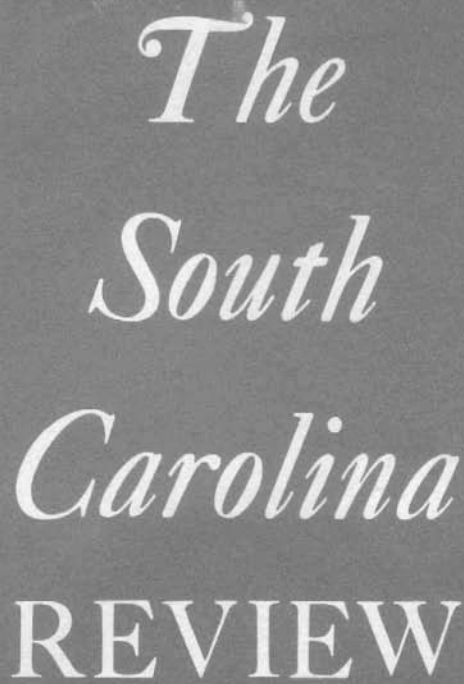

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WALKER PERCY SPECIAL ISSUE

The following essays are intended to honor Walker Percy on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday on May 28, 1981. They are papers read, with minor changes since, at the Modern Language Association at Houston, Texas, on December 30. The interview was obtained by Jan Gretlund of Odense University, who stopped by Walker Percy's home in Covington, Louisiana, after the meeting in Houston sponsored by the Society for the Study of Southern Literature. The meeting attracted a large audience, indicative of the interest in Walker Percy's works.

R. J. C.

INTERVIEW WITH WALKER PERCY IN HIS HOME IN COVINGTON, LOUISIANA, JANUARY 2, 1981

JAN NORDBY GRETLUND
Odense University, Denmark

I *KIERKEGAARD'S STAGES*

GRETLUND: To what extent do you consider your first three novels "a gloss on Kierkegaard"?

PERCY: That's my own expression. It is an exaggeration, but I wanted to pay due homage to Kierkegaard. Insofar as one thinks in a philosophical frame of reference, when I was writing *The Moviegoer,* also *The Last Gentleman,* and maybe also *Love in the Ruins,* I *was* thinking in terms of the three spheres of existence. It is a very convenient frame of reference, particularly when you are writing a novel of quest, pilgrimage, or search about a young man "on life's way," as Kierkegaard would say, to think of him going through the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and then the religious. Although most of the novels are about the aesthetic stage.

GRETLUND: Isn't there something to be said for living on the aesthetic stage? As Binx Bolling does initially.

PERCY: Of course. Kierkegaard would certainly agree. His hero of the aesthetic was Mozart and his Don Giovanni. He loved Mozart more than any other composer. The aesthetic stage is the stage of the highest enjoyment—of artistic enjoyment. You don't have to leave it. Kierkegaard never said we exist in one stage altogether. All people are probably a combination of the three stages. The three generally overlap, though there are "pure" cases, mostly literary, like Don Giovanni.

GRETLUND: When the English edition of *The Moviegoer* appeared in 1963, one Danish reviewer commented: ". . . Bolling seems to have given up his strange search, he has groped around until his thirtieth year, and perhaps that is just as well, for how much can Kierkegaard . . . and religion really help us?" (My translation)

PERCY: The reviewer should have gotten the overt reference to Kierkegaard in the "Epilogue." Binx had gone through a stage, the aesthetic stage, he stopped going to movies, he stopped playing those games about neighborhoods, movie houses, past experience, repetition, rotation. And he finally decided he wanted to do something, he takes Kate by the hand. He tells her it is all right for her to ride the streetcar alone. He takes responsibility. Binx's attitude to the stoic Aunt Emily is somewhat ambiguous. That's what I like about *The Second Coming,* it is not ambiguous. It is absolutely clear what Will Barrett is going to do.

GRETLUND: Is Sutter Vaught in *The Last Gentleman* a stoic?

PERCY: No, Sutter is desperate. He has exhausted the aesthetic sphere. I would go further than Kierkegaard, I would combine the aesthetic with the scientific. I think the two are parallel. I think Mozart and Einstein are on the same plane. They are both writing about how the world is. Music is cognitive and science is cognitive. And you have the observer writing about it, communicating with the fellow-scientists and communicating with fellow music-lovers. Sutter is in that tradition. He was a scientist, but he was also in despair. He understood the good news, the Gospel, he knew exactly what was going on in that baptism when the priest baptized Jamie. But Sutter was an unbeliever, he didn't accept it. With him it was an either/or, either belief or unbelief, and he was an unbeliever. His sister Val was a believer. Sutter was in despair.

GRETLUND: You seem to take issue with Kierkegaard on the function of knowledge in attaining faith.

PERCY: Well, it is a classical dispute between Catholics and Protestants whether faith is a form of knowledge. I thought it was a very nice opposition to have Kierkegaard making a clear statement that faith is *not* a form of knowledge, it is a leap onto the absurd. St. Thomas Aquinas saying in his classical thirteenth-century way that faith *is* a form of knowledge. It is different from scientific knowing, but it is a form of knowledge. I tend to agree with Aquinas there, even though I am more sympathetic with Kierkegaard. I am on his wavelength, I understand his phenomenology, his analysis of the existential predicament of modern man. Aquinas did not have that, but I think Aquinas was right about faith. It is not a leap into the absurd, it is an act of faith, which is a form of knowledge.

GRETLUND: Kierkegaard might well ask "what kind of knowledge?"

PERCY: A knowledge that God exists and that man is created in His image.

GRETLUND: But isn't that simply faith?

PERCY: Well, I don't think so. In fact, the burden of my non-fiction is a demonstration that man is different from other creatures. That he has this extraordinary capacity to know things, a certain freedom, and he can find himself in a predicament. You can't explain these things by deterministic biology. Ordinary epistemology does not take account of news as a form of knowing. I addressed that in *Message in a Bottle.*

GRETLUND: Does religion offer Will Barrett a solution to his existential problems at the ending of *The Last Gentleman*?

PERCY: *The Last Gentleman* ends ambiguously, too. I had a priest tell me it was clear to him what happened at the end of *The Last Gentleman,* that when Will Barrett stops Sutter in the Edsel and goes off with him, he said, obviously what they both do is they go to Sutter's place and they both commit suicide.

What was intended was, Will Barrett knew Sutter was onto something. Will Barrett had good antennae, good radar, and he knew when people know something or don't know something. Even at the end of *The Second Coming*, he knew this senile priest knew something he didn't know. He knew that Sutter knew what was going on, so he asks him. But Sutter is not going to tell him anything. He knows what it is Will wants from him, and that if he told him something, he would accept it in a psychological mode. It would be something like "How to Improve Your Life"—so Sutter is not going to tell him anything. In other words he is leaving it to him to live his own life. The implication was that Will Barrett was going to go back to the South, probably marry Kitty, and probably go into business with the Vaughts and their Confederate Chevrolet agency. That was the implication.—But he didn't. [See *The Second Coming*.]

II SCANDINAVIAN COPY

GRETLUND: At one point in *The Last Gentleman*, Sutter Vaught formulates man's choice as he sees it: ". . . to live like a Swede . . . Or: to live as a Christian among Christians in Alabama? Or to die like an honest man?"[1] Would you explain this passage to me?

PERCY: I have forgotten I said that. If Sutter said that, he is rejecting both. When he says "Swede" he is talking about a purely materialistic society. When he is talking about Val, his sister, he is talking about an incarnate Christian society. She has this Christian community in South Alabama. And for Sutter "to live like a man" is simply to be oneself, to choose despair or whatever he chooses.

GRETLUND: In your essay "The Man on the Train" you mention that these materialistic Swedes will not use the resort areas the Swedish government set aside for recreational purposes.

PERCY: A Swede told me that. His favorite place was up north. But to get away from the government reservations, to find a place which had not been set aside for recreation, he had to go to English villages. This again goes back to Kierkegaard, he was the first one that gave it a name, he called it "a rotation." He says one becomes *Europa-müde*, and if you live in Austria you'll go to the south of France. Or, if you live in Paris you'll go to outside of München, and if you're German you'll go to the coast of Spain. And it is certainly true of this country, too. People are always looking. . . . It is the favorite American pastime to go to Mexico to find an unspoiled village. [See the essay "The Loss of the Creature."]

GRETLUND: One of your characters in *Love in the Ruins* seems to have made it into a career to bring others to his home-base in Copenhagen.

---

[1] *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 379.

PERCY: If Art Immelmann was living in Denmark, he was an immigrant from Germany. For after all, the original Immelmann was a German WW I ace, and he invented the Immelmann turn. My father was a WW I flyer, and I remember him describing to me the Immelmann turn. It was a combat tactic, he would loop and at the top of the loop would do a barrel roll to escape. So I heard about him from my father, and he *was* a German ace. I don't know why I made him the Devil, but it seemed to be a good idea.

GRETLUND: Art Immelmann promises Dr. Thomas More a job as a brain specialist at the University of Copenhagen.

PERCY: [amused] I combined the best of both worlds: German genius and Danish spirituality.

GRETLUND: There isn't much Christianity in Scandinavian spirituality nowadays.

PERCY: That's why the next saint is going to come from Sweden, because you have to go all the way to the bottom to come back up. He is not going to come from Christian Carolina, I can promise you.

III LANCELOT OR PERCIVAL

GRETLUND: Lancelot's plans for a new start in Virginia with Anna are by some Scandinavian critics seen as the preparation for a leap onto a religious stage.

PERCY: It would be a sort of inverted religious stage, a caricature of the religious stage. After all, Lancelot was not in quest of the holy grail. He was in quest of the unholy grail. So, it was the religious stage turned inside out.

GRETLUND: But at that time Lancelot had realized that there wasn't any holy or unholy grail.

PERCY: True. But when he was headed for the Shenandoah Valley and Virginia to meet Anna, he was still planning what he called "a third revolution," a very violent, almost fascist revolution.

GRETLUND: So Cleanth Brooks is right in lining up Lancelot with Adolf Hitler and Idi Amin?

PERCY: If you subtract the Holocaust, the persecution of the Jews, he'd probably be more right than wrong. Lancelot liked to say the Nazis were stupid, that they could have accomplished the same thing without killing the Jews.

GRETLUND: What about Lancelot's desire for a distinction between good and evil, his ability to act, and his readiness to accept a responsibility. Aren't these positive features?

PERCY: Sure. He was in many ways like Aunt Emily in *The Moviegoer*. In one way he was worse, in another way he was better. He was worse because he didn't have the ethical values of Aunt Emily; she

would not have been in favor of killing the enemies of society. He would have. After all, he did kill three or four people when he blew up the plantation house. But he was "better" in the Kierkegaardian sense of being aware of a progression toward the religious sphere in his own way. He was "better" in realizing that the old methods of communication, the old cultural values were dead, and there had to be a new world and a new life—some sort of rebirth. And he envisioned a rebirth and a new communication by tapping on the wall, and through the wall with the girl next door: Anna. And he saw the possibility of a new life with Anna, and the possibility of a third revolution, as he thought of it, in Virginia, which had its positive elements.

GRETLUND: Would they, among others, be to get rid of the pornography and swinishness he had been fighting?

PERCY: Yes. But also to get rid of Aunt Emily's values. To begin a completely new life, Aunt Emily would have gone back to the Greco-Roman Stoicism.

GRETLUND: I had the impression that Lancelot's new life would be based on Aunt Emily's old values.

PERCY: No, he was going to make it up from scratch and find his own way. He thought of himself . . . there is a scene where he sees a young man standing in one of the passes in the mountains of the Shenandoah Valley. I had several things in mind. One was a Confederate soldier, one of Stonewall Jackson's men crossing Massanutten Mountain about to defeat the Northern army. The other was Robert Jordan, the hero of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, who is fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Remember the scene where he is lying with his gun waiting among the pine-needles. . . . And the third is a young Nazi storm-trooper. I spent a summer in Germany in 1934, and I lived with a family in Bonn. The father was a member of the S.A., *Schutz Abwehr*, and the son was a member of *Hitlerjugend*. There was a tremendous excitement at the "rejuvenation" of Germany, and the creation of new values in the Nietzschean sense: the death of God, the death of old values, and the creation of new values. I remember this young *Hitlerjugend* was very excited about the possibilities of the future. There was nothing about the Jews at the beginning. I had all this in mind when I thought of a young man standing in a pass of Massanutten Mountain. Lancelot is a conscious combination of something quite positive and quite evil.

Maybe I was also thinking of Gabriel Marcel, he is French, a Jew, a Catholic convert, who had the nerve to say: we tend to overlook something positive about the mass movements. It is easy to say how wrong they were. It is easy to overlook the positive things: the great sense of verve and vitality. This I was very much aware of in Germany in 1934. It made it even more seductive. Just as in the movie *Cabaret*, when that young German stands up in a beer garden and sings.

GRETLUND: I thought Lancelot Lamar was so deeply rooted in the values of the Old South that it would be impossible for him to escape his heritage and start from scratch.

PERCY: That's true. What I was doing was to try to destroy the middle ground. I tried to see what would happen if he *lived up to* his tradition. And his tradition is similar to Aunt Emily's tradition. He was not a Christian; as a matter of fact I had less in mind Sir Lancelot than Ulysses. In the old Greco-Roman tradition, if you had been mortally offended, if suitors had moved into your house and had taken advantage of your *wife*, what you did was go kill them. So in my own sneaky way—that's the only thing a novelist can do now is to be deceptive and sneaky—I try to raise questions which slip up on the reader. The question is: why shouldn't Lancelot do this? Instead of dealing overtly with Christianity, I deal with the old Roman ethic: what's wrong with him taking revenge in the way he did? Would Aunt Emily object to that? What he is doing is carrying Aunt Emily's ethic to its logical conclusion. If he has been cuckolded by somebody, a Hollywood producer, then what he does is *kill* him. That's what Ulysses did, and we look on Ulysses as one of the great heroes of Western Culture. Ulysses and Telemachus kill everybody! Lancelot only kills three people, I think, I've lost count, but Ulysses and Telemachus kill all the suitors. And we applaud Ulysses.

GRETLUND: How does the murderer compare morally with his victims?

PERCY: In the end I regarded Lancelot as demented, as a man who has gone into the religious stage in a demented way. He has got hold of it in a sense; and he is a man of action, he is a man who believes in putting his beliefs into action. Do you remember he said at one point—I don't know whether I got this from Kierkegaard or Nietzsche—he said: if one man comes along who believes something sufficiently, just one man, who is willing to act on his belief, then everybody will follow him. Because nobody else believes in anything, and nobody else knows what to do. Lancelot did this, it was partly admirable, partly crazy. But the novel, like most of my novels, is also an attack on the 20th century, on the whole culture. It is a rotten century, we are in terrible trouble.

GRETLUND: Scandinavian critics tend to make Lancelot more of a true hero than you have intended.

PERCY: But they leave out the other pole. The other pole is Percival. The critics are right in that the point of satire was to destroy mushy American liberalism. The mushy way of approving everything which is "life-enhancing," or "self-improving," or "how to cultivate personality." To cut it down to an either/or—I'm always trying to cut it down to an either/or—it has either got to be one way or the other. That's what Lancelot says to Percival: would you agree it has either got to be my way or your way—it is not going to be their way. That's the last question, and Percival says "yes." These reviewers are partly right, but they leave out

Percival. Isn't that a sign of the times?

GRETLUND: Is Percival the real hero of your *Lancelot*?

PERCY: I was trying to do something there, I'm not sure it worked. It worked for some people. Percival, the priest, is never described. He was never in the story. Yet he was supposed to be present. He was listening, he was the one who is hearing all this. He only says about two words at the very end. It was my intention that his character should be known indirectly through what Lancelot said about him.

GRETLUND: Virginia Woolf did something similar in *The Waves.* She also used the name Percival.

PERCY: I didn't know that. When I first began to write that novel, I was going to write it about two men. As a third-person narrative. And the part about Percival did not work. So I wrote out Percival, and I wrote it as a dramatic monologue with Lancelot, which was the way it should be. But it confused a lot of people. They didn't realize who Lancelot was addressing at the beginning—whether this person was real or not. A dramatic monologue apparently puts people off.

GRETLUND: What is Percival's role at the ending? Is he a personification of the Church?

PERCY: What does that mean? He went back to be an ordinary priest in a parish in Alabama.

GRETLUND: Is that, as Lancelot said, copping out?

PERCY: That's for you to decide. (Come to think of it, it's exactly what Kierkegaard wanted to do.) The issue is there. Percival agrees with Lancelot about the way the world is: the world is a rotten place. They agree that there's a lot wrong with the world, and that they ought to condemn what is rotten. But they don't agree what should be done about it. They have different ways. It is supposed to be a very conventional, classical statement of two different traditions. One is, well, Cleanth Brooks would call it gnostic, I hadn't thought of gnosticism, but I was thinking of good pagan Greco-Roman Nazi and so forth tradition: Aunt Emily on one side and orthodox Christianity on the other. At the end of *Lancelot* I was trying to present two radical points of view, neither of which is accepted by most people, most Americans. One is: Lancelot goes to Virginia for the third revolution, he rejects the world. The other is: Percival goes to a parish in Alabama, and he hears the confessions of Buick-dealers. They couldn't be more different, and yet they have something in common: they both know there is something radically wrong with the world.

IV. WOMEN AND INSANITY

GRETLUND: Why is it that women reviewers are not satisfied with your women characters? Are there any "normal" women in your novels?

PERCY: What about Allie in *The Second Coming*? She is crazy, but

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she is pretty normal. And what about Aunt Emily in *The Moviegoer*? She is not only normal, but normative. As normative as Marcus Aurelius.

GRETLUND: Why are the girls we like in your fiction at least mentally unstable?

PERCY: Well, that goes back to a device I use consciously, namely, to arrange the placement of the hero and the heroine so that it is always a question: who is crazy? Whether he is crazy and the rest of the world is sane—or, he is sane and the rest of the world crazy.

It is supposed to be a delicately balanced issue, so that many people can read it and say: well, I am also crazy. Allison is a crazy woman living in a sane world, or maybe she seems crazy because she is reacting sanely to an insane world. Someone like Allison, who is beginning a new life, starting afresh, even creating a new language—maybe she is on the track of sanity. It is not difficult to make out a case that the world is mad.

GRETLUND: Is it a trend in modern American fiction that the heroes are considered insane by society?

PERCY: Right. This is, of course, the thesis of R. D. Laing, the psychiatrist, that schizophrenics in their own way are sane. I think that most psychiatrists disagree, and they may be right in that Laing takes it to an extreme, but for literary purposes it is a convenient thesis. A schizophrenic may be on the track of sanity; he finds the world unbearable, and maybe the function of the novelist is to show that the world is, indeed, unbearable. And that there are certain strategies you have to take to live in it, and there are persons who are entitled to have a psychotic reaction. At any rate, it is a delicately balanced issue; the reader can read it either way.

GRETLUND: The women in *The Last Gentleman* get a particularly harsh treatment.

PERCY: Yes, and those in *The Moviegoer,* too. I don't know whether that is anti-feminism on my part, or the difficulty for a male novelist to create a woman. Good women writers have an easy time creating men. But, how many women did Hemingway create?

GRETLUND: It seems they were all either whores or motherfigures.

PERCY: True, or in my case, neurotic or psychotic. Maybe it is because men do not understand women. I didn't have any sisters, and maybe if I'd had sisters I'd do a better job. But to me "a normal" woman is an absolute mystery. I can only understand her if she is as neurotic as I am.

GRETLUND: You did create some wonderful women for *Love in the Ruins*. They all seem, however, to be seen at a distance.

PERCY: But the last one, Ellen Oglethorpe, I think is a . . . she is drawn from my Georgia background. Part of my family comes from Georgia. My mother's family were Georgia Presbyterians. So I thought it would be nice to have a voluptuous Georgia Presbyterian girl. And

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she is not neurotic, she knows exactly what she wants. She may not be very deep; I wasn't too interested in her, I just wanted to have her there. —I plead ignorance, I don't know enough about women.

V. WRITER AND SOCIETY

GRETLUND: Do you think many readers cherish your novels for your satiric portrait of contemporary America?

PERCY: Oh sure.

GRETLUND: In *The Second Coming* there are a love story *and* the continued satire of society. Do you fall between two stools?

PERCY: It may be o.k. because that may be what saves me from being a very bad novelist. It would be a bad thing to write simply a novelistic explication of Kierkegaard, or Marcel, or whoever. But since I'm a Southerner and an American, and since I get angry about a great many things that happen in this country—I am by nature a satirical novelist, and a humorist. I'm always pleased when people find the novels funny, because so many take them so seriously.

GRETLUND: One of the features of your American society is that new Christian movements multiply. What do you think of them?

PERCY: I have mixed feelings about them. I am a Catholic, and I have re-born Christians come and say to me: "Why don't you become a re-born Christian?" I would think that by definition a Christian *is* somebody who's re-born. So is it a question of being born a third time—or how many times?

GRETLUND: What do you think of the support Ronald Reagan has received from these movements?

PERCY: I think he is a little worried about it, a little uneasy about it. I think he is backing off from the embrace of Jerry Falwell. I think there are some good things in the new movements. They are reacting against some obviously evil forces in society: pornography in the movies and films, the decay of the American family. . . . So I sympathize with their concern about that. But two things worry me about them: their wanting to get into politics, which goes against the American grain, and the other is the commercialism of it. There's a great deal of money involved: heavy media involvement with tremendous appeals for money. And it is not clear where the money goes, or how sincere the ministers are. So I have mixed feelings about it.

GRETLUND: The modern trends the new Christians seem to be fighting are the very same Lancelot rebelled against.

PERCY: True. Except Lancelot wouldn't have much use for Christians of any kind, at all. And, of course, Will Barrett in *The Second Coming* finds himself in the strange position of disagreeing with both nonbelievers and believers. He doesn't like either one. So he is looking for a *tertium quid*.

GRETLUND: Does he find one?

PERCY: Well, that's a good question. That's for me to ask you.

GRETLUND: Will Barrett is also concerned that one place is much like any other place. Is the South much like any other place nowadays?

PERCY: The South has a greater sense of place than other parts of the country; but the South is changing. The South is more like the rest of the country now. I regret it in some ways, not in other ways. I saw a map of what's happening to the demography of the country, and what's happening is that the population and the wealth are moving south. The sunbelt is gaining, that's good in a sense, because there have been so many poor people, who have been in a wretched situation ever since the Civil War. That's good. But it is a terrible price we have to pay. All you got to do is to drive through the suburbs of New Orleans and of Baton Rouge, and it looks like Los Angeles. There is a word for it. It is called: losangelization. The South is going through the process of losangelization. That's not good. The trick is, given the New South, which is not the South of Faulkner, not the South of Eudora, it is not the South of Flannery, it is the South of Interstate 12 and Highway 190. It is the South of Los Angeles. How to humanize that! How do you live with that? What I am trying to do is to figure out how a man can come to himself, living in a place like that. So at the end of *The Second Coming,* very deliberately, I've Allie and Will leave the greenhouse, go to a motel, the first coming together takes place in a Holiday Inn. Which incidentally is a good Holiday Inn, I've been to one like that, where they have turnip greens, cornbread, and grits.—And from there . . . You know where he proposes to live with Allie, while they are going to build log-cabins for old people; he proposes to move into a G.E. Gold Medallion home, a mass-produced home. And they could be happy there.

. . . .

GRETLUND: Are you writing any philosophical essays now?

PERCY: That's what I am working on. I am working on a semiotic approach to consciousness. Consciousness itself, which American psychology, behaviorism, can't handle. It has no way of getting hold of it. So I am trying to get a hold of it by a science; and it is not going to be a conventional science of secondary causes.

GRETLUND: Is the philosophy something you write to charge the batteries before returning to fiction. Or do you write fiction to relax between philosophical essays?

PERCY: I don't know. When I finished this last novel it was as if I had been a woman who had been pregnant four years. And you know, women go into what you call a postpartum depression. I went into a terrible depression, and all I knew was that I would never write another novel again as long as I lived. What I can do is to write dry stuff like these semiotic essays.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE AND *THE MOVIEGOER*

LEWIS A. LAWSON

A reading of Walker Percy's works, both fiction and non-fiction, discerns a recurring reference to Arnold Toynbee, the modern British historian, author of *A Study of History*. Most frequently the reference or allusion is Volume III, *The Growths of Civilizations*, in which occurs one of Toynbee's most famous ideas, the movement of Withdrawal-and-Return. Toynbee discovers this recurring pattern in history: a civilization grows when there is a great leader who, defeated or frustrated in his project, withdraws psychologically (and often physically), communes with himself, then returns, to gain victory over the conditions that had originally stopped him.

Toynbee's way of doing history has appealed to our age, for almost everyone yearns for the kind of certainty, rationality, immanent purpose that the pattern of Withdrawal-and-Return demonstrates. Having rejected a faithful acceptance of the essential mystery that is the unfolding of time, we are delighted to be told by an authority that there is a perfectly predictable process which can be known by the intellect. It is not surprising that such representative modern men as Tom More (in *Love in the Ruins*) and Lance Lamar (in *Lancelot*) conceive of themselves as historical agents who will ultimately triumph as World Saviors, because they are just emerging from the Withdrawal phase, to begin the Return phase. Percy, I am saying, sees Toynbee's formulation for what it is—one of the most seductive versions of modern Gnosticism.

John Bickerson "Binx" Bolling (in *The Moviegoer*) has also read his Toynbee, and it is his response to *The Growths of Civilizations* that I want to discuss here this morning. "Binx," you will remember, lists *A Study of History* among the "fundamental" books, as he calls them, that he read when he was engaged in his "vertical search," in which, as he says, "You understand more and more specimens by fewer and fewer formulae." Binx read the section on Withdrawal-and-Return very closely, right down to the footnotes.

Before Toynbee applies the pattern of Withdrawal-and-Return to any Individual who has led a Civilization, he offers several examples from different cultures which should be known to all his readers, who should then be convinced of the universality of the phenomenon. First to be cited is, in Toynbee's words, ". . . the Syriac myth of Moses' solitary ascent of Mount Sinai." Then the Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldûn is quoted. You should be able to anticipate the next example. The Simile of the Cave that Plato uses in *The Republic* demonstrates that Greek culture also participated in the movement of Withdrawal-and-Return.

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You will remember what happens in the Simile: men are chained in rows in the cave, viewing shadows cast on the wall by firelight and thinking that they are seeing the real thing; then one man is allowed to ascend to the mouth of the cave, there to see things by the light of the Sun; even though he wishes to remain in contemplation of the Truth, he is forced to return to his fellows as a leader, despite the fact that he will be hated by them, because he tells them that there is a Truth which they do not see. Thus Plato illustrates his Divided Line, that description of the progress of thinking, from mere appearance through education to the reality of the Forms. For Toynbee, the Simile illustrates the Withdrawal-and-Return movement of Plato's Philosopher-King.

When he quotes the Simile, Toynbee appends this footnote:

> The simile is more strange to a reader of Plato's generation in Plato's world than to one of our generation in ours; for Plato is really picturing, by a brilliant effort of imagination, the situation of an audience in a cinematograph theatre with its eyes glued to the screen on which a lantern at their backs projects the lights and shadows of a moving film.

The several points of analogy between the cave experience and the cinema experience make Toynbee's simile itself brilliant. The likeness is so apt that it has occurred, quite independently, to others. A few years after Toynbee, Francis M. Cornford, the distinguished student of Plato, offered substantially the same footnote, in his highly regarded translation of *The Republic*. I know of two French writers, one a movie historian in 1948 and the other a philosopher in 1967, who make the same comparison. But the earliest likening I have found is by Henri Bergson, who connects the two images incidentally, as he devotes much of *Creative Evolution* (1911) to what he calls "the cinematographical mechanism of thought." I will return to Bergson later.

From Toynbee's simile, then, Binx takes his self-image: he is the moviegoer. Notice that Binx becomes a moviegoer only after he successfully completes his "vertical search," that is, reaches the top of Plato's Divided Line, at which point one gazes upon the Forms, the Idea. Now, of course, at the completion of the "vertical search" is supposed to be, as Binx tells Kate, "the big one, the new key, the secret leverage point." The "leverage point" to which Binx alludes is the Archimedean lever that Descartes hopes for, in his *Meditations Concerning First Philosophy*, that is, "one thing that is certain and unshaken." Descartes found his "leverage point," the *cogito*, from which has developed the scientific method, by which man has removed himself from the world which he studies. But one man's scientific detachment is another man's alienation. Binx knows, in other words, that in graduating from the Divided Line or coming out of the Cave, that is, in accepting the world

of scientific generalization as the Ultimate Reality, he has become homeless, occupying space but not a place. Having finished the "vertical search," that is, having explained all specimens by formulae, he finds himself "left over," "*de trop*," as Sartre puts it. To be a moviegoer, then, is to be a spectator viewing a distant screen, a world in which subjective reality is not admitted, for the only proof lies in the appearance, which is confirmed by empiricism.

When he thinks of himself in terms of Plato's image of the Cave, Binx must experience even more irony than he ordinarily does, for he knows that while he found no Ultimate Reality by looking at the world by the light of the Sun, the most powerful institution in modern life has found Plato's Simile of the Cave to be a perfect picturing of the world. I refer to atomic physics.

To introduce my point, I offer a digression. At the International Center for Theoretical Physics, in Miramare, Italy, in September of 1972, there was held a "Symposium on the Development of the Physicist's Conception of Nature in the Twentieth Century." On the last night, there was to be a concluding banquet, and at the last moment a distinguished participant from the Max Planck Institute, of West Germany, Professor C. F. Weizsäcker, was invited to give the principal speech. His hastily prepared paper was entitled "Physics and Philosophy," and his conclusion was: that the modern physicist is the intellect who has gone beyond the shadows of Plato's Cave to discover the Ultimate Reality of energy particles.

Whether von Weizsäcker was making a simile that was new to him or whether he knew that he was continuing a tradition, I have no way of knowing. I do know, however, that the image of the physicist as the person who emerges from the Cave has been used with insistent frequency in the Twentieth Century.

The Symposium that I just mentioned was to investigate the Physicist's Conception of Nature. That is to say, the physicist understands that he must have what is called a "picture" (or a "model" or even a "paradigm"), in order to be able to talk with a colleague, much less a layman. This picture is a purely artificial, fictional if you will, representation of what cannot possibly be seen, Ultimate Reality. In the nineteenth century physicists still believed in matter governed by mechanics; their picture was what Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington later called "the billiard ball view" of nature.

Sir Arthur was one of the first physicists to offer a picture that incorporates the theory of relativity, the quantum theory, and the advances in thermodynamics; in *The Nature of the Physical World* (1933), he offers a picture in which the apparent world is the shadow world, which must be viewed by the "alchemist Mind," as he calls it, before the essential world can be reached. After Eddington, there is a steady stream of

physicists who employ the new picture of the modern physicist who is able to use mathematics to transcend shadows to see objects by the light of the Sun. There is Sir James Jeans, in *The Mysterious Universe;* there is Werner Heisenberg, in his paper, "On the History of the Physical Interpretation of Nature"; there is Sir Charles Sherrington; there is Erwin Schroedinger; there is Otto R. Frisch. All cite or allude to Plato's Cave.

Binx has read in this school of physics in order to master the "vertical search": he mentions or alludes to Schroedinger, Einstein, and Eddington, in describing the night when he became a moviegoer. Since they represent a body of knowledge that he cannot refute, he accepts their definition of nature as pure space; he has the recurrent sense of being a wanderer on a desert. That is why his "one-book library," *Arabia Deserta,* is such a perfect revelation of self-image. That is why, too, he frequently feels that he is being bombarded by noxious particles, which are both the sands of a desert world and the indeterminate particles of modern wave mechanics.

Binx is a wanderer, then, now pursuing a "horizontal search," constructing "rotations," that is, novel experiences that arouse the Cartesian sense of wonder, and "aesthetic repetitions," that is, edited versions of the past that arouse nostalgia. He sees around him people who are in the Cave, that is, at home in a purely material world, or people who have come out of the Cave, that is, at home in a totally abstract world. Some examples? Walter Wade, Kate's fiancé, is delighted with the immanent world—his characteristic behavior is measuring the thickness of the walls of the house he hopes to gain by marrying Kate. The hardware salesman on the New Orleans-bound bus is perfectly happy with substantiality, as he hefts his product. His fellow bus rider is his opposite; the romantic college boy has come out of the Cave to view the world Idealistically. He is going to New Orleans to find the girl of his dreams, but Binx knows that no such Ideal exists and slyly tells us that he leaves the boy on the street gazing wistfully at a shopwindow which contains legless torsos adorned by "black net panties," in other words, Platonic dressing forms. Similarly Harry Stern, Binx's fellow chemistry student, has come out of the Cave, to see by the Light of scientific objectivity. These two collegians illustrate Binx's argument that romanticism and science are not opposed, as is usually thought, but rather are fundamentally alike. Aunt Emily is the Philosopher-King; she has come out of the Cave, sees the Light, has returned to govern. Her attitude, modeled after Marcus Aurelius, is caught by Toynbee's generalization about Leaders: "This negative, weary, melancholy temper is manifest in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the historic philosopher-king who dutifully carried on his shoulders the burden of governing the whole *Orbis Romanus."*

And what of Binx's parents? Well, his father died seeking the great Rotation, the novelty of war. And his mother contents herself with life as an Aesthetic Repetition, viewing a carefully edited present and past

as "a standard comic exaggeration," as Binx puts it. Their personal alienation has therefore precluded their concern for their son's condition. Only Kate and Lonnie, his half-brother, have some sense of Binx's despair, both because they care for him.

Actually, as Binx reveals, he was never totally satisfied by the scientific method. In college, when he and Harry Stern had worked in the lab, Binx had become so affected by "the singularities of time and space," as he puts it, that he had abandoned the project. Basically, for the scientist, time is of no consequence: an Idea is an Eternal Truth, always there, available to the person who emerges from the Cave. But Binx can not ignore the yellow sunlight moving across the floor. In other words, time neither stands still nor runs smoothly and evenly: despite Binx's statement to the contrary, time is not like peanut brittle without the peanuts.

Binx is once again made aware of the passage of time, when he returns to a theater in which he had seen a movie fourteen years before. The old theater has endured, but shows, by its wear and tear, that time has gone on, even if Binx has not been there to be aware of the process. This is Bergson's duration, the full rolling out, evolution, of the vital spirit, the *Creative Evolution.* Duration is ever so much more than mere time, which is but a small current in the stream. Or, to paraphrase Bergson's example, there is a great, an infinite amount of life in the darkness, beyond that which has been lighted up by the intellect. Confronted by the fullness of duration, the intellect *wants* to act like a movie film, Bergson says, in a brilliant discussion of the "cinematographical mechanism of thought": it wants to select small amounts that it can understand, paste them together and call the result life. But the difference between such a construct and duration is the same as the difference between a movie and life itself.

In other words, Bergson rejects Plato's model of the Cave by saying:

> Human intelligence, as we represent it, is not at all what Plato taught in the allegory of the cave. Its function is not to look at passing shadows nor yet to turn itself round and contemplate the glaring sun. It has something else to do. Harnessed, like yoked oxen, to a heavy task, we feel the play of our muscles and joints, the weight of the plow and the resistence of the soil. To act and to know that we are acting, to come into touch with reality and even to live it, but only in the measure in which it concerns the work that is being accomplished and the furrow that is being plowed, such is the function of human intelligence.

Binx has begun to learn of the need for involvement and work when the novel opens. Notice that he dreams of opening a *service* station. Now he must learn of faith, which gives meaning to action. Toward the end

of the novel, he doubts that Kate will come to him, as she had promised. His world overwhelms him as material: there is that bitter moment when he experiences his world as nothing but *merde*. It is not even a cave, but rather only a hole in which only a dung beetle could prosper.

Then Kate comes, as she had said that she would, and Binx must admit that faith is sometimes answered. Thus they marry.

The epilogue, describing a time a year or so later, announces the deaths of both Uncle Jules and Lonnie. Uncle Jules had earlier been described as quite comfortable in the City of Man; he dies on Shrove Tuesday, Mardi Gras, the high point of human merry-making. He would definitely be happy in Plato's Cave. Lonnie is certainly of the City of God; he would be one of Plato's viewers of the Sun. And indeed Binx identifies him as a moviegoer. But what kind of viewer of the Sun is he? The answer lies in the great work to which Binx is alluding, The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.

In that work Augustine confesses that he had been a Platonist, that he had believed in the Truth represented in the Simile of the Cave. He too had been among the mathematicians, had been a theater-goer, had been one who satisfied his desire for the flesh. But, in time, he had gained the faith to believe in Christ, had come to see that the Light of the World was not a Transcendent Form, but the Logos, the Incarnation. Time was rescued from eternity, to be conquered. The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine stretches, then, from Plato to Christ. So, too, does *The Moviegoer*. Is it any wonder that Walker Percy wanted to entitle his novel *The Confessions of a Moviegoer?*

WALKER PERCY: A SCANDINAVIAN VIEW

JAN NORDBY GRETLUND

Søren Aaby Kierkegaard's complaint against the Danes of the mid-nineteenth century and Walker Percy's portrait of his contemporaries have much in common. Both writers see man as being in a predicament; they ask questions about the meaning of life, for they are worried that we might miss the point of life, and they probe the general *malaise*. To the bored individual who is lost in everyday trivia, Kierkegaard and Percy offer consolation by demonstrating that there is *hope* for the individual who is aware of his despair.

The influence of the Danish philosopher has long been recognized by critics, and it has been acknowledged by Walker Percy. Some critics have probably put too great an emphasis on the influence of Kierkegaard. One critic claims: "[Percy's] great achievement may prove to have been translating Kierkegaard into concrete American terms." And it has become common to describe Walker Percy's first three novels as a "Kierkegaardian trilogy." Personally, I consider these novels much more than "a

gloss on Kierkegaard," although this is Percy's own expression. It is true, however, that there is agreement on the most essential point: it is crucial to become an individual, and God is indispensable in that becoming.

What was it he said, this acid philosopher, who wrote, as Robert Coles has it, "of all things in Danish"? For me the backbone of Kierkegaard's thinking is revealed in a passage from *Afsluttende Uvidenskabelig Efterskrift*, 1846:

> For someone who exists, there are altogether two ways, he can either do all he can to forget that he exists, by which he succeeds in becoming comical, for existence has the peculiar characteristic that the existing one exists whether he wants to or not; or he can focus all his attention on the fact that he does exist. It is on this point we must speak up against modern thinking, it does not have a *wrong* basis, but a *comical* basis, caused by the fact that in some sort of world-historic distraction it has forgotten what it is to be a man; not to be a human being in general, this even the scientists will agree about, *but* what it is that you and I and he and we are human beings individually.
> (My translation)

The key word here is "individually." Scientists cannot tell us how to live as individuals; as another remark by Kierkegaard makes clear: "What is abstract thinking? It is the sort of thinking where there is *nobody* thinking." It is essential to recognize the individuality of other people, for taking people for objects makes an object of oneself. To exist is to be subjective. The objective is independent of each individual's existence and seeks to cancel individual existence. To be subjective is to realize oneself. You are not only what you are, according to Kierkegaard, you also have to accept what you are and to accept the responsibility for yourself. It is a condition for existence itself. Hidden in the crowd, it is only too easy to live with an ego dulled into a third person. As Walker Percy has demonstrated, we tend to live as Harold Graebners, ready to do almost anything to maintain a death-in-life existence.

Free will in Kierkegaard is *not* that you can choose between this and that, but that you are free to choose yourself. In that sense life is pure possibility. If you choose not to realize yourself, you will be in despair, for your life will then in every respect depend on something you cannot control. And if you cannot control your life, Kierkegaard says, you may suddenly be overtaken by *Angst*, the worst part of which is that you do not know its origin. It is necessary to confront your own *Angst*. It is not enough to listen to Walter Cronkite and hear the grass growing. But man will not be able to rid himself of his *Angst* until he has realized and chosen himself as the basis of his existence. The alternative in Kierkegaard's analysis is defiance. But the despair is not thereby cured, for

there is despair in the very effort to combat despair. As the consciousness of self increases, the despair increases; while the increasing despair increases the consciousness of self. And in this way defiance will prove not to be a viable alternative. But Dr. Thomas More of *Love in the Ruins* hopes by his lapsometer to rid man of his despair and *Angst*, scientifically. And for this achievement he expects to receive a Swedish prize.

The history of the reception of Walker Percy's novels in Scandinavia is instructive and sometimes amusing. Furthermore, it is entertaining for a Dane to see glimpses of Scandinavia through the fiction of a Southerner. As regards the critical reception of Walker Percy's work in Scandinavia, there is a tendency to regard Percy as more of a *Southern* writer than it has been common in American criticism. As I gather from "Le Temps et la Mort dans *The Moviegoer*," by Professor Simone Vauthier, it is a shared European point of view.

The Danish edition of *The Moviegoer*, *Biografgængeren*, translated by Knud Holst for Gyldendal, was the first Scandinavian appearance of Walker Percy's work. Is it possible that the national pride was tickled by the overt reference to "the Danish philosopher"? *Biografgængeren* was published in 1964. But one Danish reviewer had reacted already to the publication of the novel in England. In his review, titled, "An Outsider Gets Married," he wrote,

> . . . [Bolling] seems to have given up his strange search, he has groped around until his thirtieth year, and perhaps that is just as well, for how much can Kierkegaard . . . and the prophets and religion really help us? (Erik Ulrichsen, *Informationen*, Aug. 8, 1963. All Scandinavian reviews in this paper are in my translation.)

On the publication of the novel in Denmark about a year later, the same reviewer returned to it with a review called "A Southern Spectator." The main idea is reflected in these lines:

> If there is some doubt in the reader's mind concerning *The Moviegoer*, it is not necessarily the reader's fault. It is throughout this book difficult to place the author in relation to his moviegoer, who is a decadent child of a no longer fruitful Southern tradition. . . . (*Informationen*, Oct. 19, 1964)

Another reviewer announced that the Danish publisher had drawn "a blank in the bestseller lottery." Noel Coward's *Pomp and Circumstance* was seen as a prize in the same lottery. But one of the most influential reviewers called his contribution: "New Orleans Spleen." He seems to have done lasting damage with statements like:

> A Southern writer may offer us almost anything—decadence, depravation and total insanity, yes, . . . he may be completely disgusting, as long as his book reflects this indefinable will to survive and endure. The only thing, we cannot accept, is that he

> throws in the sponge and gives up. . . . The best thing about Southern novels is that they fan the fire of a century old rebellious spirit against a pompous and a somewhat hypocritical Yankee moralism. . . . What is left in the way of a rebellion in Binx is a somewhat cowardly and inaccurate irony, which only serves to underline that the final surrender has taken place. . . .
> (Ole Storm, *Politiken*, Sept. 29, 1964)

I have quoted this review at some length because it explains the relative failure of *The Moviegoer* in Denmark. As the general tone of these reviews reveals, the critics expected a Southern novel of the Caldwell-Faulkner types, and when Percy failed to live up to their prototypes of a Southern novelist, they reacted strongly. And with so much effect that it has been impossible to get out another novel by Walker Percy in Denmark.

For my own part, I consider *The Moviegoer* the second-best novel by Walker Percy. (There is a surprising Scandinavian unanimity in choosing *Lancelot* as our favorite.) There is, of course, much in *The Moviegoer* for a Dane to identify with. Binx has the *malaise*, the world seems lost to him, and all the friendly and likable people seem dead to him. But he is, at least, onto something. He is growing aware of his despair, and he starts his search. He recognizes that "the Little Way," of the sad happiness of drinks and kisses, is not for him. Binx sees it as a sickness unto death. After he has realized himself and no longer is walled up in his self, but able to help others, he makes a comment on his search: ". . . the time is later than [Kierkegaard's], much too late to edify or do much of anything except plant a foot in the right place as the opportunity presents itself. . . ." Unfortunately, Percy's edifying "ass-kicking" has until recently gone practically unnoticed in Scandinavia. Both *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins* have proved too complex—or is it too long and too expensive?—for Scandinavian publishers.

In *The Last Gentleman*, Sutter Vaught offers us a choice:

> Which is the best course for a man: to live like a Swede, vote for the candidate of your choice, be a good fellow, healthy and generous, do a bit of science as if the world made sense, enjoy a beer and a good piece (not a bad life!). Or: to live as a Christian among Christians in Alabama? Or to die like an honest man?[1]

I do not think this reference to the Swedish welfare state is the reason why the novel has not come out in Sweden. As the quotation makes clear, Percy is still concerned with Kierkegaard's either/or. Williston Bibb Barrett tries not to feel good in bad environments, but he has lost the ability to focus and see. And it is through the casebook in which Sutter

[1] *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 379.

debates with his sister Val that we try to see with Will Barrett. Sweden is often used as an example of the kind of everyday Sutter wants to avoid. Will is informed: ". . . [Val] wanted us to go the route and be like Sweden, which is not necessarily bad, but to go the route, to leave God out of it and be happy or miserable. . . . She believes that then, . . . the air would be cleared and even that God might give us a sign." Sutter goes on to sum up his sister's and his own situation: "We are in the same fix, she and I, only I know it and she doesn't. Here I sit in Sweden—most of these women are Swedes, spiritual Swedes, if you will notice—but I do not wait for a sign because there is no sign" (378). By this definition most of us would probably qualify as spiritual Swedes. Most of us are good at golf or something and bad at living.

In *Love in the Ruins* a character called Art Immelmann offers Dr. Thomas More a trip:

> "Then you and I can go to Denmark," says Art.
> "Denmark!" I repeat with astonishment. Why?" . . .
> "Why Denmark?"
> "Number one, it is my home base. Number two, it is close to the Nobel Prize committee. Number three, it is the vanguard of civilization. Number four, I can get you a job there."[2]

Immelman offers Dr. More the job of chief encephalographer at the "Royal University"; this is only meant as a temporary position, so Dr. More can pass the time until he is awarded the Nobel Prize. All of which sounds much more flattering about Denmark than Sutter Vaught's comments on Sweden in *The Last Gentleman*, especially if the reader does not realize that Art Immelmann is the Devil. As it is, Dr. More is only saved from the trip to Denmark through the interference of Saint Thomas More. It is Dr. More's lapsometer which has made the Devil interested in him. The lapsometer enables man to render himself totally abstract from himself, "totally alienated from the concrete world, and in such a state of angelism that he will fall prey to the first abstract notion proposed to him and will kill anybody who gets in his way . . . in the name of peace and freedom, etcetera" (*LR*, p. 325). As Art Immelmann puts it, "We'll all be happy in Copenhagen."

Scandinavia plays a major part in the depiction of Percy's future world of *Love in the Ruins* with its sunset ills of the spirit: Minnesota and Oregon have their own consulates in Sweden, the most popular left films are dirty movies from Sweden, and holing out in the swamps there are "deserters from the Swedish army" together with Bantu guerrillas, psychopaths, antipapal Catholics, and Choctaw Zionists. Even ordinary chairs have been replaced by Danish sling chairs, but as Percy writes: "love conquers all, even a Danish sling." There is also a Professor Coffin

[2] *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), p. 375. Cited hereafter as *LR*.

Cabot, a semanticist, who gives a talk on North Ecuador, the free and peaceful nation, and on America as "the cancer in the community of democratic nations." The lecture receives an even greater ovation in Stockholm than it did at Harvard. But the professor will not even consider moving to Sweden, for where could he make as much money as he does in America, "the cancer" among democratic nations.

In spite of the many references to Scandinavia in *Love in the Ruins*, the novel failed to create much interest in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. To a certain extent I feel this is a pardonable attitude to the novel. Although it is probably the most amusing of all Percy's novels to date, it fails in coherence and perhaps also in getting across the serious existential discussion behind the hilarious plot. Nevertheless, the novel is undoubtedly valuable for its development of the themes of the first two novels: the world is peopled by death-in-life existences, and the normal state of mind is to feel tolerably depressed and terrified, solitary and yankeefied. This was also true for Binx Bolling and Will Barrett, but Dr. More goes one step further by aiding science in abstracting away the sovereignty of man. Man becomes a specimen. And man hates to be a specimen. It is what Walker Percy has objected to from the beginning. Already in *The Moviegoer* there is an elderly couple, Dr. and Mrs. Bob Dean, who are satirized because they wrote a book called *Technique in Marriage*. They have experimented with their love-life and turned it into a science. Man should not, Percy says, abstract his life into a mechanical ritual.

It took *Lancelot* to open our eyes in Scandinavia to the genius of Walker Percy. The novel came out in Sweden already in 1978, in an excellent translation by Caj Lundgren (hardcover, Stockholm, Norstedt, 246 pp.). And the Norwegians decided to publish a novel by Walker Percy. *Lancelot* was published in Oslo, Norway, in 1979, again in an excellent translation, this time by Olav Angell (hardcover & paper, Oslo Aschehoug, 220 pp.). So far, *Lancelot* has not been published in Denmark, but I am convinced it is only a question of time. The reception in Sweden and Norway has been overwhelming. No less than eighteen Swedish dailies reviewed *Lancelot*. In general the standard of the reviews is high, and they are very informative. It seems that the novel is selling in Sweden because of values and ideas which have been forgotten or overlooked by American reviewers. Let me quote my own translations of a number of Swedish reviews:

> . . . it is an old trick in literature to let the fool be the only one who speaks the truth. The jester dares say aloud what others do not even dare whisper. Lancelot's accusing tirade against pornography today could only come from someone who is not afraid of the disdain of the liberal establishment; for the liberal USA pornography is "life-enhancing." (Carl Rudbeck, "A Fool

> Speaks," *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, Dec. 9, 1977. A review of the English edition.)

> Percy has a message. He keeps an eye on the forces and dimensions in love which his contemporaries are overlooking, he wants out of the dirt, both that of Louisiana and that of the world, and to return to man the dignity which has been forgotten in a pornographic age. (Bo Magnusson, "On Rebellion in a Pornographic Age," *Strengnäs Tidning*, April 8, 1978)

> . . . the moral views which Lancelot advocates in the novel remind us of those of medieval myths. When truths were truths, and the dividing lines obvious, man was responsible for his actions and acted in accordance with simple rules of honor. (Ulf Bergqvist, "A Novel Close to the Myths," *Östersunds-Posten*, August 5, 1978)

> Margot repeatedly goes behind his back. She is sexually a fraud, but of the sort modern society condones, but who at a more honorable and resolute time in history would have been punished by death. . . . Lancelot dreams of a world in which you do not overlook what ought to offend, a world in which infidelity is punished, and where a handshake between friends is worth more than a contract. (Ruth Halldén, "A Fool's Plea," *Dagens Nyheter*, Aug. 28, 1978)

> The revenge is violent and brutal, but Lancelot believes he accepts the responsibility for his actions, which the film crew do not. (*Arbetarbladet*, Oct. 16, 1978)

> . . . I share his will to find a way to live one's life with dignity and I share his desperation: it is probably not such a simple thing to live with dignity. (Theodor Kallifatides, *Svenska Dagbladet*, Dec. 4, 1978)

> If Walker Percy should get the Nobel Prize the next time it is an American's turn, I should not be particularly surprised after reading *Lancelot*. (Gösta Johansson, *LO-Tidningen*, No. 23, 1978)

After this high praise and a reference to the Nobel Prize in the Swedish workers' union paper, it is perhaps time to end this enumeration with an excerpt from Nalle Valtiala's review. He sums up the themes of *Lancelot* which have made it a success in Sweden. The review is titled "The Knight of the Unholy Grail." It is accompanied by the picture of Walker Percy and grandson from 1970, which is also on the dustjacket

of the American edition. The caption reads: "He fills the void Faulkner left in the American South." Valtiala writes,

> Ever since *The Moviegoer* this problem has bothered Percy. In contrast to the more fortunate men of earlier periods, we have been drugged by a murderous relativism. Everything seems to be in a flux: where is the line separating good and evil, or as it is in *Lancelot*: Harvard and Forty-second Street. . . .
> The unprecedented number of possibilities, the total freedom which is poised as a sword over the western world can only lead to a total confusion, with fatal results for mankind on the ethical stage. . . .
> For the first time Walker Percy has lived up to the great promise of his first novel. With a greater authority than most of his colleagues, he can now claim the position that has not been occupied since the death of a certain Yoknapatawpha County cartographer. (*Hufvudstadsbladet*, March 23, 1979)

The Swedish critical acclaim is echoed by the Norwegian reviewers, although they are on the whole more cautious than their Swedish counterparts. The general direction of interpretation is very similar:

> . . . [*Lancelot*] shows how in certain circles moral concepts have lost all meaning. (Roar Petersen, "Infidelity and Decay," *Morgenbladet*, Dec. 19, 1979)

> Moviepeople take his wife from him, and in this way they come to represent Evil in modern society; this is not surprising for what has cheapened our lives more than the movies? (jos, *Dagen*, Dec. 10, 1979)

> We shall recognize each other in the way gentlemen used to do . . . [through] a strict moral code. . . . (Knut Coucheron Jarl, "Lancelot of Belle Isle," *AftenPosten*, April 23, 1980)

There are, of course, other voices and other viewpoints, sometimes even in the very reviews quoted above. Most notably there is dissent among women critics. Yet, the selected quotations constitute a fair sampling of the general attitude to the novel which established Walker Percy in the Scandinavian consciousness as a first-rate novelist.

The everyday boredness of living in too much of a Kierkegaardian Christendom is evidently a transatlantic disease. But, as I have tried to establish, the stoic Lancelot is a good deal closer to a Scandinavian ideal than a reformed Binx Bolling can hope to be. Is Lancelot any more insane than he has to be in the society in which he lives? He realizes that he lives in a Sahara of the soul, he is left with one emotion that he calls "interest," he is forty-five years old and he still does not know whether all is "niceness or buggery." His great discovery is that he does not have to stand his age. He makes a leap out of the apathy into which he has

abstracted himself. He comes to believe that one just man may change the ways of the world. And he takes his stand: he will not tolerate the swinishness of his age. When he has understood his choice, he has to rebel, for "which is worse, to die with T. J. Jackson at Chancellorsville or live with Johnny Carson in Burbank?" In this way Lancelot's quest may be seen as an attempt to establish the existence of a moral order. He is certain that an order is possible under which "One will work and take care of one's own, live and let live, and behave with a decent respect toward others."[3]

Lancelot plans to live on the ethical stage; but this does not preclude the possibility of a future leap onto the religious stage. The stoic values of the Old South could be crucial in preparing the leap. For it is because of his inherited values that Lancelot is able *to act* when he realizes his despair. And it is because of traditional values that he feels forced to plan a new life in Virginia with Anna. But recently Professor Cleanth Brooks, one of our greatest critics, has lined up Lancelot Lamar with monsters like Adolf Hitler and Idi Amin. And Lewis Lawson, the best Percy critic, has failed to take issue with Cleanth Brooks on this. Let this be the message from Scandinavia: *If we reject Lancelot, we reject a good deal of Southern history and heritage with him!* Lancelot admittedly commits crimes, but first of all he tries to defend his inherited values. He takes his stand for traditional moral ideas which are sorely in need of a champion. This is why the majority of Scandinavian reviewers write about Walker Percy as the man who can fill the vacuum after William Faulkner. Personally, I do not see that there has been any vacuum in the writing of excellent Southern fiction, for Eudora Welty and Madison Jones have been publishing all along. But I welcome Walker Percy as an excellent addition to the long list of classic novelists of the South. He may be the writer to re-awaken international interest in Southern literature on the grand scale.

The Second Coming has also received attention in Sweden. So far, the novel has not been published in Scandinavia. The Swedish reviews of the American edition differ considerably. It is praised for its tragi-comedy, the continued satire of the American society, and the continued existential search. Some doubt is, however, raised about the love story of the novel. Caj Lundgren writes under the headline: "Walker Percy: Waiting for the Turning Point":

> The love story is a bit dubious. The last thirty pages of *The Second Coming* become sentimental, something the author so far has managed to avoid or veil; it just goes to prove that happiness is much more difficult to give literary shape than unhappiness. (*Svenska Dagbladet*, Nov. 14, 1980)

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[3] *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 158.

Per Wästberg's review is titled "The Moment when a Man Chooses his Life," and it is illustrated with a picture of a young couple in front of their Edsel from the movie *American Graffiti:*

> Together with *The Moviegoer, The Second Coming* is Percy's most captivating novel. But it capsizes between allegory and realism. Allison alone in the greenhouse is a magic fable about man. But at the same time Percy is a humorous social critic, anchored in the Southern bourgeoisie. . . .
>
> My chief objection to the novel, and to this important body of work, is of a theological nature. Binx in *The Moviegoer* took flight from the everyday world, but for a long time I thought this was without the blessing of the author. For where can we find "the other human being" if not in the everyday world? But the other Will finds is desperately remote. . . .
>
> [Allison] becomes a depressing proof of the fact that God never pays a visit to the public highway. (*Dagens Nyheter,* Nov. 26, 1980)

Personally, I have read *The Second Coming* as another great Percy novel about alienation, and what to do to overcome it. There is in it, perhaps, a bit too much of Nick Adams meeting Sylvia Plath under a belljar for the novel to be totally successful. But when Percy asks whether it will do any good to "undeceive the ninety-nine" per cent who are fooling themselves, the publication of *The Second Coming* is, of course, proof enough that he is still trying. And the enemy is still the death-in-life which prevents us from living fully, except possibly at a time of disaster. "Why is it," Percy asks, "that Americans who are the best dearest most generous people on earth are so unhappy?" Why are we living dead; why are we looking forward to the morning movie?" Walker Percy is still diagnosing the *malaise,* and indirectly he offers us ways out of the living death through his comments.

After the success of *Lancelot* in Sweden, *The Moviegoer* was published there in November 1980 as *Biobesökaren,* a paperback with a kissing Humphrey Bogart on the cover (Trans. by Staffan Holmgren, Panter, 275 pp.). And it has had a friendly reception with review headlines like: "Kierkegaard in New Orleans" (*Jönköpings-Posten*) and "A Present-Day Descendant of Tolstoy's Prince Andre " (*Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*). It attests to the lasting popularity of *The Moviegoer* that it is a success in another language almost twenty years after the original publication.—But I must end now, for I have just received a note which reads: "I know your predicament; . . . be at the southeast corner of McKinney and Main at 12:00 today—I have news of the greatest importance."

"THE THREAD IN THE LABYRINTH": *LOVE IN THE RUINS* AND ONE TRADITION OF COMEDY

JOHN CUNNINGHAM

I

For a moment, I want to look at death in *Love in the Ruins;* the connection between death and comedy will appear presently.

Even before the neuroblastoma which pushed one of her eyes "out and around the nosebridge so that she looked like a Picasso profile"[1] had killed Samatha, her father, Dr. Thomas More, began to feed himself on the carrion comfort of "sweet remorse," and he was not "above enjoying" Samantha's suffering. Her death proved for him a "compensation, . . . a delectation of tragedy, a license for drink, a taste of both for taste's sake" (*LR*, 374). When she died he "started drinking and stayed drunk for a year—and not even for sorrow's sake" (*LR*, 273). He asks, "Is it possible to live without feasting on death?" (*LR*, 393). He took up "Steadmann's *History of World War I*" and meditated upon "the Battle of Verdun, which killed half a million men . . . and left the battle lines unchanged. Here began the hemorrhage and death by suicide of the old Western world" (*LR*, 47). One Christmas Eve he literally tasted death as he drank gin fizzes despite his fatal allergy to the whites of eggs and made love to Lola in the "grassy [golf] bunker of number 18 . . . dying of love and hives" (*LR*, 175-76). During the octave of Christmas he "became ill, suffering simultaneous depressions and exaltations, assaulted at night by longings, succubi, and the hideous shellfire of Verdun. . . . One morning—was it Christmas morning . . . ?" he asks—"my wrists were cut and bleeding" (*LR*, 97). The next night, in the mental hospital, he experienced a "regular Walpurgis night of witches, devils, pitchforks, thorns in the flesh, upkneed girl thighs" (*LR*, 109). Outside "the madhouse" (*LR*, 106) "the abyss yawns" (*LR*, 107) before him: he sees "that principalities and powers are nearly everywhere victorious" (*LR*, 31)—these are the infernal agents of darkness, those who are able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Before she died, Samantha asked her father not to "commit the one sin for which there is no forgiveness" (*LR*, 373), the sin of refusing God's grace.

Nor is Dr. More alone among the dead and the dying. Paradise Estates, "littered with the rusting hulks of splendid" automobiles (*LR*, 62), is a place of "death in life" (*LR*, 199), and Thomas More suspects that "it is possible . . . to be dying and alive at Verdum and alive and dying as a booster of the Nittany Lions" (*LR*, 190). His patients fall into

[1] *Love in the Ruins* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971), p. 373. Cited hereafter as *LR*.

two classes: for "certain psychiatric disorders have cropped up in both Lefts and Knotheads. Conservatives had begun to fall victim to unseasonable rages, delusions of conspiracy, high blood pressure, and large-bowel complaints. Liberals are more apt to contract sexual impotence, morning terror, and a feeling of abstraction of the self from itself" (*LR*, 20). Father Smith, himself "in the acute wing" (*LR*, 183) of the mental hospital, reported to his physician that "Death is winning, life is losing"; he meant that "the living are dead." He said, "I am surrounded by the corpses of souls. We live in a city of the dead" (*LR*, 185-86). When he is not in the hospital, Father Smith earns his living as a fire-watcher, and he thinks of the brushfires that people set as the "outer circle of hell" (*LR*, 398).

Partly by means of his "Qualitative, Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer" (*LR*, 30) but more by means of his own good sense, Dr. More diagnoses the pestilence all around him, and within him. He knows of a "fault in the soul's terrain so deep that all is well on top," yet "something shears and tears deep down" (*LR*, 152). The "world is broken, sundered, busted down the middle, self ripped from self and man pasted back together . . . , half angel, half beast, but no man." This is the "new plague, the modern Black Death" (*LR*, 382-83), the "deep abscess in the soul of Western man" (*LR*, 153) which "rives soul from body and sets it orbiting the great world as the spirit of abstraction whence it takes the form of beasts, swans and bulls, werewolves, blood-suckers" (*LR*, 383): "such a person, and there are millions, is destined to haunt the human condition like the [accursed] Flying Dutchman" (*LR*, 34). This phenomenon Dr. More names "the Lucifer syndrome" (*LR*, 236). It was, he says, "Descartes [who] ripped body loose from mind and turned the very soul into a ghost that haunts its own house" (*LR*, 191). Whatever Dr. More may suppose, the author knows that the ailment began long before Descartes, and Dr. More admits as much when he voices hope that his Lapsometer will be able to "weld the broken self whole" and allow man to "reenter paradise" (*LR*, 36). As things stand, however, man knows only a "chasm" (*LR*, 191), a "gap, an aching wound" (*LR*, 36), and "a longing, longings for women, for the Nobel Prize, for the hot bosky bite of bourbon whiskey, and other great heart-wrenching longings that have no name" (*LR*, 23). "The first thing a man remembers is longing and the last thing he is conscious of before death is exactly the same longing" (*LR*, 21); it is "the same cosmic sexual-religious longing" (*LR*, 156-57), "the desire that has no name" (*LR*, 393). Dr. More stoops over Lola, "covering her, wondering why God gave man such an ache in his heart" (*LR*, 266).

II

If it is the business of comedy—at least of one kind of comedy—to demonstrate that life can come out of death, health out of sickness, joy

out of sorrow, if it is the business of comedy to celebrate the victory of life over death, and if *Love in the Ruins* is comedy, one is obliged to inquire after the source of life in this novel. For Dr. More, the question poses no problem at all. Dr. Max Gottlieb wants to "condition away" Thomas' "guilt feelings" by putting him into "the Skinner box"; but without guilt Thomas knows he would "really be up a creek": without "guilt, contrition, and a purpose of amendment, . . . sin cannot be forgiven," and that "means that you don't have life in you." Life comes, therefore, from the "sacrament of penance" (*LR*, 117-18). Father Smith has "baptized the newborn into a new life" (*LR*, 139, 183): that is, he has freed them from the sin into which they are born and grafted them into the life of Christ. Life comes, therefore, from the sacrament of baptism. And pre-eminently life comes in this novel from the sacrament of the altar. Before Samantha died, Dr. More went to Mass with her, "ate Christ and held him to his word, if you eat me you'll have life in you, so," More says, "I had life in me" (*LR*, 138). After Mass, he felt so good that he would "sing and cut the fool all the way home like King David before the Ark . . . shout with joy for the beauty of the world, sing 'Finch' han dal vino' from *Don Giovanni* and 'Holy God We Praise Thy Name,' [and] conceive a great heart-leaping desire for Doris," fetch her beyond the azaleas and fall upon her in the zoysia grass (*LR*, 13), causing her on such occasions to say, "My God, what is it you do in church?" (*LR*, 254).

On weekends, before Samantha was born, Thomas and Doris would "roar seven hundred miles a day along the great interstates" and "set down in the green hills of Tennessee or out in haunted New Mexico." Their motel was the "coordinate . . . at the intersection of the interstates . . . abscissa and ordinate," the crossing of the vertical and the horizontal. On Sunday mornings, Dr. More would seek out "some forlorn little Catholic Church" where, he says, a "stove-up bemused priest" announced "the turkey raffle and Wednesday bingo and preached the Gospel and fed me Christ." The priest "upon whose head hands had been laid and upon this other head other hands and so on" is "the thread in the labyrinth" that leads out of the maze, out of the abyss, out of the Walpurgis night, out of death, out of the ruins, back to Christ of Whom the priest is sacrament and Whom the priest feeds to Dr. More in sacrament. Here is the real intersection of the vertical and the horizontal, of time and eternity, of matter and spirit, of the abstract and the concrete. Here are the real abscissa and ordinate, terms, we should recall, from Cartesian geometry. Dr. More would return to the motel "exhilarated," for, he says, "It took religion to save me from the spirit world, from orbiting the earth like Lucifer . . . , it took nothing less than touching the thread off the misty interstates and eating Christ himself to make me mortal man again and let me inhabit my own flesh and love [Doris]

in the morning" (*LR*, 253-54). In "the Old Church's traffic in things, sacraments, articles, bread, wine, salt, oil, water, ashes" (*LR*, 400), is the means for uniting the "ordinary self, the restless aching everyday self" with the "real self," "the secret self"—the divine image in each man—"that one happens on in dreams, in poetry, during ordeals, on happy trips" (*LR*, 370).

III

After Samantha died, "some years ago," Dr. More "stopped eating Christ in Communion, stopped going to mass, and . . . [fell] into a disorderly life" (*LR*, 6); and he began to feast instead on death. Moreover, Doris has left him to seek a new life in Cozumel, where she died. The novel opens at "5 P.M." (*LR*, 3) on July the Fourth, the last day of the book except for the epilogue. In the first sentence Dr. More says, "I came to myself in a grove of young pines" (*LR*, 3): as Dante came to himself in the dark wood. Both Dante and Thomas More are lost in the dark wood of error. On this day, Dr. More expects something like the end of the world: he expects cataclysmic—even apocalyptic—tumult in society, in the nation, in nature, and in the psyches of the people. At the end of the day, he has reached the bottom: lying in a ditch, full of fatal gin fizzes, his Lapsometer in the hands of Satan's legions, the bunker smoking, and the Bantus a sinister threat. At this point he announces, "I'm not going back to that. . . . Back to my old life, . . . a useless longing on week days, World War I at night, and drunk every weekend" (*LR*, 365-66). As Art Immelmann reaches out to Ellen to lead her to Denmark, that is to Hell, Thomas, who "can't seem to move," prays to his ancestor, "*Sir Thomas More, kinsman, saint, best dearest merriest of Englishmen, pray for us and drive this son of a bitch hence*"; and Art "disappears into the smoke swirling beyond the bunker" (*LR*, 376-77). Having renounced the old life and having renounced the devil and all his works, Thomas finds that his world has indeed come to an end and that he is ready for the new life which it is the business of comedy to effect.

The epilogue takes place five years later and begins on "a fine December day" as "the winter sun pours into the walled garden" where Thomas is hoeing and "fills it up" (*LR*, 381). Marriage and births—unions and new life—appropriate for comic endings have occurred. Thomas has married Ellen, his nurse, and they have two children, "Meg and Thomas More, Jr." (*LR*, 382). The old life has been put aside and its false loves renounced. Thomas is ready for the new life, and he sounds the Advent themes: he says, "Now while you work, you also watch and listen and wait"; "if you want and wait and work you can have" (*LR*, 381-82). On Christmas Eve, he and Presbyterian Ellen go to Mass. He even tries to make his confession, but he is not sure that he has "contrition and a firm purpose of amendment," but Father Smith leads his thoughts away from

"an eleven-year catalogue of dreary fornications and such" (*LR*, 397), which the priest calls "middle-aged daydreams," and causes Thomas to think instead about doing his job better, being a better doctor, showing ordinary kindness to people, especially to his family; suddenly, Thomas is "scalded" with shame (*LR*, 399). Father Smith absolves him, and Thomas eats "Christ, and drink[s] his blood" (*LR*, 400). This is the beginning of his new life. His actual birthday is July the First, the day that the Latin rite appoints for the Feast of the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. After Mass, Thomas knows that "the Lord is here," and he barbecues in the sackcloth that Father Smith has given him as part of his penance, and drinks Early Times, and finds himself "dancing and singing old Sinatra songs and the *Salve Regina*, cutting the fool like David before the ark." He ends by putting Ellen down on the "new $600 bed . . . not under a bush or in a car or on the floor or any such humbug . . . , but at home in bed where all good folk belong" (*LR*, 402-03).

IV

Sacramental matters, or at least liturgical ones, have their part in the comic and life-giving resolutions of Percy's other novels. *The Last Gentleman* ends, of course, with the baptism of Jamie Vaught. Just before Jamie dies, his body purges itself, as Will Barrett thinks, of "the dread ultimate rot of the molecules. . . . It was the body's disgorgement of its most secret shame."[2] Then Father Boomer, who has no interest at all in ministering an invalid sacrament, leads Jamie to the point of faith, purges his soul of all original sin and of all actual sin, and assures him of immediate new life beyond the grave. Somehow, as a result of these events, Will Barrett is able to prevent Sutter from the "date" (*LG*, 407) he has, we may presume, with death by suicide. The novel ends as "strength flowed like oil into [Will's] muscles and as he ran with great joyous ten-foot antelope bounds" toward Sutter's Edsel which waits (*LG*, 409). The last actions of the novel take place, one should note, in Santa Fe, to which city and which condition the novel has brought Jamie. Many years later and in another novel, *The Second Coming*, Will Barrett makes his own approach to the faith which he is determined to have; and, if it comes, it will proceed through the mediation of an aged priest, Father Weatherbee, about whom, as the novel closes, Will asks himself, "Could it be that the Lord is here, masquerading behind this simple silly holy face?"[3] *Lancelot* begins on All Saints' Day as the liturgical year moves toward its close which prefigures the Apocalypse, and the novel is full of cataclysmic events and ironic predictions of new life, new ages, new worlds. At one point in his monologue, Lancelot proposes what the case

[2] *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 401. Cited hereafter as *LG*.

[3] *The Second Coming* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), p. 360.

would be "if . . . Christ were king";[4] the Feast of Christ the King occurs on the last Sunday of the church year, the Sunday next before Advent. The novel takes place in a "jail or hospital" located where "Felicity Street [crosses] Annunciation Street," and it involves a series of revelations which Lancelot makes to a psychiatrist who is also a priest, a "screwed-up priest or a half-assed physician. Or both," as Lancelot says (*L*, 10). Early on, Lancelot says to him, "I have a confession to make" (*L*, 9), and Lancelot tells his auditor that he has been a "catalyst" (*L*, 13) in Lancelot's remembering the dreadful events of the past year. Of course, as the novel ends, Lancelot is immured in pride and has no contrition for his crimes nor any intention of amendment of life. Yet to Lancelot's last question—"Is there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?"—the priest answers, "Yes," the last word of the novel (*L*, 257). We cannot know the effect of the priest's counsel on Lancelot, but we may recall the effect of Father Smith's guidance on Dr. Thomas More and Father Boomer's on Jamie Vaught. We do know, however, of the effect of the series of revelations on the priest. At the opening of the novel, he does not wear his clericals and declines to say a prayer at a tomb on All Souls' Day. By the end of the book, he has resumed his clerical dress; Lancelot has seen him kneel and pray at a tomb; and he plans to leave the prison-hospital, "take a little church in Alabama, . . . preach the gospel, turn bread into flesh, forgive the sins of Buick dealers, administer communion to suburban housewives" (*L*, 256). In the epigram to *Lancelot*, from *The Purgatorio*, Beatrice says that Dante had sunk "so low that all means for his salvation were gone, except showing him the lost people." The allusion can refer only ambiguously to Lancelot, but it describes the priest aptly; one of the names by which Lancelot knows him is "Percival . . . , who found the Grail and brought life to a dead land" (*L*, 10). Finally, I may add that Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer* gives up movie-going, accepts responsibility for himself and for Kate on his thirtieth birthday, which happens to be Ash Wednesday.

V

The sacramental—or at least liturgical—focus that one finds at the close of each of Percy's novels demonstrates one way in which he stands in a tradition of Catholic comedy that goes back at least as far as Dante. One of Dante's last sights on Mount Purgatory is the pageant of the Sacrament—or the pageant of the Church—it makes little difference which. Having seen it, he is taken up into Paradise where even sacrament passes away. The play *Everyman* comes to rest on four sacraments which prepare Everyman to enter the grave and to be born into new life beyond it: they are the sacraments of Orders, Penance, Communion, and Unction.

[4] *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977), p. 154. Cited hereafter as *L*.

The sacrament of Communion has an important place, I am prepared to argue, in such an unlikely novel as *Joseph Andrews;* and it turns up, I am prepared to suggest, at the conclusion of some of Dickens' novels. Baptism takes place at the close of Flannery O'Connor's story "The River" and of her novel *The Violent Bear It Away;* and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament occurs at the end of "The Temple of the Holy Ghost."

I hope that I have suggested one way in which Percy is a Catholic comedian; but an adequate account of the sacramental and liturgical matters in his novels must wait upon a thorough discussion of the several elements of Catholic comedy as they come together in his books. I make so bold as to say that the most fruitful investigations of Percy will address themselves to defining this comedy.

THE SOUTHERNNESS OF WALKER PERCY

Cleanth Brooks

I have chosen this topic for two reasons. The first is a positive one: Walker Percy's novels are indeed thoroughly permeated with the visual appearances, accents, customs, folkways, vocabulary, and idiom of Southern culture. He is our most acute commentator on the social life of the South—particularly of the South during the last quarter of a century. I can recognize on his every page the men and women I have known all my life, can hear the language that they use, and their ways of responding to each other and to the world in general.

I wonder how much of this quality our non-Southern friends notice. Much, I should think, though I can only surmise that they do. But I think that many Southerners probably take little note of it for the good reason that it is so familiar to them that they are unaware of it. Maybe so, maybe not. It is possible that my thirty-odd years' sojourn in New England has quickened my own sense of what in Percy's novels is peculiarly Southern and what is simply run-of-the-mill American.

My second reason for choosing this topic is of a different order: Percy has insisted so many times on the fact that he is *not* writing the Southern novel that incautious readers may be misled. In a number of interviews—one I remember appeared in *Esquire,* one in the *New York Times Book Review,* another on Buckley's *Firing Line*—Percy has taken pains to underline the point.

Now, I am thoroughly sympathetic with Percy's position. By "Southern novel" he has something very particular in mind. It is a mode of which Faulkner was the great exemplar. With no disparagement to Faulkner, this was something that Percy had no desire to do. He meant to deal with the Southern scene of his own time and in terms of certain overriding issues, including philosophical and theological issues. "Faulkner,"

on one occasion he told his interviewer, "meant less to me than Albert Camus."

I may observe, as an aside, that in my opinion few authentic writers have—save, perhaps, in a jejeune first effort—been attracted into Faulkner's orbit. But this is not a matter that I mean to discuss here. My only concern is that nobody conclude from Percy's emphatic disavowal of a Southern fictional stereotype that Percy himself is not intensely Southern.

Yet how can I hope to establish this point in the course of a very brief paper? Obviously, I could do it only by citing passages in Percy's novels. But what to select for quotation? My choice to begin with is a little bouquet of descriptions of Southern women. A novelist of manners will usually exhibit his powers to best advantage in this area, for it is traditionally the women who establish and maintain the current code of manners. On this subject of the Southern woman, Percy writes with both gusto and sensitive discrimination. How does the girl from Alabama differ from the girl from Virginia? Or the Texas girl from her sister in Georgia?

Here is Binx Bolling's secretary, Sharon Kincaid, whom he calls his prize drum-majorette from Alabama:

> Marcia and Linda [Binx's former secretaries] were as nothing to the elfin creature, this sumptuous elf from Eufala who moved like a ballerina, hard-working and docile, dreaming in her work, head to the side, cheek downy and spare as a boy's.

She is riding beside him in the bucket seat of his MG, and he proceeds to describe her conversation and gestures as they ride together:

> Sharon eyes my MG narrowly. After she has gotten in, she makes it plain that MG or no MG there is to be no monkey business. How does she make such a thing plain and in an MG sitting thigh to thigh and knee to knee? By her Southern female trick of politeness. "This is the cutest little *car*!" she sings and goes trailing off in a fit of absent-mindedness, hands to the nape of her neck and tilting her head forward so that she surveys the street through her eyebrows and with a cold woman's eye; then seeming to rouse herself apologetically: "This sure beats typing. Mhm-M"—as singsongy and shut off to herself as her mammy in Eufala. Southern girls learn a lot from their nurses.

How different is Sharon from Doris More, the first wife of the hero of *Love in the Ruins*. After their marriage breaks up, he remembers her as

> as lusty and merry a wife then as a man could have, a fine ex-Episcopal ex-Apple Queen from the Shenandoah Valley. I long to see you.

In another passage he tells us why she left him:

> My wife, who began life as a cheerful Episcopalian from

> Virginia, became a priestess of the high places. I loved her dearly and loved to lie with her and would and did whene'er she would allow it, but most especially in the morning, at breakfast, in the nine o'clock sunlight out here on the "enclosed patio." But books ruined her. Beware of Episcopal women who take up with Ayn Rand and the Buddha and Dr. Rhine formerly of Duke University. A certain type of Episcopal girl has a weakness that comes on them just past youth, just as sure as Italian girls get fat. They fall prey to Gnostic pride, commence buying antiques, and develop a yearning for esoteric doctrine.

This is a shrewd and telling character analysis. But Percy has also a sharp ear for nuances of dialect. One morning, at breakfast time, Dr. More says to his wife, "Come here." "What for?" she replies, and More comments: "A tiny spark of Old Virginny, the Shenandoah Valley, rekindling in her: her saying 'what for' and not 'why.'"

Let's next take a look at the girl from west Texas. Her father has made a good deal of money, the family has moved to New Orleans, and the daughter would like to break into New Orleans society. She is not making much headway until she volunteers to be one of the hoop-skirted young ladies who show tourists through some of the plantation houses on the River Road above New Orleans.

On this day there has been a downpour of rain, and Margot is pretty well drenched when the owner of the house, Lancelot Lamar, comes home from New Orleans to find her, sopping wet though not woe-begone, backed against the plastered wall of the gallery of the house: "Under the muddy fringe of her hoop skirt, I could see her feet were bare. Her short hair was in wet ringlets like spitcurls on her forehead, but still springy and stiff at her temples."

The pair introduce themselves, and Margot hugs her bare shoulders, shivers, and says that she'd like a drink. Lancelot takes her by the hand, leads her over to the pigeonnier,

> the farthest place from the tourists, servants, and family, nobody but Ellis using it to store garden tools, and invited her in. Of course it wasn't fixed up then and was dusty and cluttered but dry and pleasant.
>
> "Warm! Dry!" She clapped her hands as I cleared a place among the tools and found an old glider mattress to sit on. "Get me out of this damn thing." I swear I think she almost said *git* but not really: she was halfway between *git* and *get*, just as she was halfway between Odessa, Texas, and New Orleans.
>
> Damned if the hoop skirt didn't work like chaps! It hooked on behind and came right off and meanwhile she was undoing her jacketlike top and so she stepped forth in pantaloons and bodice—I guess it was a bodice—all run with violet and green

> dye like a harlequin. I remember wondering at the time: Was it that she looked so good in pantaloons or would any woman look that much better in pantaloons?

Compare with this rather breezy, tom-boyish girl from west Texas, Percy's thumbnail sketch of a Georgia girl. She eventually became Thomas More's second wife, and this is how he describes her:

> Ellen Oglethorpe is a beautiful but tyrannical Georgia Presbyterian. A ripe Georgia persimmon not a peach, she fairly pops the buttons of her nurse's uniform with her tart ripeness. She burgeons with marriageable Presbyterianism. It somehow happens that the strict observance of her religion gives her leave to be free with her own person. Her principles allow her a kind of chaste wantonness. She touches me, leans against me, puts spit on me. I shudder with horrible pleasure and pleasurable horror. Caught up by her strong female urgings, one to mother, one to marry, one to be a girl-child and lean against you, she muses and stands between your legs, eyes watching your eyes, elbows and knees engaging you in the lap, anywhere, each touch setting off in you horrid girl-child tingles. She doesn't know how close is close.

Notice how the Texas girl's "curious droll direct voluptuousness" is neatly countered by Ellen's burgeoning "marriageable Presbyterianism."

Yet, lest I give the impression that Walker Percy's male characters or Percy himself or perhaps I myself am interested only in young, pretty, nubile females, let me offer Percy's account of two older Southern women. Here is a portrait of Binx Bolling's formidable aunt:

> She is shaking her head yet still smiling her sweet menacing smile. "The world I knew has come crashing down around my ears. The things we hold dear are reviled and spat upon." She nods toward Prytania Street. "It's an interesting age you will live in—though I can't say I'm sorry to miss it. But it should be quite a sight, the going under of the evening land. That's us all right. And I can tell you, my young friend, it is evening. It is very late."
>
> For her too the fabric is dissolving, but for her even the dissolving makes sense. She understands the chaos to come.

In contrast to this rather patrician lady from the Garden District in New Orleans, consider Percy's account of Mrs. Vaught, who lives in Birmingham and whose husband owns the second largest Chevrolet agency in the United States. Here young Bill Barrett has just been presented to her by Mr. Vaught:

> "Where're you from," cried Mrs. Vaught in a mock-accusatory tone he recognized and knew how to respond to.

"Ithaca," he said, smiling. "Over in the Delta." He felt himself molt. In the space of seconds he changed from a Southerner in the North, an amiable person who wears the badge of his origin in a faint burlesque of itself, to a Southerner in the South, a skillful player of an old play who knows his cues and waits smiling in the wings. You stand in the posture of waiting on ladies and when one of them speaks to you so, with mock-boldness and mock-anger (and a bit of steel in it too), you knew how to take it. They were onto the same game. Mrs. Vaught feasted her eyes on him. He was *nice*. (She, he saw at once, belonged to an older clan than Mr. Vaught; she knew ancient cues he never heard of.) She could have married him on the spot and known what she was getting.

Had I world enough and time, I could present you with a long succession of portraits of Percy's males, old and young, black and white; I could also quote his pithy appraisals of Southern attitudes toward religion, politics, and rhetoric; I could read to you contrasting sketches of Virginia, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana; I could use his pages to instruct you in the differences between the Upper South and the Deep South, and even explain why one of Percy's characters regards the Southerner as the perfect pornographer. There is no end of such lore in Percy's five novels, and many of his insights and observations of Southern folkways are of the sort to make a sociologist turn green with envy.

STORY, STORY-TELLER AND LISTENER: NOTES ON *LANCELOT*

SIMONE VAUTHIER

Toward the end of *Lancelot*, the eponymous character comments to the priest-psychiatrist friend who has been his confidant for five long days: "I have the feeling that while I was talking and changing, you were listening and changing."[1] The remark stressing the effects of Lance's narration points to an important dimension of the novel. Story-telling is an action which constitutes the primary frame of the narrative and is as much the vital center of the work as the "terrible events" at Belle Isle which Lancelot narrates in the secondary frame.

Lancelot, however, oversimplifies their respective roles. Though keeping silent is one of the ways in which Percival contributes to the exchange, he is not simply a listener. This is an illusion fostered by the narrative technique, which has the I-narrator integrate into his own utterances those of his partner in the act of communication. But we must posit an implicit addresser who projects first a manifest locutor (to whom in fact a great number of functions are delegated since he is also protagonist in the two time frames, observer, commentator, and mouthpiece for other characters) and a second locutor who is only made to speak out in the last two pages of the book but who has been participating in the interaction all along. The priest's final utterances reported in italics then anchor what I have called the primary frame. They retrospectively guarantee that a conversation has really been going on, and not taking place in Lance's deranged mind. Seen in relation to the implicit addresser of the narrative, the two speakers are on an equality although the mode of narration foregrounds Lancelot. Because they reach us through Lancelot's speech, Percival's contributions to the conversation are de-emphasized, thus making it our responsibility to restore the balance.

To reconstruct Percival's end of the exchange, however, is an all but impossible task. For one thing Lance relays his friend's utterances selectively and summarily. Often his own response is the only clue we have to the priest's having spoken. For instance when Lance asks, "Then you know my story?" the remark, introduced as it is with "then," presupposes that Percival has evinced knowledged of his friend's affairs. But the only other textual indication that he has indeed spoken is the blank space that separates Lancelot's two utterances. For another thing, although Lancelot sometimes quotes his friend's speech in such a way that attribution is easy ("Did I love her, you ask?" [89]; "But we have plenty of evil around you say" [138]; "You say we are redeemed" [224]), the larger part of the confidant's sayings is assimilated into the narrator's

[1] Walker Percy, *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), p. 254. This edition is cited hereafter in the text.

discourse in the form of questions: "A clue to what? A clue to the mystery of Belle Isle? The hell with all that" (106).[2] Such a device, while making for the naturalness of the narration, at the same time blurs the distinction between the quoted speech and the quoting speech which often resorts to the interrogative. For Lance is fond of rhetorical questions ("Can one ever be sure of anything?" [130]), makes bona fide inquiries from his friend ("Why did you leave twenty years ago?" [115]; "Do you think I am crazy?" [175]), and occasionally engages in some self-questioning ("Why didn't I do something about Siobhan, not about the well, which I couldn't have cared less about . . . why didn't I do something about Siobhan" [54]). Not infrequently too the question can be taken to be oriented both toward the other and toward the self (see p. 89). In the fast-running flow of the narrator's discourse, when question succeeds question, now rhetorical, now addressed to the other and now to the self, the reader may be forgiven if he fails to pinpoint the original locutor of every utterance. A close analysis of the text would, however, show that, far from being silent as it is too often claimed,[3] Percival constantly—if perhaps briefly—participates in the exchange.

Throughout the narrative, Percival's contributions, in fact, serve to authenticate some of Lance's statements. Either directly as in the following example: "Is this a prison or a hospital? A Center for Aberrant Behavior? *So that's it.* I have behaved aberrantly. In short, I am in the nuthouse" (3, emphasis mine). Or indirectly when Percival leaves uncorrected some of his friend's assertions. (Thus there is no reason to question Lance's definition of Percival as a priest-psychiatrist and see in him a fellow-inmate).[4] Although Lance's account is by no means trustworthy in its details, the priest's comments or silences provide a sort of general validation of the basic facts. On three occasions, for instance, Lance quotes headlines on the Belle Isle events (13, 60, 105), probably in an unconscious attempt to put some distance between himself and his crimes. While he quotes from memory, we may presume that his rendering is faithful to the spirit, if not the letter, of the phrases. An assumption which becomes a certainty on the third occasion. For then it is Percival who brings up the subject, as appears from Lance's questions: "Jacoby?

[2] Percival's remarks may themselves be quotations of Lance's speech: "Yes, you are right. I did say that there was something that still bothered me. What? Sin? The uncertainty that there is such a thing? I don't remember" (163).

[3] Joyce Carol Oates, in "*Lancelot* by Walker Percy," claims that "Percival is never allowed into the story, nor the past; he does not figure in the narrative at all" (*New Republic*, Feb. 5, 1977, p. 31). See also Robert Towers, "Southern Discomfort," *N.Y. Rev. of Books* (March 31, 1977); Robert Brinkmeyer, "Percy's Bludgeon: Message and Narrative Strategy," *The Southern Quarterly*, 18, 3 (Spring 1980), 88. A significant exception is Lewis Lawson's stimulating essay: "Walker Percy's Silent Character," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 33 (Spring 1980). But I do not accept some of its deductions, including one of its major premises, namely that "there is no behavior by Father John that reveals that he has any more knowledge of Lance's recent history than does the reader" (130).

[4] See Lawson, p. 130.

I haven't told you about him? The headlines? BELLE ISLE BURNS! DIRECTOR MURDERED AND MUTILATED! EX-GRID STAR HELD FOR QUESTIONING! Yes, I remember all that" (105). Since none of the headlines mentioned earlier by Lance alluded to the fate of the director, Percival when introducing Jacoby's name is not simply reminding his friend of what he told him but recalling something which he himself read. Therefore the headlines are not fantasized by the protagonist. In the fictional universe they acquire objective status as they become the basis for an act of communication between the two men.

They both "know" Lancelot's "story," or rather the newspaper version of it. But there exists also another version. For Lance is less than truthful when he says that he has "refused all psychiatrists, ministers, priests, group therapy and what not" (5). He later casually alludes to his "monthly physical and mental examination" (62), refers to "the psychologist here" and to "my psychiatrist" in contexts which prove his familiarity with both. Certainly, lawyer that he is, we may suppose that he has kept from imparting to other people the revelations which he can entrust to Percival, true friend and priest. We are quite ready to believe him when he thanks Percival at the end: "You know that I could not have told anyone else" (253; see also 105 and 108). His recital however must be set against those two other versions of his story. Of the institutional story, there is no trace in the text.[5] All we know is that it is of the anything-goes kind: "No matter what I tell [the psychologist], even if I break wind, he gives me the same quick congratulatory look" (107). Of the newspaper story, we only have fragments. But such as they are, they suffice to put us in a situation which is not unlike that of Percival: we are aware of facts and hypotheses about the destruction of Belle Isle and the murders, long before Lance can bring himself to narrate his actions. Knowledge of the public story enables Percival to prompt his friend and ask questions that cover/uncover areas which Lance would rather leave untouched. When after the account of the murders, Percival wants to know how Lance got burned, he obliquely points out all that remains unspoken in his friend's almost compulsive stream of words. And incidentally the chilling answer ("I had to go back to find the knife") gives the lie to an earlier statement of Lance's "my hands burned trying to save Margot" (105). Similarly knowledge of the headlines alerts the reader to the most glaring gap in Lance's circumstantial narration of the arson and murders—his omitting Jacoby's mutilation. Sketchy and sensation-oriented as it is, the public story reveals the incompleteness and selectiveness of the I-narrator discourse.

But this, of course, comes into being in response to the other stories.

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[5] It is to be noted however that these institutional confidences apparently win for Lance his discharge, the confirmation that he is "psychiatrically fit and legally innocent."

What Lance tells the staff of the Center for Aberrant Behavior is meaningless to him because of the psychiatric attitude of "dissolving" tolerance. What the newspapers tell, Lance can recognize as his story; but it is also the story of a third person, the stereotyped "scion of old family," to whom certain feelings and actions are conventionally and generously ascribed ("Crazed by grief and rage" he "suffers burns trying to save wife" [13]). Alienating and grossly off the mark, the newspaper account is serviceable to Lance who can exploit it as a device of affirmation/negation, yet ultimately useless in his quest for knowledge. Deprived of his identity by the institutional and journalistic versions of his case, Lancelot must reclaim his story and his identity through telling his own tale to the proper listener.

Percival qualifies as a confidant for a number of reasons. "Classmate, fraternity brother and later best of friends," Percival is Lancelot's *alter ego,* who will serve him as "a kind of catalyst." The listener, "bound by the seal of friendship if not the confessional," can even be trusted to understand that his friend gives himself "a certain license to talk crazy" (160). Because he has an image of the younger Lance, and can see him in relation to his becoming, he offers the reader the possibility to weave together past, present and future, and thus define his true nature. He is expected to help Lance look for the clue which the latter feels he has missed: "There is something I don't understand. And you are both my leverage point and my companion. Because you knew Belle Isle and you knew me" (108). And he can also be told about Lancelot's grandiose mad plans for a Third Revolution: ". . . so since you understand me and my past—if you don't, nobody does, I am going to tell you my plans for the future" (156). At the same time, Percival is the confidant whom the narrator needs because as a priest-psychiatrist, he is somehow close to the Establishment, hence a fitting repository for the secret which, *qua* secret, is oriented toward those very people from whom it has been kept.[6] It is not only to disclose whatever he could not, would not tell the doctors, and thereby unburden himself that Lance tells his twice-told tale. (As a matter of fact, the gaps in his narration, his abrupt changes of subject, his frequent denials tend to prove that Lance consciously omits and unconsciously represses a good deal). He tells it also to make it, in his own words, "not a confession but a secret" (155), to create, as it were, a space of concealment, which separates him and his confidant from "them" and creates a community. In this way Lance is able to reassert his much-threatened sovereignty and assume some power over his listener. So a verbal repetition, intended to preclude repetition of past mistakes, repeats in the very structure of the act of communication, and quite apart from

[6] Andreas Zempléni, "La chaîne du secret," *Du Secret, Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse,* numéro 14 (automne 1976).

its contents, the process of exclusion that has been lethally operative in Lance's past and has led to his present isolation.

If the telling of any story, let alone a secret, is always affected in complex ways by its recipient (the image which the teller has of him, and of their relationship, the image he has of the listener's image of himself and their relationship, etc.), the influence of the listener in this case is all the greater because the speaker stands to him in a relation of long-established dependence. Percival is Lancelot's *mediator* in the sense René Girard gives to the word. To summarize baldly Girard's theories, desire, though it believes itself spontaneous, is always mimetic. Because it is imitation of the Other's desire, it has generated conflicts and violence from time immemorial.[7] In our egalitarian societies, mimesis has become ontological mimesis. For a dead God, modern man has substituted the Self but continues to seek for absolutes. Conscious of his own radical insufficiency, the subject turns to the Other whom he believes to be endowed with the metaphysical autonomy, the plenitude of being which *he* lacks. In short, he has renounced the divine Mediator only to depend more and more on a human mediator who is both model and rival, venerated as model, hated as obstacle to the subject's metaphysical desire. Thus receiving and sending a multiplicity of contradictory signs which urge and forbid imitation, men are caught in the vicious circle of rivalry and violence. Since in the resulting state of universal idolatry, differences between men disappear, the general mimesis becomes exacerbated and, with it, the double bind which results from ontological desire.

Now *Lancelot* seems to me to mark a departure in Walker Percy's work, precisely because the mimetic process is here very much in evidence. What with the double frame, the double plot, the double quest, the doubling of the hero *actant*, the appearances of doubles, the two movies (one of which is described as a double feature), the thematic importance of actors and the cinema, etc., the traces of mimesis proliferate at all levels. I am not trying to impute to Walker Percy ideas that are René Girard's. But Girard's theory of man, which accounts for

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[7] "Le sujet qui ne peut décider par lui-même de l'objet qu'il doit désirer, s'appuie sur le désir d'un autre. Et il transforme automatiquement le désir modèle en désir qui contrecarre le sien. Parce qu'il ne comprend pas le caractère automatique de la rivalité, l'imitateur fait bientôt du fait même d'être contrecarré, repoussé, rejeté, l'excitant majeur de son désir. Sous une forme ou une autre, il va incorporer toujours plus de violence à son désir. Reconnaître cette tendance, c'est reconnaître que le désir, à la limite, tend vers la mort, celle de l'autre, du modèle obstacle, et celle du sujet lui-même," in *Des Choses Cachées depuis la Fondation du Monde* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1978), p. 436. *Des Choses . . .* is Girard's latest statement of theories which he has elaborated from the early *Mensonge Romantique, Vérité Romanesque* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1961), in *La Violence et la Sacré* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972), and in *Critique dans un Souterrain* (Lausanne: l'Age d'Homme, 1976).

man's[8] alienation, provides an alternative to the Christian-existentialist reading which is generally propounded of the work. Although the theory of mimetic desire accounts for much of what happens in the Belle Isle frame of the narrative, where mimesis works in more obvious ways, I will today use it as a key to what happens in the teller-listener situation where desire is perhaps less openly displayed.

Lance's relationship to his friend is conditioned by their past relationship and his view of it. In early adolescence, they seem, in the words of Lewis Lawson, to have "held the world in common by using the Arthurian legend as focus."[9] In Girardian terms, they had external mediators in common. When he recalls his nickname "Sir Launcelot" and fairly consistently addresses Harry by his, Percival, the narrator attempts to revive their mutual expectations of a high, selfless destiny, their sense of a spiritual bonding. But he is also unconsciously setting up Harry-Percival as his *internal* mediator and so he is led to emphasize at the beginning the redemptory role of Parsifal "who found the Grail and brought life to a dead land" (10). On the other hand, for the same reason, he does not later recognize the superiority of Percival over Lancelot in the Grail quest and groups the two together, mistakenly, as the "only two knights to see the Grail" (116). On closer examination, Lance's youthful memories are colored with the ambiguities of the mimetic situation. In the reporting of the *Tennessee Belle* incident, he shows himself as rescuer and follower at the same time, "I having to go after you as usual" (61). The middle-aged narrator still wonders whether Percival's reading of Verlaine, or his diving off the *Tennessee Belle* was an "act" (13, 15, 61), and whether his becoming a priest was not "the ultimate reckless lifetime thing" (61). The uncertainty about the "reality" of the Other's actions is of course a problem of the mimetic life, and in fact Lance puts forward a mimetic explanation of Percival's going to Africa: he intended to "outdo Schweitzer, because of course that was outdoing even him, wasn't it, because you had the true Faith and he didn't, being only a Protestant" (61). Interestingly, all three "acts" involve a mediation: in the case of the *Tennessee Belle* stunt, Harry was doing a Huck Finn kind of rotation on Jefferson, and not Jackson's, Island and turns out looking "bluer than

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[8] "A theory of man must account for the alienation of man. . . . Judeo-Christianity did of course give an account of alienation not as a peculiar evil of the twentieth century, but as the enduring symptom of man's estrangement from God. Any cogent anthropology must address itself to both, the possibility of perennial estrangement of man as part of the human condition and to the undeniable fact of the cultural estrangement of Western man in the twentieth century," says Walker Percy in *The Message in the Bottle* (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 23-24. Let me add that Girard's conception of man was originally derived from his reading of literature and singularly of Dostoevski, whose influence Walker Percy has acknowledged and whose *The Possessed* has been mentioned in connection with *Lancelot*.

[9] Lewis A. Lawson, "The Fall of the House of Lamar," in Panthea Reid Broughton, ed., *The Art of Walker Percy, Strategems for Being* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 221.

Nigger Jim." In his reading, the mediation is slightly more esoteric but quite obvious since Verlaine is a man who jumped from the aesthetic to the religious stage, a poet who after his conversion wrote a poem on Parzifal and another entitled "Saint Graal."[10] And though the reader may question Lance's explanation of Percival's motives for going to Africa, Schweitzer still appears as a likely mediator. But Lancelot, who is so keenly and contemptuously aware of the inauthenticity of the actors he meets, of their being "blown about this way and that, like puffballs, in and out of their roles, 'into' Christian Science, back out again" (112), seems to feel only admiration for Harry's acts which are endowed with a sort of absoluteness, whether they are "the *ultimate* show-off thing or the *ultimate* splendid thing" (61, emphasis mine). With his talent for doing the unexpected, Lance says "the uncalled for" thing, Harry has been a wonder to his friend. So when, on the priest's first visit, Lance puts on an "act" of his own, pretending he does not know who his caller is, he may be attempting to ease his way back into their relationship through imitation. At any rate, throughout his recital, the narrator in turn is clearly out to impress his listener. On several occasions, he expects to "surprise" him (10, 11, 20, 254), and when the response is not what he anticipated, he even inquires: "Are you surprised? No? Yes?" (31). His one-upmanship is revealed in casual remarks, like "I have an idea even crazier than one of yours" (62). And just as the many questions he asks Percival evince, not a real interest in Percival's ideas, but an obsessive desire to hold his attention, so his careful observation of his listener's facial and bodily expressions, his smiles, shrugs and turning toward the window, reveals not so much concern for his friend's state of mind as his own sensitivity to the impression he is making.

As mediator, Percival is both model and rival, hence the singular mixture of diffidence and (increasing) authority, of secrecy and self-revelation in Lancelot's recital, the character at once agonistic and seductive of his discourse.[11] Since his recent experience has brought him to the isolation of his cell and the vacuity of meetings with people to whom he has nothing to say, Lance wants to recreate the experience with and for someone whom he can talk to in order to "know what [he] already know[s]" (85). But though he needs to tell his friend, Lance, as a victim of mimetic desire, does not want to share his suffering with Percival and on the contrary attempts to hide it from him (and from himself). Because he is afraid he is alone in not enjoying metaphysical autonomy, and still depends on the verdict of the Other for his very being, he has to show how free he became and still is, notwithstanding the fact that he

[10] Paul Verlaine, *Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes* (Paris: La Pléiade Gallimard, 1954), pp. 306-307.

[11] "How come you're wearing your priest *uniform* today? Are you *girding for battle* or dressed up like Lee for the *surrender*" is his greeting one day (163, emphasis added).

is a prisoner. His recital is a display, and a construction of a fantasy of mastery. Once "the master of Belle Isle" he imposed his order on the mishmash others made through their corruption, and now he remains master of the situation, including the situation of discourse. This must enable him to prove that, when he murdered his wife, her lover and two other people, he acted in the past, as he says he will in his Third Revolution future, "from perfect sobriety and freedom" (156).

But this illusion of mastery, in the present, can only be built at the expense of Percival, who must be cut down to size. Like any mimetic disciple, Lancelot would like to repudiate the bonds of mediation.[12] In Percival, a priest physician, that is to say "a screwed-up priest or a half-assed physician; or both" (10), he finds an easy butt.[13] Furthermore, from their first talk, Lance is sure that "something went wrong" with his friend (see, for instance, 6, 11, 61). The phrase is all the more telling because Lance also applies it to himself (e.g. 106, 108, 137).[14] Lance's two favorite explanations of his friend's so-called "trouble" are love of a woman and loss of faith, both of which would mean of course that the priest has lost his radiant transcendence. Sometimes he baits Percival with a double taunt: "Why are you always asking about love? Have you been crossed up too? Isn't your God's love enough for you? Margot's love was enough for me" (122). Throughout, the sarcastic—and usually very cogent—comments he makes on the failure of Christianity in general and of Catholicism in particular, syntactically include Percival: it is "your Catholic Church," "your saints," "your Jewish Bible," "your sweet Jesus," and almost always "your Lord" and "your God." (Only your Virgin can easily be accepted as Our Lady.) Lance neatly turns the tables on Percival who stands charged at the very least with guilt by association ("So you fucked it up good" [177]) and is in fact summarily condemned: "Damn you and your God. Between the two of you you should have got it straight" (176). Lancelot's antagonism towards his mediator can also be observed in his peculiar teasing, in his use of the phrase "good news" or the word "confession." From their second meeting he tantalizes Percival with the hope that he will confess: "I have a confession to make" (9), but the confessions announced never amount to more than the admission of some failure or secret. Once he lures his friend with a "Come here Percival. I want to tell you something. It is not a confession but a secret. It's not a sin because I do not know what a sin is" (155) and finally tells him about "his plans for the future." On another occasion,

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[12] *Mensonge Romantique*, p. 19 .

[13] He will jibe at him for being "the doctor-scientist and soul expert as well," while apparently consulting him (89), or ask ironically "Are you playing the priest now?" (97), or complain "Why can't priests stick to being priests for a change?" (159).

[14] "Obviously something went wrong, because here I am, in a nuthouse, or is it a prison? recovering from shock, psychosis, disorientation" (108).

he admits: "A confession: [Margot] took the lead the first time" (170). Or he says: "Very well, I'll make another confession: My son is a homosexual now and I can understand why" (177). (The confession here presumably bears on his ability to understand since he has already told about his son's homosexuality.) Obviously, he often owns to a thing which does him little credit but is never outrageous. Several of these "confessions," however, concern sexuality and two of them the passivity of men. Thus they finally point to Lancelot's deep-lying fear of women.

Only towards the end does he use the word "confession" in its sacramental sense, but then again he anticipates the priest's expectations—or those he ascribes to him—only to frustrate them: "No, no confession forthcoming, Father, as you well know" (253). His whole performance, the success and the failure of it, is inscribed within these two statements: "I have a confession to make"; "No confession forthcoming." This pointed rejection of Percival as a mediator in the Catholic sense of the word is the negative image of his importance as mimetic mediator (and one of the ways in which Lance can remain blind to the effects of mimetic desire in his life.)

Nowhere is this importance more striking than in the pattern and imagery through which Lancelot manages to (re)construct his story. For would Lance have shaped his story as a quest for the Unholy Grail, had not his listener been the friend whom he prefers to call Percival, even though he does "not look as if [he] found the Grail"? (176-177).[15] As a matter of fact, he seems to come only gradually to this commanding image, though allusions to the Arthurian knights crop up early. At first presenting tentatively the idea of "a search for evil" ("Have you ever considered the possibility that one might undertake a search not for God but for Evil?" [51]), he eventually hits upon the metaphor that focuses various aspects of his past and present experience in the middle of his narrative: "I think I see now what I am doing. I am reliving with you my quest" (137);[16] "Do you know what I was? The Knight of the Unholy Grail" (138). By inverting the legend which referred to a Christian world-view and is doubly associated with Percival, Lancelot tries to proclaim his autonomy but in fact demonstrates once more his dependence on the mediation of Percival in a classic of negative mimetism.[17] Together with his theory of sexual love as an absolute—itself a perfect example of what Girard calls "deviated transcendence"[18]—the Unholy Grail pattern

[15] To my knowledge he never addresses him as Harry, his real name, nor as Father John. He very occasionally calls him Father, but one use of the word is certainly ironical (155) and another can be understood as such, too (253).

[16] Of course, seeing what he *is* doing is at the same time seeing, interpreting what he *was* doing, since the past quest exists only through the present attempt to put it into words, through the ongoing quest.

[17] See Girard's analysis of *The Possessed* in *Mensonge Romantique*.

[18] "La négation de Dieu ne supprime pas la transcendance mais elle fait dévier celle-ci de l'au-delà vers l'en-deça. . . . La transcendance déviée est une caricature de la transcendance verticale," *Mensonge Romantique*, pp. 65, 67.

generates or magnetizes a number of religious metaphors, some of them quite provocative. In the following example, Lancelot claims he means no offense but his calling Percival, for once, Father, leaves the reader suspicious:

> She was a *feast*. I ate her.
>
> That was my *communion*, Father—no offense intended, that sweet dark *sanctuary*, guarded by the heavy gold columns of her thighs, the *ark* of the covenant. (171, emphasis mine)

Though he pokes fun at the film people for making the stranger in their movie, "the new Christ, of course" (153, also 148), he presents Anne as "the first woman of the new order," asking "Who else might be the new Virgin but a gang-raped social worker? I do not joke" (159). In the murder sequence, religious images cluster richly (237-38). The bed where Margot makes love to Jacoby is "like a Gothic cathedral" complete with spires, gargoyles, flying buttresses, altar screen, and "unconsecrated priest hearing an impenitent confession" (238). For the I-narrator at this climactic moment in his narrative which corresponds to a crucial experience, instead of confessing or at least expressing contrition, chooses to describe the I-actor as "kneeling in [his] confessional" (238). The mimetic character of such self-images is evident.

But even when he grandly assumes a more positive role, the narrator reveals himself the prey of mimetic desire: "I'll prophesy," says the man who, a few days before, wondered whether his friend's religious name referred to John the Evangelist or John the Baptist, "a loner out in the wilderness" (10). And prophesy he does, denouncing "the great whorehouse fagdom of America" (176), "the defunct befouled and collapsing North and the corrupt and Jesus-hollering South" (219), in fact the madness of our whole Judeo-Christian Western culture, and announcing the Third Revolution (157), "the New Reformation" (177), which will accomplish what Christianity has failed to do: "We'll take the Grail you didn't find but we'll keep the broadsword and the great warrior Archangel of Mont-Saint-Michel" (178). Moreover, in one of the major reversals of roles in his performance, Lance, with arrogant generosity, offers redemption to the priest through participation in his Third Revolution:[19] "No, *it is not you who are offering me something*, salvation, a choice, whatever. I am offering you a choice. Do you want to become *one of us*?" (179). This, however, is not the last word in one-upmanship. As a quester or even prophet, Lance is still on the same human level, as his friend, priest though he is. The transformation of model into counter-model culminates in his identification, however figurative, with Lucifer. First when he depicts himself "wheeling slowly up into the

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[19] He will also delegate functions to Percival if the latter is ready to act: "Why do I tell you all this? As a warning if you like" (160).

night like Lucifer blown out of hell, great wings spread against the sky" (246) in an image which mirrors the basic inversion since the movement described is up and out of hell, whereas Lucifer was cast down into hell.[20] Then, when he asks Percival, "Why so wary? You act as if I were Satan showing you the kingdoms of the world from the pinnacle of the temple" (254). This tentative identification with him who is, for René Girard, "the very name of the mimetic process as a whole,"[21] is to be correlated to Lance's demiurgic desire to create a new order, whether a new Eden or a new Dispensation is difficult to say.[22]

The identification, however, is only the rhetorical tip of a general pattern of escalation. Lancelot who once in the past has been driven to murder—the extreme but logical outcome of mimesis—is again carried away by the mimetic process. Dismayed by the symptoms of the ontological disease which prevails in modern culture, the general indiscrimination, the indeterminacy of sex roles, the blurring of the distinction between Lady and Whore, the loss of values, etc., and unaware that he has not escaped the contagion, Lance wants a world in which "there will be no confusion" (179). In order to assert his difference, he needs to erect a barrier between himself and the madding crowd, needs to "assign responsibilities,"[23] needs to apportion guilt, and occasionally innocence. But whether he prophesies a Utopian future—a future "area of innocence which he will inhabit alone"[24] or with a chosen few—or indignantly castigates the promiscuity and corruption of the age, violence always looms in Lancelot's discourse and in fact keeps mounting. "If it takes the sword, we'll use the sword" (256). His railings against contemporary culture become rantings. The man who was reluctant to define love (81, 89) and later contended that "loving a woman" is "absolute and infinite" (129), the man who hated pornographers, comes to discover that "the great secret of life is violence and rape" and "its gospel is pornography" (224; see also 239), thus proving the double bind of metaphysical desire: the more men try to be different, the more they become like one another. In fact it is partly because the will to difference can

[20] Lancelot seems to have a Nietzschean conception of the falling theme as something positive, leading not to loss of being but to ontological increase and greater freedom.

[21] "Satan c'est le nom du processus mimétique dans son ensemble: c'est bien pourquoi il est source, non seulement de rivalité et de désordre mais de tous les désordres menteurs au sein desquels vivent les hommes," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 185.

[22] To settle the question one would have to examine all the allusions to Christmas (the Christmas bonfires, the crib, etc.) and the function of the Christmas tree.

[23] "L'indignation scandalisée est toujours fébrile de différencier le coupable et l'innocent, d'assigner les responsabilités, de dévoiler l'ignominie jusqu'au bout et de la châtier comme elle le mérite," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 449.

[24] "Ce sont toujours des armes que chacun aiguise contre le voisin dans un effort désespéré pour se ménager quelque part, serait-ce dans un avenir utopique indéterminé une zone d'innocence qu'il habitera seul ou en compagnie d'une humanité régénérée," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 462.

"never exorcise identity and reciprocity"[25] that Lancelot is caught in the spiral of increasing violence and incoherence. In order to assert an ever more problematic difference, Lancelot oscillates more and more rapidly between contradictory statements or attitudes: his last meeting with Percival is a dizzying example of his shifts and turns. Eventually after feeling free to condemn and absolve throughout his narration, Lance reaches a point where his justice is stricter than God's. Just as in the climax of the Belle Isle events he arrogated to himself the right of life and death, so at the end of his recital, he declares that the difference between God and himself is that he "won't tolerate the Russians or the Chinese either" for "God uses instruments. I am my own instrument." Metaphysical *hubris* can go no further: Lancelot has reached the autonomy he was seeking but at what cost? He has been led symbolically to repeat the sacrificial act of elimination, which he was actually guilty of, in order to hide from himself the reality of his murders.[26] His narrative quest before both succeeds as an existential gesture and fails as a moral quest for the very reason that he manages to bring himself to speak about his blood sacrifice and yet never faces up to his violence.

Attending Lancelot in his cognitive quest, Percival embarks upon a spiritual adventure of his own which only reaches us through faint echoes, through the ripples it makes on the surface of Lancelot's discourse, but which leaves him changed at the end of the novel.

On first meeting Lance in the hospital, Percival does not seek to renew the acquaintance. Yet, when the patient does, Percival commits himself to his friend as friend, and neither as psychiatrist nor as priest. Only gradually will he assume the priest's role. For long stretches, he acts as a sort of guide and tries to redirect Lancelot to his main narrative tracks. His questions, implying knowledge of the outward events, are not motivated by curiosity. Indeed Lance complains that "not even my sad case seems to interest you" (22; see also 20). But since Lance has just denounced the "interest" people morbidly take in the sensational, the mild abstraction of the priest may be taken as a sign that he is not completely alienated by everydayness and still has his priorities right. It looks as if Percival wanted less to hear Lancelot's story than to have him tell it. Confession may be in his mind as he insistently calls the narrator back to specifics ("What happened"; "the rest of it"), to the people involved ("Elgin?" "Siobhan?" "Jacoby"), to the circumstances ("The storm?") or even to the objects that Lance mentions too allusively ("The sword?"). Repeatedly he attempts to cut short the theorizing in which Lancelot indulges as a way both to postpone (or elude) the telling of the murders

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[25] "Si la volonté d'absorption et d'assimilation ne conquiert jamais la différence de l'autre, la volonté de différence, qui revient au même, n'exorcise jamais l'identité et la réciprocité," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 325.

[26] "Il faut tuer et toujours tuer, pour ne pas savoir qu'on tue," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 186.

and to build a system of justification. If he does not enter into Lancelot's antagonistic little games, never rising to the bait, neither does he humor him like an insane person: his contributions to the exchange reveal genuine interest, though they are always oriented toward bringing Lance down from his high-flown generalities to a more concrete plane. He wishes to know what Lancelot's "own life will be like" (159). He asks about the relevance of Virginia to his friend's plans (219). He is not satisfied with vague pronouns: "What I can't stand is the way things are now. Furthermore, I will not stand for it. Stand for what, you ask?" (155); "We? Who are we? . . . How will we know each other" (157). Twice he points out a major oversight in Lance's Utopia and discusses the place he assigns to women (179, 22).

But Percival's interruptions, particularly his questions about love, are also intended to get Lancelot to talk about his emotions—a subject which for all his self-analysis he shies away from. As a dissociated personality who tries to solve his problems by further splitting of the self, opposing his new self to the old self, Lance ignores—except for a few brief glimpses (see 208-209)— his rage and even his suffering. The priest attempts to put him in touch with his feelings,[27] and at one point says outright that Lance is "full of hatred, anger," a remark Lance dismisses with "Don't talk to me of love until we shovel out the shit" (179).

Percival never presses Catholic doctrine upon his listener. Perhaps, at the beginning, because he is uncertain himself, but also because he avoids indulging in abstraction. Yet when asked to, he never fails to advance his experience. Challenged to show his friend a sin (52), he apparently complies. Lancelot, however, who had claimed that he would be impressed, does not accept his friend's observation: "Oh, you have seen quite a few? Well I haven't lately" (52). Almost the same scene occurs later when the priest adduces more general evidence: "But we have plenty of evil around you say. What about Hitler, the gas ovens and so forth? What about them? As everyone knows, Hitler was a madman . . ." (138). In a series of discreet references, Percival in fact outlines what his Church has to say about sin. Apart from persistently recalling the alternative of love, which Lance rejects ("Don't speak to me of Christian love" [156]), he indicates, *a propos* of incestuous grandfathers, that sinners can show penitence afterwards (55); he expresses a belief in reconciliation (200), which is also incidentally a belief in Elgin's charity. He affirms that all men are redeemed (224). And his whole behavior is evidence enough that he does not judge Lancelot. In short, he has kept proposing the Christian way unobtrusively but with increasing confidence until he is ready to tell Lancelot something he doesn't know.

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[27] "You were asking me how I felt when I discovered that Margot had been unfaithful to me" (41).

Of the ordeal which the priest has suffered through his friend's recital and his failure to express the slightest regret, we can only see such traces as his interlocutor reports. Why does Percival look "pale as a ghost," "stricken," "unhappy"? Is it really because of his own troubles, as Lance speculates? Or is it perhaps because of his grief at finding Lance whom he may have expected to confess so devoid of contrition? Is it because of the strain of accompanying on his descent into Hell—or is it Purgatory?—a friend who is not even aware of being in Hell? As Dante says in the lines following those quoted in the epigraph to *Lancelot*:

> Alto fato di Dio, sarebbe rotto,
> se Lete si passasse, e tal vivanda
> fosse gustata senza alcuno scotto
> di pentimento che lagrime spanda.
>
> (Canto XXX, ll 142-145)

Of Percival's pilgrimage we know only a few of the consequences. If we are to believe Lancelot's observations and interpretations, Percival prays for the dead, on his way to their last meeting, whereas he had refused to do so before the first. (This incidentally is a reminder that the dead whom Lance so casually dismisses—"his" dead in more senses than one—are also to be prayed for). He wears priest clothes instead of the "phony casuals" which he affected at the beginning, and plans "to take a little church in Alabama." All of which points to a renewed commitment to his sacerdotal vocation, i.e., to the world and to God. The rest is left for us to imagine in the light of the epigraph from *Purgatorio*.

Nonetheless a few clues to the nature of Percival's Christian behavior have been offered us—the most important of which is the contrast between the two friends in the matter of mimesis. His part in the exchange is to be a witness. A witness to Lance's hopeful youth, their shared dreams, their friendship, a witness to his friend's present quest and a witness to his own faith—however shaky it may have been at the beginning of his visits. Never does he join, as we have seen, in the rivalry which is Lance's form of relating to him, not even in the name of his Church. Thus he follows the Biblical precept: "Answer not a man out of his senses according to his folly lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a man out of his senses according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit" (Proverbs, 26:4-5). Lance for his part can only see his donning his "priest uniform" as a sign that Percival is "girding for battle or dressed up like Lee for the surrender" (163), that is to say, taking part in the agonistic relation that unites/opposes them in his view in a mimetic interaction. But the attire can, and ought to, be read as confirming Percival's renewed dedication to Him who said, "I came not to judge the world but to save the world" (John, 12:47), whereas Lancelot is like

the man described in Romans: "For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Romans, 2:1). Having failed to bring his friend to a sense of repentance, Percival nevertheless accepts him in an act of love and faith evidenced in their final exchange. Such acceptance proves that Percival's way is at once totally unlike Lance's way or "their way out there," which are both the ways of mimesis. Without ever mentioning Christ, he points the way out of the pseudo-dilemma set up by Lancelot, since he practices Christian love in "imitation of the only model who can never turn into fascinating rival."[28]

Perhaps only the device of keeping Percival away from the reader's direct observation could serve to create a fictional character as free as he is from mimetic rivalry, while yet presenting (or absenting) him as a double of Lancelot. If the two characters may be considered as "a splitting of the authorial *persona*,"[29] and as incarnations of the two traditions, Stoic and Christian, with which much of Walker Percy's fiction is concerned, [30] they also embody the doubling that structures human experience as a result of the mimetic process.[31] But unlike much fiction of the double which usually maintains the shadow—whether it be for instance Dr. Jekyll or Dorian Gray's picture—in the background until the final take-over, here it is the darker sides of the Ego that are foregrounded so that the movement is toward revelation of the lighter figure. Through Lance's quest of the Unholy Grail, Percival finds the lance that enables him to cut through everydayness and the grail, the vision that redeems him and enables him to speak out, presumably in order to deliver Christ's good news.

Because of the narrative technique, the reader is at first primarily involved in Lance. Engrossed in his (re)construction of the protagonist and his cognitive quest, the reader must of necessity *judge* him. Whether he naively accepts Lance at face value, regarding him, for instance, as the writer's spokesman, or stands at a critical distance, making perhaps some sort of diagnosis, psychological or sociological, of his illness, he repeats Lancelot's mistake and falls into the trap the narrator has set. Our puzzlement at Percival's final response is a measure of our entrapment. Only when we realize that Percival has avoided yielding to mimetic fascination and why, can we be redeemed *qua* readers. (Whether we take

[28] "Les Evangiles et le Nouveau Testament ne prêchent pas une morale de la spontanéité. Ils ne prétendent pas que l'homme doive renoncer à l'imitation: ils recommandent d'imiter le seul modèle qui ne risque pas, si nous l'imitons vraiment comme les enfants imitent, de se transformer pour nous en rival fascinant," in *Des Choses Cachées*, p. 452.

[29] John Towers, "Southern Discomfort", *N.Y. Rev. of Books,* March 31, 1977, p. 68.

[30] Lewis A. Lawson, "The Fall of the House of Lamar," 243.

[31] *Des Choses Cachées*, "Les doubles et l'interindividualité," pp. 323-329 and passim.

the message to heart in our lives outside the book is an altogether different matter, although Walker Percy, a Catholic novelist possessed of all the "cunning" he says the Christian novelist must display nowadays,[32] presumably writes in the hope that we will.) Escaping from the snares of the narration into the freedom which the novel provides for us, if only we recognize that in our guilty pride we are creatures ridden with the ontological disease, we then can embrace Lancelot in a new paradoxical relationship in which like Percival we must respond yet not respond to what he says. From the pages of the closed book, Lance's voice keeps addressing the reader, *hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère.*

[32] Zoltan Abadi-Nagy, "A Talk with Walker Percy," *Southern Literary Journal*, 6, 1 (Fall 1973), 11.

THE PALM VOYEUR

Any way he traveled he confronted
The palm tree against a cloudless blue sky—
The lean, hard, horny trunk, the slashing crest,
The fronds like the backbones of great filleted fish
As if a monger's scraps hung on a pole.
Not a sign of corruption in the sky,
Not the least brocading of clouds or mist.
He tried to remember the old drugstores,
The ice-cream tropics, the large circular fans
Whirring overhead in stunted desire,
No color anywhere except upon the spoon,
This helicopter ghost not yet even dreamed.
But just that swallowed color made him rise
And settle in a land of sea and fruit—
And then to come unerring on a god—
The great green geyser of these flashing knives,
Strong enough as an Idea, a dasher
To turn a freezer of lime ice forever.
So much for the boy's drugstore fantasies,
One thing, but an important thing left out—
He had found his locus, latent weather.
But strangely flattened now, a lichen on the sky,
The palm demanded: what, of what, and why?
Search in your own concluded mind, voyeur.
Does a black beach boy climb the heartless trunk
In desperation toward a coconut,
Struck for his trouble, rich adoration,
By the heavy blind skull that holds the milk?
Think back as far as the moist, dark soda fountain.
How much did you know of what you really loved?
These stunted images rise and rise in us,
Powerful, simplified at last, and There.
Great and circular travelers that we are,
The eye, it seems, can only tattoo palms.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON

THE GRAPES

For Sandra Gilbert

(i)

When Iphigenia sits down at the table in the courtyard, there are no birds in the trees and for this reason she feels sad. She is alone, her parents grieving in separate halls, her friends holding their own shivering hands in the shadow of the east wall.

The cheese and bread she swallows are as dry as the huge sun. This is the sun she had come to love when her mother, Clytemnestra, would join her at midday in the cool springs at home. Her mother told her stories, always about women, about the female oracle who would speak like poetry to each in her sleep. Often, when the oracle had sung in a deep dream, a woman would wake with the taste of fruit on her tongue, the thin moon hanging blue above the dawn.

Once, Clytemnestra pulled her daughter's hand softly beneath the water. Quietly, she drew it to herself, letting it rest on the flesh of her own stomach. The night sang sweetly about you, she said . . . let your hand hear.

(ii)

Iphigenia remembers the submerged touch of her mother's stomach. She knows that soon she will cry and she takes a handful of grapes to her mouth. She had felt something stir in her own body that day, a longing, and at the moment the grapes burst their cool jelly on her tongue, she remembers, yes!, the pheasant rising from the opposite bank, its white tail broadening in the sweet wind.

KEVIN CLARK

LITTLE TOM

David Bottoms

B.T. stood on the second rung of the feeble chicken-wire fence, leaned over a single strand of rusty barbwire, and gazed down into the hog trough where the shredded pair of denim overalls and the wide-brimmed straw hat floated on a pile of dough-mush and rotten tomatoes. He propped his elbow on top of the fence post and scratched a shower of dandruff out of his ratty brown hair. Shit, he thought, spitting a long stream of tobacco juice at the three red hogs huddled near the shed on the other side of the pen. The largest, as tall at the shoulders as a small pony, snorted twice and dug up the mud with its snout. B.T. looked as hard as he could into its ugly pig eyes. For years he had hated that hog. Five years straight now Big Tom had taken it to the fair, and five years straight it had won a blue ribbon, and five years straight B.T. had watched it strut and snort across the pen like some kind of damn movie star or something. He spit again and looked back down at the overalls and the hat and the slop. If there was one thing he hated, it was a smart aleck hog.

It wasn't much after six o'clock, and the sun was just beginning to creep up through the trunks of the pines on top of the hill, the first light turning the tin roof of the mule-barn orange. B.T. could hear Old Jack kicking the side of his stall. A few white chickens scratching in the dirt around the barn scattered at the noise, and the rooster bolted back and forth from one hen to the next pecking in the loose abandoned ground.

He turned and looked back over his shoulder. Clair Lee and Little Tom were watching him through the bedroom window. The frost on the wavy glass made them look a little ghostly, something like one of the old tintypes in the Buford family album. He turned and spit one more time at the red hogs, then stepped down off the fence and walked across the yard toward the kitchen door. For some reason he didn't feel any of the sorrow or whatever it was that he was supposed to feel, only a sharp sense of disgust and a hatred for the old boar, and a dread, too, of Clair Lee's reaction. This might be just about the last straw for her, he thought, the very thing that just drives her right on down to Milledgeville.

Clair Lee and Little Tom met him on the porch, and their eyes locked onto his. Hers were gray and narrow and small like a possum's, but the boy's were more like a cow's, large and brown and afraid.

"Well," she said. "What's the . . ."

"I told that old man, didn't I? I told him a flat hunnert times about him a leaning out over that fence. You heard it a . . ."

"Oh Lordy," Clair Lee whispered, falling back into the doorway and propping herself against the kitchen cabinet. "Oh Lordy. Lord help us, Jesus. I just don't know if I can stand this'un. I just . . ."

"Aw, shut up. Hit's over now. Ain't but one thang left to do." B.T. felt the tobacco juice sliding down the corner of his mouth. He wiped it on the tail of his T-shirt and tucked the brown stain into his pants.

"Hit was that red boar, wuddn't it?" she said, holding her hand over her chest and panting for breath.

"Look's like."

"Lord, I knowed it. I knowed it. I knowed it." She was sucking hard for air now and staring blankly across the dark kitchen. "You let that hog get too big!"

"I let it get too big? Like hit was my damn hog! Like hit was my damn blue ribbons all over the wall in yonder!" He caught himself before he got too hot. He could see what kind of shape she was in and knew from past experience that it wouldn't be to his advantage to start a fight.

"Oh Lordy, Lordy, Lordy," Clair Lee whispered again, easing herself down into a chair. "Little Tom, get momma a glass a water."

Little Tom took a coffee cup off the cabinet and filled it from the faucet. B.T. walked across the kitchen, kicked the piece of gray linoleum peeling up from the floor in front of the sink, and disappeared through the door of the bedroom.

Clair Lee took the water from the boy and drank in long gulps. When she had emptied the glass, she belched twice and sat for a few seconds panting for breath. "What'er you a doin in thar?" she shouted into the darkness. "What in the world is . . ."

"I'm gettin my shotgun," B.T.'s voice came back through the doorway low and clean like an echo across a lake.

"Lord God, B.T.!" she screamed. "You can't shoot that hog. My daddy's in that hog!"

"Well, what the hell you reckon I ortta do," he said, stepping back into the kitchen with the single-barrel twelve gauge cradled in his arm. "Invite it in here to take breakfast with us!"

He knew he shouldn't have said that. Even before his voice had faded into the darkness, she was screaming and bawling into her hands. Little Tom looked like he was scared half to death. Crouched in the corner by the icebox, his face twisted with amazement as he watched his mother pull and tear at her hair, her arms swinging wildly around her head like two fighting snakes. B.T. leaned the shotgun against the door frame and walked toward her only as far as he thought was safe.

"Jesus, Clair Lee honey," he whispered, trying to make his deep voice sound compassionate. "Ain't no sense in getting upset and all."

But she continued to wail and tear at her hair, her eyes bulging almost out of their sockets, rolling back and forth from corner to corner, larger now and blank and white as two balls of biscuit dough.

B.T. began to feel genuinely sorry for her and in a rare gesture of sincerity walked over and laid his hand on her shoulder. For a full five

seconds it rested there peacefully, then in one lightning motion Clair Lee grabbed the arm in both hands, dug nails in like claws, jerked it toward her face, and bit through the hairy flesh all the way to the bone.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaeeeeeeeeeee! Goddamn shit!" B.T. screamed, swinging the arm up and down and slinging blood across the walls, the cabinet, and the table. "Goddamn, goddamn, goddamn," he began to shout, jumping up and down with each hoarse desperate syllable like a drunk Indian doing some kind of crazy rain dance.

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Clair Lee screamed, tearing again at her hair and ears. "My daddy's got eat by a hog! My daddy's got eat by a hog!" She propped her elbow on the table and began sobbing into her hands.

B.T. stood in the center of the kitchen watching the blood run down his arm and puddle on the linoleum. As the pain died to a dull throb, it occurred to him to try to stop the bleeding, and he slipped off his T-shirt and wrapped it around the wound.

Clair Lee continued to sob into her hands, pounding her fist occasionally on the table. "Lord God, B.T." she moaned, wiping her arm across her eyes. "I gotta bury my daddy."

"That's right, honey. But don't you be worrying about that none right now. We'll see to all that."

"Bury him?" she said, beginning to sob again into her hands. "How we gonna do that? Bury him in a . . ."

"Now don't you worry none," he said. "I'll talk to the preacher and he'll know what to do. It ain't no sin to get eat by a hog."

"Little Tom? Little Tom?" she called, raising her head and turning slowly toward the sink. "Lordy, whar's my comfort? Little Tom?"

In all the excitement, Little Tom had managed to wedge himself into the narrow space between the wall and the icebox. Very slowly now a small hand began to creep out into view, then a knee and a foot and a thigh, and then a shoulder and half a contorted child's face gone white as flour.

"Come on outta thar, boy," B.T. barked. "What choo a doin down'ar behind at icebox?"

Little Tom inched out cautiously along the wall and sat on the floor with his knees pulled up under his chin, his whole skinny body gone pale and rigid as a corpse. He sat absolutely still and stared out into the darkness between Clair Lee and B.T.

"What was you doin behind thar?" Clair Lee asked, her voice grown suddenly calm and soothing.

Little Tom began to sob quietly.

B.T. rubbed his bandage against his chest and looked down at Claire Lee. His eyebrows wrinkled and a puzzled look fell across his face. "Reckon why that boy don't never talk?"

THREE POEMS BY NAOMI RACHEL

DETOUR

travis was like you. he was as high as wide & with it.
he had a black gt with all the extras he spent many years
on the road. travis sold. & others bought. it was indeed
a successful arrangement. at least travis loved it.
he liked traveling too. the ride. the road.
his gt never complained at 100 mph travis always drove
freeways. the wide highways. travis loved speed
as much as success. one & the same. for many years
travis traveled the straight course. at 100 mph.
on march tenth travis drove into weedpatch california.
there was some construction work in progress & for the first
time in years of travel travis encountered a detour sign.
after a moment of brief contemplation travis decided
his course. throwing his body forward he bashed his head
through the windshield slashing his throat. like the hero he was.

FLOOD

in the vast rich house during the annual collectors' party
those with at least fifty first editions were drinking
a rare wine. "those artists–no idea of values. they do not
realize that if they painted one picture & waited years
& then put out another & so on & then died young, why think
of the value of their work. but no, they lack business sense.
no idea of profit or investment. no wonder they tend to die poor."
outside the wind howled agreement. the house by the
artificial river would have shaken in the storm if its
foundation had not been gold. as it was, the first
editions inside had no idea the river was flooding.
huge waves like white sheets of paper lashed against the shore.
black fish like words were smattered against the house.
but the collectors drank on.
in the morning light the art patrons left the house totally
unaware that the basement was filled with the skeletons
of fish scattered on the gold ground forming words. . . .
creation, poetry, art, inspiration, beauty . . .
what a stench!

RAT RACE

the race was set for christmas day. pope set the date.
he wanted to win. his rat came from a zoo in madrid.
a special breed of rat. larger than a large racoon.
pope had the teeth filed. claws sharpened. to points.
pope demanded the race take place in a neutral place.
a cold country. his opponent agreed. christmas day. in sweden.
the devil also wanted to win. desperately. he felt
his very reputation was at stake. sinning had become
so mundane. so acceptable. he felt a loss of power.
the devil's rat came from new york city. harlem.
he was smaller than a large racoon. his teeth weren't
filed or his nails sharpened. but he was mean.
naturally. a killer. from a family of killers.
one of a long line.
it was cold on christmas day. the devil was warmed.
by inner determination. the rats warmed by hate.
pope was cold. five velvet robes didn't keep him
warm. but he knew soon he would return to italy.
warmed by victory.
the ropes around the rat's tails were cut. they were
off. they had to run from a white flag to a black one.
it was amazing how they ran. side by side. midway
they halted. began to sniff. pope bit his nails.
the devil chewed his tail. the rats bared their fangs.
the judge (a housewife from ohio who had won the honor
by baking the most delicious pecan pie) decided if they
didn't begin to run soon it would be a rat fight.
instead of a race. the killer would be the winner.
but the rats decided otherwise. they began to copulate.
in front of the pope. he was fascinated. took off
a few robes. the judge dropped the list of rules.
& the red prize ribbons. the devil was bored.
& so they sat for hours in the neutral cold of sweden.

WHEN GRATITUDE IS NO MORE: EUDORA WELTY'S "JUNE RECITAL"

MARILYN ARNOLD

"June Recital" may well be the best thing Eudora Welty has ever written. Perhaps more like a short novel than a short story, it moves through a complex range of symbols and motifs that normally could be handled only by a novel; but at the same time it has the compression, the line-by-line energy, of a short story. As the longest piece in *The Golden Apples*,[1] a work variously labeled a novel, a short story collection, a para-novel, and a short story cycle, "June Recital" is the heart of the collection, functioning to introduce and perpetuate characters and themes that appear throughout. But it also can stand alone as a remarkable exploration of the meaning of human relationship within a context of surface order and subsurface disorder. In her essays on fiction, Welty has made it clear that for her the fiction writer's main concern is relationship between human beings. What complicates any attempt of human beings to live together is that a certain number of them, at least, are torn between the need to assert self and the obligation to look after the needs and feelings of others. How does one reconcile anti-social impulses with social expectations? How does one maintain a separate identity without tearing the delicate fabric of another human soul, and without threatening destruction to the whole social order? And if one is hopelessly excluded from human society, how does one deal with the urgent need to love and be loved?

Welty uses the terms "love" and "separateness" in the final story (or chapter) of *The Golden Apples*, a story called "The Wanderers," and Robert Penn Warren applies them to a number of Welty's works in an essay he calls "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty." Certainly they are appropriately applied to *The Golden Apples*, which chronicles events in the lives of several characters from in and around Morgana, Mississippi. These are principally characters who make figurative searches for the mythical golden apples, characters who spurn home, safety, and love in order to follow their private moon-guided pursuits. Carson McCullers too has understood the threat of togetherness, for she has repeatedly portrayed the lover, helplessly vulnerable, being exploited by the beloved who inflicts cruelty to preserve selfhood. Welty's sympathy for the separate ones, the "wanderers," does not blind her to the costs exacted by the individual quest for the luscious fruit. "June Recital" explores with great sensitivity the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the urge to journey alone and the need to find a haven in others.

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[1] New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1947. All citations are from this source.

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The principal narrator is a teenager named Cassie Morrison, who cannot be a wanderer herself but who can come to understand something of the wanderer's compulsion and something of the lover's pain. In the end of "June Recital," when Virgie Rainey clicks by her desolate old piano teacher without a sign of recognition, Cassie is heartsick. As youngsters she and Virgie had taken piano lessons from Miss Eckhart, a stranger who had moved to Morgana and boarded with Snowdie MacLain, next door to the Morrisons. And now, years later, Cassie watches the two meet and deny each other. She shudders at the vacant stare of the broken old woman, the woman who once had seemed to care terribly for the wild girl and her brilliant gift, the woman who had returned to the "empty" MacLain house to burn it down (as if she could obliterate memory and sorrow). Cassie sees the scorn of the girl who as a youngster had spurned the old woman's love and then today had romped with a sailor in an upstairs bedroom while Miss Eckhart made solemn preparations in the parlor below. Cassie also learns that her younger brother, Loch, has been observing the drama next door from the tree outside his bedroom window. Handicapped by both his innocence and his malaria, Loch sees everything, wants to understand everything, but comprehends almost nothing except at an intuitive level. Cassie does not see everything, but what she sees she understands.

Cassie repeats to herself, "*Danke schoen* . . ." (p. 96). It was what Miss Eckhart used to say when Virgie finished playing: "Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen*" (pp. 36, 42). Running home from her own lesson, Cassie "would whisper while she ran, with the sound of an engine, '*Danke schoen, danke schoen, danke schoen.*' It wasn't the meaning that propelled her; she didn't know then what it meant" (p. 42). But then, nobody did, and nobody dared ask—except Virgie, and she wouldn't. "So they just added that onto Virgie's name in the school yard. She was Virgie Rainey *Danke schoen* when she jumped hot pepper or fought the boys. . . . She was named for good. Sometimes even in the Bijou somebody cat-called that to her as she came in her high heels down the steep slant of the board aisle to switch on the light and open the piano" (p. 42). Now, hearing *Für Elise*, the tune Virgie always played, sounding in one-fingered distress from the house next door where Miss Eckhart is setting fire to the piano and studio, Cassie responds mechanically, "Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen*" (p. 34). Having passed beyond a state of frightened childish innocence, Cassie knows now what *danke schoen* means, and she is horrified that the one who spoke it and the one to whom it was spoken can meet face to face and refuse to acknowledge that the words were ever uttered. Miss Eckhart will be taken back to the county farm or worse; Virgie will continue to play at the Bijou. And that is all. Cassie in her bed that night thinks, "*Danke schoen*. . . . That much was out in the open. Gratitude—like rescue—was simply no

more. It was not only past; it was outworn and cast away. Both Miss Eckhart and Virgie Rainey were human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth. And there were others of them—human beings, roaming, like lost beasts" (p. 96).

Danke schoen, an expression of gratitude, echoes throughout the story and comes to rest in Cassie's mind as she tries to make sense of what she has seen: old Mrs. Eckhart coming out of the MacLain house on the arm of the town marshall, a dirty handkerchief covering the remains of her scorched hair; Virgie Rainey parting from a panicky, half-clad Kewpie Moffitt and boldly marching by the old woman as if she did not exist; Loch, bedridden with malaria, hanging upside down from his knees in the tree; Cassie's somewhat dreamy mother, a woman who habitually slipped away from gatherings, half-smiling at it all; King MacLain, the spiritual (and perhaps physical) progenitor of the questers for the golden fruit, appearing out of nowhere and walking a final time out of the house where his wife, Snowdie, had lived so many years waiting for him to return. Complicating and yet somehow explaining all of this is the poem that keeps running through Cassie's consciousness, "The Song of Wandering Aengus," by William Butler Yeats, a poem that seems almost a poetic justification for the wanderers in the story who cannot forego their personal quests for things rare and inexplicable, not even to save society. Cassie's first conclusion, that in light of such behavior "Gratitude . . . was simply no more," pinpoints the central conflict of the story and suggests that persons who follow their own bent are guilty of ingratitude; they destroy relationship itself and become "lost beasts." Thus, the urge toward the golden apples works against the established ethic of gratitude, of concern and caring for others and of appreciating their feelings for us. When we spurn that ethic, when we follow only our own inner music, we, in effect, abandon order and opt for disorder.

It is in terms of order and disorder that Welty describes the conflict between the needs of self and the needs of others, the problem of ingratitude and its corrosive effects in human society. Her characters, images, places, incidents, seem to align themselves with either order or disorder—or both. The desirability, the absolute necessity, for order in human society is posed against the fascination for disorder in individual life. Even those most committed to order and most determined to maintain it may find, like the wanderer in Yeats's poem, that they have a fire in their heads—a suppressed heat that occasionally steams to the surface in a cry for realization of some separate self. At best, order is probably only a surface phenomenon, dependent on unspoken agreements among civilized beings that they will not give public vent to private burnings. Cassie wants none of the fire, none of the quest. She sees others submitting to its lure and draws timidly back to the safety

of conforming social expectations and codes. She does not hunger for Hera's golden apples nor for Eden's forbidden fruit: "She could never go for herself, never creep out on the shimmering bridge of the tree, or reach the dark magnet that drew you inside, kept drawing you in. She could not see herself do an unknown thing. She was not Loch, she was not Virgie Rainey; she was not her mother. She was Cassie in her room, seeing the knowledge and torment beyond her reach . . ." (p. 77). Throughout the story Cassie is busy dyeing a scarf, making multi-colored patterns according to explicit procedures, doing obeisance to her little social group whose current badge of acceptance is just such a scarf.

The town of Morgana itself may be Welty's most obvious symbol of order, just as King MacLain is her most obvious symbol of disorder even though he appears only briefly in this particular story. Since, as in most such towns, the potential for subsurface disorder is high, certain rules must be invariably understood and religiously practiced. One rule is that an outsider is forever an outsider. Miss Eckhart brought her foreign accent to Morgana one day and began giving piano lessons in Snowdie MacLain's "studio." She had no one in the world but her senile old mother, no attachment that could be recognized. She was even "a stranger to their cemetery, where none of her people lay" (p. 54). When Snowdie finally sold the house and left, Miss Eckhart had nowhere to go. She disappeared as she had come, from nowhere to nowhere, until the day she came back to the old house and Loch watched her solemnly lace the studio and piano with paper streamers. Hearing *Für Elise* coming from the old house again, but this time "in a labored, foolish way," Cassie thinks about Miss Eckhart:

> Wherever she was, she had no people. Surely by this time, she had nobody at all. The only one she had ever wanted to have for "people" was Virgie Rainey *Danke schoen*.
>
> Missie Spights said that if Miss Eckhart had allowed herself to be called by her first name, then she would have been like other ladies. Or if Miss Eckhart had belonged to a church that had ever been heard of, and the ladies would have had something to invite her to belong to . . . Or if she had been married to anybody at all, just the awfullest man—like Miss Snowdie MacLain, that everybody could feel sorry for. (p. 66)

It is clear that even though they do not fit the Morgana mold, even though they are overt symbols of disorder, King MacLain and Virgie still have a place in the town—ties one could name and touch. The women of Morgana, breaking from their Rook party just in time to meet all the human traffic leaving the smoking MacLain house, are relieved to be able to name Kewpie Moffitt, Virgie's sailor boy, and connect him to the

town. They have just seen Virgie and Kewpie escape from the rear of the old house, King MacLain stroll from the front of it, Miss Eckhart be escorted from it by the town marshall and his fishing partner, and Virgie click past Miss Eckhart and right through their own ranks "without a word or the pause of a moment" (p. 91). Desperately, they try to corral the chaos. "Isn't he visiting the Flewellyns out in the country?' Miss Perdita Mayo was pleading to everybody. 'What ever became of his mother? I'd forgotten all about him!' " Observing this phenomenon, Cassie thinks to herself, "People saw things like this as they saw Mr. MacLain come and go. They only hoped to place them, in their hour or their street or the name of their mother's people. Then Morgana could hold them, and at last they were this and they were that" (p. 90). Morgana is a town where "life itself, sunlit and moonlit," like the air on a "windless June" day, is "composed and still and china-like" (p. 35). But it is also a town where a frightening number of the restless rumble against its settled gates.

Even though Miss Eckhart at last cannot be tolerated by Morgana, she too had to prescribe patterns of order for herself and her pupils. She too could not survive without strict boundaries and rules, and her metronome is certainly one of Welty's prominent symbols. It stood like a counting demon on the piano above the suffering heads of her pupils. She "worshiped her metronome," Cassie remembers. "She kept it, like the most precious secret in the teaching of music, in a wall safe," and when she wanted it, she "would go toward it with measured step" (p. 45). All of the children submitted to it except Virgie, who one day announced she would play to its ticking no more. Miss Eckhart was helpless to insist. When Cassie told her mother what Virgie had done, Mrs. Morrison sided with Virgie, insisting that a metronome was an "infernal machine" that made you move relentlessly when in fact you might have preferred to make a song "*dip*" (p. 46). The metronome figures as a symbol of order in the days of Miss Eckhart's reign as piano teacher; but it figures as a dual symbol, of both order and disorder, on the day Miss Eckhart comes back to burn the studio. Watching from his window and then from the tree, the feverish young Loch Morrison is fascinated by the strange object. He sees Miss Eckhart set it on the piano and he hears it ticking. In his boy's imagination it becomes something mysterious, maybe a box of dynamite, a time bomb. Even Old Man Moody, the marshal, and Fatty Bowles, who come by the Old MacLain house to wake Mr. Holifield (he works nights and sleeps there days), think it must be a bomb of some sort. In a scene that is pure farce, the two men sneak in through a window (though the door is open) and catch Miss Eckhart setting fire to the studio. They prance about in their dirty fishing clothes, trying to stamp out the fire and find the ticking thing. This is an hilarious picture of law and order ineffectually battling the flame. Loch, hanging

upside down in the tree, perceives "that they could easily be lying on their backs in the blue sky and waving their legs pleasantly around, having nothing to do with law and order" (p. 78). Finally they spot the metronome in plain view on the piano and fling it into the yard before it explodes. Loch retrieves it, stuffs it into his pajamas, and takes it to his room, still pretending to the house servant that it is dynamite and will blow them to pieces during the night. So this instrument of measured order becomes also a symbol of defiance and a symbol of potential destruction. Loch, a spiritual wanderer through whose consciousness some of the story is told, hugs the metronome to his bosom. In an otherwise puzzling line, Welty seems to be saying that order and disorder are not so terribly far apart; a union of fire and the metronome is possible. Distracted momentarily by all the activity in and around the house next door, "Loch had forgotten the dynamite. Now he could go back to expecting a blast. The fire had had a hard time, but fire could manage to connect itself with an everlasting little mechanism that could pound like that, right along, right in the room" (p. 84).

Miss Eckhart herself is a symbol of order, or at least of dedication to surface order. Cassie speaks of her "methodical mind" (p. 38) and remembers her punctuality and her insistence on established sets of procedures. The June Recital was, after all, her affair, and she tied down every detail, to the last stitch on each girl's new dress. She decided who would wear what color and who would play what piece. The parents (mostly mothers) came as required and each year saw the same performance in the same sequence from the same chairs as the year before. There were even markings on the floor to indicate where the performers should walk and stand. The same music was played, with each pupil moving up a notch to a more difficult piece each year. The recital was a ritual, a thing that had to happen come spring. It was "after all, a ceremony," and it "celebrated June" (p. 70). Cassie recalls that the youngsters invariably played their worst on that night, all, that is, except Virgie. On that one night, however, Miss Eckhart did not seem to mind. "It was as though Miss Eckhart, at the last, were grateful to you for *anything*" (p. 73). But as if already pregnant with the seeds of chaos, the recital collapsed into disorder the moment the last chord of the quartet slid off the keyboard. There was "sudden disintegration" as summer officially arrived with all its joyous freedom. "The MacLain twins, now crashing restraint, rushed downstairs . . . firing cap pistols. Two fans were set rumbling and walking on the floor, from which the dropped programs flew up like a flock of birds, while the decorations whipped and played all over" (p. 74).

The recital was Miss Eckhart's only successful intrusion into the life of Morgana; for that time, she was theirs. And it is that time, that brief time of belonging, that she attempts to reconstruct and then systematically

destroy years later in the studio where the recitals were held. While Loch watches, she decorates the room, decorates it as she had done annually in preparation for the recitals, only this time the streamers are made of old newspapers and tissue paper. Wishing her well, and eager to celebrate with her, Loch lets his imagination transform the room into something "fanciful and beautiful." He had at first thought that she was the mother of the sailor playing with Virgie upstairs, but then he realizes that she is simply "one old woman in a house not bent on dealing punishment." Most likely, she does not even know that the two are making love in a broken-down bed in the room above her. He realizes intuitively that she is a wanderer, an outsider, that she is terribly alone as she goes through the motions of preparation for another recital. He thinks, "This was only a part of something in her head. And in the splendor she fixed and pinned together she was all alone. She was not connected with anything else, with anybody" (p. 31). Once the room is decorated, she begins stuffing the cracks, and Loch becomes aware that she is "inside in the suffocating heat. A wave of hotness passed over his body" (p. 31). He knows now that she plans to set fire to the room, even though she has forgotten that a fire requires air. It is June; it is recital time. She goes to the corner and brings out the metronome. Sitting on the piano in the nest of leaves she had prepared for it, the metronome begins to tick as she "stuck out a finger and played the tune" (p. 34).

It is at this juncture that the point of view shifts to Loch's sister, Cassie, downstairs, who can hear the tune but cannot see into the old house. The story is now in Cassie's hands, Cassie, who is so terribly aware of the turbulence boiling beneath the surfaces of things. The old house itself represents the calm Morgana exterior, now that nobody lives there officially. But Cassie realizes that "in the shade of the vacant house, though all looked still, there was agitation. Some life stirred through. It may have been old life." She is aware that "since the MacLains had moved away, that roof had stood (and leaked) over the heads of people who did not really stay, and a restless current seemed to flow dark and free around it (there would be some sound or motion to startle the birds), a life quicker than the Morrisons' life, more driven probably, thought Cassie uneasily" (p. 35). Cassie remembers the frightening times in that house and outside it when inner chaos burst through the shell of Miss Eckhart's composure. Cassie did not want to see it then, and she does not want to see anything like it now. She keeps repeating the phrase *danke schoen* as if in an effort to stabilize experience through even the simplest verbal gesture of gratitude and caring. One particular summer morning, she recalls, a sudden rain storm caught her and two other of Miss Eckhart's pupils at the studio. As if unshackled by the thunder and rain Miss Eckhart moved to the piano, put a piece of music before her and began to play—the first time she had done so in front

of any of them. Something broke loose, "And if the sonata had an origin in a place on earth, it was the place where Virgie, even, had never been and was not likely ever to go," thinks Cassie. Making mistakes, slipping back and correcting them, Miss Eckhart was oblivious to the petrified youngsters. "Coming from Miss Eckhart, the music made all the pupils uneasy, almost alarmed; something had burst out unwanted, exciting, from the wrong person's life. This was some brilliant thing too splendid for Miss Eckhart, piercing and striking the air around her the way a Christmas firework might almost jump out of the hand that was, each year, inexperienced anew" (p. 56). Cassie senses that Miss Eckhart was burdened by some kind of painful knowledge:

> What Miss Eckhart might have told them a long time ago was that there was more than the ear could bear to hear or the eye to see, even in her. The music was too much for Cassie Morrison. It lay in the very heart of the stormy morning—there was something almost too violent about a storm in the morning. She stood back in the room with her whole body averted as if to ward off blows from Miss Eckhart's strong left hand, her eyes on the faintly winking circle of the safe in the wall. (p. 57)

The safe, of course, is where the metronome was kept, Cassie's symbol of order, her harbor in the storm.

On two other occasions Cassie saw Miss Eckhart lose control. When Miss Eckhart's old mother screamed "*danke schoen!*" over and over as Virgie practiced one day, then sat smiling to herself for having mocked her daughter, Miss Eckhardt walked up to her chair, leaned over it, and slapped the old woman across the mouth. And when Mr. Sissum, the shoe clerk, drowned and was buried, Miss Eckhart acted very strange. She pushed to the front at the burial service and seemed to want to get into the hole herself. Cassie remembers Miss Eckhart struggling against those who tried to restrain her, and "As she struggled, her round face seemed stretched wider than it was long by a feeling that failed to match the feelings of everybody else. It was not the same as sorrow," even though the town finally "decided it must have been crying she did" and promptly "stopped their little girls from learning any more music" (pp. 54-55).

There was still another disruption of order for Miss Eckhart's music students. For a time, Miss Snowdie MacLain, doomed as the wife of King MacLain to perpetual loneliness, rented a room out to a traveling sewing machine salesman named Mr. Voight. His way of protesting against the music lessons was to descend the stairs part way as a pupil labored over the piano and flap the skirts of his open bathrobe. Cassie remembers, "When he flapped his maroon-colored bathrobe, he wore no clothes at all underneath" (p. 47). Miss Eckhart threatened the children if they

told; they told anyway, but since they were mostly not believed little harm was done. Cassie's mother even seemed rather amused by Mr. Voight's performance, and when asked to explain why he would do such a thing, she merely said, "Call it spontaneous combustion" (p. 49). Was a fire in Mr. Voight's head too? Cassie recalls the look on his face as he gobbled and flapped; it was a belligerent look. She comprehends more now, even setting her teeth and "trying out the frantic look" (p. 49) herself, but she can never really imagine herself as a Mr. Voight. It would be too frightening.

But Loch is different. He can see the wanderers, he can make an adventure out of the house next door, and he can relish it all. Loch sees the long absent King MacLain enter the house, a house already busy with Miss Eckhart and the two clowns prancing in the smoke-filled studio, Virgie and the sailor frolicking upstairs, and Mr. Holifield sleeping in another room. Loch mistakes the king of the wanderers, the Zeus of Mississippi, for Mr. Voight. Again, Loch, the innocent, fails to understand; but he is driven to venture out on an actual limb because he too hears the wanderer's call; he too longs for the golden fruit. His malarial fever is only symbolic of the figurative fire in his head. As Welty cleverly shifts point of view back and forth between Cassie and Loch, the story moves back and forth between the imaginative perceptions of the still innocent quester and the painful realizations of one who has newly passed from innocence and has no stomach for the knowledge just encountered. Susceptible though he is to the seduction of the quest, Loch nevertheless has some compulsion toward order too. His upperstory bedroom window and his perch in the tree become command posts from which he imagines he conducts the activities below. He watches the old house through his father's telescope, an instrument of precision. When Virgie and the sailor enter the house, he feels both indignation and joy. They are invaders, and yet he controls them: "For while the invaders did not see him, he saw them, both with the naked eye and through the telescope, and each day that he kept them to himself, they were his" (p. 25), and he never betrayed them. Loch imagines that he possesses the old house next door; looking at it through the telescope, he can even smell it. But sometimes it seems to him that he is "living next door, wild as a cowboy, absolutely by himself" (p. 22), without parents or sister intruding upon his privacy or ministering to his needs. He looks at the figs in the tree and wonders when the sailor will take some. (It was golden figs from this tree also that Miss Eckhart required Virgie to bring her.) Loch thinks of the figs with their "golden flesh." He thinks of how the "golden bubbles of juice would hang, to touch your tongue to first. Loch gave the sailor time, for it was he, Loch, who was in command of leniency here; he was giving him day after day" (p. 24). The house had been Loch's mental adventure before anyone else had come to it, before Virgie had brought the sailor.

And "The big fig tree was many times a magic tree with golden fruit that shone in and among its branches like a cloud of lightning bugs—a tree twinkling all over, burning, on and off, off and on. The sweet golden juice to come—in his dream he put his tongue out . . ." (p. 25). Golden figs or golden apples, they tease with desires that can spell calamity in human society, or loss of Eden in individual lives—and Welty makes no apologies for conjoining Biblical and classical myth. Clearly, Loch and his telescope are symbolic of both surface order and a host of subsurface urges that are destructive of order.

The story abounds in references to order and disorder, in images of contained acquiescence and flight. To explore them all in a short essay is impossible. Certainly the most frequent image of disorder, and of the impulse to pursue the quest, is fire, while the most frequent image of desire is gold—usually, but not always, the golden fruit of the fig tree. (Loch is said to hang from that tree like an apple.) Welty, as in most of her fiction, also uses bird imagery, here to signify both desire and lack of it. Ever conscious of images of desire, Cassie is struck by one particular hummingbird that is the very antithesis of the unimaginative thrush that "walked noisily in the weeds, pointing her beak ahead of her straight as a gun, just as busy in the world as people" (p. 79). The hummingbird is connected with imagery of fire as well as with the idea of desire for the marvelous. Cassie sees the hummingbird streak down "like the trail of a match," something "suspended" that was both "Metallic and misty together, tangible and intangible, splendid and fairylike, the haze of his invisible wings mysterious, like the ring around the moon—had anyone ever tried to catch him? Not she" (p. 67). No, not Cassie. But Loch, and Virgie, and King MacLain, and Miss Eckhart at times, and even Mrs. Morrison, what were they piqued by if not hummingbird visions? What else led them, in varying degrees, to walk paths outside society's mapped terrain?

When described in hummingbird terms, the spirit of the wanderer seems a magnificent thing, the quest for the golden apples justification enough for any sorrow. And in one sense it is. But in another sense the quest is not justified. When the quest counts for all, human relationship counts for nought; gratitude is obliterated, and human beings are destroyed. The chief tragedy of the story is not, as Cassie knows, that Virgie is caught in an affair with a sailor, or that Miss Eckhart never had Mr. Sissum, or that Cassie herself prefers a hayride to the hummingbird's flight, or that "It was gone from her, any way to shield his [Loch's] innocence" (p. 76). The tragedy is that one human being who loved another is broken by the ingratitude of the beloved. And even one instance of destruction by ingratitude cracks the facade of the whole system of social order, undermines the premises we think we live by. Cassie knows, "Anybody could tell that Virgie was doing something to

Miss Eckhart. She was turning her from a teacher into something lesser. And if she was not a teacher, what was Miss Eckhart?" Cassie recalls that something that seemed the very essence of Miss Eckhart's identity "almost faded. Before some caprice of Virgie's, her spirit drooped its head" (p. 47). As a youngster, Virgie tormented Miss Eckhart in a thousand ways, but the final crushing blow comes that last day on the sidewalk when neither Virgie nor Miss Eckhart can own up to what they had been to each other. Miss Eckhart is essentially dead, had died long ago. In "The Wanderers," Virgie as a grown woman seeks out Miss Eckhart's grave and realizes that she had not after all hated the older woman, but had in fact "Come near to loving" her (p. 276). In "June Recital" Cassie sees the pain, understands the anguish, and takes the hurtful experiences of the day to bed with her. As she agonizes over the dehumanizing consequences of ingratitude, Yeats's poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus" flows through her head. She goes to sleep, but suddenly sits up and says aloud, "*'Because a fire was in my head.'*" The story ends with Cassie falling back "unresisting"; and in her dreams the face that was in the poem looks in upon her, "grave, unappeased, and radiant" (p. 97). Preferring safety, she nevertheless accedes to the necessity of the quest; desiring order and human caring, she accedes to the splendor of chaos and separateness. Cassie's troubled acceptance is Eudora Welty's reconciliation.

TWO POEMS BY WILLIAM AARNES

YARD WORK

This is how my father prayed
on a holiday. Dragging his knees
through the grass, a paring knife
in one fist and a sack of dandelions
at his side, he approached god
all afternoon;

he wanted to live
and as I practice that certain slow tug
he taught me for yanking up
unbroken roots, I shudder
at the success of his death.

The sprinkler spins a rainbow
I can almost touch. On such sunny days
he'd come up from his basement desk
to help trim the lilacs and, fluent
with heart medicine, tell lies:
"They say
it's a mirage but I once shadowed
a vanished spy through an arctic blizzard
into Crocker Land and came back
with this chip of granite for proof.
Here it is in my pocket with my change and keys."

No eye could doubt that jangle.

And if he were here now I'd ask him
why we were born to die. He'd study the air
and take his thumbstone
from his pocket and say
even rock is eternal.

•

Just rising, the full moon faces Venus.
As I enter the kneedeep dusk of the garden
to pull suckers
from the crotches of the tomato plants,
the crickets hush. Waiting
till their chirps start again,
I stand still, staring into the air,

which darkens as if about to take shape
and step forward with the face of my father,
his hands already gripping my elbows,
his mouth now muffled against my shoulder
while I hug close
that short man
as if nobody stood there.

WHAT SHALL I DO?

Many a man has packed an idling car,
backed down his driveway, signalled
a right turn at the corner, and never
returned home.

Once the jacket of such a man
left hanging in a motel closet–in the pocket
a paperback in verse. The sleeves
fell inches short, but I slept embraced
by his longing, and when I reached home,
found the driveway a deadend.

Yet how often
have I started off only to recall
the morning glories looping the trellis
or my daughter's uncertain chuckle?

Criss-crossing Missouri, I have learned
how the horizon keeps its distance.

LAMB SAYS

ROSANNE COGGESHALL

He was four years old, not much taller than a cypress knee, and his corn-colored hair closed in around his face like ivy around a window. His round eyes fixed your eyes as if he were a hypnotist, their relentless gaze charged by irises the blue of cobalt. His parents called him Lamb, though his real name was Lambert Charles Harroday, IV, and he thought of himself secretly as Bert. His parents, Althea Bledsoe and Lambert Charles Harroday, III, treated him consistently with warmth and tact, and he thought them nearly perfect. Still, he had not yet felt like speaking to them. Lamb's four year silence had begun long ago to alarm Althea Harroday, and, since his second birthday, she had daily suggested, less and less gently, to Charles that they take him to Atlanta, to a famous clinic there for children with speech disabilities. But Charles was firm. There was nothing the matter with Lamb, he repeated, the boy was just taking his time. After all, the first words of a famous man are the stock of history and his son was simply making damn sure his would be profound, because the Harrodays knew, knew for a fact, that Lamb would be a famous man—probably not President, he would be too short—but possibly an Einstein or a Mark Twain or, at least, a Harroday Wills. (Harroday Wills was Charles' distant cousin who had moved to Michigan and become a popular author of mystery novels. His pen name, T. Z. Lilly, was a household word in Indian Grove, the small Georgia town where the Harrodays lived.)

The reason that Lamb's parents were so certain of their son's grown-up success was because they had been able to tell, ever since the child began to walk, that he was a genius. At 22 months, he expressed interest (by pointing and reaching), in the Encyclopedia Britannica, and it was not long after he had been allowed to hold a volume that Althea discovered him propped up in an arm chair, concentrating deeply on the page before him. By the time he was three he had been through (read, his parents insisted) every volume and had begun to spend his time with literature. He "finished" the *Complete Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* in a matter of days; Sir Walter Scott detained him somewhat longer, Thackery longer still. Then he tackled, one by one, Dickens' novels. These occupied him for quite some time and during that time he showed every indication, his parents thought, of being on the verge of speech. He would push himself out of the heavy armchair and walk into the kitchen where they were usually sitting and purse his lips and lift his hands in a precipitate gesture and they would stiffen in anticipation, but, it never failed, he would not follow through. Instead, he would close his eyes, drop his hands, unscrew his mouth and yawn widely, his tongue

as pink as the Harroday Empress, the rose his mother had developed two summers before. He would then turn around and with a little shuffle which resembled a bird scratching for worms (his mother called it his "dance"), he would return to the library and climb into the chair where his book waited.

During his Dickens days, Lamb began to demonstrate other new and curious tendencies: he started looping his mother's cast-off dress sashes around his throat and knotting them in front as if they were ties; he found Aunt Valentine's forgotten parasol and somehow ripped the fabric and spines away so that he made himself a spindly cane which he carried with him everywhere; and every morning he appeared in his Sunday clothes, the long white trousers and navy blue brass buttoned jacket that had come in the mail from Atlanta. Even when the trousers were more gray than white from his escapades in the back yard and nearby woods, he persisted in wearing them so that Althea, in a characteristically accommodating gesture, bought two new pair of white linen trousers for him in the Young Men's Store in town. Not only did his dress take on a certain rakishness, but Lamb's whole manner of deportment also changed. His "dance" became an integral part of his every movement; he shuffled wherever he went. He held his narrow shoulders very straight and kept his arms close to his body. The elder Harrodays were amused and observed to each other in private that their son was surely imitating a Dickens character; they bemoaned their ragged memories and sometimes stole into the library after Lamb was in bed and leafed through the volume he was presently engaged in to find clues as to which hero he emulated, but to no avail. So they simply bided their time, each anticipating the day Lamb moved on to another author and, perhaps, changed his image again.

"Do put those Chestnutt books high up on the shelf, Charles," Althea said one night that spring. "We don't want Lamb coming in with soot all over his face and arms and in rags. Valentine and the girls talk bad enough as it is."

So the Chestnutt books were moved, as were the Steinbeck books and the Caldwell books and the set of Joel Chandler Harris. Althea had a horror of her sister Valentine's tongue, a tongue which had had much exercise since Lamb had begun to grow up so silently. It was that summer, the summer that Lamb was four and had just begun his second trip through the works of Charles Dickens, that Althea was reminded by her sister that it was the Harrodays' turn to host the Fourth of July picnic. Even though these celebrations had become far less elaborate since Wilkins and Mendal (Althea's brothers) had moved out of state with their families, Althea still dreaded them because they meant that not only Valentine and Rudy, her husband, but all six of their girls would be on hand for what seemed to her to be days; actually the picnic was

usually only a four or five hour affair, but during those hours, Althea knew, the Lucases would have more than enough time to observe Lamb and both his new and his old peculiarities to their hearts' content, which meant until she herself was close to, if not in tears. So when Val called and offered to have the picnic at her house, because the neighbors would be away and had volunteered the use of their pool, Althea was both grateful and relieved; she knew that she and Charles and Lamb could leave early, curtailing any conversation that became too tortuous. In a fit of appreciation she told Val that she would fry all of the chicken.

The night of the third, with the sound of frying chicken in the kitchen below him like a downpour of rain, Lamb sat in the bottom half of his trundle bed, thinking excitedly. He was looking forward to the picnic. Aunt Valentine made him want to close his eyes and disappear, but he liked the girls, all of them, from Tine to Puff, the baby. He knew that they were outrageous, silly and mindless, but he found himself carried away by their stories and serpentine arguments, their boasts and complaints. He especially liked Caroline, who was seven and, he thought, very dignified, even wise. She told him about the tulip poplar, how it grew straight up, defying gravity, not like other trees; and she had shown him where the pea hen had hidden her eggs. Lamb liked the way she looked, too. She looked different from the others. Her hair was about the length of his, just covering her ears, and it was light brown, streaked by the sun with blond; her eyes were large and black, her nose small and straight. She was snaggletoothed, but, generally, nobody noticed, because she seldom spoke and when she laughed she gave way to such a frenzy of motion, running in circles or somersaulting, that there was no opportunity to observe her mouth. These transports of amusement were rare, but when they occurred there was a good reason for them and Lamb knew to look out and to listen. Caroline could make him laugh like no one else could. So Lamb sat in bed and considered what he would say to Caroline if he were to decide to talk. He supposed he would begin with the story of Oliver Twist. He thought she would like that. Or perhaps he would tell her about the fauna in New Zealand or the Lincoln-Douglas debates. There were so many things he had learned about, and they were all jammed up in his head like pickles in a jar. And never once had he spoken of them aloud. He had worried for some time that his head was growing larger as he packed the information in and that soon would look like poor Bidley Hanes, whose head was like a pumpkin on a hatrack, but he had spent considerable time reading the Britannica entry on the brain and he had been relieved to find that his greatest danger was having a brain more creased and wrinkled than a prune. But this would be inside, where no one could see. This comforted him and as he debated with himself which fascinating facts he would lay before his cousin, if he were to want to speak to her at all, he pictured

the creases in his brain and what each crease signified.

The rain-sound in the kitchen had stopped.

"Lamb, honey, bedtime!" Althea called.

He climbed out of bed and slipped off his clothes, put on his nightshirt, and went down the stairs for his juice. As his mother arranged some freshly baked brownies on a plate for him, she talked steadily: "And if Aunt Valentine begins to fiddle with your clothes, you just push her hands away—politely, I mean. Just move away, there's no earthly reason why you should stand there and let her rearrange you. And, mind, whatever she or Uncle Rudy says, don't you let it trouble you. They are wonderful people and I love them but they do not know anything whatsoever about you and your ways. They don't understand. Just ignore them. Politely. And if those girls tease you, why you just smile and walk off somewhere; or you can jump in the pool and swim for a little bit. Under water. Now just don't you worry about it. We won't be there long, just a few hours and then, soon it will be all over and you and I and Daddy can come back here and read or listen to Mantovani or play Crazy Eights or something. Fun. We'll do something fun."

Lamb nodded solemnly but he reflected to himself that the real fun would be when he was there at the picnic, off listening to his cousins or with Caroline alone. He dreamed that night that he and Caroline were sitting on a fat limb in a live oak tree and that he sang a song for her. The song was one he had sung in his head over and over for nearly a year now: "Hearts Are Spades." He had heard it one day when he was visiting Danny next door; Danny's cook sang it for them while she pounded dough to make bread.

When Lamb woke up, it was to the sound of thunder and he looked out of his window into a heavily clouded sky. The gray clouds looked like huge furry animals running into each other and chasing around above the trees. He sat for a while looking out and as he watched, big raindrops pelted the screen leaving shiny streaks. He began to review in his mind the processes of precipitation, then went on to run through the annual averages of rainfall in each of the United States. He was on North Dakota when he heard his mother in the hall already in mid-paragraph. "—why come, anyway, I said to her, it will be bedlam in that house with all of us cooped up, you know, they don't use the living room and there is so much furniture in that den; can you imagine, the eight of them and us three, and the Pritchards and old Wilhelmena Pine. Eighteen. And the children won't be able to go out. And that dog of theirs, not to mention the rabbit. But she says to come on, that it might let up, and that anyway she's made a barrel of potato salad and sliced up a peck of peaches, but I know it's not going to let up, just look at that sky."

Althea paused for breath, then continued, now standing in Lamb's doorway, "Rain, honey, but Aunt Valentine says for us to come on. Now

you get dressed, quick like a rabbit, and come down for some breakfast and then you can help me pack up the chicken. We'll have to leave by three to get there in time and I want everything all ready before lunch so I can take a little nap before we go."

Lamb packed his fourth of the basket of chicken expertly; he was, his mother told anyone who would listen, a marvel in the kitchen. He began when he was just three by surprising the Harrodays one afternoon with a pot of tea and scrupulously made cinnamon toast which he arranged on the best silver tray; he had not been able to lift the tray but when he beckoned his parents to follow him into the kitchen they found the food arranged neatly, complete with china cups and saucers and fresh linen napkins.

From that day on, he was constantly amazing them with demonstrations of culinary prowess: he often created elaborate omelettes for breakfast or supper, standing on a small stool next to the kitchen counter and once, for his father's birthday, he had produced a perfect charlotte russe. It took the puzzled Harrodays some time to make a connection between their son's new preoccupation and the Julia Child Cookbook which lay within his reach on a shelf in the kitchen.

After he had helped his mother, Lamb took the book he was rereading (*Great Expectations*) up to his room and sat in bed and read. From time to time he would pause and look out at the rain, which fell harder and harder and made him think of hurricanes and tornadoes. He debated with himself the possibility of seeing Caroline alone and perhaps talking to her; it was not, he knew, a question of ability, for he could talk—he talked, in fact, inside of his head almost as much as his mother talked aloud. No, it was not a question of his being afraid to speak because of failure; it was a question of desire. So far in his four years Lamb had simply found no occasion which inspired in him the want to speak. Every time he had been urged by his family or his friends to participate in a conversation or just to answer a question he had been struck by an absence of necessity, an utter lack of true purpose.

He always replied in his head and sometimes at great length, but he had early discovered the essential preciousness of language and had determined never to exploit or waste it.

Consequently, he had never heard his own voice. Never once had he practiced or experimented; he just took it for granted that when the time came, he would be ready, fluent, exact and, even, eloquent. But that time had not yet come and, often now, Lamb wondered if it would ever come.

In the car on the way over to Twin Hills where the Lucases lived, Mr. and Mrs. Harroday went through their annual Fourth of July litany of names, ages, and present concerns of all of the cousins and friends who would be on hand.

". . . and Charles, please, do try to remember that the baby, the youngest girl, she's a year now, is called Puff, not Poof. Last Christmas you spent the entire evening addressing her as 'Poof,' and I thought Valentine was going to explode. And it's Mary Dell, not Hattie, who keeps winning the spelling prizes. Mary Dell's eight, no, nine, she's the tall, gangly one with bug eyes, hums a lot, you know. And do try to refrain from talking to Rudy about fishing. Ever since he took that trip to the coast and came back two days late, Valentine just goes wild at the very mention; she thinks he met someone, a woman, you know, or something, and the slightest hint can set her off."

"Might be the only fireworks we see today," Mr. Harroday interjected, then finding an unexpected pause in the conversation, went on to ask: "And the odd one, the small one with the pretty eyes who's so quiet, she's?"

"Caroline." Mrs. Harroday was quick. "Yes. Caroline. There have been some problems with Caroline lately." She made a meditative sound like the buzz of a dozen bees, while Lamb sat up straight and waited. His father also waited and when Mrs. Harroday did not continue, prompted her: "Yes? Trouble?"

"Well," Mrs Harroday glanced towards the back seat where Lamb sat tensed and expectant. She hesitated a moment, as if weighing consequences, and then she plunged, reassuring herself no doubt that her son would repeat nothing he heard. "Well, Caroline's a quiet child, as you said, and she's always been a little peculiar. Kept to herself, that kind of thing. No real rapport with her sisters. A loner, you know. Well, it seems she's always had this imaginary friend, Chrystal she calls her, who goes with her everywhere, even to school. At first, Valentine and Rudy thought it was cute and they asked about Chrystal and even allowed Caroline to have extra cookies and things so that her friend could share. They assumed she'd outgrow it. But she hasn't and several times last spring during school, Caroline caused quite a stir by leaving the playground and walking home because, she would tell them later, Chrystal had a call to make. They punished her of course and began to try to reason with her but it did no good. And the real trouble began when they found out that these calls Chrystal was making were to her brothers and sisters in London—she's an orphan, but she has several, I don't know how many, siblings. The calls were about the others coming over to live with her and Caroline."

Mr. Harroday laughed loudly.

"Well you can laugh, but I don't think it's particularly funny. Now, Valentine says, there are three of them, Chrystal and Riley and Asberry, and Caroline spends all of her time with them. She never plays with the other children. Valentine says she has to watch her very closely all of the time because she keeps taking food for them—from her own plate, I mean,

wrapping it in her napkin, then, well, I don't know, she must eat it herself. Valentine says she never finds traces later."

Mr. Harroday was obviously enjoying his wife's story tremendously; he kept shaking his head and laughing softly to himself. When he asked if Riley and Asberry were boys, brothers, Mrs. Harroday said, "Well, Riley is a girl; Asberry is a boy. They are all seven, Caroline's age. Valentine says they must be nice children, Caroline does not get into any mischief now that school's out, but she doesn't know what they are going to do when school begins because it seems that Caroline always insisted that Chrystal have a desk and the teacher, a wispy little young thing, just out of school herself, let her have an extra desk. But if she demands *three* chairs . . . well, that's just a part of it, what worries Valentine most is that Caroline is always alone and that when she talks to them at all, it's about Chrystal or Riley or Asberry. Val is afraid Chrystal's going to send for the others . . . why there might be a dozen of them, for all we know."

Lamb was leaning forward, biting his lower lip. He had listened attentively to everything his mother said. He had known about Chrystal last year because Caroline had left him after they had been playing, saying that she and Chrystal had plans to make. He had wanted to go with her but assumed she didn't want more company. Now there were three and one was a boy. He wondered if his cousin might let him play with them today. He knew about imaginary friends; he had read an article in *Psychology* not long ago about them. He didn't think that having imaginary friends could be bad for Caroline; it was just like the game he played when he pretended one of the characters in a book was his friend. Surely Caroline knew that Chrystal and her brother and sister were not real; she probably liked them so much because they could be any way she wanted them to be. She could decide what they played, what they talked about and how they behaved. Lamb thought that it was possible that imaginary friends were the best kind of friends to have.

When the Harrodays reached the Lucases' house, which Mr. Harroday referred to privately as "the motel" because, he said, it was so long and so tacky, the rain still fell in huge wind-slanted waves, and they found all of the family and guests inside. All, that is, but Caroline. Lamb missed Caroline the moment he entered but apparently no one else was concerned because no one mentioned her, not even his parents. Valentine and Rudy and their friends, Weezer and Cal Pritchard, were sitting around the kitchen table drinking mint juleps. Miss Wilhelmena Pine, who was eighty-two and looked 102 and who wore makeup as if it were somehow a shield against some dread infestation of insects and the more she wore the more she was protected, had perched herself on a backless bar stool and balanced precariously there, weaving almost imperceptibly back and forth. Four of the Lucas girls and the Pritchard children were draped over the furniture in the den watching Spiderman and crushing potato

chips into each other's mouths. Puff sat in the middle of the kitchen floor calmly playing with a bottle of ketchup, while Frances, the collie, pressed her body close against the refrigerator door and yawned. The crowd's greeting was subdued, as was the Harrodays'; even Althea and Valentine who had not seen each other in six weeks, refrained from their usual enthusiasm.

After his parents had settled at the table with drinks and he had been urged to join the TV watchers in the den, Lamb began his search for Caroline. He passed through the darkened den without being noticed and proceeded down the long hall slowly, listening as he walked for Caroline's voice. When he reached the end of the hall and turned around, he began to wonder if Caroline was in the house at all; he had heard nothing, not even when he listened at her door, and her family seemed to take her absence for granted. Pausing again before Caroline's door, he decided to be bold; he knocked, softly, three times. Inside he heard a muffled rustling, then nothing. He stuffed his hands into his trousers' pockets and lowered his head. Then Caroline opened the door. She was wearing an Indian suit and her face had been painted all over with horizontal and vertical stripes of red and brown. Her headdress was magnificent; it looked to Lamb as if she had a turkey perched on her head.

"Hey, Lamb," Caroline said.

He couldn't tell whether she was glad to see him or not. He smiled at her and gave a little wave. She looked at him carefully, as if she were judging him in a contest, but Lamb didn't mind. He wore a real tie this afternoon, one his mother had given him, and his shirt and white trousers had been recently laundered. He stood quite still beneath Caroline's wandering gaze and finally she stepped back, opening the door for him to follow her into the room. In the room, which Caroline shared with Puff, was an iron double bed painted gold, a battered crib, a tall white chest of drawers and a child's bureau covered with open jars of finger paint. Under it all stretched a heavy dark green rug with men's faces printed onto it, presidents' faces. In the far corner of the room there were some pillows, arranged in a rough circle and Caroline headed there and sat down. Uncertain of what she meant for him to do, Lamb followed and stood beside one of the pillows, his eyes on his cousin.

"We all were just having our tea," she told him; then, cordially, "why don't you sit over here by Asberry and have a cup and a bun."

Lamb sat down carefully on the rug in the place she had indicated.

"Asberry was just telling us about the time in London the boar got loose in the picture show. He said it ran up and down the aisles oinking and nobody could catch it and it kept grabbing away everybody's popcorn and just snuffing it up until he trapped it himself."

Lamb raised his pale eyebrowns to show that he was impressed.

SCR 13.2 Digital Facsimile

Caroline continued: "You see he had this whip he used to carry, for rats and stuff; there are lots of rats and stuff in London; so he took this whip and formed it into a lasso and then he stood up in his seat and when the wild boar ran by he threw the lasso and got him. Then he dragged it outside and found a bobby—that's a London policeman, Lamb —he found one and gave it to him. He said the bobby handcuffed the boar with some special handcuffs he had and hooked him to his horse. And he gave Asberry a badge. See? Isn't it splendid?"

Lamb looked at Asberry's imaginary badge and nodded vigorously his agreement. Caroline offered him more tea and another bun, both of which, to his disappointment, were imaginary too, but he accepted them, although he did not taste them. He hoped he would not offend Caroline but he could not make himself pretend certain things in front of other people. Even though Caroline herself seemed to be enjoying her repast immensely, Lamb just sat there with the invisible cup and plate balanced on his spotless knees.

"Riley now, Riley just got a letter from the queen," Caroline informed him. She then produced the letter which was as invisible as the tea and handed it to him. Lamb took it, screwed up his eyes and tried to appear as if he were reading, but his cousin somewhat rudely snatched it back.

"Here, I'll help you," she offered. "Riley's bashful, ain't you? She would rather that I read it. It says, 'Dear Riley Rose (Rose is her middle name), It was splendid of you to go on the ship to America to live with your sister and her friend Caroline. They sound so charming: I miss you. And when you come back you can come have cake again and ride the horse and play in the royal den. Also, you can visit the princess and teach her the new games you learn. Tell Chrystal and Asberry and Caroline *cheerio* and please write me a letter soon. Lots of love, Your Highness, the Queen.' See, Lamb, what a nice letter?"

Lamb nodded, but he was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He felt like Caroline was very far away and he wanted her to come back and to talk to him about things and people he could see and hear. He was not so sure as he had been that imaginary friends were such good friends to have.

When Caroline next began to address Chrystal, Riley, and Asberry, Lamb could hardly believe his ears: "Y'all," she said. "Lamb says that his new tie came from Jimmy Carter. He told me that the President came to his house for supper last Monday night and brought him this present and some money. Real new, fresh made quarters and fifty cent pieces and two whole real silver dollars. And the President played frisbee with him and then they watched the NBC news. Just think."

Lamb's mouth opened and stayed open. *He* had said? Was Caroline turning him into an imaginary friend too? He saw that she was looking

at him somewhat slyly when she continued her onesided conversation with the other three, "Well, it's true, too, and Lamb says that next week he is going on a camping trip, all by himself, in Stevens Woods, where snakes and wild boars and wildcats live, and he has a real tent with a door and a window in it and he's going to set it up out by a creek and stay a whole week out there by himself. And Lamb says . . ."

"No," Lamb said. His voice was low but firm. Caroline stopped and stared at him, her dark eyes serious and challenging. The silence that rushed into the room after his "no" thrilled Lamb, it was wonderful, it made him want to cry out or to sing. He relaxed in the quiet, still acutely conscious of Caroline's gaze. They sat there on the floor for a long while, neither of them speaking, each with his eyes on the other's. The rain outside had suddenly become loud and the splattering rhythm became to Lamb as comforting as the silence had been. He began to smile at Caroline, just slightly at first and then his face brightened into the best smile he had to give. She remained solemn only until she had made certain there was no irony in his look and then Caroline too smiled tremendously.

TARGETS

ROBERT T. SORRELLS

Pierce snuggled the butt of the .22 against his shoulder, but he felt uncomfortable and out of place.

"Oh ho," Bruce said. He finished the can of beer in his hand. "A lefty."

Pierce strained forward to tuck his right knee up under his right armpit as far as he could. There was no sling, but his thumb and forefinger loosened automatically into a "Y" up near the front sling swivel. He dug his heels into the earth, then slowly stretched his ankles forward until the soles of his feet were flat on the ground. With both eyes still open, he started to sight in on the empty beer can set on top of a fence post two hundred feet away. He rocked around almost imperceptibly on the triangle of his feet and bottom. The sighting was simple.

"How does she fire?" he asked quietly, waiting for the pop and fizz of a beer can being opened.

"I don't really know," Warren answered.

"Neither of us knew either," Bruce said.

He lined up the front bar sight so its top was parallel with the top edge of the rear "V" sight and set that line along the bottom edge of the can. He took up the slack in the trigger as he inhaled deeply. He let a little of the air out, held it, then carefully squeezed the trigger until he heard the report.

"Missed," Bruce said.

He held his position as he resighted again.

"Missed again," Bruce said.

And a third time he fired. He uncoiled slowly from his strained position and automatically set the safety before he lay the rifle flat on the ground.

"I'm not a lefty," he said. Then, "Son, go fetch that can, but be careful how you pick it up. You could cut yourself on the back side of it. The holes will be jagged where the slugs came out."

The boy got up from his kneeling position and started to walk toward the fence.

"Shee-it," Bruce said. "You didn't hit that can any more than Warren or me." He laughed, then hollered to the boy, "Don't hurry, now. We don't have to be back to classes until tomorrow."

The boy broke into a slow trot.

Pierce didn't say anything to that. He said, "It fires pretty true, Warren. I think it does. It may go off to the left slightly. Anyway, I call it this way: Three hits: The first, a slight nick on the left; the second, half way up and centered; the third, two-thirds up and to the right. I'll call the nick, but I'm not positive. I may have lost it."

He grinned and got to his feet, stiff from the cramped position.

"Shee-it," Bruce said again. "That can never jumped even once."

"It must have," Theda said.

"We're firing .22 longs," Pierce explained. He arched his back to unkink it a little. "They're very high-powered. They go in and out so fast you can't see the can jump."

"Like Pancho Gonzales, huh?"

"Pancho . . . ?" Pierce questioned.

"The fastest man in all of Meh-hee-co. Get een and out so fast . . ."

"Oh," Pierce said. "Yes. Put a full can up there and you'll see it damn near explode."

"Look at the boy running back," Theda said. "He wouldn't be running if his daddy hadn't hit it."

"Twice," the boy yelled, and as he drew close, his father saw that grin of bemused, detached indifference he could never read on his eleven year old's face.

"Twice," he said again out of breath from the run back up to the group: his father and two of his father's students. And Theda who lived in with Bruce. Away from them, off on the screened porch of Warren's trailer, were his mother and Aronia, Warren's woman, both studiedly having nothing to with the shooting.

They all looked at the can. One hole was half way up and centered. Another was three-fourths of the way up and to the right.

"Jesus," Bruce said. "Ok, Hot-shot-sir. Two for three. Pretty damned good. Or lucky. And even if you didn't get the nick, I'll be big about it and get you a beer anyways."

He started away, but Pierce held up a hand to keep him where he was for a second, then stuck out his index finger and asked, "See the tip of this finger, Bruce? Yes? Good. Now follow it down as I move it toward this quaint little spot on the can. Here. So. See that, Bruce? See it?"

His finger was pointed at a thin, barely visible streak no more than an eighth of an inch long—just long enough for the surface design on the can to be burned off so the metal underneath showed through.

"That there's the nick, Bruce."

"Shee-it, Pierce. Now really, you gotta admit that's luck."

He handed over a beer, but Pierce took just a sip.

"Where did I call the first shot, Bruce?"

"A nick on the left."

"And the second shot, Bruce?"

He told him.

"And the third shot, Bruce?"

He told him that, too.

"So I did call all three of them, Bruce?"

"Yes, Pierce. Ok."

"Well, then. There they by God are, Bruce." He laughed and let

the can drop to the ground.

Quickly Warren said, "It'll just have to go down as damned good shooting, I think. Damned good. I knew you had a steady hand and a good eye when you were cutting all those little bitty lines in those copper plates for your prints, Pierce. But Lordy! You are a man of great and hidden talents."

Pierce took another slow sip from his beer and bowed with a feigned aristocratic inclination of his head toward Warren, one of his graduate art students: a man, Pierce noted silently, who had no great or hidden talents. Like so many of his students now.

• • •

"It rocks like crazy in a heavy wind," Warren was saying about what he called his mobile home. "But it's set up so high on the blocks I'll never get blown over."

He glanced around the screened porch, constantly attentive to his guests. In a quiet voice he said to the boy, "You know where the ice cream is. Just go help yourself."

"You'll spoil his lunch, Warren," Wilma said.

"Impossible, impossible."

"How come you shoot lefty?" Bruce pursued.

"Bad shoulder," Pierce answered. "I had to have it operated on and it won't go the way it's supposed to. So I shot lefty."

"Jee-sus. Hey, Kid," Bruce called to the boy who had come back to the porch with his second bowl heaped high with ice cream. "Save some for the rest of us, how about?"

"There's plenty," Warren said.

Theda kicked Bruce with her bare foot. "What do you care? You want some? You never. You're drinking beer."

Pierce caught his wife's look as her face started to turn red.

"Maybe you guys can rig up a proper target after a while," Warren's girl friend said. "And set it up about ten miles down the road." She leaned over and picked up Crotte, her wire-haired terrier bitch. Her full name was *Crotte de Bique,* but she was called *Crotte* for short.

"What's wrong, Aronia? Don't you like bang-bang?" Bruce finished the beer in one hand then took a swallow from an already opened fresh one. He squeezed the empty.

"No, I don't. And neither does Pierce's wife. And neither does Crotte."

Bruce looked over at the boy. "You like it, though, don't you, Po? You like the bang-bang, don't you?"

The boy looked quickly over at his father before shrugging. "Yeh. Sure."

"Ha ha. See, Theda? See, Aronia? The kid likes a little gang-bang—er I mean *bang*-bang."

Theda kicked him again and put her hand on his arm. "Warren! The fire. Is it ready yet?"

Warren checked his watch, "Should be. Let's put the hamburgers on first. They take longer than the hot dogs." He turned to Po. "You want hamburgers or hotdogs best, Po?"

"Hamburgers," he answered, a smile ticking up the corners of his mouth.

"We haven't got too many hamburgers, Warren," Bruce called out.

"Oh, hot dogs are fine," the boy said. "I'll have hot dogs if there are more of them."

. . . and the baked beans came out, too. And the German potato salad and pickles and potato chips and relish and spiced peaches, sliced tomatoes, corn—the whole business of summer picnics in the country. Cokes, more beer, a surprise pitcher of martinis. The women spread the table with paper napkins, knives, forks, spoons, servers for the pies to come. And the men gathered around the coals to see to the cooking of the meats. An old fashioned groaning board; the American summerfull horn of plenty.

They stood to eat, then sat, then wandered about the yard, wandered in and out of the little house. Bruce finally settled himself under a near-by oak with Theda and relentlessly pushed hamburgers into his mouth and drank beer in great gulps. Pierce, holding a hot dog in one hand and a martini in the other decided he might as well get started on it. So he wandered over as casually as he could.

Bruce looked up at him. "Well, and how's our super marksman?"

Theda took her plate with a nervous little smile at Pierce and sauntered over to the others at the table.

He smiled quickly. "What's up now, Bruce? More or less immediately, I mean."

Bruce shrugged and squeezed the empty can into a wad. Then for a second he slumped.

"I'm sorry your jury was so hard on you." He tried to grin and make a little joke. "Or that you've taken it so hard. But it's nothing final, you know." He wanted to sound as encouraging as possible.

Bruce stiffened from his slouch and looked up, his eyes already red from the beer and the sun. But he said nothing.

"There's plenty of time to get going again, if that's what you really want to do." He paused as Bruce opened another beer. "Even if it's tough right now."

Bruce took half the can in three gulps, glaring up all the time at Pierce who wanted to sit, but who also wanted Bruce to offer him a conversation.

"It wasn't," Bruce said, speaking with deliberate precision. "I ain't down on what the jury said about the painting so much. Not that they'd

any of them understand what the hell I'm all about anyway. It's the rest of all that crap!"

Pierce shrugged. "You knew there were two part to it. The jury and the orals."

"Oh hell. I know where I'm at with my painting. But goddam, Pierce, I mean it. All the rest of that shit. Their precious fucking Art History and Philosophies of Composition and Definitions of Bullshit and the Names and Dates of All the Major Assholes from there up to *here*," and he yanked his finger across his throat. "That's what gets me, Pierce."

They were silent for a minute, each looking away. Softly, then, his eyes searching Pierce's face for sense, he said, "Their all-hallowed past. The questions, Pierce. Not the jury. Which was bad enough," he finished, slumping again.

Pierce squatted. "I know," he said, and he started to say more, but didn't. "I know," he repeated, moving his hands apart then together as though trying to measure the distance between the artist as painter and the artist as scholar, looking at his hands as though taking the measure of the distance between him and Bruce who continued to drink in silence.

"But here you are in an academic situation . . ."

Oh hell, he thought.

"Look," he tried once more. "If you want to 'be a painter' . . ." He looked away trying to find an image that Bruce might be able to set his teeth in. "Garrets are all very good and well, I suppose." He stopped again. "Oh, Jesus, Bruce. I mean everybody from those grunts in the caves at Lasceaux up to Picasso and Baskin had to learn something besides how to mix paints and lay on intensely personal emotions." He stood and felt the blood tingle back into his legs.

"Well," he said, his voice flat. "It seems to me you've spent the whole year being down on the school because it's a school."

Bruce leaned back against the tree, his legs stuck out in front of him, his ankles crossed, his hands holding each other gently in his lap: a study of beautiful, bucolic repose, Pierce thought. Until he looked again at the hands: thick, calloused, the knuckles scarred and chipped; the legs heavy and powerful, looking like they could still respond to the demands made of them for probably eight or more years worth of scrimmage lines; the nearly invisible scars across the forehead and at the sides of the eyes from helmets rubbing and chafing; the skin and bone above the eyes still looking slightly swollen, swollen forever from the blows of forearms and knees and shoulders and helmeted, butting heads.

Pierce got angry. He looked away and across the field where he saw the small herd of horses pastured there on the farm. They were static, heads drooping, except for one which was up and alert.

"And *you* don't like my paintings either, do you, Pierce?"

He turned slowly back to Bruce whose position was unchanged except that he had another beer between his hands. He wrenched the pop top off and the foam flowed over his hands to spread across his lap and soak his jeans.

Pierce's shoulders twitched up. "This is just one school. But we've got two degrees you can go for."

He stopped. From the corner of his eye he caught sight of Po sitting alone. Wilma's back was to him as she talked to Warren and Aronia.

"Your trouble, Bruce," he went on, bothered as usual because his voice was quivering as it always did when he had to talk *at* somebody eyeball to eyeball. "You just refuse to take instruction," he started again. "I guess because you've convinced yourself there's no one here good enough to be your teacher."

He looked at Bruce and partially turned from him. "Well," he said, squarely facing the field. "There *is* a lot for you to learn."

Bruce smirked and Pierce found himself trying to put dents in his martini glass. It had been a long time since he had felt this way about somebody, but he very much wanted to put his foot through Bruce's face. And he wanted to have on his long since worn out and discarded Army boots to do it with.

"You never answered my question, Pierce." Again Bruce spoke very quietly.

"All right. No. I don't really much like your stuff. But I also think that all any of us have been trying to do this year is point out to you where it's badly derivative. But so what if I don't like it?"

"Twelve months is a very long time not to say so, Pierce." He spoke calmly, like a man, Pierce thought, who knows he's got the goods. He stared down at the man heavy with beer under the tree.

"I suppose you're right." Calmer now, he spoke again, the shrug jerking his shoulders. "I guess I figured I was a print maker, not a painter, is all."

"What you really mean, Pierce, is that you spent the year hiding from me behind your prints."

Pierce said nothing, and for a long time they were silent.

"My job here is to teach, Bruce. That means to help my students see their own stuff more clearly and to help them develop . . ."

Then Bruce laughed, his head back, his mouth open. A long, loud, ugly laugh.

"You said it, Pierce. Painters should be out painting. Schools are for teachers."

He snorted once more, hunkered down even further, rolled over on his side, and was asleep.

* * *

"To hell with him," Wilma was saying.

Pierce sat perfectly still. *Like a cockroach*, he thought. *Caught in the*

pantry by the sudden snapping on of a light by a suspicious and outraged housewife.

"I don't care if he has had a rough time. He's a damn bully." Her voice was low as she talked. "There's no excuse for his treating Po like he has."

Like a cockroach.

"And I don't think you should let him get away with it."

He shifted slightly, then sat up straighter. They were on the porch again. He looked outside. The others were playing with a frisbee. Bruce was still asleep under the tree. Through the doorway into the livingroom he could see Po sprawled out with a *Mad* comic.

"What am I suposed to do, Wilma?" He spread his hands slowly. "What am I supposed to do? Leave my glove in his face? Invite him to leave *Warren's* picnic? Ask him to step around behind the woodshed where we can rattle our knuckles in each others' teeth like knights of yore clanking around in armor? Or . . ."

"How about just suggesting that he lay off?" she interrupted. "How about just saying, 'Bruce, lay off the kid'? How about something simple and direct like that, Pierce?"

He hunkered back down in the chair, one hand covering his face.

"Ok," he muttered, and looked out the window.

"I don't understand a creep like that," Wilma went on. "I don't understand a bully like that. If he wants to talk to you about his stupid painting, then why doesn't he do it in your office instead of picking on Po?"

"Po's all right, Wilma."

"Well I don't like it."

"Damnation," and Pierce lunged up from the couch. "I think you're the one I should tell to lay off."

He walked outside and to the table where he poured another martini from the cooler. It was still cold and good, even with the stale hint of thermos in it. He walked aimlessly toward the fence where they had set their empty beer cans earlier. Away to his right he noticed the herd of horses running off, spooked by Crotte's constant yapping and snapping. *Like Warren,* he thought. *Always at your heels for something. Yipping you and yapping you for grades or help. Always angling in at you. Like being nice and inviting you out for picnics . . .*

Wilma's hand was on his shoulder. "I didn't mean to nag, Pierce."

They strolled on, Pierce sipping occasionally at his drink. They stopped and watched the horses wheel in a tight knot as Aronia tried to call in the dog. They watched as she chased Crotte who was still chasing the horses. Then they saw Warren chasing Aronia.

"I don't think I've ever seen Warren move that fast before," Wilma said. Her voice was humorless.

Pierce laughed. "She's a very attractive girl," he said.

"I suppose," Wilma said.

He shrugged. "Forget it, then," and he walked away from her to the fence. He leaned his arms across the top strand of wire and dangled the empty glass by its stem.

"I don't know," Wilma said as she came up next to him. "I guess men and women just don't see the same things in other women."

"For God's sake, Wilma." He stopped and looked away hoping he might compose himself a little.

"Look, it may sound a little bit faggoty to you, but frankly I'm much more concerned about Bruce than I am about Aronia. Aronia is a pretty and attractive little piece of tail, and she seems to do good things for Warren. But Bruce has a tremendous amount of talent which is getting all buggered up because he's angry and bull headed and hurt. And also because he happens to be too damned right about the bulk of our department. And I care very much about that. I want this to be a good place for people like Bruce to be able to learn and work."

"Is she really a good piece of tail?"

"You just don't ever turn loose, do you, Wilma?"

"I'm sorry, Pierce. But I just never have understood how you could stand to be around a slob like that. Like Bruce, I mean."

She turned from him before he could say anything and headed back up toward the trailer.

* * *

Pierce had just chunked down another martini at the table when the general calm of distant voices was shattered by a yell that stunned him back over twenty years to the snow-crusted ridges and frozen passes of Korea with the bugles tootling their death promises as padded Chinese soldiers hurled themselves forward across the American front. Pierce dropped his glass and crouched, his eyes glazed, his arms outstretched to feel around wildly for his rifle.

It was Bruce, awake and running out toward the pasture. Pierce bent to recover his glass, but he stayed on one knee for a moment before getting up. As he poured another martini, he saw Bruce hurdle a low spot in the fence and begin what looked at first like his part in the chase with Warren and Aronia and Crotte.

"What in the world?" he heard behind him from Wilma. Then, "Oh God, Pierce! Po's down in there. Look," and she pointed to their son as he whirled along behind the others—they were all down there, now—and the horses. Crotte and Aronia and Warren and Theda and now Bruce still charging the mass—and the herd nearly frantic from them as they tore about flapping their arms up and down like great clip-winged birds trying to hoist themselves from the earth on an updraft to carry them higher and higher. Leaping in line in what looked like a ragged game

of follow the leader, they would fall, caterwaul, leap, flap . . .

"Get him out of there, Pierce. Good God! He'll get killed. Those horses will stomple him to death." She clutched Pierce's shoulder, both pushing him and holding him back.

Pierce stated. "He's all right, Wilma." He finished the drink. "Po's ok."

But Po had straggled away from the others and was chasing Crotte as she continued to yap after the horses which wheeled in a wide arc way out to the right, then cut back, Crotte hard on their heels, aiming straight at Po who continued his gleeful, flapping way across the field.

Pierce saw it and could do nothing. It wasn't an absolute danger, he felt. The herd wasn't really quite all that close to the boy. And the instinct of horses, Pierce knew, was to veer, not to run down. But he also knew that a badly frightened horse running full tilt could do crazy things. Again his arms went out, his hands spread, his body starting to crouch when Bruce, screaming again, changed direction in a mad cut and charged another twenty yards before he left his feet and sailed through the air with an exultant bellow to land square on the head of the lead horse which stumbled under the impact and nearly fell.

Bruce locked his left hand up into the animal's nose while he hooked his right elbow over the horse's neck, and grabbed an ear with his other hand. The herd flared away to the right with its leader, while Po—a plane now—dove in a steep bank to his left and glided completely away from the wad of tails and legs and hooves that had ended up squirming and kicking on the ground as the lead horse finally fell over its head with the added weight of Bruce's two hundred and forty pounds hanging from it. The others, unable or unwilling or not caring to stop, plowed straight on into them until they were all on the ground. The noise of the frantic, white-eyed, ear-backed, shrieking whinneys was nearly drowned by the great *haw haw's* from Bruce who stayed completely buried from sight until the entire pack seemed to spring apart and scatter in all directions leaving him reeling in the center of their enlarging circle: laughing, staggering, finally running again in spite of a minor limp. The horses swung around and re-grouped, but stood huddled against each other, kicking as they each tried to back into the center of their little knot.

Pierce saw Bruce join the others who had stopped to watch and cheer, then saw Po casually—arms still straight out in airplane attitude—make his way from the field. Then he felt Wilma beating him on the shoulders and head with her fists.

"You bastard," she was weeping as she struck him again and again with both fists at once. "You drunken dirty dirty "

He pushed her backwards by her wrists and tried to understand what he was supposed to do.

"Shut up, Wilma. Shut your mouth up!"

He shoved her around to the other side of the trailer hoping all the way she would snap out of it before the others saw her or before Po started looking for them. She scared him. Her eyes stared blankly ahead and her face was set into a mask of hate. She couldn't even talk. He eased his grip on her wrists to see if that would help calm her any, but she kept steadily trying to pull away from him. Her lips were pursed, her cheeks stretched down, her eyes still unseeing, and little grunts kept exploding up from deep in her chest.

"Wilma," he said quietly. His head hurt. "Wilma," and with very deliberate aim, he brought his hand around and slapped her as hard as he could. Her head snapped way over and she would have fallen if he hadn't grabbed her. But he felt her body loosen in his arms as she started to cry. He breathed deeply as he held her close and looked up the road, over the trees, to the peak of the roof of the main house. He felt her start to hold herself and he slowly turned loose. She wiped her eyes, glanced quickly at him, then turned and walked slowly around the side of the trailer. Pierce, his hands in his pockets, followed about four feet behind and to one side. They strolled casually, both looking down at the ground.

° ° °

"Come on," Warren yelled. "Down here." He waved them toward the field. Po ran up, eyes glittering.

"They've got a good target, now. It's all set up. Warren made one, then Bruce made another one and so did I."

"No, no," Pierce said quietly. "Oh no. We're about to go home, Po."

"Come on," Warren yelled again from the field. "Come on, Pierce. Come on and shoot."

"Wilma," he began, but she shrugged her shoulders with a nervous laugh, never turning to face him.

"Wilma," he tried again.

"Come on, Dad. It's all set up." And Po flew from him: past his mother, through the still open gate to them, the twitching knot of the others. And Wilma trudging to them, too; and he understood that he had to shoot again, had to try to win them back.

"Come on," Warren kept calling. Only this time they were all yelling and waving their arms at him to hurry down to join them.

"Come on, Pierce. Come on, come on."

All right. All right, God damn it. All right. All right.

He looked around the table where they had eaten their summer feast. Under it he found three six-packs of beer, now warm.

All right, by God.

He picked up the six-packs and even managed to balance the thermos on top. He could hear what was left of the martinis sloshing around. He staggered under the load. His head throbbed brutally as he

watched Wilma jerk and twitch her way to the group.

All right. You want shooting? All right, then. We'll have shooting. We'll shoot until the goddam barrel melts; we'll shoot till our fingers can't pull the trigger one more time; then we'll shoot with the next fingers in line; and if they drop off, too, then we'll by God shoot with our teeth and our toes, with our tongues and our cocks if we have to; we'll shoot till every target in the fuggin world is shot to shit and back again. You want to shoot? All right. We'll shoot.

"All right," he said. He let his arms drop and stared at Bruce as the beer and gin crashed to the ground before them. "All right, let's shoot."

Theda stooped to get the thermos.

"Is it broken?" Aronia asked.

Pierce took it from her and looked inside.

"No," he said. Then he tilted his head back to finish the drinks—three, four large gulps.

"All right," he said. "You want to shoot. Let's shoot. Where'r your targets?" He felt the words slur across his tongue.

"We just want to shoot the rifle at the targets, Pierce," Warren said.

"That's what I thought you'd said," he interrupted.

"I mean, we ain't out to murder, after all," and he buried his neck in an exaggerated, comic shrug, laughing just from his throat.

"Oh?" Pierce answered. He was breathing hard as he reached out and took the rifle from Warren, then held it in front of them all. "This here is a very sophisticated and highly portable kind of catapult. And the catapult was not devised by ancient men to chunk rocks at nice little circles in the desert. In short and so's not to bore any of you very borable post-teenies with my lectures, understand this: the gun was invented so people could kill. Period."

"Oh hell," Aronia said, backing slightly as though to break the arc in front of Pierce. "Let's drink the damn beer and forget the stupid gun. How about it? Wilma?"

But Wilma didn't answer. She simply continued to hold herself with her arms like someone trying to get warm.

"All right. Where'r the targets? Po—my son—my son said there were targets. Where'r they?" Pierce demanded, his chest heaving. "Where'r all the pretty little targets?"

Bruce nodded toward a large maple standing by itself some twenty feet this side of the rest of the woods.

"There," he said.

Pierce hefted the rifle, tossing it a few inches into the air and catching it again.

"Who's first?" he asked. "Warren? Bruce? Aronia, are you girls in on this? Theda?" He paused. "Wilma?"

No one answered.

"All right. Standing, kneeling, sitting, prone. Three rounds each position. That's twelve shots. Twelve chances. Just like the disciples. Twelve. That's thirty-six rounds for the three of us. You got that much, Warren? Ok. What you got out there? Two rings? Three? Ok. For a bull's eye, three point; for the first ring, two; for the second, one. The guy with the most points wins. And we should have more targets, probably, cause they'll get busted up, probably. Ok? Ok, then. And whadda we shooting for? A turkey? A bottle of booze? Grades?" He paused, but no one said anything. Softer then, he said, "Well something. We gotta shoot for something. Honor? Pride? Fame? Family? No? Then how about wisdom?"

He stooped and opened a can of beer which spewed out toward the others. He drank most of it before he took the can from his lips.

"Hot," he said. "That's good beer now. God I hate it when it's ice cold." He finished that one and opened another.

"Here, Warren, you're first. Standing. That's the hardest." He drank at his beer. "Is it loaded?"

Warren nodded. Pierce looked at Bruce and motioned for him to help himself to a beer.

"Who counted how many rounds got put in? Nobody? Goddam, boys. All right, then," he said quietly. "All right." He drank again. His head ached so badly he thought once he might throw up from the pain.

"All right, Warren, Bruce. The winner gets to be . . . *Best.* And whoever wins, the others'll have to tell everybody that he's *Best. Numero Uno.* In fair competition. Cause we'll all shoot at clean targets. We'll all have our own. And we'll all take them home and frame them up and put them on the wall, and then we'll be able to look at them and know we're *Best.* Or *Next Best.* Or *Least Best of All.* And we'll be able to look at all the neat little holes and they'll be there always to tell us why we're what we are."

He waited until Warren had fired his first shot, then he drank another beer.

Warren giggled. "I don't think I even hit the tree."

"Shoot," Pierce said with a fresh beer up to his face. "Shoot the goddam gun, Warren."

He fired a second time.

"Ahhhh, it's no use, Pierce. Maybe another time. . ."

"Shoot, God damn it. That's what everybody wanned to do? Shoot, then! You got targets. You got ammo. You got a gun. So then shoot, Warren. it's good practice."

"Nah, Pierce. Nah. A bad idea, maybe. Probably a bad idea."

Pierce suddenly reached way back, flung his half full beer can into the sky as far as he could, then grabbed the rifle from Warren, and fired in the general direction of the can's downward arc.

"Powpowpow," he yelled as he fired. "That's called snatch shooting, Bruce. You'd know something about that? Snatch? Genteel folks call it *yank* shots. Or *jerk* shots. You don't aim, see? You just react."

He tossed the rifle at Bruce.

"Ok, then. Warren won't shoot any more. So you shoot."

"No, Pierce." He held the rifle back out toward Pierce who bent to get another beer.

"Oh nonono, now. 'Come on and shoot,' you said. Well look. Let's get another beer."

"Ahhhh, you're drunk, Pierce," Warren said, his face a mask of trembling smiles. "We wouldn't want to take unfair advantage."

"Screw drunk," Pierce screamed. "Shoot, damn it! It's good practice." He lurched toward Warren. "Get in your practice while you can," he said very seriously, "cause then you can go forth and shoot all the people who're better'n you are. And you, Bruce. You're an ex-Marine or Paratrooper or something. So you need to get your ole eye back so's you can go shoot down everybody who knows more'n you do. And Theda and Aronia, too. They can go shoot . . ." He waggled a hand in the air. "You can go shoot whatever you think needs doing."

Bruce looked almost sad, his eyes puffy and bloated from the beer earlier. "And what about you, Pierce?"

"Me?" He staggered and nearly fell. "I didn't want to shoot. You must all remember that. I didn't want to shoot. I was up there ready to leave. Everybody else was the one who wanted to shoot. Me, I've already shot, see? I did my shooting a long time ago. See? But I said to myself, 'Ok. Everybody else wants to shoot. I'll shoot, too.'" He smiled a crooked smile and stumbled again.

Wilma finally broke into the silence. "You make me sick," she said. "You make me sick when you're like this."

Bruce turned and took a step away.

Pierce's head bobbed up and down as he looked at her, trying hard to focus on her face.

"I admire that, Wilma. Because people *should* get sick of people when they are disgusting. But what really bothers me," and he fell against Po, put his free arm around his shoulders to keep from falling. "What I really wonder is how you feel when I'm *not* like this." He looked down at Po with a wet, cock-eyed grin. Then, dropping his beer and with both hands up to hide his face as the tears seemed actually to leap from his eyes, he started running awkwardly from them, lurching and staggering up toward the car behind Warren's trailer, the car that could take him away from there, from them. Home.

"Shee-it," Bruce muttered to himself, turning so he wouldn't have to look at Pierce. Then with a quick wrench of both hands, he twisted his beer can into an hour glass.

DISTORTION BY HISTORY AND LEGEND: THE PESSIMISTIC ENDING OF *BILLY BUDD*

NICHOLAS CANADAY

The ending of *Billy Budd* is eerily reminiscent of the pessimistic conclusion of *Hamlet*, in which an ambitious Fortinbras, thinking of himself and of his public image, pays respect to the fallen prince in irrelevant terms. Fortinbras seemingly fails to hear Horatio resolutely state his intention to "truly deliver" an accounting of the deadly mischance that has followed on "plots and errors." The rhetoric and demeanor of Fortinbras combine to give immediate notice that Hamlet's wounded name will indeed live, as Hamlet himself puts it, behind him. One despairs that the "official" version of these events, packaged within the soldierly concerns of Fortinbras and the privileged interests of those who rule the state, will successfully unravel the tangled story of the dead prince. Nor can one confidently expect that Horatio's non-official narrative, projected through a lens of quiet skepticism, will show that story whole. Horatio's love for Hamlet is not in question; the range of his imagination is. Whatever consolation for Hamlet may lie in the belief that, having suffered in the plots and errors of this life, at least his story will be told accurately to those who come after, is based on a false hope. The evil-doers and those who struggle against them, and all who suffer, will have their faces distorted to serve the needs of those who do the reporting.

So after Billy Budd, too, will live a wounded name. For the story of Billy Budd will come to posterity through two warped and self-serving media, one representing the powerful and the other the people. The official version, which appears in a naval chronicle under the heading of "News from the Mediterranean," is designed to reinforce those "settled convictions"[1] of officers like Captain Vere who will be the initial recipients of the news. And to protect and preserve all the Veres and Claggarts serving the state, present and future. Perhaps the most significant lie in this account is the escalation of violence: Claggart "was vindictively stabbed to the heart by the suddenly drawn sheath knife of Budd" (130). The effect deliberately sought is to stiffen the resolve of those charged with maintaining order in the navy and to justify the severe penalty of death by hanging. But one notices also that the characters become abstractions: Claggart, a respectable, discreet, middle-aged petty officer, and Budd, a depraved alien masquerading under a British name. This report is all that stands "in human record" (131), i.e., history,

[1] Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, eds. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 62. Subsequent references to this edition will be in the body of the article.

about the incident. Melville was properly skeptical of history because it is based on such sources as this official document.

Speaking directly to the people, Billy's Horatio is "another foretopman, one of his own watch, gifted, as some sailors are, with an artless *poetic* temperament" (131), whose medium is legend promulgated through a crude ballad. The sailor-poet's love for Billy is not in question, but partly because of his untutored mind and partly out of need his portrait reveals a severely limited perception. Melville placed "Billy in the Darbies" at the very end of *Billy Budd*, which has the effect of making it a kind of final word or summation—an ironic conclusion because it is paired with the official naval chronicle. When the two accounts of the incident aboard the *Bellipotent* are considered together—history and legend, authorized chronicle and folk lore, document and oral history—the ending has implications far more somber than if the ballad alone is seen as a summary of the story. What has hitherto been the view of many readers has held that the ballad represents an instinctive perception of Billy's innocence despite the official conclusions to the contrary and that the sailors' persistence in believing in this innocence even when being manipulated by those who control the information is highly laudable. The comments of Ray West on the ballad may serve as illustration: "It represents Melville's final expression of faith in mankind—faith in the ability of the common man to see beyond the misrepresentations of evil, however disguised; faith that the essential beauty and heroism of man will always be recognized and celebrated in artistic form, however crude."[2] John Rathbun, who deals generally with the lack of perception by all the characters in the novel about who Billy really is, nevertheless takes it to be Melville's purpose in ending the novel with the ballad to present a version of Billy's experience clearly preferable to the official one. Rathbun recognizes that the ballad serves chiefly to reflect those elements of Billy's life and character that were meaningful to his fellow seamen and concludes: "Our perceptions are dimmed and our aspirations limited, which is pathetic, yet occasionally we can be stirred to a muted awareness of our humanity."[3] Yet earlier in the novel when Melville had remarked that "sailors are in character a juvenile race" (87), he is not describing an unalloyed virture because it is an innocence that "in a moral emergency [does] not always sharpen the faculties or enlighten the will" (70). That after Billy's death the sailors hold steadfastly to a concept of innocence that savors of a childhood never outgrown is a form of sentimentality that distorts truth as much as the official reporting of the alleged crime. It is a concept of innocence,

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[2] Ray B. West, Jr., "The Unity of 'Billy Budd,'" *Hudson Review*, 5 (Spring 1952), 127.

[3] John W. Rathbun, "*Billy Budd* and the Limits of Perception, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 20 (January 1965), 34.

when seen in contrast to the real Billy who dies aboard the *Bellipotent*, that shows a serious deficiency of perspective.

The artless poet's portrait of Billy in the ballad evinces qualities of naiveté, candor, spontaneity, and directness. It is the same Billy who says without insinuation as he is impressed aboard the *Bellipotent*: "And good-by to you too, old *Rights-of-Man*" (49). At that point Billy possesses "the gaiety of high health, youth, and a free heart" (49); once he has lost these qualities such forthrightness would seem no longer possible. We know from Melville's accounts of Billy's last interview with Captain Vere and the chaplain that even if Billy has not yet come to deal in indirection he is certainly no longer naive, spontaneous, and candid. The interview with Vere is not dramatized in the novel, but in Melville's account of it we are told that Billy achieves a new maturity and with it an understanding of the necessity of Vere's decision to have him hanged. With the chaplain Billy is simply all reserve; he does not respond. The real Billy is not the Billy of the ballad: "Good of the chaplain to enter Lone Bay/And down on his marrowbones here and pray/For the likes just o' me, Billy Budd . . ." (132). The spontaneity in these opening lines and throughout the poem are in contrast to the virtual silence of the real Billy from the time of his court martial until his death.

While William Shurr in his summary of the import of the ballad sees "an extraordinary perversion" of Billy's true character in its lines, the poem leaves with Shurr an impression of a lack of innocence.[4] This reading is based upon Shurr's belief that the puns in the ballad may represent a new sophistication, as does the reference to the woman named Bristol Molly. My impression is that the puns, traditional in this poetic form, are so broad and so artless, so ingenuous that they reinforce the aura of innocence. They are childish, at any rate, by contrast to sophisticated ironic insinuation. In the reference to Bristol Molly I hear an innocence with regard to the consequences of sexuality. Robert Penn Warren also seems to feel that the connotations of innocence remain in the line when he observes that Billy is "just a youthful sailor . . . who has found such natural satisfaction as he might with Molly."[5] It is agreed, in any case, that the reference is a characterizing device for the Billy of the ballad. There is no comparable scene aboard the *Bellipotent* at the end of Billy's life to show a contrasting awareness, perhaps, for example, a cognizance of the sexual relationship between Billy and Claggart suggested by several details in the narrative. Still, Billy has certainly had the kind of experience that would remove sexual naiveté.

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[4] William H. Shurr, *The Mystery of Iniquity: Melville as Poet, 1857-1891* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1972), p. 260.

[5] Robert Penn Warren, "Melville's Poems," *Southern Review*, 3 (October 1967), 850.

After the two final interviews Billy has aboard the *Bellipotent*, one with his captain and one with his chaplain, and in fact as a result of these meetings, there occurs a phenomenon that underlines further how Billy's state of mind at the end of his life contrasts with the spontaneous Billy of the ballad. The purser and the surgeon agree that at the very moment of Billy's death there was an unusual absence of spasmodic movement in the hanging body. As he closes their discussion, the surgeon attributes this phenomenon to "*will power*" (125), a phrase that characterizes a state of mind that is the very opposite of either that of the newly impressed Handsome Sailor or of the speaker of the ballad. It is significant that purser and surgeon follow captain and chaplain—all officers—in making comments on Billy based on personal observation. He has been closeted away from the people at the end of his life, in fact since the moment of Claggart's accusation, for the traditional reasons of security and the maintaining of order. Thus the ballad maker would have no experience with the real Billy after his encounter with malice, and the poet's idealized portrait of the Handsome Sailor—youthful and with a free heart—cannot have been tested by reality. Whether or not this particular result of Billy's isolation is a part of Captain Vere's conscious purpose in ordering it, the arrangement obviously serves the purposes of the powerful.

At the end of his life the real Billy may have evinced an acceptance of his fate and of the ways of the man-of-war world generally, but affirmation there is not. His only words directly quoted after the killing of Claggart are of course his cry just before his execution: "God bless Captain Vere!" (123). While the precise tone of these words must be determined from their context, at the very least, with their repetition in a "resonant sympathetic echo" (123) as of one voice from the crew assembled, they proclaim another quality in the real Billy not found in the Billy of the ballad. In those last words Billy assumes responsibility for his acts, not alone the recognition of the consequences of his act of striking John Claggart, but even more importantly for what he might say at the final moment to a near-mutinous crew. Let me emphasize my point: the cry would seem to me to indicate not culpability, still less any heavy burden of guilt, but rather that human beings must bear the responsibility for their acts even in this imperfect world. And however unwarranted his own punishment, Billy's final words are specifically designed to prevent any further attempt by the people at that time to challenge the implacable authority of the powerful. In the ballad, by contrast, Billy is ignorant of any responsibility; he is indeed without a past, no mention being made even of why he lies in the darbies awaiting execution.

In creating the Billy Budd of the ballad, the artless poet, representing the people, deliberately refuses to acknowledge power. To do this is to

put oneself into the hands of the powerful. To capitalize on innocence and to make a virtue of powerlessness, whether consciously or unconsciously, is to evade reality. Every individual, however helpless, has some responsibility in the framework of the relationships in a man-of-war world. To be sure, those in power encourage the feeling of weakness in subordinates: it serves their purpose in exacting instant and unquestioning obedience. Yet total denial of responsibility is evasion; the human condition inevitably involves some complicity in evil. And however comfortable it may be to cling to childhood, the modern world is not made by a juvenile race. Nor will such a race ever be able to effect institutional reform.

These insights by Melville seem to me to be implicit in the ending of the novel. Two earlier political readings of *Billy Budd* are very valuable, but my emphasis is somewhat different from one, my conclusions from the second. An essay by Karl Zink published in 1952 sees the novel as a "tragedy of society" caused by the inherent evil of social forms.[6] Captain Vere, of course, is the chief representative of formal authority, which the sailors tolerate passively and uncritically. Ray Browne, writing in 1963, sees the same political struggle as central to the novel but is optimistic about its long-range outcome: "My thesis is, then, that the novel instead of demonstrating the irresistible triumph of political evil, of conservatism, insists on the opposite: that the Veres (and Claggarts) prevail only in the short run, never in the long; that though the Budds seem to lose and are even destroyed personally, they ultimately conquer, not in themselves but in the political philosophy and in the people they represent. . . . They will outlast all other persons. And they will inevitably inherit the earth."[7] According to Browne, it is the ballad that summarizes the novel and provides the clearest statement that the people have outlasted everyone else. One can agree that the people will "outlast" in the sense that there will always be many of them around after the event, but it is not clear how the Budds will conquer and inherit the earth. One searches through the ending of *Billy Budd* for an affirmation of democratic faith such as this from its author.

Because crucial to moral growth and hence more serious perhaps than some unacknowledged complicity in evil, a deliberate turning away from the adult world—a world of power and its use—prevents an authentic engagement with other people. The most striking omission of subject matter in the ballad is the total absence of malice and the suffering that results from it. There is a slight suggestion of deprivation: Billy is hungry and a bit lonely. Such details suggest the uneasiness of a child

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[6] Karl E. Zink, "Herman Melville and the Forms—Irony and Social Criticism in 'Billy Budd,'" *Accent*, 12 (Summer 1952), 131.

[7] Ray B. Browne, "*Billy Budd*: Gospel of Democracy," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 17 (March 1963), 322-323.

rather than the anguish of a man about to die. Because of the elements omitted or repressed in this popular reporting of Billy's plight, there is no possibility of sympathetic identification with suffering, nor antipathy for the injustice that caused it. The childlike world of immediate gratification and limited discernment is redeemed only by affection. Without sympathy and awareness there is no moral growth.

To read "Billy in the Darbies" as Melville's final expression of faith that man, through art, will recognize and celebrate beauty and heroism, is to fail to see the ballad in its complete context, that of companion piece to the official version of the event. Or to see this ballad as the seal which certifies the ultimate triumph of democratic principles may be to overlook important considerations of power and responsibility. The art of Melville's novel *Billy Budd,* "an inside narrative," may indeed accomplish what this artless ballad does not—the telling of Billy's story in this harsh world—but the ballad as counterpoint to the official naval chronicle expresses little confidence in any prospect of institutional reform or individual maturation. "True places are never on the map," wrote Melville in *Moby-Dick,* and he might have added at the end of *Billy Budd* that the truth is never in history or legend. He also wrote in *The Confidence-Man* that readers of fiction look for "more reality than real life itself can show."

FOUR POEMS BY LYN LIFSHIN

POETRY READING BENEFIT

there are the ladies in
navy blue suits who
leave when someone says
prick in a room where
you can hear it. It's 45°
and there's only cold
apple juice. The indian
pulls a blanket closer
Then there is a long
haired pale thin woman
in a rose flowered
dress who pulls her arms
tight around her, would
even under a 90° sun
One poet listens for
lines he can use and jots
them down on a boot heel.
None of the poets have
watches. The mike hums
and buzzes and splats
like a vest of bees a
giant stamps on. There
is more pain than apple
juice. The poet who
talks about splitting
wood and seeing his
breath over a desolate
frozen stream has
written a thirty one
part poem about this.
someone listens sniffing
pathcouli and writing
her night down.

The poet who is building
his body takes off
his clothes and reads
a poem about how people
prefer wrestling matches
to poetry readings and
for the first time
so far the audience
understands

WITH THE BLUEST EYES

talked fast faster
leaves crackled in the
fire blue the color
of a lake you
scrape snow off
in Michigan I could
see night fishes
darting thru
seaweed that would
tangle with all
my hair I was afraid
if I stopped talking
his tongue would be
a book in my
mouth I couldn't
put down

EDITING THE ANTHOLOGY

wives of famous poets
send me their husband's
pubic hair like thread
in a sampler that writes
out pick me

the poems lie
flat in a closet
like those black
bugs under a
log but
i know they're
waiting in the
dark, squirming
ready

upstairs even
isn't safe that
hum in the dark
special delivery
mosquitos starved
for blood slipping
thru screens

if there's the
smallest opening
a swarm hatches
and they itch all night

READING

in a room with 200
chairs ten people
are scattered as if
trying to be as far
away from each other
as possible or

as if wanting to
touch somebody else
so desperately any
fear that they can't
paralyzes them

One leaves as if
my hair was a ghost
when I walk behind
him. The room is as
cold as if there
was a ghost

The woman who reads
is as pale as a ghost
The red wine isn't
pale enough the
crab apple juice
is too red the mike

is broken or turned
so low the poet's
voice is pale and
quiet as snow. Her
skin is bleached,
fog. In one

flash I wonder where
I have seen so much
whiteness. White
hair on a white
sheet in a student's
poem Friday was

less still. Another
flash: Bruce Jay Friedman
on tv saying veal
is best for a lonely
man's food it's

pale and it
can't hurt you

REVIEWS

Walker Percy, *The Second Coming.* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980, 360 pp. $12.95.

In *The Last Gentleman,* Will Barrett works in the basement of Macy's, monitoring the furnaces in his own little hell beneath the sidewalks of New York. He spends his money on a shrink—Walker Percy's comment on the feeble way in which we deal with the problems of our souls. But Will is redeemable; and he comes up to invest his money, ear-marked for psychiatry, in a telescope with which he spots a falcon that is circling Central Park. This sign of the second coming leads, if inadvertently, to Will's deep concern for a dying child and to his evaluation of his own life.

Such might be the key to heaven for Barrett except that Percy, whose perspective is basically Catholic, is not naive enough to believe that our salvation can come in one fell swoop. It is, as writers like John Donne have always told us, an ongoing process, one in which we may be forgiven only to need forgiveness again almost immediately. The Will Barrett of *The Second Coming* has lapsed back into "everydayness." His circumstances are far removed from the fiery furnaces of Macy's: Will is now retired, a lawyer successful enough, and well enough widowed, to leave himself to his leisure in the North Carolina mountains. But Percy, probably America's best satirist and its finest stylist, almost always has an affection for his protagonists. Will has fallen, but we should have confidence that he will rise again.

That rising, though, depends first of all on one's ability to recognize that he has fallen. And Percy is not sure that the twentieth century can recognize sin. In *Lancelot,* he took us on the search for the unholy grail. We cannot find perfection, he says, and it may be that we have gotten to the point where we cannot recognize imperfection. Percy does a bit of this again, in the opening of *The Second Coming.* His first sentence, in fact, gives us what may be the best description of the maladies of the twentieth century since Eliot discussed golf balls on asphalt half a century ago: "The first sign that something had gone wrong manifested itself while he [Barrett] was playing golf." Grace comes in many forms. But for the twentieth century, there are no wheels in the air, no burning bushes. Rather, our era has to be notified on the golf course. Will Barrett might have finished off his life oblivious to its vacuum had he not started slicing his tee shots. What is more, as he wanders through the rough after lost balls, something startling begins: Will Barrett's memory starts to work, and he is no longer a mindless participant in the present. This thinking, this remembering, interrupts his concentration; thoughts of the past wreck his current avocation. Will is so struck, a veritable Saul/Paul, that he falls into a sand trap.

Percy has made many comments on our plight. In *Lancelot,* only the mad understand the necessity of recognizing sin. In *Love in the Ruins,* the auto, and the mechanism and science that it stands for, fails as simple compassion comes to make sense, just as it does in *The Last Gentleman.* And in *The Moviegoer*—where happiness for Binx lies in "drinks and kisses, a good little car and a warm deep thigh"—"everydayness" is relieved only by disaster—a crash into the wine-dark sea, a fatal highway accident, a dying child. The crooked trajectory of a golf shot, as in *The Second Coming,* though, may be recent fiction's most wry symptom of modernity. If a slice does not do it, then the searching of our prosperous hero, Percy's latest Homo Viator, through the wilderness for a golf ball should.

Percy starts another tack in the second chapter where we meet the nineteen-

year-old Allison. She is the satirist's innocent against which he reflects the inanity of the world. Swift got that kind of innocence out of Gulliver; Johnson used Prince Rasselas, long protected from evil in Abyssinia; Voltaire produced a simple optimist in Candide; Fielding found it in Joseph Andrews, a boy who would not know a proposition if he heard one. Percy, implying that finding innocence in our world is no small task, turns to the insane asylum for his. There he finds Allie, daughter of his old friend Kitty Vaught. Allie is undergoing shock treatments which leave her without memory, without identity. She does, of course, want to escape, and she realizes that the best time to get away is just after therapy, when she is left unattended because she is mentally almost helpless. She prepares by writing herself an escape plan, stashing it in her hospital gown just before she goes in for the buzzing. She comes out of the treatment a blank, reads her directions, and finds her way out of confinement and onto the streets of the town.

There she meets some strange ones. She is puzzled by joggers in the park who tell her that running has changed their lives. She cannot make much sense of a bumper sticker that says "Do It In A Pickup." And she is even more confused when she reads another which says "I Found It." She is pretty sure that she is in North Carolina and thus cannot understand why the high school kids wear Michigan State tee shirts. She is puzzled that a young man wants her to "crash" with him while everyone else is telling her to "have a nice day."

Percy's innocent settles into an old greenhouse near the golf course, isolating herself from the world that confuses her. The greenhouse is especially comfortable because its climate is controlled nicely by air from a mountain tunnel that opens into it. Will slices a golf shot through one of her many windows, and the two meet. He is impressed by her lovely innocence and by her beautiful language—an English purged by electro-shock of all the dross it has accumulated over the centuries. Love is in the works.

Will still has some complications to resolve, though. From Mississippi he has brought a Greener shot gun, a Luger, and copies of *Ivanhoe* and *Lord Jim*. The books seem to mark for him the flimsiness of our time, the guns a possible cure. Will has thought about suicide for a long time and has even been to the extent of pulling off a few shots by his ear just to get some of the feel of dying. And he is still busy remembering. He tries to focus on that occasion when, as a child, he and his father were involved in what seemed to be a hunting accident. For the first time, Will realizes that his father meant to shoot them both. He wonders, "Is it possible that I knew it all along and until this moment did not know that I knew it? Or did you miss me? Or am I killed and until this moment did not know it? Can you be only technically alive?" He knows that his father, later a successful suicide, missed him on purpose, that his courage failed. But now he knows what his father thought of life; and now he knows that his life has been such that, indeed, maybe he is dead after all. He feels destined to follow his father.

His world before Allie does not encourage him to survive. His wife is dead. His daughter, Leslie, is a modern cliché intent on writing her own wedding vows. And more than one person is after Will's money. Jack Curl, the jump-suited priest who refers to God as "the bottom line," wants three million for a retirement center, "a total love and faith community" where old folks can co-habit in a romantic setting. Competing for the cash is Percy's Flem Snopes, Ewell McBee, who has moved up from farming and bootlegging to producing pornographic films, from overalls to sansabelt slacks. Ewell wants Will to invest in the triple-X home cassette business. Then Kitty Vaught shows up to look for her daughter; Will recovers his old passion for her, and she is certainly friendly enough, but Allie is deep in Will's mind by now.

All this is too much for Will, and he decides to drop out. He crawls into a mountain cave, site of an old Confederate magazine, to fast (aided by sedatives, still the modern) and wait for God to direct him to geriatrics or pornography, to mother or daughter, to life or death. His dreams take him back over his life; in one he imagines being tried and convicted of "Pandering and whorishness in the practice of law." He is sentenced to a year in a minimum security prison where he meets John Ehrlichman. Will wakes from his sleep with a terrible toothache, and the half-starved hero stumbles about sedated and agonized in the cave until he falls down a shaft and into Allie's Edenic greenhouse—his second birth the result of his fall.

The Second Coming is an elegant book, maybe Percy's best since *The Moviegoer*, and that is meant as high praise. The author's continuing gift is that of showing us the wackiness of our times without despairing of it. Will may be besieged by sheer madness; everything may seem to confirm his inclination to suicide. But the world and its god are still good enough to produce grace, be it in the form of a badly hit golf shot, a beautiful and innocent girl, or even a toothache. Moreover, Percy continues his remarkable balancing of his message with his art, of tempering his fine and clear ideas with first-rate comedy—such as that in some of the Jack Curl/old age home episodes—with splendid prose—such as that especially in the descriptions of Will and Allie together—and with his fine self-parody that always undercuts any hint of piety. These skills and the strong and sensible perspective mark Walker Percy once again as one of our best at showing us the world as it is and as it should be.

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Donald Gallup, ed. *Eugene O'Neill: Poems: 1912-1944*. New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1980, 119 pp. $9.95.

In the standard histories of American Literature there is usually a chapter on the "New Poetry," namely, the early modern innovations of Lindsay, Sandburg, and others. Eugene O'Neill's poetry came in bursts, and, as it turns out, the early poems were not influenced by the innovators, and the later work was written after the "New Poetry" was beginning to sound rather old-fashioned. In a curious way, O'Neill's hidden "identity" as a poet is based on two common views: the poet as versifier, and the poet as private sufferer. These two views correspond roughly to the periods in which the poems were written, that of 1915-1917, and that of 1925 (with revisions in the early 1940s).

The first period was built around a newspaper column, in the New London *Telegraph*, called "Laconics." For this column O'Neill produced imitations, sometimes on topical subjects, in the manner of Kipling or Rossetti. The poems show a literate wit, and often draw on a stagey sensibility that we also encounter in the characters the playwright was later to make such an important part of the American theater. The first line of this volume sets a typical tone: "Weary am I of the tumult, sick of the staring crowd." The inversion of the first phrase, the diction represented by "tumult," the alliteration of the second phrase, all add up to a heavy dose of period verse. The poems recall that curious mix of *nostalgia de la boue* and late-Romantic longing we associate with Wilde and others. "Let us consider the seamy side," one poem says, and finds its way into waterfront dives and dance halls. Another begins, "A singer was born in a land of gold," and ends with the line, "And the life of the singer died." None of these poems is as moving as the early one-act play, "Bound East for Cardiff," but at the same time their controlling sensibility leads directly to the anguish of *Long Day's Journey*. O'Neill's work is essentially melodrama, where the characters are always and finally in the grip of forces beyond

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their control. This melodrama is in the poetry, too, but the rhetorical traditions of such poetry kept the larger forces inside a lyric and sentimental network of self display.

In the second period of poetry writing, O'Neill adopts the *vers libre* format of the New Poetry. But his emotional nexus is still essentially Swinburnean. "I will hope/ There is communion/ Among the dead," he cries, in a poem called "Fragments." Here direct revelation—even a sort of self-laceration we can also recognize in his dramatic characters—replaces the rhetorical control of the earlier period. O'Neill wrote poetry when he was deeply depressed or physically very ill in this period; for him the truest poetic note was the cry of the lost:

> We have sent our lives
> Slowly dying
> For one liberty,
> Freedom from the spirit.
> We have spent our lives
> Contriving our own assassination.

These poems will not alter O'Neill's reputation, but they do show his limitations, and demonstrate why he is not as great a writer as, say, Joyce or Faulkner. When he approaches his own tragedy, he lacks the dimension of mythic resonance or ironic control that we recognize in the greatest modernists. Outside of *Long Day's Journey*, where his melodrama breaks through to tragedy, his work accepts too readily the security of its forms. His free verse, like the innovations of *Mourning Becomes Electra*, shows he knew such security had to be challenged or even abandoned, but it also shows he failed the challenge.

From the obvious "versifying" of his newspaper poems to the *cri de coeur* of his despairing period, O'Neill's poetry never achieves that transforming sense of figurative invention apparent in the best of modern poetry. But on at least one occasion, "Upon Our Beach," he achieves a kind of grandeur, although the Arnoldian bitterness and self-hatred mar the poem. The speaker's complaint against "the long penance Necessity has put upon us," the "writhing heaps of slimy sea-weed" that symbolize his low spirits, play off against the overly exquisite beauty of the lover, with her "lips like the rose petals of Omar." By today's measure, it's a thoroughly excessive poem, awkward in a way that recalls Lawrence at his weakest. But it has a feeling that persists; though we're not able to believe in its capitalized abstractions, it gives us a way to realize what such an inability means. Just as when the mother appears in *Long Day's Journey*, a theatricality seems inevitable despite its excess. Louis Shaeffer, in his prize winning biography, *O'Neill: Son and Playwright*, says that O'Neill wanted first and always to be a poet, that it was his "hopeless hope." That phrase, with its melodramatic turmoil, captures the heart of his poetic sensibility. Like the poems of such writers as Joyce and Faulkner, known for much greater work in other genres, these offerings are essentially period pieces. And if they lack the full grip of artistic control, they at least have a touch of the poet.

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Arlin Turner. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 457 pp. $20.00.

In an era of inflated claims of scholars for the subject under study and of inflated prices of books, it is good to find a book both honest in its treatment of its subject and fair in price. In fact, Arlin Turner's deeply informed and humanely

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weighed examination of Hawthorne and his work, both literary and bureaucratic, places this biography in contention for an award for excellence. No doubt, it will garner one or more prizes. And no doubt it will stand as the most authoritative life of Hawthorne for many, many years.

The fruitful result of years of studying and teaching the work of Hawthorne, Turner's book draws heavily upon Hawthorne's letters, diaries, journals, and autobiographical introductions. Turner often allows Hawthorne to speak for himself, to reveal his deeds and thoughts and to share the truth about himself together with the spice of fancy and whimsicality which Hawthorne added to fashion of himself something of a literary character. This is not to say that Hawthorne purposely set about to create and maintain a pose like that of Lord Byron or Hemingway. Turner calls attention to a fact too often overlooked about Hawthorne: he was one of our most autobiographical authors, appearing in both prefaces and in tales and romances in guises his family and friends instantly recognized, but not being autobiographical in ways very similar to those of Wolfe and Dickens. For Hawthorne, the materials or the action of a tale or romance might be drawn from life, but he would permit only facets of his personality a public viewing, assigning them to such characters as Paul Pry or Miles Coverdale.

Moving behind the pose Hawthorne wanted to strike before his readers, Turner unveils a Hawthorne both much alike and different from the person past biographers have given us. Hawthorne still emerges a man haunted by solitude, by a fear of falling into poverty, by a resolute drive not to allow his attraction to the dark side of humanity to form an immovable cloud over a basically sunny disposition, and by the sense of his ancestors' role in the infamous deeds of Salem. Expectedly, Hawthorne appears once more as a staunch friend, devoted husband and father, and a wary, retiring, self-protective author when in the company of Melville or members of the Saturday Club. Because of the emphasis Turner gives to Hawthorne's years as a civil servant, readers of this life can now better understand why Hawthorne dropped almost all literary activities when he worked as a customs house official or consul. Tersely put, Hawthorne did not take his public jobs lightly, a fact amply illustrated by his reports from Liverpool. And Hawthorne is here shown to be wholly capable of social graces and fully appreciative of the role of literary lion in England.

Turner, moreover, provides a sharper focus than heretofore achieved in treatments of Hawthorne's efforts to establish his reputation as a writer about New England, its past, its mind, its character, by shaping his stories into cycles or providing them frames, as in "Provincial Tales" or "The Story-Teller."

The finished portrait of Hawthorne by Turner may owe its distinctiveness from other pictures to Turner's fuller, and often telling if not inspired use of Hawthorne's own words, as in the following extract from a letter to Horatio Bridge following Hawthorne's loss of his post as surveyor of the Salem Custom House. Speaking of the response of Salemites to his "The Custom-House," Hawthorne wrote: "If I escape from town without being tarred-and-feathered, I shall consider it good luck. I wish they *would* tar-and-feather me—it would be an entirely novel kind of distinction for a literary man! And from such judges as my fellow-citizens, I should look upon it as a higher honor than a laurel-crown" (p. 209).

As these words imply, Hawthorne did not cease to be a writer when he became a public servant. From his first fond hope that he could become a man of letters until he died full of honors for his tales, sketches, and romances, Hawthorne was a writer, one of America's foremost artists. Turner's biography does him full justice.

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R. P. Blackmur. *Henry Adams.* New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, 354 pp. $19.95.

> *I need badly to find one man in history to admire.*
> —Henry Adams, letter dated 15 February 1915

Though written with great intelligence and imagination, R. P. Blackmur's long-awaited book on Henry Adams is disappointing. Blackmur is not, of course, entirely to blame. While he published many essays and reviews on Adams, he was unable to complete the book during his life-time, despite nearly forty years of work on it. We owe the publication of the present book to Veronica A. Makowsky, an enterprising graduate student at Princeton. She has carefully woven *Henry Adams* from Blackmur's previously published writings and the manuscripts stored in the Blackmur collection at Princeton University Library. Not all of Blackmur's work on Adams is included; some parts of the projected book were never written, and others—notably the essays on Adams' historical writings and his involvement in foreign affairs—are, Makowsky feels, badly dated and so have been omitted. Makowsky also decided not to include several other pieces on Adams that are already in print, such as "The Novels of Henry Adams" (*Sewanee Review*, 1943; reprinted in *A Primer of Ignorance*).

Makowsky's judgment might be questioned, since, as she admits, Blackmur intended all of his published material on Adams (with the exception of an early essay that appeared in *Hound and Horn*, 1931) to appear in the final book. And no doubt some equally enterprising student will one day assemble these other writings for a second volume. But we should be grateful to Makowsky for her editorial labors, and for bringing to light much new, important material. *Henry Adams* consists of four parts. The first is "The Expense of Greatness," reprinting the essay of that title that appeared in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (1936). Part two, the bulk of the book, explores "The Virgin and the Dynamo" and is mostly new. It begins with the *Education* and moved steadily towards *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, examining the interlocked themes of these two dense and difficult texts. Blackmur then returns to the *Education*, digressing to comment on the *Life of George Cabot Lodge* and closing with an analysis of Adams' late essays, "Letter to American Teachers of History" and "The Rules of Phase Applied to History." "King Richard's Prison Song"—Blackmur takes his title from a medieval lyric that Adams loved—is part three; it concentrates on Adams' last years and is again mostly new. *Henry Adams* ends with the previously unpublished "At Rock Creek," a short and somber piece in which Blackmur imagines Adams' thoughts and feelings as he stands before his wife's tomb.

There is a great deal of superb writing in *Henry Adams.* Blackmur studies brilliantly, for example, many of Adams' central terms, concepts, and loyalties—"failure," "scruple," "symbol," "unity," "silence," "eccentricity," and theory of history. As one might expect from the author of incisive essays on Yeats, Stevens, Cummings, and other modern poets, Blackmur often shows a rich and subtle feeling for the nuances of Adams' language; the sections on Adams' response to hearing a "Sinfonie" and his account of his sister's death are particularly precise and stimulating. More general matters of style and influence, such as Adams' attitudes towards the writings of Pascal and Carlyle, are also treated cogently. And throughout the book, but especially in the pages on Adams' theory of history, Blackmur offers those glancing insights and sensitive phrasings so characteristic of his criticism:

> The predicament of the mind still capable of setting up the dynamic theory of its own extinction is difficult but not intolerable. Curiosity is never livelier than about the cruelty of the mind to itself; nothing is of

> such vital interest as the means of death, nothing so terrifying as the means of rebirth, the end of what passes and the persistence, through new phase, of what always was, the dreadful mortality in pursuit of the immortal.

Of all the New Critics, Blackmur is, as Laurence B. Holland has recently noted, the "most brilliant and durable" (*Sewanee Review*, Spring 1980). His prose has a richness and density that guide (and sometimes cajole) the reader from literature to philosophy, and perhaps no modern critic is more attuned to the ways in which ideas are formally presented and patterned in language. A number of scholars, including J. C. Levenson and James Cox, have written well about Adams' two great books; but Blackmur is unparalleled in the depth of his responsiveness to their style and structure. He feels a profound kinship with Adams, and a vital apprehension of what Adams intended in his texts and hoped to achieve in his career. When, in part three, Blackmur brings together Adams and Henry James—the other of this critic's major studies—he gives us some wonderfully alert and suggestive writing:

> If we may quote T. S. Eliot's remark that Henry James had a mind —a sensibility—so fine that no mere idea could ever violate it, then we should say that Henry Adams had an intellect so fine—so energized—that no mere item of sensibility could ever violate that. To be inviolate in one respect fairly calls for penalties in another. Adams paid in a want of freshness, James in a want of restraint. Adams might run dry, James frequently ran off the track. The thinness in James comes from excess of feeling, in Adams thinness comes, not from want of feeling, but from excess of consideration. (p. 316)

But while this passage helps to reveal the fineness of Blackmur's intelligence, it also begins to illuminate his failings in the book as a whole. This is about the only place where Blackmur implies any kind of defect or limitation in Adams; and though as an admirer of Blackmur it pains me to say so, *Henry Adams* is disturbingly uncritical.

From the opening page, we are conscious of Blackmur's respect for Adams; it borders on, and in some passages even becomes, an outright identification with him—which intrigues the reader even as it mars and distorts the critic's "job of work." There are sections in *Henry Adams* that deal with social and political trends, higher education, the place of "institutions" in the modern age; and Blackmur's own views, even his tones and rhetorical manners, repeat Adams'. Sometimes, in fact, Blackmur simply gives us elegant paraphrase: "May in Washington was the month of dogwood and judas tree, the month in which the forces of nature burst upon the sensibilities of men, flaunting her force as flowers . . ." (p. 46).

This passage strains for but misses the evocative effects that Adams achieves in his descriptions of Washington in the *Education*: Blackmur is too close to his intellectual hero to hear his dubious imitations of Adams' voice. On occasion, these poetical renderings fall into bathos and sentimentality:

> Adams . . . made progress question by cutting question, and the questions were cries, and the cries the same cry differently voiced as the pilgrim winced in a deeper or a different place, till it seemed that the cry alone kept him in bare balance. (p. 136)

The problem, however, goes much deeper than Blackmur's style. He is, it seems, totally accepting of Adams, and nowhere does he say anything about Adams'

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racism, elitism, regional bias, historical and scientific inaccuracies, his condescension and indifference towards those outside his circle of distinguished friends, and (to borrow Denis Donoghue's term) his "malice." Adams is a writer of extraordinary intellect and speculative power; there is good reason for agreeing with B. L. Reid's judgment that the *Education* "is the single book of highest distinction ever produced by an American" (*Sewanee Review*, Spring, 1980). But Adams has his share of faults and prejudices, and a candid assessment of his work ought to take account of them. Blackmur does not do this, though he does remind us at one point that Adams "was no divinity"—a reminder that only a reader with Blackmur's own investment in (and identification with) Adams would need. Much of Blackmur's writing on Adams was done in the nineteen-forties, during World War II. Yet, astonishingly, he says nothing about Adams' anti-Semitism. But we do find passages like this one:

> It would have altered only his exaggerations and nothing of his judgments, had he seen how the population problem of India and Southeast Asia under the impetus of a mild injection of artificial energy in the absence of Western resources suggests the *need* of a mechanization of sex there. Even war, in itself, no longer cuts population much in areas dominated by new forces, and its effect on race in Russia is doubtful. Further, inertia of race among the decimated Jews seems to have intensified. Thus Adams was righter than he might have thought. (p. 251)

"Righter than he might have thought"—and there are many other examples of Blackmur's absolute acceptance of Adams' authority. He swallows the dynamic theory of history whole, and it leads him into awful misperceptions and blindnesses. Too often, his writing becomes detached and distant from historic fact, callous in its mythicizing of painful realities. To gesture towards the "decimated Jews" so easily, without a trace of self-consciousness or awareness of Adams' remarks on Jewish bankers, moneylenders, and merchants is deeply disturbing.

In taking Adams as the exemplary intellectual and prophet of the modern condition, Blackmur has badly reduced the range of his critical responsiveness and judgment. So sympathetic to and absorbed in Adams, he cannot measure his subject's failings, and he comes to use terms like "intelligence," "imagination," and "sensibility" without seeing their attachments to, and embodiments in, persons. From one point of view, *Henry Adams* is richly rewarding and insightful in its range of formal analyses of Adams' tests; no critic is more suggestive than Blackmur on the topics of form and structural pattern. Yet in other ways, the book is narrow, even claustrophobic, and I can only repeat my dismay at the uncritical nature of much of the writing. Blackmur is the best of our New Critical "formalists," and his *Henry Adams* testifies both to the real strengths and disabling shortcomings of his method. He sees the form at the expense of its content, exploring textual structures so intently, so brilliantly, that he is unable to criticize—and perhaps cannot perceive the force of—the attitudes they represent or conceal.

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We regret that this sentence was omitted following the quotation from Alan Williamson in Philip Cooper's "Lowell's Motion: *Notebook* and After," Spring 1980, p. 26: "Contrast between the one and the many forms the identity of the one with the many."