tradition but also, in its thematic aspects, from the body of Frost's work.

And yet the theme of the poem, sexual frustration leading to irrational behavior or outright madness, is dealt with elsewhere in Frost—is, indeed, at the heart of such a longer masterpiece as "A Servant to Servants" [4]—while the Pauper Witch of Grafton's eccentricity becomes a means of establishing sexual *domination*. And though the poem's "unprettiness," its lack of "flowery" qualities, would seem to exclude it from the tradition of flower verse in the language, it does maintain a number of points of contact with that tradition, however sketchily. Some of these points of contact are stylistic, others normative; both, however, involve some inversion or diminution of the expected pattern. And there *is* a sense in which the poem, in the details of its shaping, steps outside its tradition entirely. In its lines of forcefully varied stress, its use of epithet and incremental refrain, the poem resembles nothing so much as a ballad. This resemblance is hardly accidental: for the poem is essentially dramatic, and like the ballad contains a series of incidents in which the emphasis shifts like the bits of colored glass turning in a kaleidoscope.

As might be expected, the main point of contact with the tradition in the poem is the symbolism of the flower. But traditional values have been inverted here: instead of the girl's beauty finding equivalent valuation

[3] It is worth noting that Frost gathered the two poems together, placing them only a few pages apart, in his seventh volume, *A Witness Tree*.

[4] For an excellent discussion of the sexual theme in "A Servant to Servants," see Donald Jones, "Kindred Entanglements in Frost's 'A Servant to Servants,'" *Papers on Language and Literature*, 2 (Spring 1966), 150-161.

in the flower, as it would seem the boy intends, the complimentary aspects of the symbol (ephemerality, delicacy, sensuous plenitude) are rejected even as the boy's overt sexuality is rejected. In refusing the flower the girl in effect refuses the *poetry* of the boy's advances. The tradition's emphasis on descriptive richness is severely diminished here as well, at least insofar as the flower itself is concerned. It is nowhere named, nowhere specified; we do not even know its color.[5] The customary particularizing of the flower, the sometimes gorgeous rendering of its attributes, are missing from the poem, though looming perhaps the larger for their absence. As noted, the poem does address convention in its frequent use of epithet. Some of its adjectives make pejorative, i.e., moral, judgments, as in the rhyme pair *persuasive/evasive,* while "tender-headed flower" is reminiscent of such formulaic ballad epithets as "lily-white hands." There is also some use of incremental refrain in the poem (e.g., "She looked and saw the shame . . .," "She looked and saw the worst . . ."), which again ties it to the ballad tradition and helps stay the seeming rush of the narrative. And finally there is Frost's uncharacteristically frequent use of simile in the poem—a concession, as it were, to the opulent side of the tradition. I count seven similes, roughly one for every ten lines, well above the Frostian average—certainly his lyric average. What underlie all of this, I think, are the urgency and frankness of the theme. Ever the painstaking craftsman, sparing of his effects, Frost here seems to disappear in the poem's stylistic details much in the manner of the anonymous balladeer.[6] The result is a freedom of narrative perspec-

[5] In a similar context Yvor Winters speaks of the following lines from "The Last Mowing":

> The place for the moment is ours,
> For you, oh tumultuous flowers
> To go to waste and go wild in,
> All shapes and colors of flowers,
> I needn't call you by name.

Winters says: "The next to last line of this poem—'All shapes and colors of flowers'—is a curious triumph of rhetoric. Shape and color are named as pure abstractions; no particular shape or color is given; and what we get is an image of the shapeless and the shadowy, of haunting confusion, of longing for something unrealizable, of the fields of asphodel." In "Robert Frost: or, the Spiritual Drifter as Poet," reprinted in James M. Cox, *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 77.

[6] Winters notes the ballad-like nature of "The Discovery of the Madeiras," remarking that "It is written in eight-syllable lines rhyming in couplets and has something of the effect of a modern and sophisticated ballad," adding the proviso that the poem lacks the typical ballad's "important decision consciously made, and . . . the resultant action . . . either for good or for evil . . ."; "Spiritual Drifter," p. 80.

tive which gives the impression of impartiality while at the same time providing a means of judging the actions of the boy and girl in the poem.

The poem begins *in medias res,* after the presentation of the flower that occasions its incidents, so that the flower itself seems almost a stage property:

> She drew back; he was calm:
> "It is this that had the power."
> And he lashed his open palm
> With the tender-headed flower.[7]

From the beginning we are given glimpses of the bestiality and terror to come; for the most part these are located in the poem's precisely characterizing adjectives, its judicious verbs. Here, "lashed" contrasts effectively with "tender-headed," while "open" as epithet for "palm" may be an allusion to the boy's frankness of expression and conduct as well. (Later, this particular epithet comes to mind with renewed force when the girl's mother calls to her "From inside the garden wall," suggesting the openness of the field in which the pair is standing: the contrast of Eden and the postlapsarian world. It is as if Mother Eve were calling back one of her daughters from her own sexual experience in the original Garden.) One can, in fact, draw up catalogs of verbs and adjectives to characterize both the boy and the girl in the poem. One list would emphasize the girl's defenselessness, her minimal activity, her vindictiveness and incipient madness:

> She *drew back* . . .
> Her *shining* hair *displaced* . . .
> She *dared not stir* a foot . . .
> *Made her steal* a look *of fear* . . .
> The *bitter* words she *spit* . . .
> She *plucked* her lips for it . . .

By the end of the poem the girl is completely helpless; it is her mother who acts *for* her.

> Her mother wiped the foam
> From her chin, picked up her comb,
> And drew her backward home.
> (ll. 71-73)

Each of the verbs here is a telling index of the girl's condition, and the contrasting rhyme pair of *foam* (violent outrage, frenzy)/ *comb* (an

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[7] "The Subverted Flower," *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* ed. by Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), ll. 1-4.

item of the girl's daily toilet, i.e., normality) is particularly striking.[8] The crowning touch of the passage is that "drew her backward home" in the last line, which echoes all the way back to the opening line: "She drew back. . . ." The difference is precisely grammatical: in the one the girl is the subject, in the other the object, of the action.

The catalog of the boy's actions runs a gamut from violence to animality. Though at the very beginning "he was calm . . ." and "eyed her for a while/For a woman and a puzzle," his transformation begins in line 10:

> He *flicked* and *flung* the flower,
> And *another sort of* smile
> *Caught up* like fingertips
> The corners of his lips
> And *cracked* his *ragged* muzzle.[9]

Later, "with every word he spoke"

> His lips *were sucked and blown*
> And the effort *made him choke*
> Like a tiger at a bone.
>
> (ll. 27-29)

The girl is afraid that he "would *pounce* to end it all/Before her mother came" (39-40). And her point of view takes over entirely in the following seven lines, where the boy's transformation to beast is certified:

> She looked and saw the shame:
> A hand *hung like a paw,*
> An arm *worked like a saw*
> As if *to be persuasive,*
> An *ingratiating* laugh
> That *cut the snout in half,*
> An eye *become evasive.*
>
> ll. 41-47)

This is no subtle portrait, as words like "paw" and "snout" sharply demonstrate. The image of the saw, in fact, carries the process one step further,

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[8] The image of the comb recalls the earlier cameo (15-17) of the girl

> standing to the waist
> In goldenrod and brake,
> Her shining hair displaced . . .

which in turn calls to mind the idiomatic phrase, "every hair in place."

[9] *The Poetry*, ll. 10-14. The italics here and in other passages quoted are my own.

past bestialization to the world of the mechanical, of thingdom, and recalls such other symbols of sexual frustration or subjection in Frost's work as the bars of the mad uncle's cage in "A Servant to Servants" and the snowberries beside a waterfall that the Pauper Witch of Grafton makes Arthur Amy gather for her. The final picture we have of the boy makes his bestiality seem irrecoverable:

> And the dog or what it was,
> *Obeying bestial* laws,
> A coward save at night,
> *Turned* from the place and *ran.*
> She heard him *stumble* first
> And *use his hands in flight.*
> (ll. 58-63)

I conceive of these last two lines as follows: in fleeing the boy stumbles, trips and goes down on all fours, using his hands "in flight," so that his running reduces him literally to the state of an animal. As he lopes out of view his baseness is perfected in the auditory image of "She heard him bark outright" (64). "Outright" is shrewdly chosen here: it assumes the girl's point of view entirely, as though the boy's essential nature were that of a beast and needed only her refusal to be revealed to us.

The weight of judgment that falls on the boy at this point in the poem is not the narrator's, then; it is the girl's. This judgment does not represent a sudden shift in the poem's nominally third person point of view, however. From early on that viewpoint has undergone a series of slight adjustments in narrative impartiality, largely by means of the verbs and adjectives used to describe the boy, until it seems a matter of course for the narration to embody the girl's view of her crazed lover's actions. The narrator gets in *his* say some lines above, and not surprisingly it summarizes the boy's point of view:

> A girl could only see
> That a flower had marred a man,
> But what she could not see
> Was that the flower might be
> Other than base and fetid:
> That the flower had done but part,
> And what the flower began
> Her own too meager heart
> Had terribly completed.
> (ll. 48-56)

The epithet of the poem's title comes in here once again, and we see now that the flower is not merely subverted but subverting: it has occasioned the boy's mawkish advances and thus subverted *him.* Yet the flower has done only part of this work; the rest has been left to the girl's own "too meager heart." This last phrase brings us back to the question of the flower's use as symbol. There would seem to be two primary uses here: first, as representing passion; second, as a sign of caring. The girl has been revulsed by the passion, and her revulsion would seem to be the cause of her inability to respond to the boy's demonstration of care for her. His attempt to cherish her is almost intolerably overwhelmed in the flood of his feeling:

> He stretched her either arm
> As if she made it ache
> To clasp her—not to harm;
> As if he could not spare
> To touch her neck and hair.
> (ll. 18-22)

But she cannot allow any mitigation of the circumstances she finds herself in, so that when the boy suggests the possibility of her sharing his feeling, she cannot be certain she has heard the suggestion:

> "If this has come to us
> And not to me alone—"
> So she thought she heard him say . . .
> (ll. 23-25)

If we have read the poem carefully this scene will throw us back to the boy's first bafflement and its narrative justification:

> But she was either blind
> Or willfully unkind.
> (ll. 6-7)

Either way, she is obdurate, and her cringing response isolates the boy in his feelings. From line 26 on, the poem takes up his brutalization in descriptive earnest, and with a fury that would do the *scorned* woman proud; he is not merely brutalized but made to move down the chain of beasts from the tiger in line 29 to the "dog or what it was" that makes its sprawling exit from the poem.

"The Subverted Flower" is an uncomfortable, even a discomfiting poem, and the feeling it evokes in us is a mark of its dramatic effective-

ness. I suspect the poem sends most of us back to our own early, murkily awkward sexual experiences and causes us to read it autobiographically. And if we have read Lawrance Thompson's "definitive" (though to date the only) biography of Frost, we know that the poem has a biographical resonance as well, going back to 1892 and Frost's own stormy period of courtship.[10] Neither view, however, satisfactorily accounts for the poem's strange power and immediacy, its almost haunting quality. It is more useful to us as readers, I think, to range the poem in that dusky constellation of Frost poems with a similar thematic bent, such as "A Servant to Servants," "The Pauper Witch of Grafton," and "The Discovery of the Madeiras," or to compare it with such companion poems from *A Witness Tree* as "The Quest of the Purple-Fringed" and "Time Out," in order to see what Frost makes of the tradition in other flower poems. The burden of that tradition has always been its message of *carpe diem*, and in a poem by that title, yet another poem from *A Witness Tree*, Frost memorializes "two quiet children" who stand at a far imaginative extreme from the disheveled pair in "The Subverted Flower." Yet even here the poet is cautionary, warning the children (though not till they are safely out of earshot) that the traditional injunction to "seize the day of pleasure" is a counsel urged on us by time:

> "Be happy, happy, happy,
> And seize the day of pleasure."
> The age-long theme is Age's.
> 'Twas Age imposed on poems
> Their gather-roses burden
> To warn against the danger
> That overtaken lovers
> From being overflooded
> With happiness should have it
> And yet not know they have it.[11]

This passage is a sort of minute overview of English flower verse, the poet working all the stops on "burden" to suggest "refrain," "load," and "human mortality," with a glance over one shoulder, perhaps, at Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time." The triplicate "happy" ought to remind us as well of Keats's reading of static love on the Grecian urn, with its arrested lovers "For ever panting and for ever young."

[11] "Carpe Diem," *The Poetry*, ll. 9-18.

[10] Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874-1915* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 136-137, 512.

When, following these lines, Frost closes with a disquisition on the relation of time to the intensity of experience, he questions the very basis of the traditional wisdom:

> But bid life seize the present?
> . . . The present
> Is too much for the senses,
> Too crowding, too confusing—
> Too present to imagine.
> (ll. 19, 23-26)

The distracted lovers in "The Subverted Flower" *are* overtaken in a present "too much for the senses . . . Too present to imagine." The poem takes us as far into that present as it is safe for us to go; the boy and girl must make their separate ways out of it as best they can.

THE RECENT POEMS OF ELIZABETH BISHOP

JEROME MAZZARO

Long before Thomas De Quincey explained how Daniel Defoe "so plausibly circumstantiated his false historical records, as to make them pass for genuine," readers were aware of the liberties that *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) took with fact. Yet, by Defoe's inventing when "there seems no imaginable temptation" to invent and by the "apparent inertness of effect" of his "little circumstantiations," he was able to give the work a double character: amusement, that readers might take it for a novel; and verisimilitude, that they might read it as history. Five years before De Quincey's essay, Edgar Allan Poe remarked that "men do not look upon [the work] in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts—Robinson all. The powers which have wrought the wonder have been thrown into obscurity by the very stupendousness of the wonder they have wrought!" Readers of Elizabeth Bishop's "Crusoe in England" (1971) are struck as well by the liberties which her poem takes with fact.[1] Supposedly the man who Defoe says was rescued from his island in 1687, her Crusoe quotes while still living on the island lines from a poem that William Wordsworth writes in 1804. The anachronism is a deliberate clue to the complex nature of the narrative, and just as readers of Defoe have come to understand that his liberties have often to do with allegory, Bishop's readers may eventually see her work as an equally complex allegory. Her meaning lies, as did his, within both the various contexts that the work calls up and the narrative that the contexts are called to serve.

The poem's title, for example, is as much indebted to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) as it is to studies like Katherine May Peek's *Wordsworth in England* (1943). The progress of the poem is that of an imaginative journey which ends in an implied reputation when Crusoe is asked by the local museum " to / leave everything to them." This "imaginative journey" owes much to the "new and wonderful Discovries with surprizing Accounts of People and Animals" that Woodes Rogers in *A Cruising Voyage Round the World* (1712) indicates is a function of travel literature, and which many readers of Defoe have taken to be the purpose of *Robinson Crusoe*. The "imaginative journey"

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[1] Thomas De Quincey, "Homer and the Homeridae" (1841) as reprinted in Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel. Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975), pp. 292-3. Edgar Allan Poe, *op. cit.*, p. 291. Elizabeth Bishop, "Crusoe in England," *New Yorker*, 47 (November 6, 1971), 48-9.

owes, too, to the beneficial religious pilgrimages of the early Christians which Eusebius called "visible witnesses to the truth of the biblical narrative" and Cyril of Jerusalem saw "as confirmation of his baptismal lectures," except what had in these writers been a vertical movement toward God turns in secular travel literature into lateral motion. As important as these physical journeys are the "mental journeys" that Saint Bonaventure writes of in *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and which so influence Dante's allegories. Transferred in the Renaissance from a focus on Divinity to a focus on human imagination and, with the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to the uncorrupted inmagination of children, these imaginative journeys enter children's literature as states of innocence. Innocence opposes adult corruption, and just as "wonder," "chance," and "improbability" have in Dante's poetics implied Divine purpose, the same qualities in children's literature "prove" uncompromised "play." [2]

The poem, however, begins not with the story that Lewis Carroll's Alice is being read but with a newspaper account of the eruption of a new volcano. Word of the eruption merges with a second account which may refer either to a new island off Fiji that was created by a volcano in 1967 or to the better known creation off Iceland in 1963 of Surtsey. *Science News* records of the 1967 eruption that its outbreak was witnessed by Peter Bennett, captain of the New Zealand freighter *Tofua*. The immediate impression of the two accounts is to establish a factual basis at the same time the poem shifts its opening to a contemporary children's tale, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943). The narrator of that tale opens, too, on natural history. He begins with the effects on him as a child of six of a book called *True Stories from Nature*. This emphasis on natural history and *The Little Prince* continues with the poem's descriptions of waterspouts and miniature volcanoes and interests in classification and astronomy, but the reader is immediately set off on a second imaginary journey by the alienating effect of memory. The new island recalls Crusoe's "poor old island" still "un-rediscovered" and "un-renamable," and much as boredom and

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[2] Woodes Rogers as quoted by J. Paul Hunter in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Frank H. Ellis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 107. Eusebius and Cyril of Jerusalem as paraphrased in John Wilkinson's Preface to *Egeria's Travels*, trans. and ed. John Wilkinson (London: S.P.C.K., 1971), pp. 19-20. See Harry Berger, Jr., "Two Spenserian Retrospects," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 10 (1968), 5-25, and my "The Fact of Beatrice in *The Vita Nuova*," *The Literature of Fact: English Institute Papers 1975*, ed. Angus Fletcher (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 83-108, for discussions of "lateral Fall" and its effect on Renaissance consciousness.

accident work in the cases of Alice and Saint-Exupéry's airman, the explosive nature of volcanoes here identifies the condition which by the work's end must be reconciled. Like all "Falls" of children's literature, this condition must end by the child's accommodating to a world of responsibility. By altering the description Defoe gives of Friday's death in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Bishop suggests that in her poem the world of responsibility has something to do with Saint-Exupéry's view "that man's happiness lies not in freedom but in his acceptance of a duty." [3]

Acceptance of duty is especially part of the motif of Greek drama that Bishop introduces in the fifth stanza of the poem. The motif begins with mention of home-brew, a homemade flute, and gamboling among the goats, though the dancing may grow out of Rogers' account of his rescue of Selkirk. Traditionally, Greek drama is related to the wine-god Dionysus. A flute-player accompanied the marching or standing chorus, and the common etymology of "tragedy" is "goat-song," implying that its lines were once chanted by men dressed in goat costumes. Defoe's Crusoe has no flute, but his condition of long isolation is reminiscent of the exile undergone by Sophocles' Philoctetes. If not itself volcanic, Philoctetes' island has an active volcano into which at one point he implores Neoptolemus to throw him. As adapted in 1893 by André Gide, Philoctetes "is, in fact, a literary man: at once a moralist and an artist, whose genius becomes purer and deeper in ratio to his isolation and outlawry." When he was thinking out his *Philoctetes*, Gide later wrote Christian Beck, Robinsonism tormented him.[4] For Sophocles, however, acceptance of duty lies in Philoctetes' going back to Troy with Neoptolemus and Odysseus and concluding the war. For Gide, it is the realization that there is an ethic beyond love of country and love of self—a love of futurity. This love of futurity prompts the strong attraction

[3] "Creation of an Island," *Science News*, 93 (January 6, 1968), 8. The statement of Saint-Exupéry's intent is made by André Gide in his Preface to the French edition of *Night Flight* (1931), as quoted in Stuart Gilbert's Introduction to Saint-Exupéry's *The Wisdom of the Sands* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), p. vii. Friday, of course, dies from wounds received in the return voyage to the island. See *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. George A. Aitkin (London: J. M. Dent, 1895), p. 177.

[4] The description of Gide's Philoctetes is given in Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 289. Gide's statement is included in Germaine Brée's *Gide* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1963), p. 109. See also L. R. Lind's Introduction to Sophocles' *Philoctetes* in *Ten Greek Plays*, ed. L. R. Lind (Boston: Riverside Editions, 1957), p. 157, for another statement of Philoctetes' resemblance to Robinson Crusoe.

he feels to the young Neoptolemus, and it is this ethic that Bishop seems to allude to in her version of Crusoe and Friday. Friday's arrival objectifies the urge toward futurity that is implicit earlier in nature, art, and dream. Crusoe's tragedy is that Friday is male, and only meaningless artifacts, representative of a technology inferior to England's, will be left posterity.

The pastoral world which William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) makes part of children's books and *Alice in Wonderland* is equally enforced by the mention of flutes and homosexuality. Critics of Defoe have maintained a link between his novel and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and something of the rhythm of Renaissance pastoral obtains as well in the Bishop poem. As if to underscore the importance of this rhythm, Bishop adapts line 45 of Vergil's famous Messianic Eclogue in "One day I dyed a baby goat bright red." The double worlds which give rise to the rhythm are in this instance the two islands: the "poor old island," on which Crusoe lived, and England. But like Defoe's Crusoe, Bishop's castaway is not able to effect the classic interchange which Empson describes. Both protagonists can impart to the wilds a degree of technology that they learned in civilization, but the religious natures of their wilds experiences do not translate back into civilization. The economy of the "old island" is "home industry," patterned on a model of industry in England, but, in the case of Bishop's Crusoe, the knife on the shelf which once "reeked of meaning, like a crucifix" has had its "living soul . . . dribbled away." The cyclical process of history, on which the repetitive and reversible rhythms of Renaissance pastoral are based, is given up for an irreversible linear development. Much as in Bishop's "Arrival at Santos" and "Questions of Travel," the historical views of Giambattista Vico, *Finnegans Wake*, and Norman O. Brown are questioned, and, again, no definitive answer is reached: Although there may be no value left for her Crusoe in the relics of his years alone, the local museum keeper, at least, feels differently.

The undercurrent of natural history which has been a constant in Bishop's writing here again seems to take up positions promoted by Alfred Russel Wallace. She expresses high regard for Wallace, Charles Darwin, and G. J. Bruce in her interview with Ashley Brown (1966), and in her poetry, she specifically mentions *National Geographic* magazine and the works of Martin Johnson.[5] From Wallace, she derives the

[5] Ashley Brown, "An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop," *Shenandoah*, 17 (Winter, 1966), 19, and Elizabeth Bishop, "In the Waiting Room," *New Yorker*, 47 (July 17, 1971), 34.

poem's view that Crusoe's "small industries"—artistic, mathematical, philosophical, and musical preoccupations—cannot be explained on the basis of natural selection and a struggle for existence. Man's mental processes greatly exceed these needs. From Wallace, too, she derives the idea that machines and tools are part of man's evolutionary nature, replacing the changed body parts that occur in other animals. Thus, different environments require different adjustments, and tools and machines, like Crusoe's knife and umbrella, which make survival possible on the island are useless in England. Yet, perhaps most crucially, she takes Wallace's proposal that out of man's excess mental activity comes his spiritual awareness and uses the proposal to develop a position similar to that of Defoe's novel: Religion has a real function in less technologically developed environments. Just as in Defoe's novel, "the living soul" which exists on the island has little effect on Crusoe's actions once he returns. Religion is a specific stage of evolution, perhaps comparable, in the context of the poem, to that "theological" stage described by Auguste Comte's *Considerations on the Spiritual Power* (1826) as preparatory to a secular "religion of humanity."

In presenting these evolutionary positions, Bishop does not entirely neglect the work of Darwin. The Galapagos, as readers of his *Journal of Researches . . . during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle* (1845) remember, "are all formed of volcanic rocks." The clouds there, also, as in the poem, "generally hang low," and the lava is "basaltic." On Chatham Island where the famous turtle episode occurs, Darwin counts "from one small eminence" sixty volcanoes and goes on to describe the voice of the turtle as "a deep hiss." The sand on James Island is "extremely hot." A thermometer placed in some brown sand rises immediately to the maximum gradation of 137°, and he notes that "the black sand felt much hotter." Ostensibly, his voyage, like the nightmare of Bishop's Crusoe, is one of registering "eventually for ages" flora, fauna, and geography. Of the various landings, he writes in a pocket notebook—"Dry sand—Lizards—Black mud—parasites." He follows this entry with "Feast—Robinson Crusoe." The voyage produces the original of his theory of evolution which in 1858, when sent Wallace's essay on the origin of species, he was persuaded to make public. Darwin does so first as a joint paper with Wallace, at the Linnean Society in 1858 and later as *The Origin of Species* (1859). Although Darwin makes no mention in the book of waterspouts, scientists have found that they occur "only in association with heavy cumulus or cumulonimbus clouds" and that "as many as ten spouts have been sighted simultaneously by observers

flying in the tropics." Alexander von Humboldt, whose *Personal Narrative* is a major influence on Darwin's thought and one of the few books he took with him on the voyage, relates waterspouts occurring off the West Indies in cloudy weather, but the "half a dozen at a time . . . flexible, attenuated / sacerdotal beings" that Bishop's Crusoe describes can as easily be assigned to personal observation.[6]

Much as natural history is a preoccupation impinging on Bishop's poetry, so too are motifs of solitude, travel, and childhood. In *The Poetics of Reverie* (1960), Gaston Bachelard speaks of the "indelible marks" that "the original solitudes"—those of childhood—leave on certain souls, and he associates the sensitizing action of these states with "poetic reverie," where one can relax his aches. In "Elizabeth Bishop and the Poetics of Impediment" (1974), I described the impact of these "original solitudes" on the emotional values that she places on objects and setting. Having found their voyages disappointing or destructive, narrators try to return to either their homes or childhoods. They find, however, that they cannot return or, like Crusoe, that returns are as disappointing as reached destinations. The acts of travel—the processes of imagining and going on—offer the challenge, and arrivals succeed in interesting only insofar as they deviate from or exceed expectation. Nowhere, perhaps, are these values of original solitude more clearly laid out than in the story "In Prison" (1938). Bishop's narrator tells the reader that he already lives "in relationship to society, very much as if [he] were in a prison," yet he yearns to know his "proper sphere" and those duties "Nature intended [him] to perform." He, too, would have one place and "one intimate friend, whom [he will] influence deeply." Not by tending to nature or solitary introspection but by reading one dull book—and perhaps a commentary—the narrator of the story, like Crusoe, will "draw vast generalizations, abstractions of the grandest, most illuminating sort, like allegories or poems."[7] Necessity proves a

[7] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Books, 1971), p. 99. Jerome Mazzaro, "Elizabeth Bishop and the Poetics of Impediment," *Salmagundi*, 27 (Summer-Fall 1974), 118-44. Elizabeth Bishop, "In Prison," *Partisan Review*, 4 (March 1938), 3, 9, 8.

[6] Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches . . . during the Voyage of H. M. S. Beagle* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1896), pp. 372-4, 377. The Notebook entry is given by Nora Barlow in her *Charles Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 247. The description of the formation of waterspouts is from *The Harper Encyclopedia of Science*, ed. James R. Newman. 2nd Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 1240-41. See Alexander von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative*, tr. Thomasina Ross (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), 3:149, for his encounter with waterspouts.

far less lasting and powerful force in the story, however, than it does in "Crusoe in England."

Long before Bachelard, in "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming" (1908), Sigmund Freud treated these same matters. He contended "that happy people never make fantasies, only unsatisfied ones" and "that every separate fantasy contains the fulfillment of a wish, and improves on unsatisfactory reality." The wishes are either ambitious in that they serve to exalt the person creating them or they are erotic. In both cases, fantasy sets up a special relation to time: it "at one and the same moment hovers between three periods of time—the three periods of our ideation"—past, present, and future. Freud, too, sees "the stress laid on the writer's memories of his childhood" as support for the hypothesis "that imaginative creation, like day-dreaming, is a continuation of and substitute for the play of childhood." But unlike the fantasist, the writer induces readers to accept his fantasies as their own. "The writer softens the egotistical character of the day-dream by changes and disguises, and he bribes us by the offer of a purely formal, that is, aesthetic, pleasure in presentation of his fantasies." More recently, in "Passages, Margins, and Poverty" (1972), Victor Turner writes of a "liminality" where, like Bishop's Crusoe, a detached individual "passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state." The passage presumably leads to reentering the social structure, "often, but not always, at a higher status level." This factually is what occurs in the poem, although Crusoe tends to think of himself as a "marginal," having "no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution to [his] ambiguity." Turner notes that marginals usually "are highly conscious and self-conscious people and may produce from their ranks a disproportionately high number of writers, artists, and philosophers."[8]

The quotation from Wordsworth seems to crystalize this sense—implicit in Gide, Bachelard, Freud, Turner, and Bishop's other works—that solitude is one stage in creativity and that, among other things, "Crusoe in England" is a poem about writing. Artistic creation is the intended analogue to nature's creation of an island which begins the poem. The two lines the work cites are from "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." They are often glossed as embodying the "recollection in tranquility" that Wordsworth writes of in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

[8] Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 47-8, 52-3, 54. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 232-3.

(1800). Wordsworth was himself fond of solitude and felt that his highest experiences came while he was alone. Writing on the poem in "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth" (1950), Frederick Pottle finds that "so far as his subject is expressed in imagery drawn from nature . . . , there is implied a lifelong habit of close, detailed, and accurate observation of the objects composing the external universe." But the subject Wordsworth alludes to in the Preface is not an object in external nature. Rather, "the subject is a mental image," recurring in memory "not once but many times; and on each occasion [the poet] looks at it steadily to see what it *means*." Pottle concludes in terms applicable to Bishop's poem that "Wordsworth's method . . . is not the method of beautification (Tennyson), nor the method of distortion (Carlyle); it is the method of transfiguration. The primrose by the river's brim remains a simple primrose but it is also something more; it is a symbol . . . of sympathy, theopathy, or the moral sense." Willard Spiegelman traces the debt generally of Bishop's nature poems to a tradition of Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge in "Landscape and Knowledge: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop" (1975).[9]

Nor, in pursuing the creativity suggested by these various other contexts, should a reader undervalue the real debt that Bishop's poem owes to Defoe. The knife, the turtles, the umbrella, the goats, and the goat-skin clothes owe their existence to Defoe's narrative. Similarly, the description of Friday by Defoe's Crusoe as "a comely handsome Fellow, perfectly well made" may well have instigated her narrator's comment—"Pretty to watch; he had a pretty body." Although their actual contents differ, detailed dreams are common to both works, and the playful "Mont d'Espoir/Mount Despair" line in Bishop's poem may have been prompted by the change of Defoe's island from "the Island of Despair" to "my Island." Even the poem's preoccupation with the propagation of kind has its antecedent in the original Crusoe's concern about his dog: "My Dog who was now grown very old and crazy . . . had found no Species to multiply his Kind upon." But most importantly, Bishop owes to Defoe the origins of Crusoe as a model of the "triumph of human achievement and enterprise," an example "of the elementary processes of political economy," and the embodiment "of the enduring traits of our social and economic history." In "*Robinson Crusoe* as Myth" (1951), Ian Watt divides into three these areas of Crusoe's apotheosis—"Back to Nature," "The Dignity

[9] Frederick A. Pottle, "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), pp. 279-80, 281. Willard Spiegelman, "Landscape and Knowledge: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop," *Modern Poetry Studies*, 6 (1975), 203-4.

of Labor," and "Economic Man." Edwin B. Benjamin and others would subdivide the first of these categories into external and human nature, and Bishop's poem shows ironic agreement with them.[10] Her Crusoe *is*, however, the obverse of Defoe's: He cannot remember the "moment when [he] actually chose this," and his efforts at Divine reconciliation are more witty than real. Similarly, although manual labor and social and economic history are implied in the artifacts of the final stanza, life on the island is strikingly devoid of work. Evolution not economics is stressed.

Indeed, in contrast to the Christian and capitalistic character that readers encounter in Defoe's Crusoe, Bishop's Crusoe is self-consciously Hellenic and aesthetic. W. H. Auden's distinction between Greek tragedy as "the tragedy of necessity" and Christian tragedy as "the tragedy of possibility" is paralleled by Bishop's narrator's having decided that he cannot remember "a moment when I actually chose this." In fact, he would like to believe that, like Oedipus, things "happen to him without his knowledge and against his desire, presumably as a divine punishment for his *hubris*." This lack of relation between being and acts which he perceives happening and which Auden finds typical of Greek drama prevents him from undergoing self-consciously the kind of historical development that Auden associates with Christian sensibility. Rather, like many late Victorian Hellenists, the narrator's allusions to art and interest in Greek drama may be seen as a resistance to the concept of progress in historical theory. Artistic monuments appear intermittently to challenge views of continuity and ongoing improvement.[11] The language of his descriptions, moreover, stresses sentimentality as a basis for interest. He speaks of "my poor old island," "miserable, small volcanoes," and drifts of snail shells looking like "beds of irises." He reduces lava fields to "a fine display" and offers to give or take a few years "for any sort of kettle." He often gives way to self-pity, arguing that " 'Pity should begin at home.' So the more/pity I felt, the more I felt at home." This turning back upon himself at times out of boredom or the interests in verbal play heightens the impression that he finds no real metaphysical purpose to his life.

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[10] *Robinson Crusoe*, pp. 160, 55, 174, 116-7. Ian Watt as quoted in *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 313. Edwin B. Benjamin, "Symbolic Elements in *Robinson Crusoe*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, pp. 34-38. J. Paul Hunter and William H. Hazelwood are other Defoe scholars who stress religious aspects of the novel.

[11] W. H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero," *New York Times Book Review*, December 16, 1945, p. 1; W. H. Auden, "The Dyer's Hand," *The Listener*, 53 (June 16, 1955), 1065. See Noel Annan, "Science, Religion, and the Critical Mind," in *Backgrounds to Victorian Literature*, ed. Richard A. Levine (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 110-1, for a discussion of this aspect of Victorian Hellenism.

The emphasis on self-pity which is part of the narrator's sentimentality allies him eventually to the starting point of Existentialism. Existence for him precedes essence; essence is known by reflection. In his case, he affects some of Albert Camus's notions of the Absurd. Actions are perpetually thwarted. By seeming to take up the stance of Gide's Philoctetes, he grows intolerant of the past (Odysseus and "love of country"), indulgent of the present (himself and "love of self"), and enamored of the future (Neoptolemus and "love of futurity"), but his drama does not end like Gide's. He does not send his Neoptolemus back to Troy with a miraculous bow. His Friday, as the poem's conclusion states, "died of measles/seventeen years ago come March." The one meaning—or "taming"—which has occurred in the poem has been dashed, leaving the narrator as uncertain about the future as are many of Saint-Exupéry's heroes. Unlike Defoe's hero, he seems to have no wife and children as an alternative to Friday. Instead, readers have an analogue to the character of volcanic islands and to Bishop's "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore." Volcanic islands are extremely unstable. They are foredoomed to destruction by new explosions or landslides of the soft soil. Similarly, "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" praises the older poet for writing a poetry that is coevally "dynasties of negative construction/darkening and dying." Like real comets, the "comets" of verse fade. Thus, although ignored by the narrator, a choice for aestheticism has been made. The poem's pretense at extenuating everything and blaming for nothing turns, as in other Bishop poems, into a stance that extenuates nothing and blames for everything.

Much of the brilliance of "Crusoe in England" lies in the apparent ease with which Bishop combines these various contexts into the thread of her narrative. The dual focus of world and narrator, on which the poem begins, is repeated in the final stanza with the request of the local museum keeper for artifacts of the island. Implicit attitudes and diction work to suggest an environment consciously and unconsciously at odds with Crusoe and a Crusoe whose tendencies toward exaggeration and fancy smooth over obvious discrepancies. Having established that his "poor old island's still/un-rediscoverd, un-renamable," he goes on to explain, "None of the books has ever got it right." How might they, readers may ask, since, by the various contexts of the poem, several islands are involved and, by the poem's Heraclitean view of time, one cannot step into the same stream twice? Like the daffodils of Wordsworth's lyric, the island of the poem is a mental and, therefore, unlocatable image—both for the narrator and for the other castaways he resembles. A physical description of the island follows, blending in its allusions

to giantism with Book I of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and in its allusion to smallness with sequences of *The Little Prince*. The *Alice* metaphor dominates as the poem moves into an implicit tea party only to turn from a description of environment to an analysis of self-pity as a premise for feeling at home. Behind this first description is a sense of alienation resembling that characterized by H.D.F. Kitto as common to Greek tragedy: "If a character speaks of the scenery around him, it is to emphasize that he is cut off from his fellowmen." [12]

A more detailed description of the island begins in the next stanza, colored by both proprietorship and interaction. Having discovered the island's "one kind of berry," the narrator moves explicitly into the Greek drama implicit in his former alienation. An egoism emerges in his admission of not knowing enough: "The books/I'd read were full of blanks." The "blanks," as he reveals, are his own fault; they are the result of his inattentiveness and refusals to be "tamed." Complaints ensue of the smells, sounds, and colors of the island's animals, and echoes of the "bird islands" of Bishop's "Cape Breton" occur in the baas and shrieks. The poem extends these aspects of pastoral with its conscious use of Vergil; however, the improvements on nature by the imagination appear playful, egotistical, and absurd. They give way in the Bishop poem to the wish-fulfillment of dreams, as the narrator's inclinations to violence and propagation surface. These inclinations are conveyed in the images of "slitting a baby's throat, mistaking it/for a baby goat" and of "infinities/ of islands, islands spawning islands,/like frog's eggs turning into polliwogs." The appearance of Friday "just when I thought I couldn't take it/another minute longer" relieves the narrator's loneliness and boredom, though he is soon lamenting Friday's not being a woman. Rescued from the island and presently surrounded by "uninteresting lumber," he drinks real tea, reads of sea news like the erupting volcanoes on which the poem began, and clings nostalgically to the artifacts of his own experience. The poem ends as he feels a need for a new self-definition comparable to the affirmation that self-pity allowed on his island home. This new self-definition, however, is blocked by his inability to accept either the judgment of the museum keeper or the death of Friday.

Within the body of Bishop's poetry, "Crusoe in England" reverts particularly to poems like "Chemin de Fer" and "The Gentleman of Shallot" and their interests in loneliness and the purpose of love. Master and servant giving each other meaning form the basis as well of

[12] H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 52.

"Cootchie." The baa of the island world echoes not only the bleat of the islands in "Cape Breton" but also the hillside about Rio in "The Burglar of Babylon." Like Crusoe, the burglar finds that, once having left home, he cannot return, even though he returns to the same place. Beaches hiss in "Sandpiper," and naturalistic detail abounds in "Florida." But most importantly, the poem seems to reflect backward on "The Prodigal" and "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance." "The Prodigal" deals, too, with isolation, as a modern day wastrel decides to leave the pig sty of a world he lives in. Like Crusoe, the prodigal at times takes solace in drink and thinks "he almost might endure/his exile yet another year or more." Not nightmares but "shuddering insights, beyond his control" touch him, relieving his nausea. But unlike Crusoe, who seems at the poem's end to accept "Necessity," the prodigal chooses to go home, though the reader is not sure if this means suicide or relocation. "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," with its goats, dead volcanoes, social teas, and "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and,'" parallels the theme of the Crusoe poem of an experience that puts one beyond being satisfied with former worlds. Here the Incarnation rather than an Adamic world without Eve is made central to changed perspective. Bishop's traveler makes clear that it was really "this old Nativity" which she was seeking laterally rather than the mutual self-confirming intersubjectivity that Crusoe and Friday or Adam and Eve convey.

The poem's themes of evolution, moral responsibility, and loss are reinforced additionally by other recent Bishop poems. "Night City" (1972) uses the image of an Indian fakir to describe flying over population centers at night. The urban light clusters resemble burning coals, as the city itself is described as uninhabitable and the sky dead. But in an evolutionary way, "there are creatures,/careful ones, overhead." These "creatures" who "set down their feet" and "walk/green, red; green, red" are, as Wallace argued, man extended by technology into something greater. The comparison of the inexplicable religious mystery of walking on live coal to the mystery of flying is, in part, the delineating of a recurrent dichotomy of religion and science that Bishop sees existing. "Five Flights Up" (1974) with its "unknown bird" on its "usual branch" and "little black dog" who has "no sense of shame" compares the world of nature to that of man, for whom yesterday is "almost impossible to lift." Memory and Christian responsibility are again the differences as "shame" is a determining focus. "In the Waiting Room" (1971) describes the development of Christian responsibility in a girl of seven as she sits pondering a *National Geographic* magazine while her aunt is in with the

dentist. Mysteriously, in the course of the wait, the girl discovers that she is part of humanity and the World War going on about her. The villanelle, "One Art" (1976), describes the recurrence of losses that, at first, are "no disaster" and which finally "may look like . . . disaster." The poem shares with "Crusoe in England" a sense of thwarted immediate goals that, if surmounted, may lead to greater realizations.[13]

But perhaps most clearly "Crusoe in England" parallels and opposes "The End of March, Duxbury" (1975).[14] In this later poem, a "proto-" or "crypto-dream-house" replaces the island as a locus for withdrawal and, with its "two bare rooms" and "boring books," the situation of "In Prison" is even more pronounced. The withdrawal occurs, in this instance, just as the Canadian geese are returning North to propagate their kind and when the lion/lamb or "mutton-fat" aspects of March are ascendant. Nature's hostility emerges in a broken kite, the sense of the dream-house as protective, and the image of the sun as a kittenish lion who bats the "kite out of the sky to play with." Instead of the creative explosions of "Crusoe in England," the narrator would oppose this hostility. The wind, however, is "much too cold" and the house is boarded up, and he chooses the alternative of a completed, uneventful walk. An image of Walter Pater is conveyed in the poem's "lovely diaphanous blue flame," wavering "doubled in the window," though the speaker would be American enough to gulp "*grog à l'américaine*." The difference between the speaker of the poem and Crusoe is one of necessity. Crusoe is forced to invent and create by circumstances. The speaker of "The End of March, Duxbury" is forced only to imagine. The poems that result are styled accordingly. Crusoe's narrative is as baffling to him as the desire by the local museum keeper to enshrine his belongings. Crusoe speaks like a man who is uncertain of what makes him interesting. In contrast, the "I" of "The End of March, Duxbury" focuses on the "lesson" of the broken kite and sentimentality ensues. Like the stones it describes, the poem may tease the sun a while but it, too, will end batted down. Self-pity is not transcended as it is in parts of "Crusoe in England."

Yet, it is the allegorical nature of "Crusoe in England" which shows Bishop most brilliantly as a poet, especially for modern readers. Her

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[13] Elizabeth Bishop, "Night City," *New Yorker*, 48 (September 16, 1972), 122; Elizabeth Bishop, "Five Flights Up," *New Yorker*, 50 (February 25, 1974), 40; Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art," *New Yorker*, 52 (April 26, 1976), 40. For a more detailed discussion of "In the Waiting Room," see my "Elizabeth Bishop's Particulars," *World Literature Today*, 51 (Winter 1977), 46-49.

[14] Elizabeth Bishop, "The End of March, Duxbury," *New Yorker*, 51 (March 24, 1975), 40.

concentration simultaneously on precise language and on the workings of a spiritual force implicit in the recurrence of certain words and situations makes her an heir of both Dante and the New England minds that Yvor Winters describes in *Maule's Curse* (1938). Much as the Puritans came to look "upon themselves as instruments in the divine hand for the carrying out of a great religious mission, the object of which was the rebuilding of God's church," [15] her narrators look upon "objective evidence" and "inner assurance" and individual behavior as symbolic. Their aim, however, is not the sectarian goal of Calvinism or Catholicism. Rather, humanity as a whole becomes God's church and biological survival an instrument of its perpetuation. As manifested in her poetry, Divinity assumes a status comparable to Necessity or History. Through a kind of clustering about recurrent words similar to that which David Lyle recommended to William Carlos Williams in the early forties and Williams used in the construction of *Paterson*, the shape of this Divinity is discoverable empirically. Thus, the combination of "choice," "necessity," and "Greek drama" within the poem sends a reader immediately to Auden's uses of the terms. At the same time, in the context of *Robinson Crusoe*, the terms evoke the specific Greek drama, *Philoctetes*, and the particular adaptation of it made by Gide. Similarly, "basalt," "cloudiness," "volcanic islands," "guano," "propagation of kind," and registering flora, fauna, and geography set up immediate connections with natural history and historians and bring this realm of discourse into play. Although secular, both sets of referents are as exactly circumscribed as the Bible and biblical commentary, and Bishop accords them as careful treatment.

This care or respect for the formality of what, by simple common usage, comes to represent the objective or general creates the empirical equivalent to the Ideal world that theorists posit for allegory. In *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964), Angus Fletcher proposes that at the heart of allegory "is a human reconstitution of divinely inspired messages, a revealed transcendental language which tries to preserve the remoteness of a properly veiled godhead." Thus, allegory is often employed when there is a conflict between rival authorities and appears "when a people is being lulled into inaction by the routine of daily life, so as to forget all higher aspirations." [16] The rival authorities seem, in

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[15] Yvor Winters, *Maule's Curse* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1938), p. 9. See my *William Carlos Williams: The Later Poems* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 62-3, for a discussion of Lyle and Williams.

[16] Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 21-3.

Bishop's case, to be everyday experience and the linear perspectives of Christianity and Evolution: Sensuous apprehension is contrasted to salvation by Grace or evolution into a new species of man. A kind of stoicism rises from the opposition. The Christian bias, which occurs often as a memory of a religious purpose rather than as vital religious experience, can be accounted for in several ways: Bishop's upbringing was Christian and the bias correctly interprets her attitudes as the outgrowth of this upbringing. Yet, one can as easily propose that for her to break completely from Christian myth is for her to cut Western culture off from its past and, thus, to sever the linear development which underscores her vision. Finally, one may argue that Christianity is a deep myth and that all deep myths have about them some truth. In any case, much as the personae of Dante's *Commedia,* her narrators by a coalescing of inner and outer truths achieve a type that comes increasingly to flesh out a vision of the world.

The evolution of Crusoe offers an excellent illustration of how this coalescing occurs. Bishop presents him as a type for the creative individual by rejecting the autobiographical "I" and adding new details to the myth. He is neither a mask for her view nor a Platonic type to which experience conforms. In some ways, he is an extension of the mythic method described by T. S. Eliot in "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923). By his sheer survival he comes to symbolize her evolutionary belief. Yet, even here, hagiography gives way to concern for the struggle for survival. By investigating the imagination, he seemingly furthers survival at the same time that his failure to propagate works against his success. At all times, as in "The Armadillo," a concept of mass ecology appears to be critical: Man's aspirations cannot come at wanton damage to the world about. He reflects, consequently, what Fletcher cites as characteristic of the allegorical protagonist: He acts "as if possessed," implying "cosmic notions of fate and personal fortune." His actions touch on both "human and divine spheres" and make "an appeal to an almost scientific curiosity about the order of things." He is "a conquistador," arbitrating "order over chaos by confronting a random collection of people and events" and "imposing his own fate upon that random collection." As in Dante, "the literal sense . . . come[s] first, it being the meaning in which the others are contained and without which it would be impossible and irrational to come to an understanding of the others, particularly the allegorical."[17] This literal sense permits the factive sense to border at times on rationalism and at times on surrealism.

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[17] Ibid., pp. 68-9. *The Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri,* trans. and ed. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 113.

If it were not for the allegorical bent in other of her poems, one might think that Bishop was drawn to allegory in "Crusoe in England" by the nature of the material that she was assembling. In his Preface to *Serious Reflections . . . of Robinson Crusoe* (1720), Defoe affirms "that the Story, though Allegorical, is also Historical," and critics like Leslie Stephen have seen the novel as "a kind of allegory for [its author's] fate. He had suffered from solitude of soul." Benjamin and others have seen the book less personally as "a symbolic account of a religious experience." Similarly, critics of Sophocles have proposed that his play is an allegory for the situation of Athens in 409 B.C. and that Philoctetes is intended "to be identified with Alcibiades." While recognizing the faults of Alcibiades, Athens needed him to manage her war with Sparta. Gide's adaptation, as Germaine Brée states, is an attempt "more or less consciously to deal indirectly with the question of homosexuality, a central problem of [Gide's] own." Allegorical interpretations have been applied to *Alice in Wonderland* and *Gulliver's Travels* almost from the moments of their publication, and Saint-Exupéry begins his account of *The Little Prince* with a drawing of a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an elephant and he goes on to assert that "what is most important is invisible." [18] The insistence of natural history that plants, animals, and environments be studied in order to uncover information about the nature of man makes its disciplines in their way allegorical. The reality of their data is no less ciphers in an ideal encyclopedia than, in the Middle Ages, fact had been seen as ciphers in a Divine work. The parodic nature carries with it aspects of the original, transcendental motion.

One may see Bishop's allegory, moreover, as a necessary solution to what she describes in her interview as a love of religious poetry and a dislike of didacticism. She told Ashley Brown that "Auden's late poetry is sometimes spoiled for me by his didacticism. I don't like modern religiosity in general: it always seems to lead to a tone of moral superiority. . . . Times have changed since Herbert's day." By means of a corresponding ideal world at one remove from experience, she can assert a "moral" meaning at the same time she keeps her narrative free from overt moralizing. Certainly, the ideal world that "Crusoe in England" and other of her recent poems call into being goes a long way toward bringing together the body of her work in a more unified, recognizable, and coherent way. When *The Complete Poems* appeared in 1969, one was thankful mainly for the convenience of having all her poems under one

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[18] *Robinson Crusoe*, pp. 259, 298. Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 34. Wilson, p. 286. Brée, p. 101. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1943), pp. 7, 76.

cover. Bishop's tendency to keep her subjects isolated, small, and circumscribed, worked there toward establishing her as the master of the self-contained anthology piece. Now, one has something closer to the "one significant, consistent, and developing personality" that Eliot makes requisite to great poets. Nonetheless, readers must not forget that the allegory and its coalescings are brought about by Bishop's continuing respect for particulars. Like Wordsworth, her best poetry "does not start with an abstraction or a generalization, a divine commonplace which [she] wishes to illustrate."[19] Nothing in "Crusoe in England" or the recent poems shows a retraction of the discretenesses she articulates in "Sandpiper." On the literal level, her world is still "minute and vast and clear." Her "millions of grains" remain "black, white, tan, and gray,/ mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst."

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[19] Brown, 10-11. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 203. Pottle, op. cit., p. 280.

REVIEWS

Austin Clarke. *Selected Poems.* Dolmen/Wake Forest University Press, 1976, 207 pp. $6.95; John Montague. *A Slow Dance.* Dolmen/Wake Forest University Press, 1976, 63 pp. $4.25; Ciaran Carson. *The New Estate.* Dolmen/Wake Forest University Press, 1976, 42 pp. $3.25.

With typical Irish understatement, a literary historian has said that, at any moment in time, there are at least 10,000 poets living and writing in Ireland. Wake Forest University Press, established in May 1976 as an American agent for Irish books, offers three of these poets in the paperbacks listed above. Appropriately, the volumes differ in significant ways, as do their writers. Austin Clarke (1896-1974) was a prolific but scarcely known Dublin poet who has been ranked second only to Yeats in Irish verse. Of the older generation of Irish poets, the two are without equals. John Montague, born in Brooklyn in 1929 and reared in Ulster, now lives in the Republic in Cork and belongs to the middle generation of Irish poets. *A Slow Dance* is his third volume. Ciaran Carson, born in Belfast in 1948, still lives in Ulster and works for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Both by date of birth and the fact that *The New Estate* is his first collection, he represents the younger, present generation of Irish poets.

As Tom Kinsella's introduction emphasizes, Clarke's work is outstanding for its incorporation of medieval Gaelic rhythms. A rival of Yeats whom Yeats ignored, he chose materials which Yeats overlooked to produce eighteen separate volumes of poems. Because their quality is uneven, Kinsella has culled carefully from fourteen of these. It may be, as he says, that these are the poems of Clarke's destined to live. The result is a variety of highly sensual, whimsical poems which any reader can enjoy. If the collection has weaknesses, they are that Kinsella favors Clarke's long poems and offers only two examples of his satiric verses. Since Clarke's poems are difficult to locate, Wake Forest offers a needed service in making this collection available.

Montague's *Slow Dance* continues the epic collage techniques of his highly praised second volume, *The Rough Field.* The title poem indicates that Montague is concerned with universal themes, even while treating provincial subjects. The "dance" of dying and death, begetting and birth, and living and loving is made poignant by the alternate peace and destruction which is modern Ireland. While some poems are violent, Montague's style is consistently smoother and more polished than is Clarke's or Carson's. He is obviously a mature poet who has found his voice. He should produce many more good volumes.

Ciaran Carson's *New Estate,* by contrast, is obviously the work of a young poet. His images are more powerful than finished. The poems are occasional: painting a house, attending a funeral of a relative, or remembering a country cousin or a sister. The poet, at this stage, is provincial in outlook, but has talent and should grow and develop. Still, Wake Forest is taking a chance with him. If a single poem makes a poet, one volume does not make a poetic career.

Still, *Selected Poems* of Austin Clarke, John Montague's *A Slow Dance,* and Ciaran Carson's *New Estate* are volumes which Irish specialists and readers of poetry generally will want to read. Those of us who teach Irish literature hope that

the Wake Forest (Irish) University Press will make additional volumes available. Writings of Tom Kinsella and Seumas Heaney might be volumes four and five. After that, there are 9,995 left to consider.

JACK W. WEAVER
Winthrop College

Richard Holmes. *Shelley, the Pursuit*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975, 829 pp. $22.50.

Shelley's life has frequently drawn very heated critical responses—much more so than that of any of his major Romantic contemporaries, including even Byron. The spectrum of biographical material runs from the apologetic accounts of Shelley's friends Thomas Love Peacock and T. J. Hogg through the adoration of Andre Maurois' *Ariel* to the contempt of Irving Babbitt. Those who have attempted objectivity generally have ignored the controversies over Shelley's atheism, thoughts on sex and marriage, and revolutionary politics to discuss how Platonism and emerging doctrines of the nature of electricity are reflected in Shelley's poems—in other words, they have avoided the arguments his life, it appears, must inevitably raise. Richard Holmes's *Shelley, the Pursuit*, which, along with K. N. Cameron's *The Young Shelley* (1950) and *Shelley: The Golden Years* (1974), should supplant Newman Ivey White's long-standard biography, refreshingly conducts a rational examination of Shelley that deals with the biographical controversies head-on without escaping into abstract philosophical speculation except where absolutely relevant to an understanding of a particular incident in the poet's life.

Holmes prefaces his study by announcing to all "Shelley lovers" that "this book is not for them" (p. ix). It is certainly not for Shelley haters either. We don't find Ariel here, but neither do we confront the abstractly thinking, atheistic whipping-boy of the New Critics and moralists. Holmes readily admits the apathy, perhaps even cruelty, of Shelley's treatment of his first wife, Harriet Westbrook, destined to commit suicide, and has a perfect ironic perspective on the contradictions in his poet's character that would lead him, apparently, to encourage his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg to profess liberal ideals on sexual relationships and subsequently banish him from the Shelley circle after becoming suspicious that a liaison was developing between Hogg and Mary Shelley. But Holmes also lauds Shelley's consistently generous and compassionate attitude toward Claire Clairmont in her tribulations with Lord Byron and is always prepared to refute spurious charges: in giving by far the best discussion to date of the alleged attempt on Shelley's life while he was promoting the land reclamation scheme at Tan-yr-allt, Tremadoc, Wales, in February of 1813, Holmes rejects the theory, fostered by Peacock, that Shelley, in a paranoid state, was merely hallucinating. He shows that the poet was in fact being assaulted for his radical principles and thus had just cause for the fears many have attributed to extreme psychological weakness.

Holmes's study will, I suspect, be valued for its treatment of Shelley's death, for it cuts through the pathetically romanticized derivations from contemporary accounts like Edward Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858). Holmes admits that Shelley was depressed in the weeks preceding his drowning and notes that an Italian sea captain claimed to have seen Shelley angrily preventing Edward Williams from taking measures to save the *Don Juan* in the storm, but refuses to speculate that the poet reached a nadir of despair in his com-

position of *The Triumph of Life*, dropped his pen in anguish, and sailed into death and heroic cremation. His skepticism on these points comes through in his inclusion of one mundane detail as a final point in his section on Shelley's death: "Much later Shelley's ashes were buried in a tomb . . . in the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, after having remained for several months in a mahogany chest in the British Consul's wine-cellar" (p. 730).

Two other strengths of *Shelley, the Pursuit* should be noted. First is Holmes's treatment of Shelley's works; rather than attempt to cover every interpretive angle in a manner which, in many critical biographies, often distracts one's attention from the main narrative, he discusses the poems and prose pieces only to the extent that they reflect the period in Shelley's life under discussion. Hence, *The Cenci*, which would be a major topic in a generic approach, receives brief treatment, while *The Mask of Anarchy* is meticulously discussed because it shows a reawakening of the poet's political muse in answer to "one of those crises which a writer must seize" (p. 537). The second noted strength of this biography is its concise introductions of those people who had an obvious effect on Shelley's life. There is no protracted discussion of Shelley's ancestry here, since Holmes does not see that as an important force in the poet's development beyond the fact that Shelley had ambiguous feelings about his hereditary nobility, but there are frequent references to William Godwin's metamorphosis from youthful radical to money-conscious nuisance and to the state Byron was in when he and Shelley were together in Italy—a description I find sensitive and accurate: "Flippancy [for Byron] had become a last refuge" (p. 420). With this portrait in mind, one can easily accept the view Shelley gives us of his fellow poet in "Julian and Maddalo."

Holmes's book signals a new direction for examinations of Shelley's life. It avoids emotionalism and should set a prime example for those who, in the future, will shun both Ariel and the rebellious demon, and will deal alone with Percy Bysshe Shelley.

FRED SHILSTONE
Clemson University

René Char. *Poems*. Translated and annotated by Mary Ann Caws and Jonathan Griffin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, 292 pp. $15.

Between Mary Ann Caws's Madeleine (p. 93) and Jonathan Griffin's Magdalen (p. 147) stands the poem of Char, accessible, for the first time, in all its richness to the American reader. Jackson Mathews' *Hypnos Waking*, 1956, has, at last, found its companions. Spanning nearly fifty years of Char's career, from *Les Cloches sur le coeur*, 1928, to *Aromates chasseurs*, 1975, the volume is an impressive sampling of the poet's art—and of the translators'.

Though both were helped by Char in their choice of texts and words, Mary Ann Caws and Jonathan Griffin emerge as craftsmen very different in technique and tone, recognizable at every turn. Of the two, Ms. Caws is the more literal and succinct. Compare, for example, the rendering of Char's titles. For Griffin, "Dansons aux Baronnies" becomes "Let's Go Dance at Les Baronnies," "Les parages d'Alsace" turns into "Alsace—That Part of the World." Ms. Caws renders "L'extravagant" as "The Extravagant One," having rejected the more pleasing "Wanderer Outside" (Preface, p. xxiv).

I choose these examples because they immediately point to each translator's particular mode. Jonathan Griffin emerges as an English poet. As such, he strives for rhythm and rhyme. Sometimes, the price paid is too high. For example, his version of "Compagnie de l'écolière" with its "you/two" rhyme and "slip/sleep" half-rhyme catches none of Char's elusiveness, and the ending (p. 37), "It's you father altering now," leaves one wondering about father's *métier*.

In fairness to Griffin, it must be said that thanks to his poet's ear he also achieves some remarkable successes. Thus the "Dansons aux Baronnies" mentioned earlier is beautifully brought over with all its Gallic lightness of touch, a noteworthy accomplishment. And despite its compensations, "Le village vertical" (p. 220) also comes off well.

Mary Ann Caws, whose *Presence of René Char* (Princeton, 1976) should be read as a companion to the translations, is the poet's critic. Her versions always "call attention to the opposite page." They may lose in rhythm and tone what they gain in fidelity. Take, for example, the ending of "A l'horizon remarquable" (p. 4). The tension created in the French line between sound and meaning (trail and gunpowder) is lost in the choppy English *wildfire*, semantically accurate, yet far from the mark.

Ms. Caws is best at the longer pieces of poetic prose, and some free verse. Her "Louis Curel de la Sorgue" is very good, and the first part of "Commune Présence" is excellent, though again I would quibble with the compensatory rhyme which turns

> Eclaireur comme tu surviens tard
> L'arbre a châtié une à une ses feuilles

into

> Light-bearer how late you come
> The tree chastised its leaves one by one.

Actual mistranslations by either author are few. See, on this point, Henri Peyre, *French Review*, 50 (May 1977), 934-35. The volume as a whole is a decided success, given the peculiar difficulty of Char, a useful and welcome addition to our appreciation of poet and translator.

MECHTHILD CRANSTON
Asheville, N. C.

Richard M. Cook. *Carson McCullers*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1975, 202 pp. $6.95.

Richard M. Cook's slender, unpretentious evaluation of Carson McCullers for the "Modern Literature Monographs" series provides a concise, limited approach for the basic reader. With a format similar to Twayne studies, the monograph offers methodical chapters on McCullers' life and each of her major works. It does not offer a comprehensive view of her total work, nor original departures from received critical opinion. Nevertheless, Cook explores the customary themes, ideas, and attitudes with clarity and poise. The faults of probable compression show in occasional lapses in logic and in over-generalizing, while minor errors in detail (one page reports her right arm was paralyzed by a stroke; another says it was her left) and spelling show a haste in copy preparation. He also has the quirky habit of naming his

subject Mrs. McCullers, McCullers and Carson on the same page. But his most serious lapse is one of critical imagination, for he seems to rely too strongly upon the remarks of Tennessee Williams, though he mentions the more important commentators on the McCullers canon.

Such a critical simplicity as Williams supplies in his enthusiasm for his friend's gothicism is, of course, acceptable in a book intended to be an extended study guide, but Cook teases the serious reader with his final provoking pages. For there he summarizes McCullers' themes of suffering, alienation and narcissism with admirable compactness, while suggesting that in leaving the South McCullers lost touch with the source of her art. Her career thus prefigured, I think, the pattern of those writers of her period like William Styron and others to come who would write in the non-sectional style despite their Southern roots (see, for example, the poetry and fiction in the two volumes, *Southern Writing in the Sixties*, edited by John Corrington and Miller Williams). Although some writers felt the need to flee from the South, they recognized that it was the source of their strength and returned to it for their greatest later triumphs. McCullers, far less confident of her feelings or her direction, fluctuated in her understanding of the South's meaning to her. And so her fiction of alienation, noncommunication and narcissism reflects a symbolic struggle with her region, and it shows her increasing inability to extricate herself from her own emotional and artistic adolescence because she could not discover how to use her real material.

Cook's book will have much use among students seeking a reliable guide to plots and characters, a term-paper checklist, and an index. But other readers, teased by what he implies, will want more. They may take an anecdote from her early Yaddo days as symbolical. McCullers, seeking the affection of Katherine Anne Porter, was, after initial sympathy, eventually rejected, left pathetically sprawling across Porter's doorway. She remains there still: a shadow in the doorway to the Southern experience left by a writer who inherited it and lost the ability to use it. The shadow remains to be lifted.

JACK DE BELLIS
Lehigh University

William Heyen, ed. *American Poets in 1976*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976, 495 pp. $10.00.

The title of this book is deceiving. I thought, when I first picked it up, that it was another anthology of poetry. Not so. It is a collection of essays by twenty-nine poets writing about their own life and poetry. One of the dangers of such a book, as was clear to the editor, is "that it may feed the appetites of those who . . . would rather talk about and read about poetry than read the poetry itself." But even more dangerous is that it may bore to death those who would rather read the poetry itself.

Included are essays by many of the major poets of our time—Stafford, Ignatow, Bly, Hugo, Sexton—and many poets not so popularly known but equally substantial—Stryk, Simpson, Plumly. And there are some whose inclusion I wonder about. But the book is not one to be read cover to cover. A reference tool, it will probably be welcomed more by scholars than by poets.

This collection is most useful in explaining different processes of writing poetry. The poets' standard approach is to discuss experiences that led to a particular poem and then to give the poem itself. Unhappily, many of these essays are dry and lifeless because of their almost fanatical concern with detail and trivia. This happens, even with poets I greatly admire, like Richard Hugo, whose essay is a section of his autobiography in progress. He says at one point, "I see myself in the poem," as though it were a great revelation. But it takes five pages of his unnecessarily detailed childhood before we get to the poem.

The problem is that we are used to compression when these poets write. Tell them to write prose, especially about themselves, and stand back. Even much of Robert Creeley's essay is dry and tedious: "I could see nothing in my life nor those of others adjacent that supported this single hits theory. Dishonest to say I hadn't myself liked it, haikus, for example, or such of my own poems that unwittingly opened like seeds. But my own life, I felt increasingly, was a *continuance,* from wherever it had started to wherever it might end—of course I felt it as linear in time—and here were these quite small *things* I was tossing out from time to time, in the hope that they might survive my own being hauled on toward terminus."

It is ironic, too, that Creeley opens his essay with a disclaimer about trying to write an essay on his theory of poetry and life: "As I get older, I recognize that my thinking about poetry may or may not have anything actively to do with my actual work as a poet." And the key to my (and his) discomfort with some of these essays as teaching tools for other poets can be seen in Creeley's quotation from William Carlos Williams: "the poet thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is profundity." Perhaps that is why, while reading many of these essays, I kept wanting to skip quickly to the poems scattered throughout them.

Another approach to poetry in this collection, though, gives less importance to Hugo's "I see myself in the poem," and more to the intangibility of the poem—the difficulty in telling just what caused the poem to come together. The first essay of the book, by Robert Bly, offers an explanation which is echoed later by William Stafford, Lucien Stryk, and others. These poets realize that, as Bly says, "everything I say here is speculation." Bly talks specifically about writers who attain a certain "mind-set," in which they believe in standard and predictable images and values. It may be such a mind-set that would prompt poets to believe they can logically explain what forces brought their poems together. Logic.

It is easy for poets to forget (or pretend to forget) that a certain amount of magic, mystery, or "shadow," as Bly says, is necessary to a poem. In fact it is the unpredictability of a poem that makes it interesting:

> Sometimes we look to the end of the tale
> where there should be marriage feasts,
> and find only, as it were,
> black marigolds and silence.

Bly uses this poem by Wallace Stevens as an example of a "shadow poem," which explains that in most creative writing, the language itself often takes over to create the mystery of the piece. Some of the poets writing in this book seem to feel as though the poem can be broken down into basic experiences and examined as though it were made up of logical and definable elements. But Frost's comment,

"no surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader," is relevant. The poems themselves in this book are good; they surprise. Some of the essays mistakenly assume that the surprises can or need be logically explained.

William Meredith states that "the energy is in the words rather than in the thinky parts of man's mind." He gets to his poem early and remarks: "This poem, and to a less conscious degree 'Love Letter,' were irrational acts of surrender to an experience I knew very little about but which I had a sudden sense was being offered to me." And William Stafford states explicitly that poetry is no "easily seen pattern;" and when he does attempt to explain one of his poems, he does so with very selective comments: "Two of our children were away at college. The house was quiet. I saw that I should weed the lawn. And with these preliminary thoughts I began to write." The poem, of course, has more to say and grows into something much larger than these mere details.

Some of these poets write about their own work with modesty and embarrassment. Some assume that everyone is interested in how the "I" got into the poem. And some give the reader a way of seeing poetry as mystery and surprise, avoiding, as Stryk says, "the hateful evidence of our will to impress."

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Richard Allan Underwood. *Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and Turtle": A Survey of Scholarship*. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache and Literatur, Universitat Salzburg, 1974, 366 pp. $12.50.

In 1601 appeared a slender quarto entitled *Loves Martyr: Or, Rosalins Complaint, Allegorically Shadowing the Truth of Love, in the Constant Fate of the Phoenix and Turtle*. Appended to this most inauspicious verse by Robert Chester are "diverse poetical essays on the former subject . . . done by the best and chiefest of our modern writers"—with subsequent ascriptions to Vatum Chorus (as if jointly composed), Ignoto, William Shakespeare, John Marston, George Chapman, and Ben Jonson. Shakespeare's poem had no title; the designation "The Phoenix and the Turtle" is found first in two Boston editions published in the early nineteenth century, and the present title (omitting the second article) derives from the general title page of Chester's book. The poem, in tetrameter quatrains and triplets, runs only sixty-seven lines. Yet, not surprisingly it has been the subject of extensive critical commentary, in part simply a consequence of the attribution to Shakespeare and all the more so a consequence of the difficulties of interpretation and the enigmatic relationship of the work to the remainder of his canon.

Richard Allan Underwood systematically and sometimes rather tediously examines the history of this previous scholarship. He depends heavily on Hyder E. Rollins' edition for critical comment prior to 1936, readily admitting that the Variorum editor "has done all the work" and "has made laborious investigation unnecessary" (p. 1 fn.). In general he permits the critics to speak for themselves; verbatim extracts comprise virtually half of the text. If such a practice is on occasion annoyingly redundant, it does serve to display both the general tone and the context of the critics' appraisals. The rhapsodizing of J. M. Murry, for example, in whom bardolatry reaches its apex, is interesting in itself, but more importantly it significantly qualifies the manner in which one might accept the specific details of his evaluation: "The poem floats high above

the plane of intellectual apprehension. . . . For reasons which evade expression in ordinary speech, *The Phoenix and the Turtle* is the most perfect short poem in any language. It is pure poetry in the loftiest and most abstract meaning of the words. . . . It is inevitable that such poetry should be obscure, mystical, and strictly unintelligible" (p. 192).

The chronological survey of scholarship is arranged in appropriate categories, though again sporadic duplication and overlapping occur. The varying opinions concerning the authenticity of the text and the date of composition are followed by discussions of the allegorical meaning, the sources, and the relationship of the poem to the plays. Two useful appendices are included, one providing a brief history of the legend of the Phoenix and the other describing three essays which appeared in print subsequent to the completion of the study in 1970. In every category the reader encounters the full spectrum of critical opinion, and Professor Underwood wisely makes no effort, beyond noting factually erroneous or unusually strained hypothetical observations, to force one particular interpretation at the expense of another. In Chapter III, for example, proposed sources include Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Matthew Roydon's elegy on Sidney, Chaucer's *The Parlement of Foules*, "the allegorical stuff common in the medieval bestiaries," the "upstart crow" epithet of Robert Greene, Pliny, Marco Polo, the *Adages* of Erasmus, Lactantius, John Foxe's *Actes and Monumentes*, Chaucer's *Book of the Duchesse*, William Smith's *Chloris*, and Nicholas Breton's "Amoris Lachrimae." The list becomes so overwhelming that one almost leaps to accept J. W. Lever's assertion that "no precise 'source' can be claimed" for the poem (p. 174).

Like William Matchett's analysis in 1975, this book is obviously not for all readers. Its audience will be limited not only to those who have a reasonable familiarity with "The Phoenix and the Turtle" in particular and Elizabethan prosody in general but also to those who have a particular interest in the poem's critical fortunes and misfortunes. At the same time its publication, presumably in largely unaltered dissertation form for the Salzburg series in Elizabethan studies, is not without value. Perhaps Underwood's major original contribution is his argument that the poem is not an anomaly in Shakespeare's work, that it provides "a distinctive tone or aspect [for the Chester collection] that it would otherwise have lacked" (p. 291) just as Shakespeare's songs make a functional tonal and thematic contribution to their stage worlds; indeed, the point seems well worth exploring more extensively than the "afterword" permits. Ultimately more significant, however, the work is essentially an extension of the Variorum edition and can profitably be utilized as a companion volume.

LARRY S. CHAMPION
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Stuart Berg Flexner. *I Hear America Talking: An Illustrated Treasury of American Words and Phrases*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1976, 505 pp. $18.95.

No book is above criticism, but Stuart Flexner's new book comes very close. High praise must be commonplace by now for Mr. Flexner, whose best known work, *The Dictionary of American Slang*, which he edited with Harold Wentworth, was an important addition to American language studies. *I Hear America Talking* is valuable, not only for language students, but also for students of American history. As Mr. Flexner writes, "This [book] is not a history of the American language but an

attempt to present and reveal the language itself against the broad background of our history, to display the language in its historical and human context."

Flexner takes as his thesis statement Emerson's idea that "language is the archives of history." Much of the violent dissatisfaction with America's involvement in the Viet Nam War, for example, is preserved in the verb "to frag." A soldier ordered on a dangerous or distasteful mission oftentimes killed his superior officer with a fragmentation grenade, hence, "to frag." At the turn of the nineteenth century, few people had indoor plumbing; therefore, when John Quincy Adams became the first American president to enjoy this luxury, an indoor toilet was known for a while as a "Quincy." Teddy Roosevelt's phrase "embalmed beef" recalls that during the Spanish-American War fewer than three hundred men lost their lives in combat, while more than a thousand died of spoiled canned meat. Finally, the word "banana," Arabic for "finger," is a reminder that the Blacks who brought the word to America were in many cases exploited and owned by Arabs in Africa.

In addition to recording history, words often record that vague subdivision of American history called Americana. An Oreo is a Black with White values. From the 1890s to the 1940s, a Calamity Jane was any prophetess of doom. Flexner states, "History isn't sure whether she [the real Calamity Jane, Mary Jane Canary] was a frustrated feminist or merely a foul-mouthed transvestite shrew." The term "Butternuts," a nickname for Confederate soldiers, records the straits of Southerners who wore homemade uniforms dyed with a butternut walnut extract. And Horace Fletcher theorized in 1903 that since the adult mouth contains thirty-two teeth, each mouthful of food should be chewed thirty-two times; mothers urged their children not merely to chew their food but "to fletcherize" it.

Nevertheless, while some of Flexner's etymologies are interesting and colorful, they are of uncertain validity. In most cases when an origin is uncertain, he notes the fact, but in the case of the term "gun moll," Flexner neglects the obvious and assumes that "gun" is from a Yiddish word meaning "thief": a possible origin but certainly improbable. Elsewhere Flexner argues that the term "honkey," which has been regarded by some etymologists as a derivation of "bohunk" and "hunkie," is "probably from the Whites' nasal tone." Since no one is sure of the term's origin, Flexner would have improved his discussion by at least mentioning the other possible source. In his "Preface" Flexner admits that his book is not exhaustive, but when a term like "Tarheel" is used, an explanation, especially in a book on language and history, should follow. "Incommunicado," "marijuana," "plaza," and "pronto" are other terms which are listed and dated but not discussed.

In 1789, Noah Webster wrote, "The reasons for American English being different from English English are simple: As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government." Despite my objections, Stuart Flexner has done an excellent job of illustrating in words and pictures the independence of American English in a format that is certain to be copied.

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Larry Rubin. *All My Mirrors Lie*. David R. Godine, 1976, 48 pp. $3.50.

Larry Rubin's first book of poetry, *The World's Old Way* (University of Nebraska Press), was published in 1962. Since that time a second volume, *Lanced in Light* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), and hundreds of poems in dozens of magazines and journals have appeared. *All My Mirrors Lie* shows a maturity of thought and form we expect in major poetry.

Most of this book is intensely personal. The reader is sometimes an eavesdropper and voyeur, hearing and seeing private thoughts and actions. Much of Rubin's power, in fact, comes from the stance of privacy and privacy invaded. For although many of the poems are about the interior life, they are never embarrassing or self-conscious as Rubin's mature vision lends assurance and balance.

The poems in this volume form a catalogue of life at middle age—the life of a bachelor poet and professor of literature, with parents dead, a beloved sister dead, with career half-finished. Wistfulness is here, of course, but no bitterness—no Prufrockian *angst*. Essentially, the most pleasant thing about Rubin's poem of middle age is the tone of good sense and comic introspection produced by a man absorbing the shocks of life:

> oh yes, I've tried the iron shots
> And also vitamins, but this anemia
> Is so pernicious, nothing seems to help;
> Some precious vial of the spirit (a vile
> Cliché — forgive me) has been spilled somewhere,
> And prayers do seem so pointless. I mean, God
> Is dead, and all (I read that somewhere), and all
> My mirrors lie — I'm not that grey.
>
> ° ° °
>
> I scribble a little, but who reads poetry
> These days? A protein diet — a little sun?
> I'll try, but I have dozed in whitest light,
> Dreaming of pregnant virgins, the groins of gods.

Fears of death and dying pervade this book. Ghosts haunt the pages: there are the mailbox on a graveyard wall waiting for "some ghost / Who forgot to write," and the ghost of the father whose "bones were climbing ladders to my room." But the central image of death here is found in "Sharing with Sister," the section which examines the death of the poet's sister Mona. In the face of dreadful loss, Rubin poses a question about poetry's power to capture and assuage the sorrow death brings to the survivor:

> We spoke of poems on my visits to
> Her cell, and she saw Father in my eyes,
> Swallowed her tablets and spoke the swollen lines,
> Calmed again by sunlight, words that cushioned
> The concussion in her skull. But when the lines
> Collapsed, I was on continents unknown,
> Linking words her veins could never spell.
> Father I would not be, and blood and words
> Slowed in their cold cycle, and were gone.

Related to the death theme are recurring images of the bonds of the generations with the poet's identification with his dead father, as in

> I was dreaming
> Of my father's bones, touching his cold mouth
> With fingers like a child's soda straw.

Such Hamlet-like brooding is common in the death and mourning poems which dot this collection.

Several poems in *All My Mirrors Lie* take requited and unrequited love as their subject. My favorite of these is a playful and frightening poem about two teen-aged couples who die accidentally of carbon monoxide poisoning while parked in a lover's lane. Rubin mentions the lovers on Keats's Grecian urn: "these couples must have read it / In some English class, but they forgot, / And failed the final test." The poem ends with a painful irony:

> They
> Came through that sacred hour, safe from thaw,
> Carved in moonlight, cold within the urn.

Larry Rubin has always had a good eye and ear for the macabre and the surreal. In this book, the poem which best exhibits this skill is "Dinner at the Mongoloid's," in which the speaker is left alone with a Mongoloid child:

> she moved closer, turning
> Her dented features toward my face, and said,
> "I think you're very handsome." I smiled, truncated,
> Faceless, afraid of mirrors, chromosomes.

This poem also illustrates the controlling image of the book: other people may be mirrors to reflect the self. The self is seen in the faces of fathers, mothers, sisters, lovers, chance acquaintances, and strangers. Broken mirrors (dead fathers and sisters) and cracked mirrors (the twisted face of the Mongoloid child) presage more than bad luck; they symbolize the poet's loss of certitude and his realization of his own mortality. If mirrors tell anything, they tell of transitory life.

Thus mortality weighs heavy in these poems, though yearnings for performance and even rebirth are strong. The most powerful and impressive poems here speak of the grave, especially of Mona's grave. In "The Storm" the poet sees a tornado approaching. He thinks of his dead sister and calls for the storm to open the earth. He calls for Mona to rise from the dead:

> The twister
> Slashed the graves apart and she was in
> My palms, my sister waking in the wind,
> Remembering me, my flesh, my wild earth.

This mystic reunion signals a strained and only partial affirmation.

All of the poems in *All My Mirrors Lie* have immediate impact, uncommon currency and freshness about them, reflecting the poet's solid sense of the inner and outer worlds and his unimposing craftmanship.

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The Fall 1978 issue of the *South Carolina Review* will emphasize works by and about contemporary Southern women writers. Although studies of such important figures as Porter, McCullers, Welty, and O'Connor are anticipated, the editors plan to devote a generous portion of the issue to middle and younger generation writers like Mary Lee Settle, Doris Betts, and Ann Deagon.

For 1979 two issues are planned to focus on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1929 economic crash and of the publication of four memorable novels: *The Sound and the Fury, A Farewell to Arms, Dodsworth,* and *Look Homeward, Angel.*

Contributions for these issues are invited.