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The South Carolina Review

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The cover photos show Gamel Woolsey acting in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Woodstock, New York *(upper left)* and Gamel Woolsey in Charleston, South Carolina in 1919 *(lower right).*

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Spring, Nineteen Hundred Eighty

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SISTERS

Joyce Carol Oates

My poor lovely Thea sits waiting on the veranda, in a white wicker chair with a green cushion, her arms flat on the arm-rests, her thin legs drawn in beneath the chair, ankles locked together. So rigid, so clenched!—it would take a pry to loosen her. She is wearing the pink lambswool sweater I sent for her birthday, buttoned to the chin; the sleeves are too long, so that the cuffs cover half her hands. How like a child she looks . . . ! Her skirt seems to be shapeless, falling just over the knee. Is it made of denim? Strange. Her legs are so pale, they must be bare. And in this changeable weather. . . . I'm surprised they don't make her dress more sensibly.

It's been so many months since I've seen her that I am afraid my face will show the shock I feel. I can't hide my feelings, I never could. But what can I do?—the poor thing has already seen me, she has been watching me all the while. Saw me drive up the lane, probably. Watched me have trouble maneuvering the car into a parking place. (It's Sunday, and some of the other visitors—from out of state, I noticed—are selfishly parked, taking up more than one space.) Unless I am imagining it I can see, in Thea's face, a queer confused leap of expectation, a look of raw hope, in the instant before her habitual expression shifts back into place—that look of hostility and arrogance, that pretense of not having expected to see me.

We greet each other. I am almost stammering. Her voice is toneless but she is smiling—she is really smiling. How cold her hands are!—and how frail! She is in no hurry to rise from the chair and allow me to embrace her. But I want to hide my eyes, I've been told that tears might upset her. . . . "Thea, how wonderful you look," I say, hugging her, my voice nearly breaking, "how wonderful it is to see you. . . . Oh, you're looking so much better, you look so pretty!"

"Do I," she says. Her voice is thin and reedy. It is not really Thea's voice at all. "But you're looking a little tired, Sally. You shouldn't have driven all this way alone. . . . Yes," she says, drawing back to stare into my face, her forehead crinkling into tiny lines, her lips puckering, "yes, you really look exhausted. There are such bluish shadows under your eyes. . . ."

So the visit begins.

° ° °

I am hurt of course. But the feeling is familiar; it is one I can tolerate. I'm not angry. Thea showed her anger, even as a small child she let herself go, would have destroyed the world itself during one of her tantrums, had it been within her reach—but I learned as a girl to show nothing upsetting. I learned the trick of smiling whenever

someone tried to hurt my feelings. "Just turn insults aside," Mother said. "Don't let any of that low-life trash hurt your feelings." She was speaking of my classmates in Juniper, where there was quite a mixture—some well-to-do children from town, some children like Thea and me, from small farms without any mortgages or debts, and others from really poor homes, even from trailer courts. "Just smile and smile," Mother said, "and show them they can't touch *you* at all."

Now I am smiling at Thea and Thea is smiling at me. It's odd, we're almost shy with each other . . . ! I keep wanting to touch her, I can't quite believe she's here beside me. No one would guess she is four years older than I am. Even after her illness she looks so young, so sweet—there's no sign—except maybe that squinting, which is a new habit of hers. There's nothing wrong with her vision, they said. She has pale green eyes, almost gray, almost colorless, and long brown eyelashes, and her hair has been brushed carelessly back from her face in no style at all. It looks as if she just shampooed it, however. For my visit? She begged me to come in her last letter. *Dear Sally, please Sally, I need to see you, I need to talk with you, if you come I won't act the way I did last time. . . .*

She asks me about the drive—over two hundred miles, it is, from Juniper in the northern part of the state down here to Lake Park—but when I start to tell her about it, especially about the terrible bottleneck at the detour outside Lexington, she interrupts me and asks about Dwight, as if she had just remembered him, clapping her hand to her mouth like a contrite little girl. Then she asks about our aunt Eleanor, then about several of our cousins, though I know I've written detailed news of them in my letters, and about certain neighbors, and friends, and a former friend of mine about whom I don't care to talk—doesn't Thea know?—and she stands there listening, nodding slightly, her pale clear eyes fixed on mine. This patience, this thoughtfulness, is something new. In a way it's discomfiting. I expect Thea to suddenly crinkle her nose and wave me aside, saying she's heard this all before, she doesn't give a damn about those people, those boring ugly people—but no, she stares at me, blinking slowly, nodding almost imperceptibly, as if she were memorizing my words. I can't help but be flattered by her interest. My face warms, my voice rattles on happily. Dwight was wrong to warn me against coming; he has never understood the special feeling between my sister and me.

"And Larry—do you hear from Larry? Do the two of you write?"

She speaks of him so easily. But I don't find it possible to reply in the same manner. "No. Of course not," I tell her awkwardly.

"You don't? Really?" she asks, puzzled. "I understood that you did. Someone told me you did."

"No."

"Yes, you told me yourself—when you were here last spring. You exchange letters, you said. You and Larry."

"No, Thea. Why, I don't even know the man, I never knew him very well. . . . What on earth would Larry and I write about?" I say, trying to laugh.

"What would you write about . . . ?" she says softly, staring at me. She is going to say something further: a tiny nerve jumps in her left eye. I see it. I feel it, as if it were my own. Then she hesitates, thank God, and the moment passes, and we stand here smiling at each other. Her eyes are so clear, so empty. I might almost wonder—is this Thea?—this woman? They have drugged her, of course. Doped her. Like Mother at Daddy's funeral, staggering and swaying as if she were drunk, in front of all the relatives—poor Mother! Hanging onto Eleanor's arm, whispering so loudly we could all hear, she'd been having trouble with her gall bladder and didn't think she could make it through the funeral breakfast, would it be better for her to go to the ladies' room before breakfast got started . . . ? Poor Mother, how embarrassing! It was a blessing she never knew how she appeared to other people, near the end. Thea has Mother's narrow chin and delicate cheekbones and curly brown hair, but she's much taller, and of course she's much prettier. When she smiles, especially.

As she is smiling now.

* * *

I'm relieved that there's no formal Sunday dinner. I wouldn't have had the appetite for it. Instead there's a nice lunch, cold ham and turkey, and greens, and a salad with artichoke hearts and real French dressing, and cornbread and butter, and excellent coffee. The dining room is a large, handsome, airy room. I count ten tables, though they're not all filled. The rug is a trifle shabby—a very faint maroon—but the wallpaper looks new. It's a pale brown. And the view of the hills! I hadn't noticed the other time how lovely the view is. It's no wonder some of the women just sit and stare out the windows, without talking, hardly bothering with the food on their plates.

There are seven of us at our table. Thea is sitting as rigidly as she was sitting out on the veranda, her head now bent at a peculiar angle, as if she were listening to a voice almost out of earshot. She's eating very slowly. Very methodically. Anyone who didn't know her might imagine she was perfectly tranquil. But I can feel the tension in her. I always could. It makes me nervous to sense the pressure in her, the terrible pressure in her skull, running hot in her veins. . . . At any moment she could spring up. She could destroy the peace of this pleasant meal. As a girl she got angry all the time, flew into incredible rages, said the ugliest, most astonishing things. Such ugly

words—! Words I hadn't even heard before. "Highstrung," people called her. Nerves tightly wired. We were always opposites, Thea and me. People were surprised to learn that we were sisters. She's tall and thin; I look shorter than I really am because of my compact, squarish body. Her skin is clear, and mine has always been freckled, and for a while—four or five miserable years—it was badly blemished. She's pretty and I'm not. That's the truth, no matter what Mother used to say: and I don't mind in the slightest. How could I mind, knowing the misery Thea's looks brought her? Life isn't what we thought it would be, as girls! There have been so many strange surprises, so many ironic turns. . . . "High-strung," everyone said of Thea, fondly. And so she flew into her tantrums and broke things and even tore at her hair, like a tempestuous heroine in a movie, and they scolded her, and forgave her, and loved her. I was the opposite: good-natured, easy-going, even-tempered. It was said of Sally that she was "even-tempered."

Was I jealous? Yes. For a while, yes. For years. But it isn't in my nature to remember unpleasant incidents. I forget as fast I can. I always have. I never showed what I felt when the relatives teased me or compared me with Thea, as it seemed they always did, the women anyway; I never let on that I was hurt. Sally is the one with *sense*, they sometimes said. Sally doesn't take herself so seriously, she doesn't spend an hour and a half in the bathroom dolling herself up, she doesn't leave her things lying around in a jumble . . . At the end, at the very end, Mother said: "You're my good girl, aren't you. Sally." There was just the slightest emphasis on *You're*. I had to hold my breath to hear it.

At our table there's a big, merry woman in her late forties, her dyed red hair in a chignon, her rings flashing as she chatters. I remember her from my first visit; she doesn't seem to have changed much. She's been at Lake Park a long time, Thea told me, having almost killed herself with alcohol and diet pills. She had prescriptions from three doctors. Her husband is a mystery, people wonder where he is, and her children?—if visitors come to see her, they don't spend much time in the public rooms. She is talking excitedly about a scandal in the state government. Do I know anything about it?—do I know any of the people involved? *She* knows them. Knows them all. Her Southern accent is so pronounced that I almost can't understand her. "God, the things that go on in this world," she says, one corner of her mouth raised in an impish grin. "And the newspapers don't print half of it. . . ."

The others appear to be listening. Even Thea is listening, though she doesn't look directly at the woman. Across from me is a girl of no more than twenty years of age. She is terribly thin—it's painful to look at her. Must weigh no more than ninety pounds, a girl Thea's height! Her eyes are heavy-lidded. She might be attractive if her skin weren't so sallow, and she didn't have to wear such thick-lensed glasses.

Like Thea she is eating slowly and fastidiously, without any appetite. Is it possible that this young girl came close to death, like the others, poisoning herself with alcohol . . . ? Drugs? She sees me watching her and flushes angrily. I smile but there's no response, not a flicker of acknowledgement. . . . Beside her is Mrs. Renfrew, whom I remember from my other visit, and who is gracious enough to remember me. She's a beautiful woman in her late thirties, small-boned, no more than a size five, black-haired, black-eyed, one of the most striking faces I've ever seen . . . lovelier, even, than poor Thea's used to be. Like Thea she had trouble with her marriage. There were other men, there was drinking. Her twelve-year-old boy had come home from school to find her upstairs with a man, a stranger. . . . She is a tobacco heiress, Thea informed me. Mrs. Renfrew with her heartshaped face, her lovely face, diamond rings glittering on her fingers. Did she also come near to death, this child-sized woman? What secrets does she know? Has she Thea's terrible wisdom? A failed marriage . . . separation . . . divorce hearings . . . a court decision . . . an appeal . . . more drinking . . . finally a breakdown . . . finally hospitalization. Now she sits drinking cup after cup of coffee, smiling politely, staring out the window at the wooded hills.

The red-headed woman is now chattering about an incident that took place in Covington. Just last week a small gang of children had tortured an eight-year-old boy; they had tied him to a piece of heavy machinery in a boarded-up warehouse and burnt him with matches. But her voice is cheerful. Her eyes are bright. "The things that happen," she says, shaking her head. "Jesus Christ!"

Thea looks up suddenly. "It isn't true," she says.

"What?"

"It isn't true—what you've been saying."

For an instant the woman appears to be silenced, almost intimidated. Thea's haggard face is so defiant! Then the woman reaches for her cigarettes, which are in a red leather case with gold initials, and says, "Just you read about it in the paper, honey. It's all there. What's fit to print is there. The government is rotten, everybody's grabbing what he can, and the kids are killing one another, don't you tell me, honey, don't you tell *me*. I've been around and I know. I know what the world is like."

"You want to believe those things," Thea says quickly, "so you won't have to care about anyone. You're afraid. You're a coward. You want to believe in evil . . . It's for you, for your protection. I know. I can hear it in your voice. You don't want to love anybody, you're afraid, you don't want to give a damn about anybody, I know, I know, you don't want to feel anything. . . ."

Everyone is shocked. I want to hush Thea, I want to put my hand lightly over her mouth. She has been speaking so passionately! Though I am an outsider here at Lake Park I know that my sister has violated a rule: She has insulted the others by speaking about something real. Mrs. Renfrew is upset, the emaciated girl is picking at her thumbnail, the red-headed woman is staring at Thea. They aren't going to forgive her for that outburst.

"Thea, why don't you eat your dessert," I hear myself saying, in a bright, false voice that isn't mine. "You always liked lime pie as a girl, and this is so delicious. . . ."

"Is it?" Thea says sharply. "Take mine, then. Here."

"Thea, I—"

"Yes. Go on. What else did you come for? Take it. Here."

The other women stare as Thea pushes the plate to me. I am too startled to be embarrassed or offended; but her rudeness is familiar, after all. I happen to catch the gaze of the red-headed woman, who looks at me pityingly. In that instant she strikes me as kin of mine, as close as any sister.

"Here," Thea says fiercely.

* * *

Afterward, more questions about the family. Aunts, uncles, cousins. My husband and his family. Neighbors. Friends. People in Juniper. Does she care about them, does she even remember . . . ? She interrogates me in her polite, disinterested voice. She is playing at being a sister of mine.

Deliberately she asks about my sister-in-law Beth—knowing how Beth hurt my feelings, shortly after I married Dwight. Talking behind my back, saying such cruel, outlandish things! Of course Thea knows. And of course she must ask. *And how is Beth . . . ?*

If I'm upset I don't show it. Not a bit.

Dear Sally, she begged, *please come to see me, I need to talk to someone close, I need to talk to you, only to you . . . No one else understands me, except you. No one else cares about me. Sally, please forgive me, do you forgive me . . . ? I'm so lonely here. I could die, I'm so lonely.* Lonely, is she? Not Thea! Never. Look at her smoking a cigarette, cool and poised as she was as a fifteen-year-old, intimidating her eleven-year-old sister. Who worshipped her, of course. Who knew no better than to worship her. *Dear Sally,* the letter begged, and so Sally came, hopeful as always, and so Sally walks alongside Thea, a little ridiculous, perhaps, in her new suit of lightweight green wool and her new, uncomfortable shoes. Sally is being interrogated. Aunts, uncles, brothers-in-law, second cousins, former friends, neighbors . . . and what of Mother's grave, what of the cemetery, are the

plots neat, are the gravestones in good condition? And what of Larry? And Bonnie and Dave?

I am not supposed to tell Thea anything that might disturb her. I think she knows this or senses it—she's intelligent enough—and so she watches me closely as I answer. I'm not a very good liar. But I manage well enough. "As far as I know, Larry and the children are fine," I tell her. "They're living in Chicago."

"How are they? The children—"

"They're fine."

"Is he married yet?"

"I don't know."

"He's married, is he?"

"I don't know, Thea."

"But you write to him, don't you? And he writes to you?"

"No."

"You talk on the telephone—?"

"No. Not really."

"Does he know you're here, today? Visiting me?"

"I'm sure he doesn't—"

She seems exhausted suddenly. Her thin shoulders droop.

"It's such a mass of lies," she says. "Oh Jesus. I can't sort them out. Ugly vicious lies. You've always been the worst of them all . . . Do you talk to him on the phone? Do you talk to my children on the phone? Do you? . . . Just tell me the truth, please. Please, Sally."

"The truth . . . ? But I, I always tell the truth," I say weakly.

It's a terrible moment: Thea and I on the gravel walk, staring at each other. There are things she must not know, things she must not even guess. How much does she remember of what happened?—of the terrible thing she almost did? Her eyes are so pale, so clear. The rage in them seems so innocent, like a child's rage. Thirty-six years old! And she was meant to be always seventeen. *That* was her ideal age. She was so beautiful then, heartbreakingly beautiful, she had so much spirit—everything lay before her. I was jealous, yes, but not spiteful, like some of the other girls. Like at least one of our cousins whom I won't name. Of course Father loved her best, of course Mother favored her, who wouldn't have favored Thea? I didn't mind. I loved her so much myself. We were always so different, entirely different. Even as babies, they said. Thea fussed and demanded things and had to have her own way, and I was good-natured and smiled a lot and rarely sick. So they say. I'm sure it was true. Thea was a colicky baby, the poor thing thrashed about in the bassinet and cried and cried, there was no comforting her. She had to be held. She had to be fussed over and loved, they said, she was just so high-strung. And such a pretty child . . . ! Somehow it doesn't matter if you're pretty, people will endure your tantrums and

even admire them, in a perverse way, and forgive you afterward. Most of the time. Her fiancé Jesse didn't forgive her, though, that nice boy from Virginia, and of course Larry didn't—but that was only a few years ago, when Thea wasn't seventeen any longer and things had begun to change. I wonder what the world looks like to her, as it begins to slide away from her . . . ? In this sunlight she really looks haggard. I can see clearly that her hair has become thin. Who would ever have guessed it—Thea's lovely hair thinning out like old Aunt Rosellen's? Why, Thea used to make jokes about Aunt Rosellen's wig! Thea's hair used to be thick and lustrous and of course she wore it in the most flattering styles, mainly a page-boy, which was fashionable at the time, but now you can practically see the poor thing's scalp, in this bright sunlight, and there's no body or shape to her hair at all. I wonder, is it because of her refusal to eat right, these past few years? And all that drinking. . . . Bourbon, they said, I don't really know because I have never talked with Thea about it, directly about it, or about the accusations Larry made against her, or the divorce itself, or the trouble with Bonnie and Dave afterward; of course she knows that I know, but since our childhood we have observed certain rules, not mentioning certain things, but talking deftly around them. It's a strain, a terrible strain, but I have to respect her wishes; everyone in the family was like this, perhaps everyone, in all families, is . . . ? All I know is that I'm a poor liar. I make my way falteringly, doing the best I can.

"You always tell the truth," Thea repeats slowly. For a moment I think she is accusing me: then I realize that she is quite serious. Her eyelids flutter rapidly. I wonder—has her brain been damaged, has her intelligence been affected? Alcohol would do it, of course, and poor nutrition. The carbon monoxide, maybe—? I just don't know. The last visit here at Lake Park, I spent an hour discussing my sister with her doctor, Dr. Ganley, a very nice woman in her fifties, extremely nice, courteous and soft-spoken, maybe just a trifle opinionated—but that's to be expected, after all—and I explained to her that Thea has really been a problem to the family for almost twenty years now, or maybe even thirty years: such vicious temper tantrums, and her bouts of weeping, and breaking things, and shouting obscene words. That was how she learned to get her own way. But it was an early sign, wasn't it, of her sickness . . . ? After her rages she would be sweet and lucid and pretty again, in control. Always in control. She hurt other people—hurt her best friends in high school, and a number of boys—she *had* to hurt the boys, I think, though I don't know why, just as she had to hurt her husband—and then she'd walk away and make new friends, always new friends. She had a string of "best friends" and a string of boy friends. I did envy her, of course, I admit it. We were always so completely different, people seemed surprised that we were sisters. . . .

Our teachers seemed surprised. Thea was bright and quick and got good grades, without working hard, while I was much slower, had difficulty concentrating if I had to read for more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time, and my good grades were the result of hard work, terribly hard work; after Thea left home I did better, but school never came easily for me. Dr. Ganley was quite interested in what I told her. I was like the older sister, I said, and Thea was like a baby sister. She broke things and I repaired them. She hurts people and I heal them.

Still she is staring at me, blinking rapidly. "You . . . came to visit me, to tell me the truth," she says slowly, gropingly. "In my letter I asked . . . You don't have to tell me about Larry, I know he's married again, I had a terrible dream about . . . about him and another woman, a young girl in a wedding dress . . . I won't ask about him. But Bonnie and Dave: they just don't write. A birthday card, and a little note, and . . . Are they all right? Are they well? Do they think about me, do they remember me? Do they remember what happened . . . ? Larry didn't tell them, did he? How much do they know?"

The queer way she is looking at me makes me very nervous. My stomach is queasy with all this strain, and that second piece of pie at lunch . . . which I ate without tasting, without any appetite, just wanting to get the meal over. Thea knows I cannot tell her anything that will upset her; she *must* know. As a girl she pried secrets from me all the time. She forced me to betray certain confidences and she forced me to lie to friends of hers, boys and girls both. To everyone else she was a little princess, with her big green eyes and lovely skin, but I knew her for what she really was, and she has never forgiven me—never. Sometimes I think that Thea hates me more than anyone in the world. More than she hates Larry, even, or that man—I can't remember his name—that man who supposedly wanted to marry her and then changed his mind. You can't be a little princess to your own sister.

"Thea, I think we should head back," I tell her. "We must have walked a mile. . . ."

"A mile! For Christ's sake, Sally, we haven't walked a quarter of a mile," Thea says, "the building's just behind us. A little exercise won't hurt you. You're putting on weight, aren't you?"

"Why, no, I don't think so. I don't think so."

"*I don't think so,*" she says cruelly.

Once, years ago, she came home from the university in the middle of a school week, just showed up at home without any announcement, and sat on the living room sofa crying her heart out to Mother and me. Of course it was something about a boy—her first "real" love, she said—and Mother and I did everything we could to comfort her. Mother was terrified—she had thought, of course, that Thea and the boy had made love—she might even have thought that Thea was pregnant—but that

wasn't the case at all, Thea would never have slept with any boy, never, not before marriage. She was a virgin when she married and so was I. In that single respect we were alike. (Which is why her infidelities after her marriage, after Dave was born, always astonished me so.) So she wept and wept and we comforted her and the telephone rang and it was for her, it was her boy friend calling, but she wouldn't talk to him, she ran upstairs and locked her door, and that night the two of us talked late, she invited me into her room, she asked me to sleep in the other bed, the way she had had her best friends stay over, in high school, and we talked about all sorts of things . . . even about serious, frightening things like Daddy's death, and how much money Mother had from the insurance, and what life was supposed to be, whether there was a God or not, whether there was a hell, whether the soul really existed and would survive the death of the body. . . . I can remember some of the things we said to this day. I was so nerved-up, my teeth were practically chattering, and Thea seemed very moved too. Life and death and the soul and God. And love. And marriage. What was marriage, what would it mean to be *married*? What was a husband, what was a wife? Did we want to have children? How many? I felt so special, so privileged, just to be with Thea overnight, to lie wide awake listening to her talk, listening to her low soft daring voice. The things she said . . . ! And she was smoking in bed, which was forbidden, of course; in fact, she was forbidden to smoke at home. But as long as she smoked in her room Mother pretended all was well. Poor Mother, she must have seen the ashes and cigarette butts in Thea's wastebasket, Thea couldn't have been bothered to hide anything, but of course Mother never mentioned it, in my hearing at least. Thea was the little princess who could do no wrong. . . . But I loved her, I felt so privileged that she should talk to me about anything at all. It was as if I had become her best friend at last. And then, the next morning a call came for her, and it was her boy friend, and this time Thea talked with him—for forty-five minutes, in fact—and she wept again—but the disagreement was smoothed out and she got the eight-fifteen bus back to the university and left Mother and me behind, just left us behind, not even bothering with breakfast. I was so surprised, I could hardly believe it. I think I was terribly hurt by what she did but, at the time, I didn't even acknowledge it to myself. Those long intense hours of conversation . . . the things she asked me, the confidences she made to me . . . and then, in the morning, everything was changed, everything was forgotten, all intimacy was shoved aside and she was back at being Thea again . . . with no more than a rushed goodbye kiss for poor stupid pimply-faced little Sally.

Hasn't that been the pattern? All these years?

"Why do you look so angry, Sally," Thea asks tonelessly. "You shouldn't frown like that, you'll get wrinkles. Driving all the way down to Lake Park just to stuff yourself at lunch and get winded on a five-minute walk, and to tell such clumsy lies, why, the least you can do is give me that nice big bright toothy grin of yours. . . ."

"We'll go back to the hospital," I say quickly. "Aren't you supposed to rest this afternoon, didn't you have a nap last time I was here, after lunch . . . ?"

"That's better," Thea says. "Now you're smiling. Yes, that's much better."

"We'll go back, Thea," I say, taking her arm. "We've walked long enough."

° ° °

Thea has tried her best to ruin this visit but I refuse to allow it to happen. Last time, I was shocked at her behavior and went away badly hurt, and it wasn't until days later that I realized that I could not judge Thea by ordinary standards; she was Thea, after all, and she was sick. I had to forgive her. I had to ignore the things she said. This time I'm better prepared and she can't hurt me, not a bit. Let her try! Back in her room now she's pretending to be contrite and I am pretending to go along with her, but I'm not fooled, I'm never going to be fooled by her again.

"I'm sorry I said those things, my mind just runs on, things pop into it and I hear myself saying them," Thea says, in that maddening toneless voice of hers, as if she is drugged and not really listening to her own words. "I think maybe I am a little tired, Sally. I love the fresh air but it makes me tired . . . and I seem to lose control of myself."

Her room is smaller than I remember. She was always vain about her room at home, and of course the big showy house Larry bought for her, with that expensive furniture, and the expensive Oriental rug, but now it looks as if she doesn't much care, she has done very little to make this room her own. It's attractive enough, with a fairly nice carpet and curtains and white-painted furniture, crowded together, and a little writing desk up against the window. A girl's room. A solitary girl's room. Thirty-six years old, married to that marvelous man, so very, very fortunate to marry him—and the mother of two adorable children—and look where she is now, look what she is now. I want to cry sometimes, just thinking of it. But at least she's regaining her health. She hasn't had a drink, I believe, in almost a year.

There are a number of books on the desk, by authors whose names I don't recognize. I pick up one of the books and leaf through it and am surprised to see some of the pages annotated. It's poetry, it isn't anything I'm familiar with, I seem to remember now that Thea had

liked poetry in high school and had even tried to write poems, for a while, which she showed only to one of her teachers; but of course nothing came of it. She had no talent. *To be born woman is to know . . . that we must labor to be beautiful.* What do these words mean, why has Thea underlined them?

She takes the book from me, frowning.

"Is this something you studied in college?" I ask.

"Yes."

She lies down, slipping off her shoes. She does look tired and drawn. I pull the quilt up over her; it's Grandma's old quilt, a bird-of-paradise design, that I hadn't even known Thea still had. She lies down but doesn't close her eyes.

"Please don't leave, Sally. Not yet."

"But—shouldn't you nap?"

"I'm not going to sleep, I just want to lie still for a few minutes. My heart feels jumpy. I just want to rest. But don't leave, I'm not going to sleep. Sally?"

I am standing by her window, admiring the view. The way the sun is slanting onto the hills . . . those rust-colored weeds . . . those lovely evergreens. And the mountains in the distance. The wind is blowing patches of cloud about. It's late autumn. It's going to be cold tonight. The sun is shining hard, the wind is beating at the trees, a raw wind, jangling and discomforting. What is that bird out there, at the edge of the woods? It's hovering in the air, a hawk of some kind, wings moving rapidly. A sparrow-hawk? Daddy used to know the birds and tried to teach me but I'm afraid I have forgotten nearly everything. . . . In such weather I feel nervous and excited and not myself. All sorts of things are blown through my mind, raw patches of words, half-thoughts that alarm me because they're not my own. Such as: I was the one who found Thea and the children there in the garage, I was the neighbor who discovered them, who called the ambulance and the police. Or, worse: I was the one, not Thea, who woke the children and bundled them into snowsuits and took them out, half-asleep, at six in the morning, into the garage, into the car, and turned the ignition on and sat there, huddled together beneath a blanket, waiting for everything to end. I remember such strange, vivid details . . . The red wagon, Dave's little toy wagon, jammed beneath the dashboard so that the accelerator would remain depressed; the comforting sound of the car's motor; the smell of bourbon and cigarette smoke.

It makes me shiver, just to have such crazy thoughts.

"Sally? Why are you closing the blind? Leave it open, the sky is so blue . . . I like to lie here and look out."

The sun is shining into the room. It's too bright.

"Sally—?" she says weakly, petulantly.

"Because you should sleep," I tell her, "it's the best thing for you." Now that the blinds are closed the room seems much cozier.

"You aren't going to leave, Sally, are you? When you just came? There's so much for us to talk about. . . . I know you and Larry confide in each other, I know you talk on the telephone, I know, I know, even during the divorce you were in contact, and the two of you came to the hospital together, I know, but I'm not going to ask about that, I promise, Sally, I won't ask. It's just about Bonnie and Dave," she says groggily. "I want to know if they know. I mean, if they understand. They weren't awake when I . . . when I took them out into the . . . into the garage, it must have seemed like something happening in a dream, the way it seemed to me, don't you think? It couldn't have been real to them. And I don't think Larry would ever tell them, do you? Sally? Of course he hates me and I suppose he has every right to hate me, but he wouldn't want his own children to know, would he? . . . what their mother tried to do? And of course you wouldn't tell. I mean, no one in the world would ever tell them, no one would ever be that cruel. . . ."

"Why don't you sleep, Thea?"

"But don't leave. Please. . . . Sometimes when you aren't here I dream about you, you're right in the room with me, and you say such awful things, you have Bonnie and Dave with you, and . . . ."

Her breath catches, her voice trails off. She slips helplessly into sleep like a swimmer, exhausted, slipping beneath the surface of the water, tugged downward by gravity. I sit at the desk, watching her. My nerves are in shreds, my stomach isn't settled even now. I don't know how long I can continue this masquerade. Lying to her. Lying to her about the children and what they know and what they should know, what they must someday be told. *I'm going to visit your mother next week.* I told little Bonnie when Larry was out of earshot, *do you have a message for her?*

No. Because Bonnie doesn't have a mother any longer.

Thea sleeps. Sometimes she stirs, moans faintly, querulously. I sit here, waiting in the dark. I am very patient. I have years and years before me. It's true, as she said, that I can't lie: that is, I'm clumsy at lying. So if she continues to interrogate me about the children and how much they know I will have to be cautious, not to give away any secrets, not to upset her. (She is, after all, *high-strung.*)

Well. Isn't it sad. In my imagination I rehearse what I will tell people back home. Isn't it the saddest thing, isn't it tragic, that lovely young woman Thea, a nervous collapse and a steady decline and the doctors say she will probably never be strong enough to return to the outside world, just thinking of it makes my throat ache, and tears flood stinging into my eyes, and I feel as if my heart would *break.* Always,

from earliest childhood, I was exactly the opposite of Thea: things hurt me, wounded me, I was very sensitive, I wept easily, I had delicate feelings, I could feel, even, the wounds of others and wanted to protect them. She hurts and I heal. I should tiptoe out of the room but she begged me to come, she begs me to stay, to tell her all the ugly things she shouldn't know, all the ugly truths about herself, how can I abandon her? I am the only person who loves her. She has no husband, she has no children. The bright peopled world of Thea's admirers has shrunk back to me, only to *me*: no one else remains.

In her sleep she murmurs, "Sally . . . ?"

"Yes," I say at once. "I'm here. Of course I'm here. Don't worry, I will never leave you."

K.

they said
her hair
was a fire
burning in the tips
of a frazzled Brillo pad—
they said
she washed
her hair
with the dry
blue powder—
that feels like oil between my hands—
of Tide—
they said
she washed
her body once a month—
they said
she immersed her
self in Lysol
once a month—
that's what they said
and I believed them
being nine years old
and knowing
I was born
on a wind-swept ledge
and swaddled in new snow—

DEBORAH ANN GAGE

FIELDS

I return to the fields of my childhood,
to the tall, gray, bristling weeds
where the milkweed pod cracks open
and the gray shafts grow so high, that to move through them,
we skip and leap, catching glimpses of where we are
and where we are going—
or crushing them underfoot,
snapping the dry stalks to break a path through
to the wood's edge.
Tangled in stickers,
burrs clinging to our socks and pant legs,
we are seedy
with the dust of a dozen stalks, itching
with ticks and chiggers burrowing under the skin
in the fields
where one hawk circles,
scouring the ground for the slightest bending of a grass blade.
For we bound with the deer and the fieldmice, with
the rabbit flushed out of hiding, romping
while two vultures turn
above a fir tree, half out of sight, barely stirring their long wings.
Funereal, grave as they watch,
the vultures flap and wheel
off over the horizon—for down here
all things are alive and hopping.

Summer, and those broken stalks blossomed,
greened, gained in resiliency; bleeding
white when the shaft was broken,
even the weeds gave milk. Blue flowers
blossomed on dried crowns, white aureoles
gathered over battered weed clumps, and black-eyed Susans
swayed by the thousands
in the field burnt off last season.
And among the stalks, an ankle-high undergrowth
of grass and ground-running vines
sweetened with wild strawberries.

Amidst that ocean of stickers,
raspberry bushes rolling like breakers
hummed in their halos of bees,
strung with black berries and flowers
that added a musk
to the already heavy air.

There, on a summer morning, surrounded by such fields,
we could look out over the lawn
in four directions
and see nothing but trees—
trees ringing the horizon
in groves, or thickening into forests
that dropped down rocky hills threaded with streams
that gathered to a river.
While a warm wind rattled under the grape arbor,
a ring-necked pheasant took wing
and settled among the pine boughs in the distance,
or a quail trailing fledglings
skittered awkwardly into our garden, or hopped
in single file down the dirt lane that ran past our house.
In silence, or naming the names
of towhee, cardinal, finch, or indigo bunting,
we eyed the natural world—the snow bird
on a silver sheen
replacing the towhee on the grass,
the geese crossing over in formation,
twice yearly—once north, one south—
or the blackbirds, an infinite stretch of pepper,
blowing across the sky for days
from daybreak to nightfall.
It was there on our island of grass
we saw oak and sycamore surrendering
to the evergreen
fir and pine
that, laden with rain-glazed, frozen snow,
caught the last light
of evening, and for days
would shake that burden off
with a steady singing.

Paul Lake

LOWELL'S MOTION: *NOTEBOOK* AND AFTER

PHILIP COOPER

1. Preamble

In 1967, at the age of fifty, Robert Lowell read his poetry at the MLA convention in Chicago. Asked what he thought about form and content, he replied: "I think it's awful when they don't grapple." I remember the laconic retort because the word *grapple* is arresting, and it offers a key. Meter and matter don't just suit each other, they don't simply fit or blend, they *grapple*: the relationship between them is dynamic, not static. Change, or surprise, is the key. Freshness in poetry, like a fresh place on the pillow, is a matter of contrast. "It really doesn't matter whether one style is better than the last," Lowell says. "When it no longer serves, you must adventure."

During the six years that followed his reading at MLA, Lowell published five volumes of unrhymed sonnets: *Notebook 1967-68* (1969), *Notebook* (1970), and the three volumes published simultaneously in 1973, *For Lizzie and Harriet, History,* and *The Dolphin.* With *The Dolphin* the flow of sonnets apparently reached its conclusion. In the following year, 1974, when Lowell published a set of ten poems, nine were in free verse, and these were followed by at least ten more free-verse poems by the end of 1975. The final poem of the first set is titled "Homecoming." It begins:

> Since 1930—as was is.
> The boys in my old gang
> startle me. They start up
> bald like baby birds—
> we talk of retirement.

It is a new version, drastically rewritten, of "Returning," from his 1964 volume *For the Union Dead.*

Lowell's return to free verse, which he had scarcely used since *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead,* marked the completion of a ten-year cycle of work in the stricter forms. He began his career with very tight meters, broke through to free verse in *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead,* returned to stricter forms in *Near the Ocean* and the neo-sonnets of the *Notebook* years, and then once again began to explore free verse. The principle of alternation evidently governs the larger developments as well as the smaller, and governs choices of subject as well as of meter. "You say I have become more overtly concerned with public events," Lowell said in 1971, "but true public poetry must come as an inevitable accident. I grew up in anti-artist-sage days, when Eliot and Picasso worked in one surprising style for some years, then surprised with another—maturing without becoming public voices or portents. Who wants

to be on call to society? Have a resonant poem for each great issue?" The alternation between two worlds, public and private, is a conspicuous feature of Lowell's work.

To show the workings of surprise, the principle of alternation or oscillation, inside individual poems, I want to consider first some of the unrhymed sonnets, with examples from four different volumes, and finally one of the free-verse poems, from the concluding phase of Lowell's work.

2. *Notebook* (1970)

In the same conversation, published in *The Review* in 1971, Lowell was asked what, in *Notebook*, he felt the fourteen lines actually did. "Allowed me rhetoric, formal construction, and quick breaks," Lowell replied. "Much of *Life Studies* is recollection; *Notebook* mixes the day-to-day with the history—the lamp by a tree out this window on Redcliffe Square . . . or maybe the rain, but always the instant, sometimes changing to the lost. A flash of haiku to lighten the distant. Has this something to do with a rhymeless sonnet? One poem must lead towards the next, but is fairly complete; it can stride on stilts, or talk. . . . It can say almost anything conversation or correspondence can."

Lowell tried putting into the *Notebook* stanza (he sometimes called it a stanza, and *Notebook* a long poem) all kinds of material—including raw (or apparently raw) fragments of quoted correspondence or conversation. As he says in the "Afterthought" to *Notebook*: "I have taken from many books, used the throwaway conversational inspirations of my friends, and much more that I idly spoke to myself." He experimented with a wide range of effects. One extreme of that range is shown by "Open House," a poem that does not appear in the subsequent volumes.

The open house is evidently a party in Boston. The voices are those of the guests, and finally the host. The host speaks the last sentence, in the long-distance telephone call to Gary, Indiana; everything else is said by his guests, who are black and intend a pun on "soul." They refer to the host as "Whitey," the landlady, "a girl" and "the Virgin Mary." He appears to be a drunken victim of physical assault and extreme insult; but we know nothing except by inference—rather agile inference—from the apparently raw fragments of conversation. The words are evidently "meat-hooked from the living steer," or else jottings from a notebook, as if from the notebook of a playwright. These fragments are organized in two ways: first by contrasting the grotesque play of the wit with the implicit violence of the assault, and finally by contrasting the cumulative brutality with the fragility or vulnerability at the end. All this is capped by the irony of the title. The poem veers from sensationalism to sentimentality and is rescued, if rescued it is, mainly by the puzzled connection between poverty and love, in the final sentence: *"You believe in love, / some use for poverty outside imagination. . . ."* If the poem suc-

ceeds, if the atmosphere of racial tension is sufficiently charged, then, on rereading, even the apparently factual specification of Gary, Indiana, connotes Cowboys and Indians, and suggests our national history of racial strife.

It is a risky poem, no doubt, considered either on social or on literary grounds. But its omission from *History* (where versions of its companion sonnets, "New York" and "Sounds in the Night," duly appear) is not a matter of poetry but of social tact: the material is too disturbing.

3. The Crack in Everything God Made: *History, For Lizzie and Harriet,* and *The Dolphin*

In 1973 Lowell published simultaneously three volumes: a new volume of the unrhymed sonnets, called *The Dolphin* and dedicated to his new wife, Caroline; a matching volume of the old unrhymed sonnets, in new versions and in a new order, *For Lizzie and Harriet,* for his former wife and their daughter; and *History,* containing the rest of the *Notebook* poems, rearranged in chronological order and rewritten, together with eighty new sonnets. One of these is "Lévi-Strauss in London."

"Lévi-Strauss in London" develops a theme of opposition or cleavage—"the crack in everything God made"—beginning with the opposition implicit in the title: the French social anthropologist, the London scene. The principle of opposition, the surprise of the imagination's leap between the poles of contrast, is well illustrated in *Tristes Tropiques,* where Lévi-Strauss tells how he hiked "along the flank of a limestone plateau in Languedoc to determine the line of contact between two geological strata." His discovery is a paradigm of structuralist imagination:

> Every landscape appears first of all as a vast chaos, which leaves one free to choose the meaning one wants to give it. But, over and above agricultural considerations, geographical irregularities and the various accidents of history and prehistory, the most majestic meaning of all is surely that which precedes, commands and, to a large extent, explains the others. A pale blurred line, or an often almost imperceptible difference in the shape and consistency of rock fragments, are evidence of the fact that two oceans once succeeded each other where, today, I can see nothing but dry soil. As I follow the traces of their age-old stagnation despite all obstacles—sheer cliff faces, landslides, scrub or cultivated land—and disregarding paths and fences, I seem to be proceeding in meaningless fashion. But the sole aim of this contrariness is to recapture the master-meaning, which may be obscure but of which each of the others is a partial or distorted transposition.

The clue Lévi-Strauss follows across his landscape corresponds to the thematic opposition that organizes Lowell's poem. Moreover, the essential elements of Lévi-Strauss's story are present in the poem, deftly compressed. Lévi-Strauss continues:

> When the miracle occurs, as it sometimes does; when, on one side and the other of the hidden crack, there are suddenly to be found cheek-by-jowl two green plants of different species, each of which has chosen the most favourable soil; and when at the same time, two ammonites with unevenly intricate involutions can be glimpsed in the rock, thus testifying in their own way to a gap of several tens of thousands of years suddenly space and time become one: the living diversity of the moment juxtaposes and perpetuates the ages. Thought and emotion move into a new dimension where every drop of sweat, every muscular movement, every gasp of breath becomes symbolic of a past history, the development of which is reproduced in my body, at the same time as my thought embraces its significance. I feel myself to be steeped in a more dense intelligibility, within which centuries and distances answer each other and speak at last with one and the same voice.

Lowell compresses the story into a three-line summary at the beginning of his poem.

> Lévi-Strauss, seeing two green plants in a cleft
> of a cliff choosing diverse ammonites,
> imagined a crevasse of millennia spanned. . . .

Such brevity may be felt to enact the truncation performed by his hostess' faux pas. "Lévi-Strauss in London" tells an anecdote about an interruption, and reflects on it. There is an anecdote within the anecdote: Lévi-Strauss was telling Lowell the story of the ammonites when their hostess intervened. The intervention—her tactless switching to French when Lévi-Strauss was talking English—is described as a decapitation: "when he told me this in English, our hostess spoke French; / I left the party with a severed head." Both the rupture of the conversation and the severing of the head are analogous to the cleft of the cliff in Lévi-Strauss's story.

The disparity between the two green plants, which led to the discovery of the disparity between the ammonites they have chosen for food, and thence to imagining the miraculous span of the millennia, corresponds to the difference between the languages, and to all the other oppositions in the poem: the details are highly coherent. The tactlessness of the hostess's choice, and its resulting curtailment of the conversation, the experience of the severed head, the distance "from Marx to death," the contrast between Cézanne and Picasso, and between their arts and the sciences represented by Marx and Lévi-Strauss—all make

closely woven analogies. The thematic rift climaxes in the disparity between *Marx* and *death* in the rhetorical question:

> I was so tired of camp and decoration,
> so dog-tired of wanting social hope—
> is *structuralism* the bridge from Marx to death?

The presence of Marx, the German social philosopher, in a poem about a French social anthropologist, is validated by *Tristes Tropiques*, where the story of the ammonites is followed without pause by a discussion of Marxism and psychoanalysis—Marx and Freud. In this context "death" becomes a metonym for Freud (Eros and Thanatos), and the familiar pairs, Marx and Freud, and love and death, are conflated into Marx and death.

The puzzled question ("is *structuralism* the bridge from Marx to death?") leads to the image of Cézanne, "his spine sticking in the landscape." In a literal sense of course Cézanne died and left his skeleton sticking in the landscape like the ammonites. (In the density of associations created in this poem, even the verb *muck* suggests its noun and coheres with the ammonites, in an image that makes a pun out of *sticking*, and that reappears in the stickiness of the resin.) But there is more. The image of the spine is primarily metaphorical and ambiguous. Cézanne, by contrast with the "camp and decoration," the fashionable superficiality or inauthenticity represented by the hostess, threw himself entirely into his work. In this sense the spine—the backbone—*is* the seat of life and the principle of vital order. Cézanne's authenticity—the authority of his painting—instructed our perceptions, taught us to see anew by showing us how to structure the "vast chaos" of the landscape. The image of his spine suggests the artful, structural simplification of forms that is characteristic of his style, and that constitutes his signature on our world.

By a peculiar play of submerged puns, the identity of Cézanne merges with the landscape. He left his pines sticking in the landscape, he left his spine sticking in the landscape, in the *land's cape*, with "Picasso's bullfighter's wrist for foil and flare," or sword and cape. The image of the spine sticking in the landscape becomes an image of the bullfighter's sword sticking in his cape to stiffen or extend its flare. The land's cape, shadowy, huge, is a gigantic animation like that of the beach in "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket": "the beach increasing, its enormous snout / sucking the ocean's side." Cézanne's "slow brush sucked the resin from the pines": his careful, painstaking art drew out the essence or underlying cohesive principle of the landscape.

Picasso's *flare* or *flair*, the agile style of his bright spontaneous sketches, makes a *foil* for Cézanne's "slow brush"—foil in the sense of illuminating contrast, as well as in the sense of the bullfighter's sword,

the backbone of his art. But for all their art, taken singly or together, "they cannot fill the crack in everything God made": not even with their lives. Neither they nor the scientists (Lévi-Strauss, Marx) can repair the flaw in creation.

I have gone into this short poem in considerable detail to show an example of Lowell's achievement in the *Notebook* form. In an apparently relaxed, conversational manner he has achieved immense imaginative compression: great complexity and dense coherence.

Much as the boundary between tight and loose meter is crossed and recrossed, the line between Lowell's two worlds, the public and the private, is repeatedly crossed. Publication for Lowell was not an act kept separate from his private life. In a note at the end of *Notebook* (1970) he wrote: "I am sorry to ask anyone to buy this poem twice. I couldn't stop writing, and have handled my published book as if it were manuscript." Later, in 1973, when the collection of sonnets grew and divided into three simultaneous volumes, one of these was essentially a private gesture. *For Lizzie and Harriet,* for his former wife and their daughter, doubtless was shaped to balance *The Dolphin,* the volume of new poems for his new wife.

Despite their physical division into three separate volumes, and despite their rearrangement, in *History,* into merely chronological order, Lowell's sonnets are as interconnected as ever. The chronological ordering of *History* makes more strenuous demands on the reader, opening the possibilities to his imagination instead of making pre-emptive juxtapositions. The context of any one of the sonnets, in any volume, potentially is still the entire collection.

To read, for example, "Window," in *The Dolphin,* fully, one needs more than the obvious context of its immediate sequence (it is the second poem in a set of seven titled "Redcliffe Square"). One needs the associations of the wind not only in the next poem, "America from Oxford, May 1970," but also in "Wind," in *History* and in "These Winds," in *For Lizzie and Harriet:* winds of passion, winds of inspiration and of chaos, winds of social and political turbulence—wind and calm. In this way the three-volume collection still behaves like a single poem—as *Notebook* always has aspired to do.

And yet each sonnet is, as Lowell says, fairly complete in itself. "Window" develops a structure of contrast that can stand by itself. Images of turbulence alternate with images of stability; both sets are varied and balanced against each other to form, as a whole, an aesthetic equilibrium.

> Tops of the midnight trees move helter skelter
> to ruin, if passion can hurt the classical
> in the limited window of the easel painter—
> love escapes our hands. We open the curtains:

a square of white-faced houses swerving, foaming,
the swagger of the world and chalk of London.
At each turn the houses wall the path of meeting,
and yet we meet, stand taking in the storm.
Even in provincial capitals,
storms will rarely enter a human house,
the crude and homeless wet is windowed out.
We stand and hear the pummelling unpurged,
almost uneducated by the world—
the tops of the moving trees move helter skelter.

The "helter skelter," chaotic movement of treetops threatens destruction —but its turbulence is contained in the rectilinear order of the window, as if it were a painting. Culture controls nature . . . for the moment. "Passion" is part of the nature that threatens to break bounds—or rather, does not threaten: "love escapes our hands." The lovers open the curtains, gaze at the storm out the window, over Redcliffe Square. The rectilinear order of the window reappears in the Square, whose houses shut out the storm and "wall the path of meeting": the meeting is illicit. "We stand and hear the pummelling unpurged, / almost uneducated by the world— / the tops of the moving trees move helter skelter." The lovers and the storm are *both* "unpurged." both turbulent, in contrast with the "Square of white-faced houses," which "window out" unruly passions or storms. The poem is fairly complete all by itself.

Yet the next poem continues the story, and the contrast: The lovers "have climbed above the wind to breathe." To move from "Window" to the poem that follows it is to move away from images of storm. "America from Oxford, May 1970," contrasts the calm in a meadow near Oxford with the turbulent political scene back in America, with its student strikes and anti-war protests: "the students march, Brassman lances Cambodia." But the turbulence is not only political. The wind the lovers have climbed above is also the wind of passion, and its problems. A reflection about the lovers in bed follows an image of American military impotence: "Brassman lances Cambodia— / he has lost his pen, his sword folds in his hand like felt. / Is truth here with us, if I sleep well?" And in the next lines, "the ten or twelve years my coeval gives himself / for the new bubble of his divorce . . . ten or twelve years," a thought about a friend suggests also, indirectly, the emotional turbulence of Lowell's divorce from Elizabeth, who is in New York, to marry Caroline, who is with him at Oxford. The weather is hot in Oxford, but things are hotter still in America, especially at home in New York: "this air so estranged and hot I might be home. . . . / We have climbed above the wind to breathe." According to Susan Jones, when he was asked by students at Oxford what that last line meant in *Notebook* (in an earlier version of the poem)

Lowell replied: "Here in Oxford I can read Milton without reference to New York politics."

The image of the wind as passion reappears most strongly in *History*, in the Dante series. "Dante 4. Paolo and Francesca" is Lowell's translation of the famous passage from the *Inferno*, concluding, "That day we read no further." It is followed by "Dante 5. Wind," which makes an extension of Dante's metaphor of the buffeting, chafing winds on which Paolo and Francesca, in the *Inferno*, ride as punishment in kind for their crime of passion. In Lowell's poem, Francesca reappears as a girl he watches rowing her boat, her thighs showing, as he reflects on how the winds of passion are the winds of change for all.

> The night blowing through the world's hospital is human,
> Francesca's strife and monotony blown
> by the folly of Christendom that loathed her flesh—
> seed winds, the youthful breath of the old world,
> each a progression of our carnal pleasure
> and a firm extension of the soul. . . .
> The girl has been rowing her boat since early morning,
> hard riding has never blistered her agile thighs.
> The snail, a dewdrop, stumbles like the blind,
> puts out his little horns to feel the sun.
> In the garden of Allah, man still wears the beard,
> the women are undressed, accepting love. . . .
> They loved if one or two days of life meant much,
> then an eternity of failed desire—
> winds fed the fire, a wind can blow it out.

Like the ambivalent wind in Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter," Lowell's image is of an energy that is alternately creative and destructive. "These Winds," a poem addressed to his own daughter, Harriet, in the volume *For Lizzie and Harriet*, sees her composing at the piano, in her early teens, and senses the fragility threatened, even by the lightest of winds.

> I see these winds, these are the tops of trees,
> these are no heavier than green alder bushes;
> touched by a light wind, they begin to mingle
> and race for instability . . . .

The underlying contrast developed by the poem resembles one developed by Yeats's poem: between the vulnerable innocence of the girl, and the murderous innocence of untamed nature—between the child in the cradle and the Atlantic storm—with the winds of musical harmony

crossed by the scream of the wind in the elms. Lowell's daughter, correcting notes

> at the upright piano,
> twice upright this midday Sunday torn from the whole
> green cloth of summer

is faced with the crack in everything God made:

> your room was once the laundry,
> the loose tap beats time, you hammer the formidable
> chords of *The Nocturne*, your second composition.
> Since you first began to bawl and crawl
> from the unbreakable lawn to this sheltered room, how often
> winds have crossed the wind of inspiration—
> in these too, the unreliable touch of the all.

Lowell's meditation for his daughter moves from what is most delicate, most fragile and most fugitive to the levelling, destructive, undifferentiating *all*. As Alan Williamson glosses this poem (in its *Notebook* version),

> The more things one sees moved by the wind, and the slighter, the more delicate they are, the more one seems to "see" the wind. Later in the poem, wind is equated with "inspiration"; while the small, unstable branches that respond even to a "light wind" might be the slight, indefinite materials on which Lowell leans his poems, in contrast to the "brush" of heavier themes. . . . The "touch of the all" is most surely felt in the "unreliable"—perhaps because what has no adequate contingent cause must fall back on the fundamental Cause, the whole interweaving of the cosmos.

In the three-volume cleavage there is a formal design, built of the contrasts between the separate volumes. *History*, with its 368 unrhymed sonnets, is more than double the length of the two slim, attendant volumes combined. Although *History* still includes personal material, it is predominantly public, whereas the flanking volumes concern opposing phases of a private life. *History* is arranged in simple chronological order; *For Lizzie and Harriet* and *The Dolphin* illustrate other, more complex, groupings. Opposition, or the principle of alteration, governs the triad.

Expansion of the boundaries, to recover materials formerly ceded to prose, has been Lowell's ambition (as I have explained in my book on Lowell) probably since his review of Robert Penn Warren's *Brother to Dragons*, a historical novel in verse. Lowell's *History*, by its very title, reflects that ambition; and Robert Penn Warren's theory may help to suggest, if not Lowell's design, at least his purpose: "Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry

is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake."

In his description of the rush and labor of the sonnets, the guiding principle of alternation is clear—from the classical opposition between "a sense of line" and the onward flow, to the alternation between "the squeeze of the sonnet and the loose ravel of blank verse." There is novelty in the combination of the sonnet with blank verse; but Lowell also thought of the novel as a relevant form—though not as a simple model. "I hoped in *Life Studies*—it was a limitation—that each poem might seem as open and single-surfaced as a photograph. *Notebook* is more jagged and imagined than was desirable in *Life Studies*. It's severe to be confined to rendering appearances. That seems the perfect way, what *War and Peace* is, but it is flattening to poetry's briefer genius. . . ." The reference to *War and Peace* reflects his difficult ambition, I believe, not only in the open-faced *Life Studies*, but also in the jagged *Notebook* sonnet sequence. It is the ambition for poetry to follow, in some measure, Warren's lead. As Lowell put it: "Warren has written his best book, a big book; he has crossed the Alps and, like Napoleon's shoeless army, has entered the fat, populated riverbottom of the novel."

"Beyond the Alps" is the opening poem in *Life Studies*. It is written in regular meter and rhyme, and so are the other three poems that form Part One of the famous volume. Part Two is "91 Revere Street," pure prose. Part Three consists of four poems about writers, written in various meters. Part Four, titled "Life Studies," is divided into two sections. The first is the famous series of poems in free verse about himself and his family. The second section concludes the volume with five poems in varying forms. One is a sonnet, for example; another is in six-line stanzas with rhyme, or off-rhyme, but not meter; the concluding poem, "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th," later titled "For the Union Dead," is in unmetered quatrains. The rule seems to be to break the rule . . . in order to remake it. Lowell told Robert Penn Warren that the poems in *Life Studies* were sometimes written first in perfectly regular meter and then made irregular, and sometimes written first in prose and then rewritten as poems. He often began at one extreme and crossed to the other.

Such is the distinguished antecedent of the *Notebook* hybrid. Until his death on September 12, 1977, the prospects were good that Lowell would continue his hybrids, and continue to explore the current limits of poetry. Yet his discourse is not with current fashion but with the whole of time. "'All time and culture and my sorrows vocal— / I have ripened on remorse like Stilton cheese. . . .'" If Lowell's view of history is extremely personal, it is also immensely cultured, immensely learned. Steeped in the currents of literary history, he was also intuitively in-

volved in the literary evolution of our time. Harry Levin, in the Taylorian Lecture at Oxford for 1974, *Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the European Horizon*, compares Lowell's *History* with Pound's *Cantos*, and sees both in a line of descent from Whitman—with Pound "closer to the immediate urgencies of poetry today than Eliot." While it may be premature to rank Lowell among the giants—when Kathleen Raine compared him to Eliot, someone observed that she was leading with Lowell's chin—nevertheless the precedent for doing so bears on the controversy, since profound innovations are notoriously misunderstood in their own time. "I suppose a poet is content to be a minority," Lowell said. "The public is a lost cause."

4. After the Sonnets

After the sonnets Lowell returned to free verse. "Not Cleared of Killing," first of three poems in the *New York Review* dated May 29, 1975, makes a good example.[1] At a reading in London at the annual Poetry International he introduced the poem with these words:

> This one's called "Not Cleared of Killing" and it's . . . it's one of the few occasional poems I've ever written. In Boston, where I was in the last few months, teaching, there's a very celebrated case of a doctor who made an abortion in the fourth month, and the fetus was killed, and he was tried for murder—he apparently a good doctor who did these things free. And, well, the liberals were for the doctor, and all women . . . or maybe just liberal women, and all doctors, but somehow the mass of the population was against him and he was convicted—but he got a light sentence.
>
> I'm not really writing about that occasion at all but about the fetus—it's the smallest form of man we can think of. And at three or four months it looks exactly like a baby, and even has its thumb in its mouth—this way—and it's quite . . . well, God knows what it is.

His thoughts about the abortion trial grew into an irregular meditation on the image of man. The sixty-two-line poem divides roughly into three scenes. The first concerns the courthouse and the public event, which was reported in a front-page story in *The Boston Globe*.

From the public scene the poem progresses, through an increasingly personal meditation on the image of the fetus as a model for the image of man, to a vision of the unforgivable Boston landscape (as in-

[1] Lowell constantly revised, but his revisions were sometimes tryouts that he would later abandon in favor of the original form. "Not Cleared of Killing" was considerably revised, and retitled "Fetus," for *Day by Day* (1977), but Lowell died before there could be any further revision. Throughout this discussion I keep to the original version as it was published in the *New York Review* of May 29, 1975, and as Lowell read it in London at the annual Poetry International of that year.

fernal as the landscape in "The Mouth of the Hudson") which was created by the Puritan commercial theocracy. The fetus is

> too young to be gladdened
> by our old New England hope of heaven,
> alone made palatable
> by a certainty of hell.

In the second or middle section of the poem there is a climax of identification with the fetus, introduced by an arresting, almost surrealistic image of the advent of death:

> When the black arrow arrives on the silver tray,
> the fetus has no past,
> not even an immovable wall of paintings . . .
> no room to stir here,
> no breathless servility,
> overacting our last day
> writhing like a worm
> in the violet ray of science—
> our fierce scared eyes,
> our call to wife or sister,
> when we wake to our age,
> to find our hearts enlarged,
> all men our brothers . . .
> hypocrites pretending to answer
> what we cannot hear.

The lines become metrically more regular and the commitment clearer.

But in the third and final section, beginning with a "spidered" vision of the hellish landscape—"winter trees, / blackened concrete stores"—the lines are irregular, wavering, and the tone is deliberately flattened. The poem culminates in a puzzled self-knowledge. The image of the fetus is replaced by that of a girl on a billboard—and Lowell's sense of complicity in the sins of the fathers emerges as a blurring of himself with his own dead father:

> The girl on the billboard
> would have teased my father—
> unkillable, uncatchable,
> disused as the adolescent tan on my arm . . .
> a model, she has not lost her looks—
> unborn
> a generation too young for any buyer.

All these thoughts occur to Lowell inside a car—"as I drive on." The car, though only implicit, is womb-like and Lowell is therefore fetus-

like, a morbid creature inside a mechanical womb. "*Méchant,* mechanical"—according to the equation in "Cypress Street Brookline," an even later poem, where an imagery of automobiles is deliberately mixed with an imagery of the human body in the act of sex, and where free verse again is mixed with more regular measures. In "Not Cleared of Killing," the phrase "breathless servility" combines with the presence of the car to recall, perhaps, the "savage servility" and monstrous, finned cars at the end of another Boston poem, "For the Union Dead":

> The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
> giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
> a savage servility
> slides by on grease.

Like a criminal signing his crimes, Lowell is perhaps deliberately echoing certain associations from his earlier poems—associations of guilt or sin. The image introducing his vision—"the focus is spidered"—recalls the ambivalent images of sinful mortality in "Mr. Edwards and the Spider." If you judge man by his works, he is a monster, a creator of monsters: "blackened concrete stores / bonneted for Easter with billboards."

"Not Cleared of Killing" ends with an unsolved problem. By moving between the images of the girl on the billboard and the fetus that was killed, the last lines keep both present: "unborn / a generation too young for any buyer." Through its ambiguity in the context of the poem, it means something like this: Just as that girl is too young for the likes of me or my father, the fetus is too young for anyone at all. But since the girl, like the figures on the Urn *and* like the fetus, is "unborn," she too is "a generation" too young for anyone at all—"for any buyer," since the billboard addresses itself to buyers. Both she and the fetus are images, imaginary projections. The ambiguities and the succession of four "generations," like Chinese boxes or Joyce's umbilical telephone, make a puzzle, where the fetus blurs into the girl as Lowell blurs into his father—and by extension into the New England Puritan Fathers, progenitors of the commercial theocracy now judging the surgeon. Finally, the concluding line may even mean something like this: that the fetus (the "generation") is too young for anyone to "buy" (or agree with) the verdict. Anyone, that is, except the public—but the public, of course, is a lost cause. The convicted abortion surgeon is "not cleared of killing"—but neither is it clear what it is that he has killed. The focus is spidery. God knows what it is.

GAMEL WOOLSEY: A POET FROM AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Kenneth Hopkins

Gamel Woolsey was a poet. She was born at Breeze Hill Plantation, Aiken, South Carolina in May, 1899, the daughter of William Walton Woolsey and his wife Elizabeth, and named Elizabeth Gammell Woolsey, Gammell being her mother's maiden name.

William Woolsey had been an engineer—one of his undertakings had been to lay the first telegraph line from Bogota, Colombia, to the Caribbean. His father was a prosperous banker and business man of Cleveland, Ohio, but after the Civil War William settled in South Carolina, and became a cotton planter. This was in 1870, and he bought Breeze Hill in 1871. He was twice married, and his first wife gave him a daughter and three sons, one of whom was afterwards Justice John M. Woolsey who pronounced the famous judgement that James Joyce's *Ulysses* was not obscene.

William Woolsey was descended from George Woolsey, who was born in 1610 and emigrated from Great Yarmouth, England, to New Amsterdam (by way of Holland) in 1623. This East Anglian ancestry suggests a possible link with Cardinal Wolsey, who was a Suffolk man, even if he didn't spell his name properly. He was the son of an Ipswich butcher, and Ipswich is not very far from Great Yarmouth. The Cardinal, Thomas Wolsey, had a son Thomas, who was perhaps George Woolsey's great-grandfather. Woolsey, however spelt, is not a common name in England, but it occurs fairly regularly in East Anglia, and there are a number of people of that name in Great Yarmouth today.

Gamel Woolsey's ancestry stems directly from George Woolsey, and along the way there are several celebrated names in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, including Theodore Dwight Woolsey (1801-1889), a distinguished president of Yale University, and Sarah Chauncy Woolsey (1835-1905), who was Gamel's aunt, and wrote a famous best-seller, *What Katy Did*, under her pen name, Susan Coolidge. She lived at Newport, Rhode Island, and died when Gamel was six.

Gamel's mother was a girl from Charleston, South Carolina, who married in her teens; she was usually called Bessie. She had two daughters, of whom Gamel was the eldest. The other, Marie, was her sister's opposite in temperament, and grew up with a love of motor racing and aviation. In the family, Gamel was called Elsa, or sometimes Elsie, but in later years she took her middle name, spelled Gammell, and shortened it to Gamel, which is a Norse word meaning "old."

Several of Gamel's poems refer to her childhood at Breeze Hill. The original house in which she was born was demolished in 1933, but the

Plantation is still occupied by the family. There is no cotton there now, but much remains which would be familiar to Gamel if she could return: a number of old barns, the sloping land and the pine trees, and a huge holly tree which must be somewhere near the biggest in the world.

Gamel's principal companion seems to have been her half-brother Con: she shortens his name, which was Convers (his mother's maiden name). In one poem she speaks of him by implication as the youngest son, but he was in fact the second child of four; he was, however, the only boy who stayed at home, for his brothers were educated and afterwards worked in New York and New England. Something of nostalgia lies in all these poems, perhaps because they were written years later when Gamel was many thousand of miles from her old home. "Carolina Low Country" was probably composed during her life in Spain:

> It was the country where the wild grapes grew,
> The Vineland that the Norsemen never found,
> Where schuppernongs droop heavy towards the ground.
>
> It was the country where false-jessamine bloomed,
> Its yellow garlands tangled in the trees:
> Their deathly sweetness burdening the faint breeze.
>
> It was the country where the buzzards hung,
> Motionless wings under heat's trembling hood:
> Their gold eyes aiming at their carrion food.
>
> It was the country where the West wind blew,
> The country where the offshore seas were deep,
> The country of lost wars, sad dreams, and sleep.
>
> And Oh, the country of the sea-shell sands,
> And small boats sailing to the palm-fringed beach:
> The land of ruined plantations, soft brown speech;
>
> The land of mists and memories we regret,
> The land where loves are never put away,
> Where yesterdays are better than today.

Most of Gamel's writing has an autobiographical element, and her unpublished novel *Patterns on the Sand* recalls again her life in South Carolina as a young girl growing up. The novel is dedicated to the memory of her father and mother and her brother Con, another indication that he filled a larger part in her life than the other children.

In 1910, when Gamel was eleven, her father died, and shortly afterwards her mother took her two daughters to live in Charleston, where no doubt she still had relations[1] and childhood friends, for she was then only in her early thirties.

At sixteen she was proficient in French and Latin and already a great lover of poetry. Then she was stricken with tuberculosis, and spent something like a year in a sanitorium, where part of her lung was removed. Gerald Brenan says in his volume of autobiography, *Personal Record, 1920-1972,* that her melancholy seemed to date from this time, giving a grave cast to her expression although she could sometimes be gay.

In her early twenties Gamel left home to go to New York. She had difficulty now in living with her mother, who had become a heavy drinker. Gamel had some thought of becoming an actress, and indeed there are photographs of her in various productions. She settled in Greenwich Village, living for a time in Patchin Place, where she met John Cowper Powys, and afterwards his brother Llewelyn. She was now writing poetry, and perhaps other things. Her poem "Early Spring: New York" seems to refer to these early days, and perhaps the lost love it speaks of may be connected with her friend Edward Jennings, of Charleston, who committed suicide; or to Reginald Hunter, whom she met and married after she had been a few months in New York.

Hunter was a journalist from New Zealand, a "tall, fair-haired, handsome man," Gerald Brenan tells us. He wrote a curious novel of Greenwich Village called *Porlock*, and he published several collections of poetry.

Reginald Hunter was an itinerant lover, moving from flower to flower and never settling long with one; but his relationship with Gamel seems to have been somewhat deeper, and when she became pregnant he married her in early summer 1923. Gamel was still in delicate health, and this pregnancy had to be terminated. After this, perhaps to set her up again, Hunter took her to England, but their interest in one another was already under a strain, and when they returned to New York they ceased to live together. It was then that Gamel again took a room in Patchin Place. Some typescripts of her early poems are dated from 1-A Patchin Place. At that time John Cowper Powys lived at number 5, where E. E. Cummings lived later. Gamel was living at number 5 in 1927, and it was then that she met Llewelyn Powys during his winter in New York as visiting critic for the New York *Herald-Tribune*.[2]

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[1] But the Charleston City Directories of the years 1910-1930 do not record any residents under the name Gammell.

[2] "Up the stairs of No 5 I stood at the very place where I first saw you."—Llewelyn Powys to Gamel Woolsey, 20 October 1930.

A long poem called "By Night" begins with a note of sadness near desperation. This poem would perhaps be a little earlier and may treat of the feelings which drove her at least to separate from Hunter; there are sixty lines, of which these are the first few:

Lying beside him in the night
My thoughts go on, my thoughts go on. . .
The window is four squares of light,
Set in the blackness of the night,
A little light until the dawn.
My thoughts go on, my thoughts go on. . .

I turn my head and I am bound
My limbs are held by other limbs,
Those manacles of flesh they were,
And I am weighted to the ground
By bones and blood and mesh of hair.
My thoughts go on, my thoughts go on. . .

Yet another poem, "Empty Spring," expresses the loneliness of separation after a time in which the writer had a companion: he may be gone, but she looks for another:

This bitterness, to be alone
When the soft winds begin to stir,
When the sun higher rides the sky,
And something brightens in the air.
Through all the winter I have lain
With unkissed mouth and empty eyes,
Then sleeping deep have felt no pain,
Have felt no wonder or surmise,
But only turned to sleep again.
But now—O, empty are the skies
Because I have not found a mouth
To dream on mine; a bitter drouth
Has sucked the springs and poisoned them,
And poisoned all the summer mood,
And slain the bird and starved her brood.

As a poem, this is not wholly successful: its fifteen irregularly-rhymed lines suggest that perhaps it is the draft of a sonnet which went awry; and, as it happens, Gamel Woolsey has a number of poems which suggest that they were intended for sonnets. But of the strength of the emotion there can be no doubt, and it is interesting to see powerful emotion being married to powerful lines, as the poet's mastery became established in later years.

I have been quoting from early, unpublished poems, dating from the mid-1920s, and the typescripts of several of these carry her name and New York address, as if prepared for submission to magazines.

It was in November 1927 that Llewelyn Powys and his wife Alyse Gregory returned to New York, which they had left in the spring of 1925; and shortly after their arrival, they met Gamel. In his commentary to *So Wild a Thing*,[3] Llewelyn Powys's letters to Gamel Woolsey, Malcolm Elwin says that (as was natural in that small and lively community of Patchin Place) Llewelyn, Alyse, and John Cowper Powys were "continually meeting 'the little poetess,'" as they called her; and they all liked her. In all that followed Alyse Gregory seems never to have felt any personal dislike or resentment for Gamel. According to Elwin, it was Alyse herself who "connived at and suggested Llewelyn's seduction of Gamel," and he cites her statement of 8 May 1945 as his authority; whether this was verbal or written is not indicated, but that the event described followed speedily is certain enough. Llewelyn fell in love with Gamel. After he and Alyse had returned to England in April 1928 Gamel wrote to tell him she was pregnant. A few weeks later, after an accident in a taxi, Gamel was taken to hospital and suffered a miscarriage. But before discussing the relationship between Gamel and Llewelyn I want to say a little more about the end of her sojourn in New York.

As we have seen, she was already writing poetry, and it was about this time that she began her autobiographical novel, *One Way of Love*, which is about her marriage. Llewelyn Powys says in a letter dated from White Nose, his Dorset home, on June 18, 1928, a few weeks after he got back from New York—and before he knew she was pregnant: "It is exciting that you think of writing a novel. . . . How lovely the days that you spent in Carolina must have been. . . ." These letters as published by Malcolm Elwin contain many omissions, and what else Llewelyn said we are not told; no doubt at some later time we shall see an unabridged text. But he may have said more about the proposed story, for *One Way of Love* contains very little about South Carolina. Indeed, it is not impossible that she had told him about her other novel, *Patterns on the Sand*, which *is* about her life in Charleston, S. C., but about the writing of this I have no date and the novel exists only in an unpublished typescript.

One Way of Love begins with a prologue in which the heroine, Mariana, is lying in a cot in an attic in an old house by the sea—presumably 63 Meeting Street, Charleston, where Gamel had lived with her mother. We are told something of Mariana's nature and character, but only in five pages, and then Chapter One finds her taking an apartment in New York. Thereafter the story follows Gamel's own life in New York, her marriage, and the trip to England. Mariana and her

[3] Dulverton, England: The Ark Press, 1973.

husband return to New York, and she leaves him, although they continue to meet as friends, and he urges her to go back to him. She will not do this, and turns to other relationships—they are hardly love affairs—and the book ends with her lost and solitary, about to go to bed with a married man.

The later history of *One Way of Love* is curious. It was accepted by a London publisher, Victor Gollancz, and set in type in 1932, and then withdrawn before publication because Gollancz felt that after the recent prosecution of his publication *Children Be Happy* (a novel based on the German play *Mädchen in Uniform*) there was a possibility that the "sexual explicitness" in Gamel's novel would bring it the same fate. The novel contained none of the lesbian element that had condemned *The Well of Loneliness* four years earlier, but it was a period of police activity in this area of prosecutions for alleged pornography, and Gollancz may have been wise not to proceed with *One Way of Love*. It was offered to him again in 1934, and again he decided not to proceed. The passages concerned with sexual encounters would seem very innocent if published today, fifty years later; and perhaps because of their innocence they might serve to make the novel unacceptable now to a publisher and to readers. But to a reader interested in the life of Gamel Woolsey this novel is a fascinating document.

Why Gollancz? About this period, the novels of Alyse Gregory and Phillipa Powys were published by Constable; Llewelyn's novel *Apples Be Ripe* was published by Longmans. By 1932 Gamel was married to Gerald Brenan, who had several books already to his name, but none with Gollancz. It may be that some of these publishers were offered Gamel's book, and declined. But in 1932 Louis Wilkinson had published four novels with Gollancz, and he may have used his good offices; for he was a friend not only of the Powyses, but of the Brenans. Unfortunately, the records at the Gollancz offices do not tell us very much.

In mid-May 1929 Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory returned from Anacapri after almost a year of travelling abroad. Shortly after they had settled in at White Nose, Gamel arrived from New York and took rooms in a cottage at East Chaldon, the nearest village to White Nose, which is simply a tall chalk headland with a row of old coastguard cottages at the top. Gamel's life now became entwined and enmeshed with the whole Powys circle—T. F. Powys lived in the village, Gertrude and Phillipa Powys lived on the downs in the farmhouse called Chydyok, Llewelyn at White Nose; and shortly after this, John Cowper Powys came over from New York. Malcolm Elwin tells us that John Cowper had already begun preparing material for *A Glastonbury Romance* and that in late June he went to Glastonbury, taking Llewelyn, Alyse, and Gamel with him. It was soon after this that Gamel found once again that she was pregnant.

And now the former unhappy pattern repeated itself. The doctor whom Gamel consulted advised her of the necessity for an abortion, for he saw evidence of a recurrence of her tuberculosis. And although this may not have been discussed with the doctor, Gamel and Llewelyn could not have failed to consider Llewelyn's own position as a sufferer from the same disease for nearly twenty years; they must have discussed the possible effect on the child of two afflicted parents. Llewelyn, Alyse, and Gamel now set out for London, where a nursing home was found for Gamel, and the others stayed with Llewelyn's brother Bertie. Here Gamel returned to spend her convalescence, and from here in due course they all went back to East Chaldon.

Malcolm Elwin in *So Wild A Thing* makes the suggestion that possibly Gamel was not quite so ill as she professed herself to be. He points out that Llewelyn had some thought that her first pregnancy by him had been terminated by an abortion, and not a miscarriage. Elwin speaks of Gamel's passivity, her indolence, her talent for procrastination. He mentions Gerald Brenan's curious discovery that she had been a whole year in East Chaldon without even troubling to unpack her suitcase.

Elwin was a very exact man, and very well informed; he expressed opinions only when he had weighed them well. It may be doubted if anyone knew the whole background to the Powys family better than he. But it seems to me not unlikely that a pregnant girl might miscarry in a street accident, and Llewelyn Powys's response to her news that she was pregnant on that earlier occasion speaks of her "exciting letter," which was "a lovely one," and this suggests to me that Gamel was not then despondent about the pregnancy, or likely to seek an abortion, and still less so after telling Llewelyn of the coming child. She would surely have had the abortion and said nothing to Llewelyn, who was three thousand miles away and unlikely ever to hear about it.

Abortion at that time was not readily effected in a legal manner, whether in USA or England, and there is no suggestion that Gamel's stay in the London nursing home after that second pregnancy by Llewelyn was in any way a clandestine affair, although of course there were nursing homes in London where illegal abortions could be arranged. The doctor whom Gamel consulted in the first place was presumably the local doctor, or one in the area, perhaps at the county town of Dorchester. Such doctors were very careful indeed at that time; they needed very formidable medical evidence to back up a recommendation for an abortion. It is possible that the doctor consulted was Dr. B. P. O'Neill, a lifelong friend of all the Powys family, who practiced in Chiswick not far from where Bertie Powys lived in Hammersmith. I have myself heard Dr. O'Neill speak of the care a doctor had to take in such matters; for countenancing abortion without sound medical grounds a doctor could

be struck off the register—and many were. So, whomever Gamel consulted, I feel sure the resultant abortion was a genuine medical necessity. The alternative under Elwin's theory would be a deliberate falsehood on Gamel's part, lying about her condition, lying about what the doctor has said. I cannot see Gamel in this light.

There are accounts of the next few months in Elwin's commentary to *So Wild a Thing,* and in Gerald Brenan's *Personal Record.* Elwin admits his debt to Brenan's book, but his own unrivaled knowledge of the Powys story makes the two accounts complement one another; certainly the student should consult both. I do not want here to add a third, for mine would be based largely on the other two. There is yet another viewpoint, and a poignant one, in Alyse Gregory's *The Cry of a Gull,*[4] which contains her journals for these years; and, of course, for those who can reconcile it with other authorities, the whole Gamel-Llewelyn affair is related in Llewelyn's imaginary autobiography, *Love and Death,* about which I shall say something later.

For the moment I shall say only that the strange three-sided relationship continued, for Alyse was a consenting party, although a deeply unhappy one. She loved Llewelyn, and depended on him in her different way as much as he depended on her; and she was growing to love Gamel, also. There is never any reproach of Gamel in her journals. But now in the summer of 1930 Gerald Brenan arrived in East Chaldon for a lengthy stay. He had just returned after living for some ten years in Spain, in order to complete legal business concerning an inheritance which had left him modestly independent in the monetary terms of the time. Among Brenan's friends was the sculptor Steven Tomlin, and among Tomlin's friends was T. F. Powys, whom he thought Brenan should meet. Brenan had just bought a car, so he turned its nose to the south-west, and set out. Within an hour or two of reaching East Chaldon Brenan went for a stroll round the village, and met Gamel Woolsey in a lane running up to the downs. She was walking slowly, stooping to pick up flints. Brenan thought she might be T. F. Powys's sister, whom he had heard lived near Chaldon. After she had passed he wondered idly if she might be a good person to marry, for, as he puts it, "my mind was always running on whom I would marry." Gerald Brenan at this time was thirty-six, Gamel was five years younger.

When Brenan went to take tea with Theodore Powys next day he found the girl there, and learned her name. Over the following weeks they naturally met often, for in so small a village it would be difficult not to meet; and moreover Gamel was a part of the Powys circle, into which Brenan was now admitted. Brenan naturally met Llewelyn and his wife, and Gertrude and Phillipa Powys, and others who came and went, visiting Theodore or Llewelyn. In those years East Chaldon was

[4] Dulverton, England: The Ark Press, 1973.

regularly visited by a number of artists and writers, and at various times some of them were in the village for lengthy periods. Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland were living in a cottage just along the road from T. F. Powys. David Garnett, Middleton Murry, H. M. Tomlinson, Mrs. Thomas Hardy, H. E Bates, Robert Gibbings, Louis Wilkinson, and of course the other Powys brothers and sisters were often to be found somewhere between the village and the sea, on their way to or from the various Powys establishments.

Gerald Brenan began to fall in love with Gamel. She accepted his friendship, but responded more slowly to his love; and he soon learned of her relationship with Llewelyn, which was inexorably corroding the lives of Gamel, Llewelyn and Alyse. Partly from love, and in some degree from pity, Brenan asked her to marry him. After a time, she agreed to do so. There are graphic and moving pages in Brenan's *Personal Record* concerning these weeks, and they are also treated in some detail in the other books I have mentioned, although again some reservation must be made in the case of *Love and Death,* which is in any case presented as fiction, or at least as "imaginary."

When all decisions had been taken Brenan drove Gamel to London in preparation for their life together; they intended to go on for their honeymoon in Ireland. But Gamel was in a weak state—brought on largely by a tempestuous parting from Llewelyn Powys—and the doctor advised her to go into a sanitorium at Mundesley, in Norfolk. Brenan found lodgings in Cromer, a few miles along the coast, and this curious honeymoon began.

It is needful here to recollect that Gamel was still married to Reginald Hunter. There could be no legal marriage with Brenan unless she obtained a divorce, and at that time they did not seriously contemplate this. Neither Brenan nor Gamel had lived a life studying the conventions.

Gamel's involvement with Llewelyn Powys was not easily set aside, and Gerald Brenan accepted this, concerning himself with keeping her as happy as he could. Gamel's love is expressed equally clearly behind the reticence of the poems she wrote for him and about their life together—such quiet and contented poems as the "Song for Gerald," which appears as the dedication of her book, *The Last Leaf Falls;* or "The House in Spain," where the sad notes in the middle are altered at the end when, despite all else, this, she says, is "the heart's country." She could not have felt that way if her life there with Gerald Brenan had not been contented and satisfying.

How far Gamel continued to love Llewelyn is not clear, and was perhaps not clear to her.

In 1931 Grant Richards published the only book of Gamel's poems to appear in her lifetime. This was *Middle Earth,* a collection of thirty-nine poems which must have been selected from the many that were

available. Many of the unpublished poems date from earlier years, and others to which it is less easy to assign a date were certainly earlier than her marriage with Gerald Brenan, as internal evidence makes clear. There are several sonnets in *Middle Earth*, but I think she used this form more readily in later years. Gamel's characteristic mood at this time is well seen in her "variation on a sixteenth-century theme," "Epithalamium":

> Lovers, haste! the dusk has come;
> Why do you waste these pretty hours?
> Everything has gone to sleep,
> Sheep and lambs, and birds and flowers.
> Only you shall waking keep
> All the secrets of the night,
> Hide them from the morning light.
>
> Lover, see her body fine,
> Pull away her fragrant lace,
> And her shift that's white and neat;
> Kiss her body naked so,
> You shall find her flesh more sweet;
> Here's the pasture where sweets grow,
> Here between her opening thighs
> Is the treasure of the wise.
>
> Then upon her curving breast,
> In her closed arms fall asleep.
> All your safety here is found,
> Fast these arms have shut away
> For a night earth's care and wound
> Till the coming of the day.
> Here's all shelter men shall have
> Between a cradle and a grave.

Gamel Woolsey always had an individual voice, whether she wrote in verse or prose. The quantity of her writings was relatively small; perhaps she wrote slowly and carefully. Certainly she was content to use conventional forms, and despite her admiration for T. S. Eliot (for instance) there is little in her poems to suggest the *avant garde* writings of the twenties and thirties. Sylvia Townsend Warner suggested to me that perhaps Gamel was influenced by the sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay, and reminded me of Llewelyn Powys's regard for Miss Millay; he was fond of reading her poems aloud, and no doubt he read them to Gamel. There are certainly affinities of thought in the sonnets of these two poets, but I am not sure that it represents an influence of the one on the other. The cast of Gamel's mind seems apparent from her earliest

surviving work. It is true that Edna St. Vincent Millay was well known for many years before Gamel met Llewelyn, and Gamel must have been aware of Miss Millay's poetry at least from the time of her own first arrival in New York.

Llewelyn Powys tried to get an American publisher for *Middle Earth*, but he had no success; the book was afterwards published by Simon and Schuster. I have no doubt Llewelyn showed the book to Edna Millay when she visited him in the spring of 1934, and it is likely that if the two poets had not met before, they did so in 1934, for Gamel and Gerald were at a cottage in East Lulworth, an easy walk from Llewelyn. There is a charming footnote to this visit in Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Ballad of Chaldon Down." [5]

Gamel Woolsey wrote five books, of which three were published in her lifetime; and she published a translation from the Spanish of a novel by Benito Pérez Galdós, *The Spendthrifts*. She also left many unpublished poems and a collection of chapters of autobiography concerned mainly with her life in Spain. These are notes for a book, rather than the book itself, and are perhaps too fragmentary to print as they stand; but they contain insights which a biographer would find invaluable. The published books are *Middle Earth*, which has been glanced at above; *Death's Other Kingdom*, which is an account of the Spanish civil war as she experienced it at first hand; and *Spanish Fairy Stories*, the title of which is self-explanatory.

Death's Other Kingdom describes how war came to the quiet agricultural community in which Gamel and Gerald were living, in the hills some miles north of Malaga; and Gamel speaks in conversational tones of the tragedy, the violence, and the crass inhumanity of those terrible times. It is a very feminine book, as John Cowper Powys points out in his introduction, and perhaps (the reader might reflect) it would be a splendid thing if we had more books on war written by women. There is none of the glamor of war here, but a quiet and compellingly effective document on man's inhumanity.

The two unpublished novels are essentially chapters of autobiography. The story in *One Way of Love* is Gamel's own, for the period under review, the events narrated, and the feelings Mariana the heroine displays are clearly Gamel's own. *Patterns on the Sand*, on the other hand, is autobiographical more in the South Carolina setting and background than in the events, which would seem to be much more loosely based on Gamel's own life—and indeed, the events are pastoral rather than dramatic. The autobiography here lies in the way the author reacts to and presents the local character and way of life of Charleston around the year 1920. There may be something here—and especially in the

[5] In *Huntsman, What Quarry* (1939), dedicated to Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory.

poetry of the book—which stems from a creative impulse similar to that which lay behind Llewelyn Powys's *Love and Death.*

In considering Gamel Woolsey as a writer I borrow a graphic phrase from Louis Wilkinson writing in an essay about Llewelyn Powys, for it applies as well to her as to him: Gamel Woolsey wrote in exact accordance with herself. That is why I do not acquiesce too easily with Miss Warner's suggestion of Edna Millay's influence. It is possible to find such an influence—here, for example:

> Then in a moment suddenly you were gone,
> The place where you had been was voiceless air—
> Only your folded clothes, a lock of hair
> Were left. Our love betrayed, the summer done.
> And still I searched for you. Ferns, fields and streams
> Were like pale drawings on a yellowed page.
> I tore your fading image in my rage;
> I could not find you, even in sad dreams.
> Oh, love, I know no way to find you. There
> The worlds go wheeling by, east of the sun;
> And death that took you, left me helpless here.
> The faithful heart hopes on; it can not know
> If all its hopes are false; the empty eyes
> Still ask of nothingness, where the dead go.

But this strain of melancholy runs through all the poems, and was present from the first; it may be associated with the "grave countenance" which Gerald Brenan says Gamel put on after her serious illness and operation of 1918-19, when Edna St. Vincent Millay was known only to a few readers. Where there are affinities, they are of circumstance and temperament.

Gamel Woolsey is a poet whom we must read for certain insights, certain intuitions, certain lines and phrases, which if we do not read them here we can read nowhere else, and are by that much impoverished. But the small edition of *Middle Earth* in 1931 can hardly have fallen into many hands, and the bulk of the work Gamel Woolsey wrote remained unpublished. Only now, twelve years after her death in Spain in January, 1968, do we find new collections in her name: *28 Sonnets, The Last Leaf Falls,* and a reprint after forty years of *Middle Earth.* I believe her to be one of the significant American poets of her generation, because she writes of the stuff of human life as felt and suffered and enjoyed *from within;* and if we look back over the centuries at poets who have fallen by the way, and at poets whose work has endured, we shall see that those who have endured were such poets—each in his or her degree—as was Gamel Woolsey.

Your soul may go to heaven's bliss,
They may have that, it was not mine;
But the dear body loved like this . . .

O, will that whiteness bloom again
In cherry or in hawthorn boughs?
The body that was my dear house.

What is the soul? Behind the eyes
A flickering candle flames and dies.

What is the mind? A bitter sword
Wounds the heart with many a word.

But the dear flesh knows lovely ways
To please us through the summer days.

And your kind body fair and strong
Sheltered me when nights were long.

The soul may go to heaven's bliss,
And the wind blow away the mind!
But the dear body loved like this . . .

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One Way of Love and *Patterns on the Sand,* unpublished novels; and certain other unpublished prose essays. Gamel Woolsey left a quantity of unpublished poetry, from which two collections have been made, as listed above, together with a new edition of *Middle Earth.* There remain sufficient unpublished poems for at least one more book, possibly two; after which her *Collected Poems* will be published, with a memoir.

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The author is indebted to many people for information about Gamel Woolsey, and full acknowledgements will be made when the *Memoir* of Gamel Woolsey is published; in the meantime he will be grateful for any other information that readers of this essay may be willing to send him.

ENCLOSURES

L'Arte nel suo mistero
le diverse bellezze insiem confonde . . .
—*La Tosca*

Tu, Cavaradossi!
In your Third Act cell with only
three sides wait for dawn's
trill of bullets. Winged notes
spatter the staff. They enter me.
You at the brink of death, tenor,
cry your blond cry. It fills
the cab of the van where I follow
the interstate like a score.
Tears blur the airport exit,
wash traffic down the ramp.
Coming into Douglas dawn
breaks me.

Water comes up the marble stairs and leaves its salt stain.
Water comes up the marble stairs and then goes down again.

Icarus salutes the airborne sun.
The cockpit is afloat with light.
Icarus at the console runs through
landing procedures, plots his cadenza
falling away to earth.
In the empty
hangar he and the woman
arms belted to his belly, white-
helmeted cycle the square
reverberating shell, hunt down
their deaths full cry.
The high whine rising inside her
she thinks a dictionary—
nenia soricina:
the cry of the shrewmouse
when pierced through.

Water comes up the marble stairs and leaves its salt stain.
Water comes up the marble stairs and then goes down again.

The man in the houseboat remembers land.
He remembers wife and dog and children,
building the carport—ten-penny nails
each stroke the nail sings upward
shorter higher then hard home.
The woman adrift between his arms
arrived and will depart by air.
But by what act or what refraining
has he come to water to hear
slow waves slap and his dumb heart
hammer on the tight walls
of his chest?

Water comes up the marble stairs and leaves its salt stain.
Water comes up the marble stairs and then goes down again.

The practice room is eight by eight
and has four walls. He is singing *Tosca.*
In forests trees fall unheard. Here
notes fall, implode. His whole
skull is resonating. Her body's chambers
fill. The maximum capacity
of the human skull is sixteen hundred
cc's. The human heart
holds more. She is the measure:
of things that are, that they are;
of things that are not, that they are
not. The room is closing
around them. It will not happen
but once.

Water comes up the marble stairs and leaves its salt stain.
Water comes up the marble stairs and then goes down again.

There are places one arrives at
only by water. And only
in the last act. They are palaces
built on water and in them water
is always rising. I close with you,
because I cannot close with you.
Your life runs through my fingers.
Water is blond. It has blue eyes.
This is a poem of transportation.
And transport. These are the grace-notes,
the coup de grâce.

I cannot bring
the poem to closure ever. It runs
on past the page. It rises over
the bed, the table where I write,
over my tall head and I am under
water drowning with open eyes.
I at the brink of life, lover,
cry my dark cry.

Water comes up the marble stairs and leaves its salt stain.
Water comes up the marble stairs and then goes down again.

E non ho amato mai tanto la vita.

ANN DEAGON

NET GAIN

I knew what ecstasy was once,
I was leaning against the breeze
I was hanging, my limbs holding onto
The limbs of a tree up forty feet
In the air I was stretching with it I was
A web for the wind at four.

WARREN FESSLER

LITERARY POLITICS AND THE SHAPING OF THE FROST POETIC CANON

Andrew J. Angyal

During the months following the publication of *A Further Range* (1936), Robert Frost encountered intense and often bitter criticism from liberal and leftist critics who objected to his conservative politics, his opposition to Roosevelt and the New Deal, and the general lack of social awareness in his poetry. Horace Gregory, in the *New Republic*, accused him of making a "strategic retreat" from the social responsibilities of the Thirties; Richard Blackmur dismissed him as not a true "poet" but a "bard"; and Rolfe Humphries castigated him in the *New Masses* as a "reactionary" and a "counter-revolutionary."[1]

Granville Hicks had set the tone for much of this criticism six years earlier with his review of Frost's *Collected Poems* (1930) by charging that Frost's poetry was missing three important thematic elements of Modernism: industrialism, science, and Freudianism.[2] Even as late as 1944, Malcolm Cowley continued this same line of criticism, attacking Frost in the *New Republic* for presenting merely the prosperous and complacent "antique shop" and "tourist home" view of New England life, devoid of its harsh realities. All of these critics seemed to find Frost's pastoralism evasive and somehow intellectually dishonest in an age when, as Rolfe Humphries would have it, poets should put aside their personal voice and subject matter and embrace Marxism and the class struggle.[3]

Reacting as they were to the implicitly conservative tone of *A Further Range* and to Frost's thinly disguised antipathy towards President Roosevelt, especially in "To a Thinker," these critics could not possibly respond to the full range of Frost's work, particularly to those poems that he had deliberately excluded from his collected works because they did not fit into the direction his career was then taking. To otherwise liberal friends such as Louis Untermeyer, however, whom he had known and trusted long enough to exchange opinions in a frank discussion, Frost revealed a much wider range of political responses, particularly in those poems written at an early point in his career, when memories of his work

[1] Donald J. Greiner reviews the history of Frost and his negative critics in chapter three of *Robert Frost: The Poet and His Critics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1974), pp. 109-40, and provides a valuable checklist of these reviews on pages 139-40. Malcolm Cowley's "The Case Against Robert Frost," *New Republic* (September 11, 18, 1944), pp. 312-13, 345-47; and George W. Nitchie's *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1960) provide the most intelligent and articulate arguments for Frost's lack of social responsibility in his poetry.

[2] Granville Hicks, "The World of Robert Frost," *New Republic*, LXV (December 3, 1930), 77-78.

[3] Rolfe Humphries, "A Further Shrinking," *New Masses*, 20 (August 11, 1936), 41-42.

in the Lawrence mills were still fresh enough for him to take a more sympathetic view towards many social issues. The range of these unpublished and uncollected poems, many of them at odds with the tone and spirit of the *Collected Poems* (1930) and *A Further Range* (1936), indicates how deliberately and self-consciously Frost shaped his public voice and indeed the entire direction of his poetic career by the time the New Deal began.

Frost was, moreover, astute enough to realize that his political views would antagonize many critics and reviewers, and he took pains at least in private to justify himself to friends and admirers such as Untermeyer. Almost as if to anticipate these later attacks from his critics in the Thirties, Frost included the following comments in a 4 January 1919 letter to Louis Untermeyer:

> Sometime I must copy you out a poem I did on Bolshevism in 1911 as I saw it spectral over Lawrence at the time of the strike. It will show you where I was.[4]

The letter refers to an unpublished poem entitled "The Parlor Joke" that Frost had written about the time of the 1912 Lawrence mill strike and the labor unrest that had preceded it. A year later Frost copied out the poem he had promised Untermeyer and sent it in a 21 March 1920 letter, presumably offering it for publication, since Untermeyer included "A Parlor Joke" in *A Miscellany of American Poetry* (1920), which he edited and published for the first time that year.[5] Yet Frost never collected this "town" poem, which contains some of his strongest comments on the labor and housing conditions associated with the Lawrence mills. Another observation in Frost's 4 January 1919 letter to Untermeyer may explain his subsequent reluctance to include this poem among his collected works:

> If the poor promised themselves no more than vengeance in the oncoming revolution I'd be with them. It's all their nonsense about making a better or even a different world that I can't stand. The damned fools!—only less damned than the God damned fools who have made and made such a mess of industrialism.[6]

Frost often expressed his misgivings to Untermeyer about being too closely identified with any political position: "The fact is I am neither

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[4] Louis Untermeyer, ed., *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 80.

[5] Louis Untermeyer, ed., *A Miscellany of American Poetry, 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920), pp. 25-28. Untermeyer also reprints Frost's 21 March 1920 letter, with the text of "The Parlor Joke," in *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer*, pp. 99-101. The original manuscript of the poem can be found in the Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts.

[6] Untermeyer, ed., *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer*, p. 80.

a conservative nor a radical and I refuse henceforth to be called either." [7] Yet his innate skepticism and his Emersonian preference for individual rather than collective action led him to a conservative position, particularly in regard to New Deal politics. By the 1930's, even if the poem were first-rate, Frost would have found "The Parlor Joke" politically embarrassing, given his outspoken opposition to Roosevelt's policies. For obvious reasons, then, "The Parlor Joke" remained buried in the 1920 anthology until Untermeyer reprinted the text of the 21 March 1920 letter, which included the poem, in his edition of *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (1963), published after Frost's death.[8]

The editorial choices in *Collected Poems* (1930) and *A Further Range* (1936) suggest that by the Thirties, Frost had made a conscious decision to remain a pastoral poet, a spokesman for rural American values, and deliberately to exclude from his poetry, although not from his awareness, the problems of modern urban and industrial America. His decision to limit the canon of his poetry primarily to pastoral subjects and a corresponding rural (though not uneducated) voice may also have led to the exclusion of two interesting sonnets about the Lawrence mills, "The Mill City" and "When the Speed Comes," both written during the Derry period.[9] The evidence on these poems is inconclusive, however, since Frost probably submitted both pieces to the New York *Independent* before 1912, judging from the manuscript handwriting, and may have afterwards forgotten about them, even though the poems remained in the files of the magazine after it ceased publication and were subsequently transferred to the Huntington Library.[10]

Yet within this pastoral mode, Frost's view of nature did not exclude human nature, and the American working man/farmer was an integral part of his New England landscape. Far from being indifferent to human needs, or to the dignity and worth of labor, as some of his critics have implied, his poems hold as an ideal that human situation in which "love and need are one,/ And the work is play for mortal stakes. . . ." In such poems as "The Tuft of Flowers," "The Code," "The Line-Gang," "The Ax-Helve," and "Two Tramps in Mud Time," Frost pays tribute to Yankee values of hard work, good craftsmanship, and ingenuity. His regional vision evokes an egalitarian society of yeoman farmers and their wives, laborers, and rural townspeople. Rarely except for purposes of contrast does his natural world absolutely exclude the human perspec-

[7] Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[8] See footnote 5.

[9] For additional information on these and other poems written during the Derry Period, see Andrew J. Angyal, "Robert Frost's Poetry Before 1913: A Checklist," *Proof 5: The Yearbook of American Bibliographical and Textual Studies* (Columbia, S. C.: J. Faust & Co., 1977), 67-125.

[10] These manuscripts can be found in the files of the New York *Independent* at the Huntington Library: "The Mill City," c. 1905 (HM 7645) and "When the Speed Comes," c. 1905-07 (HM 7649).

tive; nowhere does Frost show indifference or contempt for human suffering; and nowhere does he countenance the deliberate exploitation or degradation of others. There is no doubt that Frost's conservative tendencies became more pronounced with age, but they were based on a Jeffersonian mistrust of big government and collective solutions, rather than on any inherent misanthropy, and as one can discover from Thoreau and Emerson, this mistrust of federal power runs at least as deep in the New England spirit as the social activism and reformist spirit that Newton Arvin finds among the great New England writers.[11]

It would have been strange for Frost not to align his sympathies with ordinary people, since he belongs with Whitman, Sandburg, and other American poets who grew up in working class or impoverished families. During Frost's childhood in San Francisco, Henry George was a frequent family visitor, and often debated his single-tax theories in the family parlor.[12] Isabelle Moody Frost read *Progress and Poverty* with great interest and found herself attracted to the utopian socialism of George and of Edward Bellamy. When her children were old enough to understand, she even read aloud to them from Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.[13]

After her husband's death in 1885, Mrs. Frost moved back to New England with her two children and tried to support herself as a schoolteacher. Her salary was small, however, and she expected Rob, as the eldest child, to contribute to the family income. From the age of twelve, Frost held a series of summer jobs as a leather worker, farm hand, bobbin boy, and mill hand. These experiences offered a hard and sometimes bitter apprenticeship for a young man who wanted above all else to become a poet. Living in a New England mill town, Frost understood the town-country dichotomy as a brute reality rather than merely as a pastoral convention. Whatever the conditions in the rural New England hill country that Frost found in Derry, they were surely better than those he had known growing up in the Lawrence mill neighborhoods. Frost cryptically hinted at this distaste for Lawrence in a 1913 letter to F. S. Flint:

> When the life of the streets perplexed me a long time ago I attempted to find an answer for myself by going literally into the wilderness, where I was so lost to friends and everyone that not five people crossed my threshold in as many years.[14]

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[11] Newton Arvin, "A Minor Strain," *Partisan Review*, 3 (June 1936), 27-28.

[12] Both Lawrance Thompson and Elizabeth S. Sergeant provide accurate accounts of Henry George's close friendship with the Frost family, first in San Francisco, and later in New England. See Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 12-13, 30, 55, 106; and Sergeant, *Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 8, 20, 215.

[13] Sergeant, *The Trial by Existence*, p. 20.

[14] As quoted in Elaine Barry's *Robert Frost on Writing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973), p. 86.

While Frost is partly mythologizing his own past here, particularly in exaggerating the degree of his isolation on the Derry farm, he certainly did not find street life or factory work in Lawrence, among the mill hands, to his liking. As Lawrance Thompson, his biographer, indicates however, Frost was not without sympathy for the plight of the factory workers:

> Rob had not worked long at Braithwaite's mill before he found that his sympathies were newly allied with the labor organizations which had been stirring up the city with protest meetings. Never before had his mother's Socialist interest in the doctrines of Henry George or her deep admiration for Bellamy's recently published *Looking Backward* made so much sense to him.[15]

Given his distaste for factory work and his eagerness to leave Lawrence, Frost's choice of a rural and pastoral subject matter in the early Derry poems should not seem surprising.[16] It would have also been unusual, however, if none of his Lawrence work experiences had found their way into his poetry. Yet only one poem among his collected work, "A Lone Striker," deals overtly with factory work, and then only in a wry and circumspect manner.[17] The fact that at least three of Frost's other labor poems remained unpublished or uncollected provides an interesting study in the gradual change in Frost's political views and offers a necessary corrective for Frost scholarship, which has often criticized him for the lack of social awareness in his poetry.[18]

About 1905, Frost prepared fair copies of two sonnets describing Lawrence mill conditions and submitted them to the New York *Independent*. Apparently the editor, William Hayes Ward, a clergyman and staunch McKinley Republican, did not find them acceptable for his Congregational weekly, because the poems were never printed and they remained in the files of the *Independent* until they were acquired by the Huntington Library in 1929, after the magazine ceased publication.[19]

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[15] Thompson, *The Early Years*, p. 106.

[16] See John Lynen's excellent discussion of Frost's New England pastoralism in *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 48-79.

[17] Other Frost poems, of course, such as "Mowing," "Mending Wall," "After Apple-Picking," "The Ax-Helve," "The Grindstone," and "Two Tramps in Mud Time," describe various aspects of farm labor.

[18] See especially George Nichie's *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost*.

[19] For a comprehensive history of the New York *Independent*, see Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines* Vol. II: 1850-1865. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), pp. 367-79. Between 1894 and 1916, Frost published eight poems with *The Independent* ("My Butterfly," "The Birds Do Thus," "Caesar's Lost Transport Ships," "Warning," "The Quest of the Orchis," "The Trial by Existence," "Across the Atlantic," and "The Telephone"), but he also submitted additional manuscripts which were never printed. See Robert S. Newdick's "Some Early Verse of Robert Frost and Some of his Revisions," *American Literature*, VII (May 1935), 181-87; and W. B. Shubrick Clymer and Charles R. Green, *Robert Frost: A Bibliography* (Amherst: The Jones Library, Inc., 1937), pp. 81-96 for checklists of Frost's early periodical publications.

These files remained virtually untouched until 1938, when Robert Newdick, who was then preparing a Frost biography, examined them.[20] The list of manuscripts that he sent to Frost rekindled a lively dispute over attribution between Frost and R. B. Haselden, curator of manuscripts at the Huntington Library.[21] Eventually Frost reclaimed and revised two of the manuscripts, "To a Moth Seen in Winter" and "The Rabbit Hunter," and included them in *A Witness Tree*.[22] Yet he apparently never bothered to print "The Mill City" or "When the Speed Comes," perhaps because neither sonnet was first quality and their implicit criticism of factory working conditions might have embarrassed him by the 1930's. Neither of these sonnets was published until 1966, when Thompson printed the text of "When the Speed Comes" in *Robert Frost: The Early Years*, although he never mentioned "The Mill City," and this sonnet has remained unpublished.[23]

Drawing perhaps on Frost's own experiences at the Arlington Mill, the Everett Mill, or Braithwaite's Mill, these poems describe the dreariness and tedium of factory work, particularly the toll that long hours of rapid, machine-paced labor exacted from the human spirit. The first eight lines of the sonnet "When the Speed Comes" depict the starting of the mill machinery in the morning with the ponderous movement of the overhead network of belts and shafts and pulleys that powered the spools and looms. The concluding sestet then describes the endless and fatiguing efforts of the mill workers to keep pace with the machinery, amid the oppressive atmosphere of the factory. Using phrases reminiscent of Henry Adams, Frost stresses the human price of long hours of work matching the harsh and relentless pace of automated machinery. Like Henry Adams confronting the dynamo at the Paris Exposition of 1900, Frost's mill workers also have their spirits broken by the eruption of social and technological forces beyond their control.

The unpublished sonnet "The Mill City" is almost impressionistic in its depiction of the dreary and oppressive working conditions in Lawrence. Although the poem's diction is archaic and perhaps inappropriate for its subject matter, the opening octet contains a powerful description

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[20] Joan St. Clair Crane documents some of the correspondence between Frost and Newdick in *Robert Frost: A Descriptive Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library University of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), pp. 241-46.

[21] Lawrance Thompson reprints the original exchange of letters between Frost and R. B. Haselden, the Huntington manuscript curator, in the *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 354-56.

[22] These two poems appear in earliest manuscript form in a selection of seventeen poems which Frost sent to Susan Hayes Ward in December, 1911. MS: Huntington Library (HM 7237). "To a Moth Seen in Winter" was first published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 18 (Spring 1942), 240-42.

[23] Thompson, *The Early Years*, p. 158, note 8, pp. 516-17. The original manuscript is found in the files of the New York *Independent*, Huntington Library (HM 7649). See also footnote 10.

of the factory workers marching to and from the mills like automatons, almost without hope, lit only by the harsh beams of the factory lights. Frost's persona, a more empathetic version of "The Lone Striker," actively sympathizes with the workers and wonders what the quality of their lives could be. Their one hope, which he celebrates in the sestet, rests in the unwillingness of their spirits to be subjugated by the tyranny of the machine.

Though Frost and his family were living on the Derry farm when he wrote these sonnets, he did not remain entirely aloof from or unconcerned with Lawrence affairs, particularly with the labor unrest that reached its peak in the 1912 strike.[24] In a 25 June 1912 letter to the executor of his grandfather's estate, soon after the settlement of the Lawrence strike, Frost commented:

> I felt almost sorry to be so far from Lawrence when the syndecalist strike was on. How much Lawrence has and has not changed since I left the town twelve years ago! The Letts and Portugese and the Greeks and the Syrians are all quite new. But at the same time they appear not to have altogether displaced the older population. I never heard of the Syrian dentist who was dying a martyr to the cause at the hands of the militia. But I was going to say I knew all the other people the papers mentioned from Clark Cart to John Breen. I went to one college with Danny Murphy, to another with Louis Cox. I went to the New Hampshire St. School with John Breen. I am proudest to have known John—as you may suppose.[25]

While Frost may not have approved of the tactics used by the strikers, especially the violence and civil unrest, he was apparently sympathetic with their cause; otherwise there is no way to account for the remarkable labor poem he wrote during this time, entitled "The Parlor Joke."

Frost's "town poem," as he referred to it in his 21 March 1920 letter to Untermeyer, contains a sharp indictment of the New England factory owners' exploitation of cheap immigrant labor and their indifference to the housing and living conditions of their workers. In this 78-line poem,

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[24] For additional information on the Lawrence Strike of 1912, see Donald B. Cole's *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), pp. 177-194; Maurice B. Dorgan's *History of Lawrence, Massachusetts* (Cambridge: The Murray Printing Company, 1924), pp. 151-58; and Justus Ebert's *The Trial of a New Society* (Cleveland: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1913). See also Paul F. Brissender, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957).

[25] Thompson, ed., *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, p. 48. The John Breen mentioned in the letter was probably the son of the first Irish mayor of Lawrence. During the 1912 strike, he was implicated in a plot to plant dynamite next to a building used by the strike leaders. Frost's comments may have been an attempt to ingratiate himself with his grandfather's estate lawyer during a time when Frost was anxious to receive his settlement and leave with his family for England. Cf. Cole, *Immigrant City*, pp. 181-84.

written in thirteen six-line stanzas, Frost depicts the callousness of the Yankee industrialists who treated the problem of maintaining a constant labor supply as if it were no more than a matter of human engineering: to be regulated by raising and lowering the sluice gates of the immigrant flood to keep their wages as low as possible. The middle stanzas then ridicule the affected mannerisms of the Lawrence *nouveaux riches*, who recoiled in mock horror from the immigrant poor and asserted their superiority "with a manner and a glance." Continuing his verbal thrusts, Frost compares the spread of the tenement neighborhoods up the fashionable hillsides of Lawrence to a "bog of sphagnum" climbing the side of a mountain.

The most remarkable image in the poem is perhaps the Shelleyan revolutionary spirit that Frost conjures, a dumb and still inarticulate embodiment of human suffering that looms over the city. This spectral shape, which Frost later identified as the spirit of "Bolshevism," may have been influenced by his early reading of Shelley's "Queen Mab" and *Prometheus Unbound*.[26] Perhaps alluding in the poem's concluding stanza to Lawrence's periodic labor strikes of 1882, 1894, 1902, and 1912, Frost implies that the mill owners have mortgaged their future in order to maintain a constant supply of cheap labor.[27] Once again, Frost withheld this poem from his collected works, perhaps for political reasons, after its publication in 1920. Instead, he reworked some of the descriptive material from these rejected poems when he wrote "The Lone Striker," in which the point of view has changed from sympathy and engagement with the plight of the factory workers to an ironic aloofness and isolation, in which the lone striker turns away from the closed factory gate to pursue, like Thoreau, his separate business.

Frost's exclusion of these three early labor poems, however, raises important questions about the completeness of the Frost "canon" in the 1969 collected edition of his poetry. His editor, Edward Connery Lathem, takes the justifiable position that Frost

> . . . left at his death in 1963 no unpublished, completed poems that there is any definite reason to believe he would have included in such a collection as this. The time will come for a variorum or definitive edition in which it will be appropriate to print every scrap of verse that can be attributed to Frost, but the materials are not yet adequately at hand.[28]

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[26] See Frost's 4 January 1919 letter in *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer*, p. 80. Thompson documents Frost's early interest in Shelley in *The Early Years*, pp. 136-37; and in the *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, p. 20.

[27] Cf. John Higham's *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) for further discussion of the impact of immigrant labor on the domestic American work force.

[28] Publisher's note to *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed., Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. iv.

That variorum edition, however, may be years away, and in the meantime such poems as "When the Speed Comes," "The Mill City," and "The Parlor Joke" are relegated to a critical limbo, inaccessible to scholarship.

The shaping of the Frost poetic "canon" is a matter of especial bibliographic, critical, and aesthetic importance, yet it cannot even begin to be resolved until scholars know what Frost omitted, as well as what he retained in the authoritative edition of his poetry. Until then, we can only speculate about the fate of many such apparently completed but unpublished or uncollected poems. In the case of these three early labor poems, the questions are particularly intriguing. Was it that Frost, who was fiercely independent, did not want to be identified with Sandburg, Lindsey, and Masters, whose poetry was proletarian in its sympathies? [29] His decision, in any case, amounted to a conscious limiting of his poetry largely to a rural New England landscape, however metaphorically extensive that later proved to be.[30] Was it also that the Frost canon, as it had shaped itself by the 1930's, allowed little room for poems such as "The Parlor Joke"? The thematic distance between "The Parlor Joke" and "A Lone Striker" represents a range from a youthful Shelleyan social protest to a measured, Thoreauvian affirmation of personal freedom. If these three labor poems indicate a "road not taken" for Frost, then scholars ought at least to be aware of this choice.

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[29] Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems*, in particular, was publishel by Henry Holt and Company (also Frost's publisher) in 1916, the same year as *Mountain Interval*. As Thompson and others indicate, Frost was keenly jealous of his poetic reputation and jealous of any potential rivals. See Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. xvi-xvii, 179-80.

[30] Theodore Morrison presents a compelling argument for the range of Frost's poetry in "Frost: Country Poet and Cosmopolitan Poet," *Yale Review*, LIX (Winter 1970), 179-96.

REVIEWS

A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977, 276 pp. $15.00.

Philip Henderson. *Tennyson: Poet and Prophet.* London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 222 pp. $16.95.

Of the major Victorian poets Tennyson has been the most difficult to make palatable to modern taste. Irreverent writers like Osbert Sitwell aimed witty quips at eminent Victorians, dubbing the former laureate "Alfred Lawn Tennyson." W. H. Auden said of Tennyson, ". . . he had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; there was little about melancholy that he didn't know; there was little else that he did." Fortunately, we are now far enough removed from the Victorians that we do not have to throw bricks at the great panjandrums of the age.

Efforts to reclaim Tennyson began with Sir Harold Nicolson's *Tennyson* (1923), which argued that only a part of Tennyson's poetry was acceptable to modern poetic taste—that which reflected his melancholia; the remainder, which had spoken in sanguine tones about progress and the reconciliation of science and religion, could be dismissed as period furniture. As late as 1948 critics were still trying to set Tennyson's poetic house in order. P. F. Baum in *Tennyson Sixty Years After* claims that "Now . . . we are able to separate the 'true' from the 'false'. . . ." According to Professor Baum, Tennyson was true when he followed his instinct for beauty and false when he attempted to employ his mediocre intellectual endowments.

This tendency in Tennyson criticism has led to the "two voices" theory expressed in E. D. H. Johnson's *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* and Jerome Buckley's chapter on Tennyson in *The Victorian Temper* entitled "The Two Voices." The bifurcated approach prevailed during the 1950's and 1960's, giving rise to many ingenious readings whereby Tennyson's polarities seemed to be limited only by the number of poles that critics could imagine; thus, Tennyson was analyzed for the tensions that he would yield, namely in terms of such opposites as art versus society, sense versus soul, doubt versus faith, progress versus regression, past versus present.

Dwight Culler's recent study *The Poetry of Tennyson* (1977) attempts a median position between the school that would scrap all that is topical in Tennyson and the school that would divide and critique. Professor Culler's book is comprehensive in scope and interprets the entire career of Tennyson as a poet, with detailed discussions of Tennyson's apprentice works "The Devil and the Lady," "Armageddon," and "Timbuctoo," and a final chapter on Tennyson's later lyrics in which Culler explicates such often anthologized but seldom analyzed poems as "Crossing the Bar." It is the major works of Tennyson, however, which receive the greatest emphasis, and lengthy separate chapters are devoted to *In Memoriam, Maud* and *Idylls of the King;* the reading of these works provides the basis for Culler's argument.

The book follows a loose chronological structure in which Culler treats Tennyson's poems singly and by groups. The eleven chapters of his study are in a sense separate essays, and indeed the book could be read with profit in a piecemeal way. Yet, this book does not lack cohesiveness; each discussion of Tennyson's poems creates a context for the next cluster of poems in a way that sets up a creative interplay. Every chapter has running through it the thread of Culler's thesis that every Tennyson poem contains its own literary history. What is meant by this can be seen in Culler's discussion of Tennyson's poetry written in the 1820's and early 1830's which is labelled "the poetry of apocalypse." The term derives from one of the two schools of nineteenth-century geology: the "uniformitarians," who claimed that the earth had assumed its present form through gradual processes of change over immense periods of time; and "catastrophists," who held that the earth's contours and creatures were the result of violent catastrophes, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and floods.

In Chapter Two Culler uses the concepts of catastrophism and uniformitarianism to discriminate among literary figures of the Victorian period. Carlyle, for example, was obviously of the apocalyptic temper, while George Eliot is for the most part uniformitarian. Newman, in moving from Evangelicalism to Catholicism, exemplifies a writer who began as a catastrophist and became a uniformitarian. The movement of the great Victorian writers was generally away from catastrophism, which implies visionary imagination and revelation, toward the more moderate and measured views of uniformitarianism; it was, according to Culler, a shift from the Romantic to the Victorian frame of mind.

Tennyson, who began as a catastrophist in a literary sense, wrote his early poems under the influence of Milton, the great Romantics, and the English Evangelical revival with its emphasis on some terrible final destruction and violent end of the world. During Tennyson's middle years he moved toward a more rational and scientific understanding of change, and his eschatology was modified: he no longer believed in a sudden ending but held that human history would be played out through long cycles of uniform change whereby progress was inevitable. In his later years, as he grew more pessimistic, his vision again darkened and he moved back toward catastrophism.

Culler's argument is more convincing in the longer poems than in the lyrics. His chapter on *In Memoriam* proves to be a lode of new information and insights. Although he does discuss the poem in typical fashion by breaking its 130 sections into thematic blocks, Culler is best when explaining why Tennyson could not employ the conventions of pastoralism in his elegy. First, Hallam was much closer to Tennyson than the other friends were to their elegists; therefore, he eschewed the artificialities of the classical genre. Second, Tennyson avoided the pastoral elegy because he could not employ its most characteristic feature, the reversal or peripeteia. Milton could be consoled for the loss of King by his belief in orthodox Christian doctrines; Shelley could celebrate Keats's death because of his belief in Platonic idealism, but Tennyson, who at this stage in his life was a "formal agnostic," could not be certain of Arthur Hallam's immortality. Thus, Tennyson was denied the convention of the "discovery" which is an essential part of the elegiac machinery.

Culler further explains Tennyson's choice of a sequence of meditative lyrics for his elegy by arguing that "in his mature poetry he is a gradualist rather than catastrophic in his assumptions" (p. 150). According to Culler, the pastoral elegy is apocalytic in form and has a planned peripeteia where recovery takes place suddenly, whereas Tennyson gradually moves from sorrow to consolation in *In Memoriam*.

In his most daring application of the geological metaphor to literary form, Culler writes:

> We should consider what Lyell required for the formation of mountains and seas in the exactly contemporaneous *Principles of Geology*. For *In Memoriam* is to *Lycidas* as Lyell's *Principles of Geology* is to the Mosaic cosmogony. It operates not by means of volcanic eruptions and deluges but by subsidence and erosion (p. 150).

After *In Memoriam*, Culler's most interesting remarks are on *Maud*, which he calls "a psychomachy within the national soul" (p. 194) wherein the chaos of the speaker's state of mind is emblematic of the entire Victorian psyche, which Tennyson felt was diseased by contending passions of avarice and spasms of morbidity. The much criticized conclusion of the poem that has the speaker resolving his problems by embarking for the war in the Crimea is explained less convincingly by Culler, who says, "What the end of Tennyson's drama seems to mean is that the evils of the age are so great that they cannot be assuaged gradually by the holy power but only catastrophically by holy power of war" (p. 204). One does not need to resort to

apocalyptic theory here to explain Tennyson's reason for ending *Maud* on such a jingoistic note. Tennyson was living on the Isle of Wight at this time, and as he was writing this scene he could look out from his study windows and see the ships of the line loaded with troops moving down the Solent bound for the Crimea. Always a patriot, Tennyson felt the proper place for an Englishman, whether mad or sane, was on the deck of a warship bound to fight the barbaric Russians. Yet, no one would argue that his martial sentiment makes the conclusion any more convincing.

Although Culler devotes some discussion to areas of Tennyson's verse little read today, it seems beyond the powers of criticism to revive interest in some of the *English Idyls* which Culler himself says "seem less the product of the muse than of one who is 'bemused' by the problems of modern life" (p. 128). One might sum up the achievement of Culler's study of Tennyson by first pointing out here he does not advance his views with the dogmatism that he occasionally fell into in his earlier books on Newman and Arnold; in *The Poetry of Tennyson* his views are proposed more tentatively and he does not treat his ideas as established facts. Professor Culler's book will not give us a totally new way of looking at Tennyson, but by setting Tennyson's entire poetic career against Victorian scientific controversy, the changing literary structures, and the shifting conception Tennyson had of himself and the role of the poet, he has made us better able to understand the Victorian elements in Tennyson's poetry, to see his contributions to the new genres like the dramatic monologue, and to comprehend better the wholeness of Tennyson's career as a poet.

Aside from Culler's lucid evaluations of Tennyson's poetry and his astute application of the background material, the most appealing aspect of this book is its freedom from critical jargon. Although the intended audience is academic, there is much here which the non-specialist could follow and even appreciate.

The late 1970's are a good time for students of Tennyson's life because the great collections of his letters and papers, which have so long been in private hands or under restriction, are now open to the public and are available for quotation. In addition, there is forthcoming a definitive edition of Tennyson's correspondence by C. Y. Lang and E. R. Shannan. It would be natural to expect a new study of Tennyson's life and works to incorporate the wealth of information now accessible, but this is not the case with Philip Henderson's study of Tennyson's life and works entitled *Tennyson: Poet and Prophet*. The choice of subtitle is somewhat misleading; there is no critical *aperçu* in this book that indicates a concern with Tennyson as either "poet or prophet." In fact, one wonders why the book was undertaken at all. Henderson neither breaks new ground in tracing the biographical background of Tennyson's poems nor attempts to explore the Victorian age which Tennyson's career spanned. Perhaps it is not fair to judge too harshly an author who makes such slight claims for our attention in the first place. Henderson writes in the preface, "The present book makes no other claim than to be a personal interpretation, the record of the rediscovery of a great poet . . . (p. xii)."

The book is a *réchauffé* of biography and criticism which gives a straightforward accounting of the main events of Tennyson's life. A prominent feature of Mr. Henderson's study of Tennyson's life which deserves remarking is his use of extensive quotations and paraphrases from contemporary memoirs and journals, especially Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* of his father and the definitive biography of Sir Charles Tennyson, the grandson of the poet.

From these sources Henderson constructs a dispassionate account of the private life and family background. All the stock anecdotes are given, such as Tennyson's flinging himself down as a boy and weeping as he writes out the words in the sand that Byron is dead. The rant and gloom that surrounded family life at the Somersby, the misadventures of Tennyson's morbid brothers, the disappointment at the reviews of the early volumes of his poems, and the trauma that Hallam's death caused are

predictably recorded, but without any new light being shed or new perspective gained by re-examination of the facts.

In dealing with biographical matters, Henderson has a penchant for showing how Tennyson appeared to his contemporaries; he cites numerous impressions of Tennyson recorded by the Carlyles, Browning, Edward Fitzgerald, Henry James, Mrs. Cameron, Lewis Carroll, Hawthorne, and even Queen Victoria. We learn from a Cambridge classmate that Tennyson wore dirty shirts and spoke with a broad Lincolnshire accent. Carlyle saw him as a "life-guardsman spoilt by making poetry." He further described him as "a fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured man . . . dusty, smoky, free and easy, who smokes infinite tobacco." Hawthorne reports that Tennyson "might well enough pass for a madman at any time there being a wildness in his aspect. . . ." The Irish poet William Allingham noted that he was a "strange almost spectral figure."

As well as noticing his smoking habits and appearance, Tennyson's contemporaries remarked on a more significant trait—his frustrated sexual desires. During the 1830's Tennyson had become infatuated with three young women, all of whom turned him down except Emily Sellwood, to whom he wrote a poem declaring that he was "sick of single sleep." Shortly afterwards he asked her to be his bride. He was twenty-seven years old at this time, and fourteen years—a long engagement even by Victorian standards—would intervene before he would wed Emily and cease sleeping alone. These years of continence must have worn heavily on Tennyson because Jane Carlyle reports with malicious wit that "he wanted to marry and gave it out that he 'must have a woman to live beside—would prefer a lady, but cannot afford one; and so must marry a maid-servant.'" Mrs. Carlyle goes on to say that she is writing Tennyson on behalf of her housemaid, who she says is "quite a superior character in her way" (p. 60). Thus, we are shown how Tennyson's longing to be married became the gossip of Victorian drawing rooms. It is unfortunate that there are not more enlivening episodes for Henderson to document, but Tennyson was a writer who led an uneventful life; hence, biographies which touch primarily on the external events are apt to be dull. The real drama of Tennyson's life was played out internally and is reflected in his poetry, which forms a record of Tennyson's inner debate on the nature and purpose of art and life. There were dark recesses of his soul with which he kept an unconscious communion; it was from these depths rather than outer stimulus that his creativity derived, and his life, which had pathological episodes, calls for psychological interpretation.

In Chapter Six Henderson delves briefly into this subterranean stratum. Here he treats the neglected homosexual implications of many of the lines of *In Memoriam*. Noting how often Tennyson casts himself as the female in his relationship with Hallam, Henderson broaches the question as to what kind of love is being celebrated in *In Memoriam*. His answer is that in Tennyson's strong affection for Hallam there was something very close to homosexual feeling that he may or may not have been aware of. This view is based on evidence such as cancelled lines from the poem which describe his friendship with Hallam in passionate terms:

> They madly drank each other's breath
> With breast to breast in early years.
> They met with passion and with tears,
> Their every parting was a death (p. 83).

Henderson finds further evidence in documenting the homosexual nature of this friendship in a line that remains in the poem in which Tennyson describes his love for Hallam as "a love passing the love of a woman." Additional suspicion is aroused by the fact that the private letters exchanged by Tennyson and Hallam were destroyed by the families of both men upon their deaths. Significantly, it was not the post-Freudian generation who first sensed that *In Memoriam* might be concerned with

"the love that dare not speak its name." The Reverend Charles Kingsley, ever alert for unmanly prurience, wrote a review which appeared in *Frazer's Magazine* in 1850. Here, as Henderson points out, Kingsley finds in Tennyson's lament for his dead friend "a successor to the old tales of David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, Socrates and Alcibiades, Shakespeare and his nameless friend . . ." (p. 84).

Tennyson wrote a great deal, and any book which attempts to deal with both his life and work has to be compromised to some extent. The bias of Henderson's book is biographical, but there is some elementary effort at interpretation of traditional anthology choices; *Maud, In Memoriam,* and *The Idylls of the King* are given the most attention. It is as a critic that Henderson is most disappointing. He typically approaches a poem by citing at length from the text; passages of several pages are not uncommon. This practice in itself is not without merit; it is good to be referred to salient lines from an author's work, but Henderson's quotations strike one as "filler" which is being used to flesh out an otherwise thin book. There is no evaluation, analysis, or interpretation of Tennyson's poetry beyond the most rudimentary sort of commentary. For example, we are told that "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" is "Tennyson's rejection of his former ideas and hopes of human progress" (p. 67). Where we do find actual criticism it is not by Henderson, but taken from other authorities, most frequently from Christopher Ricks, who is quoted whenever there is the need for some actual critical opinion.

Although there is not much discerning criticism presented in the pages of this book, a reader who wants the basic facts about Tennyson will find Henderson's discussions generally lucid, but the prose sometimes runs to unevenness because of the too-numerous quotations from other authorities. If one wants to know no more than *what* happened to Tennyson during his life, this book will serve; but if one wishes to know *why* Tennyson was the kind of writer he was, this book will not provide the answer. The intricate relationship between the life and the work of Tennyson awaits a more convincing analysis.

HALLMAN B. BRYANT
Clemson University

A. Scott Berg, *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978, 498 pp. $9.95.

Carole Klein, *Aline.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979, 352 pp. $12.95.

Thomas Wolfe's pride in having come to know and enjoy the friendship and love of Max Perkins and Aline Bernstein and his sorrow in pushing them aside to devote himself more fully to the quenchless demands of his art underlay Wolfe's attempts to capture the minds, talents, and hearts of Maxwell Perkins and Aline Bernstein and to give them prominent places in his fiction. Had no biographer ever had the good sense to add scope and corrective details to the images Wolfe left us of these strong forces in America's cultural history, we should have keenly felt their presence nonetheless. On the whole, I believe that Wolfe would be proud to see what Berg and Klein have done to give us fuller measures of his friends' lives.

Carole Klein's *Aline* narrates, in novelistic detail, the paradisiacal days when, in the lake country of England, Wolfe began the story of Eugene Gant and his family. Ms. Klein then traces the events of those months and years wherein torment was joined with triumph, doubt wedded to belief, anguish mingled with joy, despair mixed with hope. During the time *Look Homeward, Angel* was aborning Aline moved from success to success in her work as a stage designer. Wolfe, meanwhile, completed his novel, found an agent with Aline's help, and awaited a decision from a publisher.

The long-awaited word came from Perkins, who by this time had already forged strong ties to two of the authors, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, who would make

his erstwhile timid house, Scribners, the talk of the literary circles. The bond he would form with Wolfe over the next four years would find him, as a surrogate father and overeager but well-intentional helpmate, at odds with Wolfe's jealous and sometimes ireful muse. This psychic tugging match, heretofore reported in the biographies of Elizabeth Nowell and Andrew Turnbull and particularly in Wolfe's letters, becomes no prettier in the more detailed recountings offered by Berg and Klein. To both Aline and Max, Wolfe became so emotionally indebted that he could see no easy way to clear accounts with them.

His inability to discharge his emotional debts gracefully left Wolfe, in reality and appearance, a bungling friend, an ingrate, and a cad. But had his esteem for them and his sense of fair play not prevailed in the end, American fiction could not lay claim to two of its finest characters, Esther Jack and Foxhall Edwards, for, together with his depiction of his bungling, caddish ingrate, George Webber, Wolfe portrayed both the warts and wings of Aline and Max.

In the pages of these two biographies, Wolfe stands like a rough-hewn boulder. So large did he become for Klein that she slighted the writings of Aline, giving fewer than five full pages to Aline's five books, to highlight the tender but tempestuous events leading to the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*. For Berg, Wolfe had to be dealt with as Max's surrogate son and as the source of the greatest event in his role as editor. Despite the many pages upon which Wolfe thrust himself in Berg's study of Max, the other gigantic forces in Perkins' life, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, do not receive less than their due. Max emerges as a pleasant eccentric but gains stature as a mentor, critic, counselor, and champion. To these roles, as Berg repeatedly shows, we should now add Perkins's role as an idea-giver. Book after book, from authors great and small, owe their germ idea to Perkins.

Both biographers had access to materials and sources untouched or untapped by earlier researchers. Klein drew heavily from unpublished correspondence of Wolfe and Bernstein, and Berg discovered a fruitful cache of letters to Elizabeth Lemmon, Perkins's confidante and friend for many years. Their interviews also produced some fresh opinion, some of it, as in the case of Aline's theatrical friends, tainted with lingering bitterness.

Specialists in the writing of the Lost Generation will reap a good harvest here. And students looking to find ways of understanding important literary forces at work in America during the period from the mid 1920's to the mid 1940's will not go away empty-handed. Two productive and energizing talents come to life in these pages and so does an absorbingly interesting era in American letters.

JOHN IDOL
Clemson University

Flannery O'Connor: The Habit of Being, Letters selected and edited by Sally Fitzgerald, with an introduction by the editor. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978. 617 pp., $15.00.

This volume is a selection of Flannery O'Connor's letters from early 1948 to her last letter in 1964. The letters offer an insight into O'Connor's world: her orthodox Catholicism, her literary taste, and her interpretation of her own work. She lived on "Andalusia," the family farm just out of Milledgeville, Georgia, but there is no indication in her letters that she felt isolated, nor is there any self-pity. Her correspondence helped prevent any feeling of isolation.

The letters give us a detailed portrait of a quick-witted and sincere writer. In her ironic, humorous tone, she describes life on "Andalusia" and its visitors, but the two central topics are the Church and literature. O'Connor displays a complete

acceptance of her faith and a pitiless criticism of her own "faults," and comments often on literary subjects. There is relatively little about the novels *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) in the selection, perhaps because O'Connor's busiest letter writing period seems to have been 1956-57.

Of her stories O'Connor seems to have preferred "The Artificial Nigger." She writes that it was meant to convey "the redemptive quality of the Negro's suffering for us all." Otherwise she chose to observe the traditions of the society she had fed on, and she thought it "only fair" that she should do so (April 25, 1959). She received many questions from readers about "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and she never tired of explaining that the story illustrates the effect of divine grace on "unwilling" recipients. Professional critics irritated her, especially symbol-hunting critics. When asked about the naming of Mrs. May in "Greenleaf" by a "Professor of English," O'Connor was too irritated not to reply: "As for Mrs. May, I must have named her that because I knew some English teacher would write and ask me why. I think you folks sometimes strain the soup too thin. . . ." (June 6, 1964). The technique was unconscious, the vision all.

She did not think much of critics, but she was herself a keen critic, as her letters affirm. Whatever we may think of her judgements, they are at least not boring: Conrad Aiken makes her "sick just to read about"; James Branch Cabell is a "dope"; a chapter from *Pictures from an Institution* she calls "good Randall Jarrell" but "not good fiction." New Criticism can easily be mistaken for "pure gibberish." Nelson Algren's talent is "wasted by sentimentalism and a certain overindulgence in the writing"; *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is "dull" and Truman Capote makes her "plumb sick, as does Mr. Tennessee Williams"; and "anybody that admires Thomas Wolfe can be expected to like good fiction only by accident."

These instant opinions were not meant to be read by the public. They were written jokingly to intimate friends and do not necessarily represent O'Connor's final idea of any writer. Yet, the tendency tells us about her taste, and about the kind of writing she hoped to avoid. But there were literary heroes, too. She preferred E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* to his *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and she read Virginia Woolf. She did not care for Valéry, Gide or Beauvoir, but she read all of Proust and called it "great stuff," adding, however, that she had "no desire to read any of it again." Among the critics she liked Percy Lubbock and Richard Chase. She thought Leslie Fiedler was able to recognize a good thing when he sees it, "even if he does have to wrap it up in Freud." She complained in another letter that "the Freudian technique can be applied to anything at all with equally ridiculous results."

Most of Flannery O'Connor's literary "heroes" are from the South. She owned at least seven novels by William Faulkner, but two appear not to have been read. She admired Faulkner for his technical achievement in *The Town;* and the Joe Christmas figure of *Light in August* was very clear in her mind. She did, however, try to steer clear of Faulkner when she was writing. Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Fiction* was a decisive influence; she calls it an "invaluable help" and recommends it to three of her friends. She did not read *I'll Take My Stand* until shortly before her death in 1964. But the letters prove how insignificantly she was influenced by both classics and contemporaries. She was not a product of academia. Her work originated almost exclusively in her own mind and in her own world.

The O'Connor wit is the most appealing feature of the letters for critic and general reader. Her humor is delightful. She did not want to be called "Mary F. O'Connor," for she thought it sounded like "somebody's wash-woman." Nor did she like the recorded sound of her own voice: "like a very old woman with a clothespin on her nose and her teeth in a dish beside her." She never tired of pointing out to new friends that she lived in a bird sanctuary with a population of 12,000, "people, not birds." When she lived with the Fitzgeralds, she observed their daily lives with

an unfailing eye: "they said the Benedictine grace before meals in Latin every day while the dinner got cold."

There are details in this selection that will irritate scholars. It is certainly in order to leave out the word "Baptist" if the editor feels that it would offend the Baptists, but it is less than satisfactory that the deletion is not indicated. The use of ellipsis is often confusing. See, for example, the letter to Elizabeth McKee of June 29, 1955. Do the ellipsis periods in that letter indicate that a part of a sentence has been left out, or is it perhaps a whole sentence which has been deleted? The reader cannot tell from the text; for all he knows a whole section may be missing. There are other silent deletions which are disturbing, if only from a scholar's point of view. See, for example, the letter to Katherine Anne Porter of Jan. 22, 1960: one comma, one parenthesis and one question mark have been deleted and one period has been *added,* all of this silently.

It is regrettable that there are no letters from before 1948. It would have been of a particular value for critics to be able to study the letters from the State University of Iowa student days. There are other gaps in the selection. One of the essential figures in O'Connor's literary life was Caroline Gordon; it is unfortuate that so few of the letters to her are reprinted here. And in one of the letters O'Connor mentions that she likes Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer,* and adds that she has corresponded with Percy for a couple of years. But there is only one short note to Walker Percy in the selection.

A selection from the private letters of a writer who had been dead for only fifteen years demands much discretion by the editor, and Sally Fitzgerald has shown efficiency and much diplomacy. The friends of Flannery O'Connor who were kind enough to offer their personal letters and who wanted to remain anonymous have been allowed to remain so. The editor's sensitivity in the selecting has prevented any breach of privacy. And the readers can be grateful that we did not have to wait any longer for these letters. We are, however, constantly reminded that this is a *selection,* and *not* a selection with its emphasis on the literary biographical. This worthwhile selection can only be a preparation for the final edition of the complete letters.

JAN NORDBY GRETLUND
Aarhus, Denmark

Kenneth Hopkins, *Gamel & Rex.* North Walsham, England: Warren House Press, 1979, 22 pp.

The life of Gamel Woolsey of Aiken, South Carolina, is sketched elsewhere in this issue of *SCR* by Mr. Hopkins. Of the twenty-two sonnets in *Gamel & Rex,* Mr. Hopkins says, "This poem is based loosely on incidents in Gamel Woolsey's unpublished autobiographical novel, *One Way of Love,* which was set up in type in 1932, and withdrawn before publication." Mr. Hopkins has written his poem in the first person, from Gamel's point of view, to tell the story of Gamel's marriage to Rex Hunter and the collapse and aftermath of the marriage. Mr. Hopkins makes clear the frustration of this marriage, and his ending lines are quite affecting:

> I am like one new-born, who has retained
> Nothing to show from where he was before,
> Not even a wisp of wool with which to clad
>
> The cold flesh quivering, the cold heart shrinking,
> The cold mind sickened by its sterile thinking.

FRANK DAY
Clemson University

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By Sue Lile Inman

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CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREW J. ANGYAL is Assistant Professor of English at Elon College and the author of several articles on Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens. He is working on a critical biography of Loren Eiseley for Twayne Publishers.

PHILIP COOPER is the author of *The Autobiographical Myth of Robert Lowell.* He teaches at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

ANN DEAGON is the author of several books of poems, including *There Is No Balm in Birmingham.* She is Professor of Classics at Guilford College.

WARREN FESSLER is a poet from Cleveland, Ohio.

The poems of DEBORAH ANN GAGE have appeared in numerous journals and reviews, including *The Texas Quarterly* and *Black Maria.* She lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, where she teaches high school part-time.

KENNETH HOPKINS, F.R.S.L., has published more than a dozen collections of poems, as well as eight crime novels and several books for children. His critical works include *Walter de la Mare* and *The Poets Laureate.* He lives in North Walsham, Norfolk, England.

PAUL LAKE teaches at the University of Santa Clara and is one of the editors of *Occident.* He has published a book of poems, *Bull Dancing.*

JOYCE CAROL OATES is the distinguished author of such works of fiction as *Do with Me What You Will* and *Expensive People.*