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# The Role of Place in Malcolm Cowley's Blue Juniata and Exile's Return

Robert Pratte

*Eastern Illinois University*

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**The Role of Place in**  
**Malcolm Cowley's *Blue Juniata and Exile's Return***

(TITLE)

BY  
**Robert Pratte**

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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This study examines the various ways in which Malcolm Cowley develops and uses sense of place in his works *Blue Juniata: Collected Poems* and *Exile's Return*. Through examination of the literature, I identify four phases of place sense. Starting with childhood in the Identification phase, I illustrate the development of Cowley's place perspective through his poems and writings. As he moves through Adventure and Exile phases, I discuss their relation to the Identification phase and to each other. Likewise, I consider the role of the Nostalgia phase as a bridge from literary to experiential perception. Through close examination of his writing, I define the identifying features of each phase as well as their relationship to other phases.

Further, I examine Cowley's use of phases of place perception. One use is generational identification, allowing Cowley to differentiate his literary generation from those coming both before and after. Similar to this idea is the use of place perception to identify a certain time period. By linking place and ideology, Cowley metonymically references a certain set of experiences. The role of place perception as a metonymic identifier is drawn from the idea that place perception serves as a guide to background knowledge for the reader. An important aspect of its use as a guide is the establishment of common experience between Cowley and his audience. Finally, I explain the use of place perception as a mechanism for developing "story."

While I include Cowley's own ideas concerning generations and the cycle of Adventure and Exile, the main assertion of my investigation is that he presents four distinct phases of place perception. Also, this study presents various ways in which Cowley uses place perception as an organizing theme in his works. Further, while he describes many of his experiences as attempts to disassociate from place, place

perception is, paradoxically, at all times central to his thinking. Cowley uses various aspects of place and place perception in such a way that his own ideas of identity are inextricably tied to it. Ultimately, his life, as presented through his literature, illustrates the passage from naive childhood to nostalgic reflection.

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## Prologue

Understanding how Malcolm Cowley uses the sense of place is crucial to understanding his writing. Sense of place is central in his collection of poems, *Blue Juniata*, as well as his literary-historical work *Exile's Return*. In these works, place is used as an indicator of time and worldview, serving as a guide to perception. Moreover, sense of place falls into phases, providing a reference from which to evaluate memory, sensory, and imagination based inputs. These mental reference points attain a type of mutability through their association with physical location, providing a rite of passage as the individual moves from reference point to reference point. Therefore, each phase comes to represent a different stage of development or being. Conversely, place sometimes serves as an indicator of perspective, allowing place perceptions to be differentiated. Additionally, both sense of place and place indicator can serve as icons of shared experience or knowledge, useful in bringing forth background information to the reader.

In order to understand how place perception works, this essay identifies features of each phase. Furthermore, it will discuss the ways in which Cowley uses these phases to direct the reader. The examination of phases will begin with the initial phase, identification, which provides a baseline reference for other phases. Identification is the phase of childhood, of limited perspective and innocence. As the individual grows past the boundaries of his childhood phase, anticipation that greater opportunity exists outside of home will sometimes develop. This growing anticipation may even develop into a sense of disillusionment, spurred by a need to rise above the accomplishments of past generations, or by a sense of indignation. As the anticipation or disillusionment

develops, it will lead to the next phase, adventure. The adventure phase is therefore a reaction to identification. Moreover, the adventure phase is driven by the idea that a new place holds the promise of something greater. However, just as a sense of disillusionment sometimes emerges and drives the individual from home, the same disillusionment eventually develops in the adventurer. This feeling that the new place has failed to provide "something greater" drives the next phase, exile. During this phase, the promises of the adventure phase are cast aside, and the individual no longer views the new place as salvation. The adventure and exile phase follow each other in a cycle, until one day the individual reaches a stage of contentment. At this point, the fourth phase, nostalgia, can cast new meaning upon previous phases.

Cowley organizes his books *Blue Juniata* and *Exile's Return* around these conceptions of place. Likewise, throughout the books, sense of place suggests time, community, and experience. Sense of place is integral to the way Cowley identifies himself and his generation, partially because of the time when Cowley came of age. The relationship between individual and place, however, is also fundamentally human. By examining how he uses place sense, one can also find universal application for some of its tenets.



### **Part 1 - The Phases of Place Perception**

Cowley presents four clearly defined senses of place perception: home, adventure, exile, and nostalgia. In the initial phase, baseline identification with a geography and culture is established. We find it in the "Blue Juniata" section of *Blue Juniata* and in the "Mansions in the Air" section of *Exile's Return*. Cowley indicates the importance of this phase when he opens the latter work, "Somewhere the turn of a dirt road or the unexpected crest of a hill reveals your own childhood...the landscape by which all others are measured and condemned" (13). One important characteristic of the identification phase is that most of its meaning to the individual arises within the context of other phases. In other words, while the identification phase serves as a reference for other phases, the importance of places and events is drawn out by the contrasts between the familiarity of home and the strangeness of the foreign. These foreign places and experiences are sought out during the adventure phase. In this phase the individual voluntarily explores life outside the comfortable bounds of home. In *Exile's Return*, the adventure phase begins at the end of the first section and extends through "Paris Pilgrimages." Likewise, *Blue Juniata* illustrates this phase in the New York experiences of "The Crooked Streets" and in the Europe of the "Valuta" section. Eventually, the new world tarnishes, and adventure is replaced with exile. This phase comes of age in both works in the sections titled "The City of Anger," though in *Exile's Return* it begins with "The Death of Dada." Both works end with the nostalgic phase. This phase presents a sense of nostalgia for a former place, whether that place is real or imagined. This last phase can project to any or all of the previous phases. The projection of place through language allows place to become a metaphor for perspective, so that these phases can be

cast as a series of dialectics through which the individual ascertains his identity.

Consequently, while the first three phases are more experiential, the nostalgic phase is closely aligned with the mechanics of literature. In other words, the experienced sense of home, adventure and exile may occur in any order and for any length of time, but these phases remain phases of direct experience. Nostalgia, however, occurs after the experiential phases, and is reflective in nature.

There are two ideas that Cowley discusses later in life which help explain his idea of stages. One of these ideas is his sense of history. He links chronology and ideology through his book titles and subtitles. While *Exile's Return* focuses on the voluntary exile / adventure of his generation during the 1920's, in mostly non-political terms, *The Dream of The Golden Mountain*, examines the 1930's in decidedly political terms. Also at play is Cowley's search for a definition of "literary generations." Cowley writes in *—And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, "I should like to combine Fitzgerald with Ortega – not a difficult feat, since they are talking about the same things – and offer a sort of generational paradigm" (9). Earlier, Cowley discusses how Ortega divides life into fifteen-year stages "from one to fifteen, childhood; from fifteen to thirty, youth; from thirty to forty-five, initiation; from forty-five to sixty, dominance; and from sixty to seventy-five, old age" (8). Ortega's chronological model largely coincides with Cowley's stages of place sense, yet Cowley is specifically examining the idea of a literary generation every fifteen years. Moreover, Cowley's exile phase is found when the next generation usurps the status quo's role, an advancement that fits more comfortably into the amalgamated Ortega/Fitzgerald model Cowley seems to adopt later, than into a rigid

interpretation of Ortega's model (12). In support of the model based upon usurpation, note that Cowley writes,

In the literary world, an immediate cause of the alternation from one extreme to the other is disappointment with the works produced by writers of the previous era (not to mention the simple need to be different). The famous 'reaction against the fathers' is more likely to be a sibling rivalry, that is, a revolt against one's older brothers in art. The young writer of twenty-five affirms his own worth by disparaging writers of forty. (15)

Once again, however, Cowley has described such a model as cyclical, either as an alternating romantic/classical model (13), or as a diastolic/systolic one (15).

When examining how Cowley creates these phases of place identification, it is worthwhile to note that this structure may not have been entirely planned, but may reflect his desire to define a specific generation, while explaining processes that define all generations. In other words, place perception helps age groups to separate themselves from others, particularly when these disparate age groups, or generations, exist simultaneously. The processes that differentiate generations, however, are also intrinsically tied to the process of differentiating phases of place identification. That is, while place perception helps define a generation's self-identity, there are background processes that likewise assist in differentiating place perception. Therefore, a closer examination of these processes is necessary.

### **Phase 1 – Identification**

The identification phase has two major functions. Primarily, it provides a sense of who the individual is, what values and beliefs will initially be held. The physical landscape will serve as an identifying feature for the individual, an association with

childhood that allows place to be used metaphorically for the initial self-identification. Ron McClamrock hints at this relationship when he writes, "we also often enforce a structure on the environment to reduce load in other ways – as, for example, when we set the local world up so as to remind us of various things" (88). The difference here is that the individual doesn't define a world but is immersed in it. The relationship McClamrock is discussing is a smaller-scale version of that employed by base line identification.

In "Boy in Sunlight," the initial poem in the self-titled first section of *Blue Juniata*, Cowley provides a sense of what this relationship between identity and land looks like. Importantly, the boy in the poem is absorbing what will become his past;

he feels them, insect, hawk, and sky,  
 much as he feels warm sandstone under his back,  
 or smells the punk-dry hemlock wood,  
 or hears the secret voice of water trickling under stone. (26-29)

Cowley makes this baseline identification an intrinsic part of the individual, forming the individual's identity. He adds,

The land absorbs him into itself,  
 as he absorbs the land, the ravaged woods, the pale sky,  
 not to be seen, but as a way of seeing:  
 not to be judged, but as a way of judgment;  
 not even to remember, but stamped into the bone. (30-34)

The main effort of this first section the *Blue Juniata* is to define the identification phase of the individual. An interesting point in this particular poem is that while Cowley recognizes a cycle of life and death, something that will later be tied to the cycle of

adventure and exile, at this point, the boundaries of the poet's worldview are limited to his narrow, initial sense of place. Cowley writes,

having reached a place of sunlight  
 that used to be hemlock weeds on the slope of a broad valley,  
 the woods cut twenty years ago for tanbark  
 and then burned over, so the great charred trunks  
 lay crisscross, wreathed in briars, gray in the sunlight,  
 black in the shadow of saplings grown. (6-11)

As a child, he didn't know how these woods were cleared by the tanning industry, because this industrial context was a force operating outside his realm of perception. Since he cannot explain the process, a simple explanation is used instead. In other words, Cowley maintains the local boundaries by ignoring or redefining intervening processes. He says that the forest was cleared for tanbark, instead of describing how an outside company came in and cleared "his" forest. This distinction is important later, when Cowley presents the exile phase with examples such as the Germans in France.

The identification phase is a point of reference, with other phases being reactions to it at some level. Therefore, we discover the most important aspects of this phase by examining the other phases. Not surprisingly, relational aspects of the identification phase are first seen during the early phases of adventure. Jack Kempf notes the baseline identification with place during adventure when he writes of Cowley's contribution to the first issue of *Secession*. Kempf writes,

Although experimental in structure, the poem makes a clear statement. Once again Cowley drew on his memory of the solid Pennsylvania landscape of his

youth, describing the thoughts of a young man on a train from New York to Pennsylvania. (23)

The young man leaving his home would naturally ponder what he is leaving, with his thoughts perhaps being triggered by what he sees outside his window. Cowley saw hills, houses and mountains behind him, and darkness, symbolizing the unknown, ahead (23).

### **Phase 2 – Adventure**

In the *Blue Juniata* poem, "Tumbling Mustard," Cowley describes the quintessential adventurer/wanderer. Using typically American vocabulary, Tumbling Mustard exclaims, "I am the tumbleweed that rolls across the prairies, winds at the back of it, mountains in its face" (15). Mr. Mustard represents a perpetual cycle of adventure and exile, yet is associated with Cowley's generation in particular, at least by Cowley. An important characteristic of Tumbling Mustard is that he is not tied to a region, and he certainly isn't concerned with the events of the world. This sentiment is echoed in *Exile's Return*, when Cowley writes, "Meanwhile, in Boston, Pittsburgh, Nashville, Chicago, we boys of seventeen and eighteen were enormously ignorant of what was going on in the world" (23). These writers were part of a generation, a literary generation, and they were not tied to a region. Cowley suggests a difference between how the individual identifies with a place (place identification) and how they perceive it (place perception). Cowley's generation of writers have a shared background in ideas and adventures, not a shared background in soil. Cowley further distinguishes this point when he later writes,

It often seems to me that our years in school and after school, in college and later in the army, might be regarded as a long process of deracination. Looking backward, I feel that our whole training was involuntarily directed toward

destroying whatever roots we had in the soil, toward eradicating our local and regional peculiarities, toward making us homeless citizens of the world. (27)

For Cowley, this separation began when he left home for college. Perhaps his ride to Harvard is that of the young man on the train from Pennsylvania to New York, destination notwithstanding. To Cowley, however, the severing of these regional ties is an inseparable part of the university education. He writes, "The ideal university is regarded as having no regional or economic ties. With its faculty, students, classrooms and stadium, it exists in a town as if by accident, its real existence being in the immaterial world of scholarship" (29). The ideal education, therefore, disassociates the individual from his past, and fosters attachment to ideas rather than places. This attachment to ideas, in turn, becomes a key component in the adventure phase.

### **Reasons for Adventure**

When examining the movement from the identification phase to the adventure phase, one central question is what are the reasons for the individual to move into the adventure phase? There are various reasons why the adventure phase is necessary, but among them lies the fact that "One must add that each new age group has been shaped by a different sort of childhood. The work of the older men does not express what the younger ones feel to be their particular sense of life" (Cowley, *Dream* 145-146). One feature of the identification phase is that it ties the individual to the previous generations, the "older men." By separating from that identification, the individual is able to view his own experiences within the context of "self" rather than that of their forebears. Further, in *The Literary Situation*, Cowley writes, "Not being a Spenglerian fatalist, I believe that the new expression forms will appear before it is too late" (245). This confidence is

Cowley's response to Spengler and "pseudomorphic" history, where younger generations' work is defined by preceding generations (243-244). Within Cowley's framework, the adventure phase works to break this mold by differentiating itself from the identification phase.

As a corollary to their desire to distinguish themselves from previous generations, many of Cowley's fellow adventurers were trying to escape from an identification with the previous generation. In *Exile's Return*, he describes adventure as escape, writing:

Many writers of the 1920s regarded our commercial society as an enemy of that sort and believed that their only hope lay in finding a refuge from it. Escape was the central theme of poems, essays, novels by the hundred; it was the motive underlying many types of action that seemed impulsive and contradictory. Most of its manifestations, however, could be grouped into three general headings...escape into art...escape toward the primitive...[and the] search for adventure. (236-237)

Moreover, they could expect a difficulty escaping the identification phase. Over time, the adventurers would recognize their past in the present, and realize that they, as a group, were responsible. Cowley writes,

The refugees were also trying to escape something more subtle, some quality of American civilization that they carried within themselves. Wherever half a dozen of them gathered together, the quality reappeared and the same experience was re-enacted. There was first a glow of enthusiasm; friends were told about this marvelous untouched place and came hastening to enjoy it...Then, as the colony grew, there were jealousies, boredom, gossip, intrigues...Artists complained that it



was impossible to work here any longer with all these interruptions; writers again felt that something was constraining them, interfering with their thoughts – and the colony began to dissolve, a good half of it moving onward in search of a place that was still unspoiled by themselves. (241)

Kempf notes that Cowley's reason for self-imposed exile was not so much a disillusionment, or present sense of exile, with America as much as a pursuit of greater opportunity. Kempf writes, "His [Cowley's] motive for leaving America was not a total rejection of American culture, as was the case with writers like Harold Stearns. Cowley had simply decided that for the present at least America did not provide the freedom and economic support required for serious artists and intellectuals" (13). Moreover, Kempf notes a letter to Burke where Cowley "once again told Burke that his escape to France could only be temporary and must eventually be resolved by his return to America" (17). Yet, a sense of something missed imparts a partial exile-like existence to Cowley, making his early experience somewhat non-deterministic. In a May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1922 letter to Burke, Cowley writes, "I miss the open country and American trout streams" (Kempf 28). The sadness is countered by a healthy measure of the opportunity that a foreign venture affords, when Cowley adds, "On the other hand this existence in the French provinces – like that in the Argentine or a Chinese river town – gives an excellent perspective on America, and under its influence my ideas seem to be clarifying" (28).

An important question at this point is what the other adventurers were seeking in France. The answer to that question lies in their previous experiences in France during the First World War. In *Exile's Return*, Cowley writes, "When the war came the young writers then in college were attracted by the idea of enlisting in one of the ambulance

corps attached to a foreign army"... "We were eager to get into action" ... "We drank to our new service in the bistro round the corner" (37). Further,

one might almost say that the ambulance corps and the French military transport were college-extension courses for a generation of writers. But what did these courses teach?

They carried us to a foreign country, the first that most of us had seen; they taught us to make love, stammer love, in a foreign language. They fed and lodged us at the expense of a government in which we had no share. They made us more irresponsible than before: livelihood was not a problem; we had a minimum of choices to make; we could let the future take care of itself, feeling certain that it would bear us into new adventures. They taught us courage, extravagance, fatalism, these being the virtues of men at war; they taught us to regard as vices the civilian virtues of thrift, caution and sobriety; they made us fear boredom more than death. All these lessons might have been learned in any branch of the army, but ambulance service had a lesson of its own: it instilled into us what might be called a spectatorial attitude. (38)

Cowley describes the experience in war-torn France as a "college-extension course."

Given that he idealized college as a place that separated the individual from his past, or the identification phase, and put him into the realm of pure thinking and pure art, Cowley seems to suggest that the adventurers were looking to France to eradicate what they previously knew, once again the identification phase.

A similar escapist motive also appears attached to New York. Cowley details adventurer life in New York, though the adventurers are called "bohemians" instead of

"expatriates" here. In *Exile's Return*, Cowley writes, "After college and the war, most of us drifted to Manhattan, to the crooked streets south of Fourteenth, where you could rent a furnished hall-bedroom for two or three dollars weekly or the top floor of a rickety house for thirty dollars a month. We came to the village without any intention of becoming Villagers" (48). Cowley describes the history of "bohemia" as a sort of self-induced adventure phase (55-56). Like Paris and New York, in the history of Bohemia, London's Grub Street holds an important place. Cowley describes "Grub Street, where dinnerless Gildon drew his venal quill, contemptible Grub Street, the haunt of apprentices and failures and Henry Murger, was transformed into glamorous bohemia. The unwilling expedient became a permanent way of life, became a cult with rituals and costumes, a doctrine adhered to not only by artists, young and old, rich and poor, but also in later years by designers, stylists, trade-paper sub-editors" (57). The modern Grub Street, for Cowley, is Greenwich Village. The association of place and ideology is furthered when he writes, "Greenwich Village was not only a place, a mood, a way of life: like all bohemias, it was also a doctrine" (59). This association of place and ideology is typified in Cowley's eighth noted generalization of Bohemian doctrine, "The idea of changing place. – 'They do things better in Europe.' ... By expatriating himself, by living in Paris, Capri or the South of France, the artists can break the puritan shackles, drink, live freely and be wholly creative" (61). The idea of "The Village," an association tacked onto notions of the actual place, becomes inextricable from the ideologies of the inhabitants. When Cowley describes the pre-WWI village, "It contained two types of revolt, the individual and the social – or the aesthetic and the political, or the revolt against puritanism and the revolt against capitalism – we might tag the two of them briefly as

*bohemianism and radicalism.*" ... "During the bread riots of 1915 the Wobblies made their headquarters in Mary Vorse's studio on Tenth Street; and Villagers might get their heads broken in Union Square by the police before appearing at the Liberal Club to recite Swinburne in bloody bandages" (66). As "The Village" matured, it moved from adventure to exile as an entity. Cowley completes the transition, writing,

After the war the Village was full of former people. There were former anarchists who had made fortunes manufacturing munitions, former Wobblies about to open speakeasies, former noblewomen divorced or widowed, former suffragists who had been arrested after picketing the White House, former conscientious objectors paroled from Leavenworth, former aviators and soldiers of fortune, former settlement workers, German spies, strike leaders, poets, city editors of Socialist dailies. But the distinguished foreign artists who had worked in the Village from 1917 till 1919, and had given it a new character, had disappeared along with the active labor leaders. Nobody seemed to be doing anything now, except lamenting the time's decay. For the moment the Village was empty of young men. (67)

Importantly, Greenwich Village was not empty, and had young men, implying that young men are not "former somethings" but "becoming something."

When New York no longer held the promise of erasing identification, the adventurers recalled France. Yet, intent and implementation often differ, and this case was no different. Returning to Europe after the war, Cowley writes in *Exile's Return*, "The exiles of 1921 came to Europe seeking one thing and found another. They came to recover the good life and the traditions of art, to free themselves from organized stupidity, to win their deserved place in the hierarchy of the intellect. Having come in search of values,

they found *valuta* [sic]" (81). Further, "Exchange! It happened that old Europe, the continent of immemorial standards, had lost them all: it had only prices, which changed from country to country, from village to village, it seemed from hour to hour. Tuesday in Hamburg you might order a banquet for eight cents (or was it five?); Thursday in Paris you might buy twenty cigarettes for the price of a week's lodging in Vienna." Regarding the movement of adventurers in Europe, he adds in *Exile's Return*:

Those who had gold, or currency redeemable in gold, hastened toward the cheapest markets. There sprang into being a new race of tourists, the *Valutaschweine*, the parasites of the exchange, who wandered from France to Rumania, from Italy to Poland, in quest of the vilest prices and the most admirable gangrenes of society. Suddenly indifferent to the past of Europe, they were seen in fashionable hotels, in money-changers' booths, in night clubs oftener than in museums; but especially you saw them at the railway station at Innsbruck: Danes, Hindus, Yankees, South Americans, wine-cheeked Englishmen, more Yankees, waiting by the hundreds for the international express that would bear them toward the falling paper-mark or the unstabilized *lira* [sic]. We too were waiting: a few dollars in our pockets, the equivalent of how many thousand crowns or *pengos* [sic], we went drifting onward with the army of exploitation.

(82)

The excitement, the movement, and the desire for adventure culminate in a drug-like sense of stimulation. Cowley describes this feeling in *Exile's Return*, when he writes, the Paris express—all this hurry and loss of sleep was a stimulant like cocaine.

You could not sit still in your compartment, but picked your way up and down the

crowded corridor, watching the Seine unwind as the train creaked faster, faster; thoughts, verses, situations were flashing into the mind, and there was never any time to write them down. Paris!...Paris was a great machine for stimulating the nerves and sharpening the senses. (135)

Paris, in this light, is an escape. Yet, escape implies exile, in this case a sense of exile from the home identification. The possibility for adventure as exploration still remains, and this possibility, at least in Cowley's depiction, is realized through art.

### **Poetry as Adventure**

Cowley examines the relationship between art and place identity in his discussion of Tristan Tzara and the birth of Dada. He writes in *Exile's Return*, "It is wholly fitting that this new school of art and letters should have been founded in a cabaret, by a young man so thoroughly expatriated that he could not speak more than three words of his native language" (138). Dada denied national and regional identification. Cowley adds, "Dada, in art and life, was the extreme of individualism. It denied that there was any psychic basis common to all humanity" (149). In this regard, Dada has much in common with Cowley's wandering adventurer, Tumbling Mustard. Art, however, doesn't necessitate a denial of identification but could easily move forward from it.

The main artist Cowley describes as explorer is T.S. Eliot (111-112). One way in which Eliot maintained his status in the adventure phase was by never repeating his work (111), an attribute Cowley finds in Joyce and Pound as well (111,121). Cowley describes this exploration via art, writing, "They began to picture the ideal poet as an explorer, a buffalo hunter pressing westward toward new frontiers – from the Shenandoah he marches into unknown Tennessee, thence into the Blue Grass, thence into Missouri,

always leaving the land untilled behind him" (112). However, despite his movement into new territory, Eliot lost the support of his fellow adventurers with the publication of *The Waste Land*. As Cowley states the case, "It happened that we were excited by the adventure of living in the present. The famous 'postwar mood of aristocratic disillusionment' was a mood we had never really shared. It happened that Eliot's subjective truth was not our own" (114). The major issue here was that the expatriates wanted to view their adventure as possibility, whereas Eliot had already begun to move into the exile phase in his poetry. Put another way, the issue arose when the difference in literary generation became apparent. While Cowley sees the movement in terms of his own generation, he accurately points to the disappointment residing in what the expatriates were looking for. As he states, "the truth was that the poet had not changed so much as his younger readers. We were becoming less preoccupied with technique and were looking for poems that portrayed our own picture of the world" (113).

The disappointment with Eliot demonstrates the individualistic and almost violent approach of art in the adventure phase. The individual is so bent on differentiation or release from the identification phase that anything that hearkens back to it, or that degrades the promise of the adventure phase is attacked. This dynamic is at work in the *Blue Juniata* poem "Variations on a Cosmical Air." In this poem, "The stars above my chamber / are old acquaintances of mine / and closer now than I remember" (21-23). The stars serve as a baseline reference, the unchanging physical landscape to the adventurer. As such, they evoke the past, with "the moon, a last year's valentine" (24). Yet, the stargazer yearns to break free of his past at this point, stating,

Before I start let planets break

and suns turn black before I wake  
 alone tomorrow in this room;  
 I want a cosmic sort of broom  
 to reach the Bear and Sirius even,  
 annihilate our ancient heaven,  
 or rearrange in other pairs  
 those interstellar love affairs. (31-38)

Cowley is comparing the fleeting nature of love with the permanence of the night sky. The sense of adventure feels impinged upon when the poet is reminded of his past, via the stars. At this point, the poet is after things new and fleeting, love in particular. Comparing this delight in the new to the poem "Mortality," another poem written from the standpoint of the adventure phase, Cowley points to death as both a completion of a process and as an end to adventure. The idea of death as completion runs alongside the idea of adventure as the movement toward something, or a beginning. He writes, "death is rigid, being the achievement of a pattern; death is a finished pattern of wrinkles round the eye" (2). Further, "considered abstractly, death is a process of exteriorization; the possible is realized and buried" (4). Whereas in "Variations on a Cosmical Air," the poet looks at the stars and yearns to rearrange them in order to remove links to his past and engage in unencumbered adventure, in "Mortality" this desire is made moot when "eyes having first looked sightless at the sky" (7) lose their ability to create. The links between adventure / creation and exile / death will be explored in more detail later. The most interesting observation at this point is the way in which Cowley categorizes life into identification, adventure, and an impending exile phase. The identification phase is seen



as the stability of the night sky, and exile as the inability to renew adventure, or create. The impending nature of exile, now realized as inevitable, forces the adventurer to create categories of "us" and "them," with "them" becoming a buffer between adventure and death. This differentiation is a defining characteristic of Cowley's idea of literary generations.

### **Phase 3 – Exile**

Looking at when this distinction among generations became visible, Cowley uses his experience in Greenwich Village as an example. He writes, "It was in the Working Girls' Home [the remaining of two main bars in the Village during early Prohibition] that I first became conscious of the difference between two generations. There were two sorts of people here: those who had lived in the Village before 1917 and those who had just arrived from France or college. For the first time I came to think of them as 'they' and 'we'" (69). Moreover, he dissociates his generation from the bohemian generation of before. He writes of the differences in outlook, "The Village in 1919 was like a conquered country. Its inhabitants were discouraged and drank joylessly. 'We' came among them with an unexpended store of energy: we had left our youth at home, and for two years it had been accumulating at compound interest; now we were eager to lavish it even on trivial objects" (71). Unlike prior generations, his generation refused a sense of place identity, even if the identity imparted a sense of rebellion. In Cowley's words, "The truth is that 'we,' the newcomers to the Village, were not bohemians. We lived in top-floor tenements along the Sixth Avenue Elevated because we couldn't afford to live elsewhere. Either we thought of our real home as existing in the insubstantial world of art, or else we were simply young men on the make, the humble citizens not of bohemia

but of Grub Street" (73). Instead, Cowley envisioned his generation as having a grand sense of place perception.

Often, the move to adventure was spurred on by a sense of exile in the current situation, creating a sort of wandering citizen. Gussow writes that

the one ideal they [the Lost Generation] did share wholeheartedly with the older, self-conscious bohemians, said Cowley, was "the idea of salvation by exile": "Life in this country [had become] joyless and colorless, universally standardized, tawdry, uncreative," and the only sane response was to *go* – to the Village, to Europe, to rural Connecticut. Perpetual flight from a hostile postwar world, sustained by a free-living but tightly knit community – here, clearly, is the spiritual link between Cowley's Lost Generation and Kerouac's rebellious Beats' (297).

In the footnotes to this section, Gussow adds, "In a recent letter to the author, Cowley confirmed the author's hypothesis: 'At the time [I first read *On the Road*] I had just published...the revised edition of *Exile's Return*. You are right: that helps explain why I was impressed by Kerouac's account of a new generation'" (297). Further on, Gussow writes,

Cowley had been trying to recover precisely such a communal life since the days of *Exile's Return*, when he first formulated his myth of diasporactive exile as a way of explaining the Lost Generation. His own life and the lives of his friends, he wrote in that book, had been marked by "a long process of deracination," a progressive destruction of all ties to place and to human community: "[O]ur whole training was involuntarily directed toward destroying whatever roots we

had in the soil, toward eradicating our local and regional peculiarities, toward making us homeless citizens of the world"(p 298).

This reflection from *Exile's Return* concerns Cowley's generation and their "years in school and after school, in college and later in the army" (27), periods that have already been described as transitions from the local to the universal. The effect was the creation of "immigrant[s] into that high disembodied realm," the "international republic of learning" (28). Likewise it could be said that the effect was creating a generation of emigrants from place, where place identification is separated from place perception. However, as the poem "Variations on a Cosmical Air" shows, a complete separation is elusive, if not impossible.

The process of separating place identification from place perception is ongoing. One reason for this ongoing nature is that the sense of exile can be recurrent, even to the point of combining with adventure to form a sine wave, or diastolic/systolic cycle (such as Cowley describes in – *And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*). Kempf notes Cowley's New York-Connecticut jaunts forming such a cycle when he writes, "Retreats to the countryside were not numerous enough to overcome a feeling of oppression" (13). In – *And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, Cowley hints of a diastolic/systolic conception of creativity, separating generations according to Ortega's model. Early in the book, he discusses how writers at peaks of mountains often join groups in the valley, either older or younger: "In each case the groups are identified not only by dates but also by shared feelings and something close to a common language" (4). The identification between "peak" authors and "valley" groups tends to lift the lower-status writers toward the peak, or adventure phase. In other words, the attachment and literary relationships tend to

create new meaning in "forgotten" works. This critical reflection, however, is still part of the cycle, and exile eventually takes over. Cowley adds,

One must reflect, however, that every age group is doomed to disaster, or at least to defeat in terms of its aspirations, when these are measured against its actual way of life. Some groups are defeated sooner than others, for more predictable reasons, but each in the end reveals some fatal overemphasis, some flaw in calculation, some failure to cope with historical events; or else it will be destroyed by the simple passage of time...There comes a morning when the survivors grope among the wreckage, as after a tidal wave, and learn that their world has been swept away with, among other things, its web of literary relations, its editors, its magazines, its responsive audience, its rewards and penalties for being honest, and its fine gradations of respect. (16)

Even for those adventurers who thought that redemption could be found in a removal from their past, those who were looking to escape something old as well as find something new, exile is inevitable. Cowley discusses the link between place and ideas of exile and adventure in *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* when he writes,

They had let themselves be bribed into acquiescence by publisher's contracts and penthouse parties and weekends on the north shore of Long Island. Even when they escaped to Europe, they had been corrupted by the mood of the times, and now, back in New York, they dreamed of changing everything in the world and in their hearts. They wanted to bury the corrupt past and be reborn into a new life. (41)

Importantly, Cowley is also attaching place labels to these events. The time and place of these movements and events combine to form a mental guidepost whereby Cowley, or readers if they have similar subsets of background experience, can extract a number of relevant memories. These may be sights and smells, or feelings experienced. Cowley hints at this last possibility when he speaks of the "mood of the times." The importance of mood as an indicator of place and time is demonstrated in the way Cowley discusses his experiences. In *Exile's Return*, Cowley reviews his return to America after his post-war period in Europe. He writes,

Everything was strange to me: the exhausting and dispiriting heat, the colors of the houses, the straightaway vistas, the girls on the sidewalk in their bright frocks, so different from the drab ones that French shopgirls wore, and most of all the lack of anything green to break the monotony of the square streets, the glass, brick and iron. The next year – the next three years, in fact – would be spent in readjusting myself to this once familiar environment. (173)

There are two important points here. First, Cowley is becoming more explicit in his associations of place and emotion. The major importance of this shift is that in the early adventure phase, when he left for college and the war, the emphasis was exactly the opposite. In other words, this shift marks a return to place identification, though the separation of place perception and identification is still at work. Cowley is now identifying with a place and time, not just a place. This expansion of identification allows him to view his own shifting views and perceptions within the readily accessible framework of time and place. If he speaks of New York in the 'teens, or Paris in the Twenties, he knows exactly what set of emotions this reference should be attached to.

The second point is that the sense of exile can be imposed by external, as well as internal, forces. Cowley points to the externally imposed exile status felt by Americans returning after the First World War when he writes,

Our nation had passed the Prohibition Amendment as if to publish a bill of separation between itself and ourselves; it wasn't our country any longer.

Nevertheless we returned to it: there was nowhere else to go. We returned to New York, appropriately – to the homeland of the uprooted, where everyone you met came from another town and tried to forget it; where nobody seemed to have parents, or a past more distant than last night's swell party, or a future beyond the swell party this evening and the disillusioned book he would write tomorrow. (47)

In keeping with the idea of adventure and exile engaging in a cycle, it is worth noting that the sense of exile itself, the disillusionment and frustration, can also lead to new possibilities and creations. Cowley discusses this relationship when he writes concerning his poetry, "They were poems about America, poems that spoke of movies and skyscrapers and machines, dwelling upon them with all the nostalgia derived from two long years of exile. I, too, was enthusiastic over America; I had learned from a distance to admire its picturesque qualities. And I was returning to New York with a set of values that bore no relations to American life, with convictions that could not fail to be misunderstood in a country where Dada was hardly a name" (170). In addition to demonstrating the cyclical nature of adventure and exile, Cowley is also demonstrating the cumulative effect of previous cycles. When he speaks of his new values, these are adventure phase experiences used in much the way that identification phase values were previously. Yet, it wouldn't be accurate to say that the adventure phase had usurped the

identification, but rather is recalled analogously via a separate cognitive mechanism. This mechanism is at the core of nostalgia. Moreover, Cowley is forming an identification with his European experience as if it were his boyhood experience, and reevaluating his past through this modified lens.

### **Cycle of Adventure/Exile**

Upon examination, Cowley realizes that the cycle of adventure is fundamental to his story. Beyond his story, he also realizes that this cycle appears to be a fundamental theme in both fiction and experience. In his epilogue to *Exile's Return*, Cowley writes "As I read over these chapters written almost twenty years ago, the story they tell seems to follow the old pattern of alienation and reintegration, or departure and return, that is repeated in scores of European myths and continually re-embodied in life" (289). Yet this cycle is complex. From a large-grained perspective, across generations, this cycle is part of a larger cycle that continues indefinitely. Cowley hints at this when he mentions the relation of his experiences to European mythology. The cycle that impacts the individual resembles a sine-wave, a series of peaks and valleys leading to completion, or death. For Cowley, this realization began when he noticed that the processes he saw at work extended beyond his own circle. He writes,

In the preceding chapters I have been describing a process that first impressed me as being geographical. A whole generation of American writers-and how many others, architects, painters, bond salesman, professors and their wives, all the more studious and impressionable section of the middle-class youth – had been uprooted, schooled away, almost wrenched away, I said, from their attachment to any locality or local tradition. For years the process continued, through school

and college and the war; always they were moving farther from home. At last hundreds and thousands of them became veritable exiles, living in Paris or the South of France and adhering to a theory of art which held that the creative artist is absolutely independent of all localities, nations or classes. But most of them didn't remain exiled forever. One by one they came lingering back to New York, even though they came there as aliens, many of them holding ideas that would cause them a difficult period of readjustment. (206)

No less important than their return is their rationale behind it. Recalling that many had left either to find something or to flee something, it seems plausible that their return would have an ideological impetus. Cowley explores this when he writes,

The refugees were undergoing a peculiar experience. In Paris or the South of France they had written stories about their childhood, about Michigan or Nebraska, stories the hero of which was a sensitive boy oppressed by his surroundings. Later, when this feeling of oppression faded in their minds, they had begun to write about their new friends in Europe, but without the same enthusiasm; they were easily interrupted. Here in this ultimate refuge there were no distractions whatever, nothing to keep them from working except the terrifying discovery that they had nothing now to say. Boredom and loneliness set in. They began to find that the food was bad, that there were fleas in the hotel, a dozen minor discomforts – and suddenly one morning they packed their bags and started north toward Paris, where for all the tourists like fantastic neanderthals, still there were people who spoke your own language. (242-243)



A complex dynamic exists between the identification phase and disillusionment with the adventure phase. Likewise, there is another dynamic at work between the place perception of the adventurer and the place perception of the native, regarding both Europe and America. This dynamic is what Cowley is referring to when he writes,

sometimes in a Vienna coffehouse full of dark little paunchy men and golden whores, in the smoke above these shaven or marceled heads we saw another country, not just painted, revolving, but solid with little hills and the earth brown beneath the plow. "I shall never return, never, to my strange land" - but sometimes beside an unreal Alpine lake they asked us, "Everybody is rich in your country, say?" and steam shovels suddenly bit into the hills, gold washed itself from the rivers, skyscrapers rose, heiresses were kidnapped – we saw the America they wished us to see and admired it through their distant eyes. (82-83)

Once again, this passage is an example of the inescapability of the identification phase. Yet, there is something different here, as the exiles are seeing home from the viewpoint of their European experiences. This difference is nostalgia creeping in again, taking bits of experience and merging them. There is a sense of impending renewal of place identity, driven by the imagination. The individual begins to assess his surroundings from the perspective of his background, not in spite of it. Cowley describes the effect of this change when he writes, "Some of the exiles had reached a turning point in their adventure and were preparing to embark on a voyage of rediscovery. Standing as it were on the Tour Eiffel, they looked southwestward across the wheatfields of Beauce and the rain-drenched little hills of Brittany, until somewhere in the mist they saw the country of their childhood, which should henceforth be the country of their art" (96). The

hopes of the adventurers, their desire to eradicate their past and to find a path to constant creation, had faltered, yet their experiences allowed them to see something in their past that would have remained invisible otherwise. Cowley writes that, "We had come three thousand miles in search of Europe, and had found America, in a vision half-remembered, half-falsified and romanced" (83).

For the expatriates, this stage of the adventure / exile cycle represents development, a place that could not have been reached except via the path they had chosen. In the *Blue Juniata* poem "Dan George," Cowley plays upon this idea of development. Dan George is asked a question, whether he is the fellow who "ran away to fight / came home to drink with the wild paddy boys," to which he replies, "I don't / rightly remember. A long time ago" (12-13, 16-17). Dan George is part of the community, but doesn't fit into it. His perspective had changed, and he is able to use his increased awareness to his advantage when he "drove a hard bargain with [his] neighbors, / stole their virgin timberland, slept with their wives" (14-15). That both the speaker and Dan George are using experience outside of the community, from adventure and exile phases, is shown by comparing the way in which Dan's use of "resources," wives and timber, is portrayed. Recalling the hemlock woods cleared for tanbark in "Boy in Sunlight," there is a distinction in portrayal. For the individual steeped in the identification phase, there is no difference between place and self. Moreover, there is an implied innocence, a characteristic manipulated by Dan George when he returns. The old evils of America, from which the expatriates had fled, became a mere nuisance. For expatriates, or people like Dan George, an advantage could be gained through experience. This realization marks the end of their first cycle of adventure and exile, and a move into a new period of adventure.

Cowley describes the difference between those entering their second cycle of adventure and those still awaiting their first when he writes,

In Europe we were learning to regard the dragon of American industry as a picturesque and even noble monster; but our friends at home had not the advantage of perspective; for them the dragon blotted out the sky; they looked up and all they could see was the scales of its belly, freshly alemited and enameled with Duco. They dreamed of escaping into older lands which the dragon hadn't yet invaded – while we, in older lands, were already dreaming of a voyage home.

*(Exile's Return 106)*

To the exile turned adventurer, the return to America was a parallel to their departure. Instead of a foreign land holding the promise, though, it was now the homeland. Yet, the hopes were now colored by all previous experience, as the various phases experienced became the various phases recalled through nostalgia. This shift is an important consideration for place perspective, and one that impacts Cowley's depiction of New York. No longer the Bohemia, it is now "the least human of the babylons" (201). He describes New York as a place,

inhabited by six million strangers,...the metropolis of curiosity and suspicion. It is the city without landmarks, the home of lasting impermanence, of dynamic immobility. It is the seat of violent emotions, hate, desire, envy, contempt, all changing from moment to moment, all existing at the tips of the nerves. It is the city of anger . . . but underneath the anger is another mood, a feeling of timeless melancholy, dry, reckless, defeated and perverse (201).

The exile turned adventurer is now faced with a second problem, "that of reproducing in New York the conditions that had seemed so congenial to us abroad, and of continuing to appreciate and praise the picturesque American qualities of the Machine Age and the New Economic Era while living under their shadow" (174). Later, he adds, "We had tried on Manhattan Island to re-create the atmosphere of intellectual excitement and moral indignation that had stimulated us in Paris among the Dadaists" (196). At this point, their experiences overseas still represent adventure. However, they see this mood as portable, even if the time and place aren't.

Just as those departing for France a decade earlier had been unsuccessful in their search for paradise, those hoping to find it in their return to America also fail. Cowley remarks, "five months after my return from Europe I was dispirited, exhausted, licked – by Mr. Smith and Mr. Boyd and the quarrels among my friends, but most of all by myself, by my efforts to apply in one country the standards I had brought from another." New York, and America's industrialism in general, "expressed [its life] in terms of geometry and mechanics...Its people have a purely numerical function...Their emotions are coefficients used in calculating the probability of trade" (201). Ironically, Cowley criticizes New York, or rather the mood associated with that time and place, for abstracting daily life, the same quality he condones in a university. Of course, these returned exiles have the benefit of their experience: they are Dan George, they are no longer facing a dragon. Moreover, they benefit from a similar type of thinking. Just as New Yorkers learned to extract life from place, just as they learned to live by abstract ideology, so have the expatriates. Therefore, "When the exiles returned from Europe, their normal instinct was to remake the environment, to substitute moral for mechanical

values, to create a background that would render their own lives more exciting or rewarding" (202). This effort marks a transition from passive adventurer to active adventurer. No longer relying upon the mood of a time and place to provide his identification, the individual is learning to create it via the nostalgia phase. Also, for many, movement into this phase requires a compromise. Cowley describes this compromise, writing, "They had satisfied a childhood ambition by moving to the metropolis and becoming more or less successful there, yet most of them wanted to be somewhere else: they wanted to leave it all and go back to something, perhaps to their childhoods" (209-210). Yet, they cannot return to their childhood, "but perhaps they could make a compromise, could enjoy the advantages of two worlds by purchasing a farm somewhere within a hundred miles of Manhattan and spending their summers in the country without separating themselves from their urban sources of income" (210). Without realizing the change that the generation had gone through, moving from passive to active in its own sense of identification, Cowley writes, "the long process of exile-and-return was resumed almost in the form of a mass migration" (210).

#### **Phase 4 - Nostalgia**

In the poem "Blue Juniata," Cowley describes a nostalgic look at baseline place identification. In the last stanza of this poem, the inescapability of place identification becomes apparent,

for sometimes a familiar music hammers  
like blood against the eardrums, paints a mist  
across the eyes, as if the smell of lilacs,  
moss roses, and the past became a music

made visible, a monument of air. (23-27)

That this is a nostalgic look is apparent because there is no place attachment. In *Exile's Return*, Cowley writes, "Wherever it [our nostalgic sense of place] lies, the country is our own; its people speak our language, recognize our values...This is your home...but does it exist outside your memory?" (14). The landscape may change, even in your homeland, as upon "reaching the hilltop or the bend in the road, will you find the people gone, the landscape altered, the hemlock trees cut down and only stumps, dried tree-tops, branches and fireweed where the woods had been," much as they were in "Boy in Sunlight."

Possibly, though unlikely, nothing has changed. Yet, just as Dan George is no longer the same, "if the country remains the same, will you find yourself so changed and uprooted that it refuses to take you back, to reincorporate you into its common life." Yet, the past as recounted through nostalgia is immutable, as "the country of our childhood survives, if only in our minds, and retains our loyalty even when casting us into exile; we carry its image from city to city as our most essential baggage." Cowley recounts this immutable and inescapable past in *Exile's Return*, when he describes the Americans serving in the First World War, "Somewhere behind them was another country, a real country of barns, cornfields, hemlock woods and brooks tumbling across birch logs into pools where the big trout lay. Somewhere, at an incredible distance, was the country of their childhood, where they had once been part of the landscape and the life, part of a spectacle at which nobody looked on" (44).

This nostalgic relation to the past, however, often belies the actual, experiential relation to the past. When Cowley describes the impact of place on the summer inhabitant of the country home, he writes, "The land for which they were overassessed

was not really theirs; it did not stain their hands or color their thoughts. They had no functional relation to it" (213). Furthermore, the homeland of the individual's cannot cohabitate with the nostalgic homeland. Describing the possibility of the former adventurer happening across the place of his childhood, he writes, "He could live and die there like his ancestors – but no, the door was double-locked against him; the house would not take him back" (213). Yet, this exclusion is easily compensated for by a nostalgic return. The individual cannot return to the home place, metaphorically, in that he could not return to the home state, or identification. Once the limitations of childhood have been broken through experience, the rite of passage cannot be reversed. The reason why the physical return breaks down when the imaginative, nostalgic one does not is that "He was seeking for something that was no longer there. It wasn't so much his childhood, which of course was irrecapturable; it was rather a quality remembered from childhood, a sense of belonging to something, of living in a country whose people spoke his language and shared his interests" (214). Furthermore, the exiles "had been uprooted from something more than a birthplace, a county or a town. Their real exile was from society itself, from any society to which they could honestly contribute and from which they could draw the strength that lies in shared convictions." The problem with a reliance upon shared convictions is that these convictions changed the minute that the individual leaves home. Shared convictions, at the most basic level, rely upon a large area of shared experience. While the possibility exists for a generation, in Cowley's sense of people with common experience and desires, experience is fundamentally individualistic in nature.

Of course, a major part of what prevents the individual from re-identifying with their past is the cumulative set of experiences gathered during the adventure / exile cycles.

The existence of the individual and place diverge when they leave. The returning adventurer finds that things have changed, as in the *Blue Juniata* poem, "The Chestnut Woods," where the prodigal,

headlong crashing down a hill to find –

and lost again and now it is too late.

We have lived a long time under sheet-iron skies

in neon-haggard dreams where no moons rise;

the juneberries will be withered on the branches;

the chestnut woods are dead. (17-22)

Yet, the fact is that the homeland has changed, despite an earlier feeling that it was as immutable as the stars. In everyday life, the home of the exile begins to feel immutable. In fact, this feeling of stasis is part of what forces the loss of sense of adventure. The complexity of experience, of the combined experiences in a place, can overwhelm the individual, forcing a desire for purification. When Cowley discusses his return to New York, he writes, "I sometimes had pleasant nightmares in which I fancied that New York was being destroyed by an earthquake: its towers snapped like pine trees in a storm, a tidal wave poured through its streets and swept them clean of lice. But slowly, in spite of these rebellions, I was adjusting myself to an old situation" (203). In a sense, the desire to cleanse the place represents a desire for a return to the identification phase, a chance to start over. Likewise, the compromise is a realization of lessons learned through the



adventure and exile phases. The constant battles among identification, adventure and exile perceptions are resolved through nostalgia. The assumption that nostalgia is inextricably tied to art seems the best way to interpret the way Cowley describes his own resolution of the battle. In this regard, he writes, "The function of poetry is to make life tolerable. New York was becoming more than I could bear" (204). Additionally, he states, "Philosophy is the power of not being disturbed. After six months in New York, one takes refuge in such preoccupations, and the atmosphere of New York is a hysterical classicism, to be distinguished from the classicism of the Mediterranean, which results from sympathy with one's environment instead of rebellion against it" (203).

One of the requirements for compromise is the admission that there is something of value in each competing side. Possibly, the thing of value is mere survival, as is the case with the fictional writer Burnside, who Cowley uses as an example in *The Literary Situation*. After he loses his audience and is unable to acquire a new one, Burnside finds that "The entry about him disappears from *Who's Who*, although his name is still printed there with a sign indicating that information about him can be found in an earlier volume. Burnside looks at the name and feels as though he has been exiled, living, to the land of spooks; he can still talk but nobody hears him, nobody knows that he exists" (182). Here, the literary landscape echoes the physical one; exile is induced through a nostalgic reflection of the previous generation. Such a reflection is inextricably tied to past glories, the peaks, as it is when Cowley discusses how younger generations are viewed by the status quo. He writes, "When discussing the changes in American ways during a single lifetime, one is always tempted to condemn the present and exalt the fresh world of one's boyhood" (235). Stated another way, once a generation comes to terms with its own

background, it will try to impose the same path to enlightenment upon younger generations. From the vantage point that this method of education was effective isn't a question for Cowley, as he writes, "It was indeed a better world in some respects, and notably in its felling of self-confidence, which later gave way to the fear of impending disaster" (235). Surprisingly, though, he misses the point that his approach is highly individualistic, and thus would be self-contradictory if applied across several generations.

If Cowley supposes that his own education would be equally effective for others, even those who lack the same background experiences as a child, then it is important to determine what portions of his experiences he considers vital. Moreover, when Cowley refers to the impact of his experiences, the "felling of self-confidence" and the development of "fear of impending disaster," it must be figured whether he realizes that these consequences merely stem the actions that began his entire adventure / exile education. Alternately, it could be that this stemming of the wandering hopeful is all that Cowley is after, thus he is only concerned with results and not how they were acquired. In order to determine what is important in the progression of the adventurer, the *Blue Juniata* poem, "The Peppermint Gardens," is helpful. In this poem, Cowley recounts the stages that the exile goes through. Discussing his disillusionment with Paris, he writes,

an ordered beauty that having seen  
for two long years, I choose to question,  
tired of a too, too brilliant green,  
too brilliant whites against the green.  
Maybe from eating their plums I have  
more than a twinge of indigestion. (7-12)

Interestingly, the gardens of Paris are ordered and geometric, just as New York. What once seemed new and interesting now becomes predictable. Even more interesting, his disdain causes a homesickness, which would seem to be equally predictable. Yet, he adds,

and so finding nothing to praise about  
 those geometrical rows of plum trees,  
 wanting a country where briars sprout  
 under the crazily twisted gum trees,  
 an imprecise, untutored country  
 where all the gardens are inside out. (13-18)

This yearning in turn brings the baseline place identification as presented via nostalgia.

In my country the big pines grow  
 at the edge of the woods,  
 in the heart of the woods,  
 wherever the autumn winds may plant them,  
 not in close order, row by row,  
 where acres are left that men will grant them,  
 and in my country the chestnut trees  
 scatter their harvest where they please. (19-26)

The idea that this landscape is an imaginative construct is found in the plasticity of the environment. Nothing is ordered, as in the Paris garden, but in "his" country the trees control their own fates. This control is in dire contrast to the dynamic at work in baseline identification, such as is shown in "Boy in Sunlight" and "Dan George." Cowley

confirms that the country of "Peppermint Gardens" is imaginative when he inventories the "magic of [it]" (33). After naming several items, his memory falters. He writes, "item – damn my memory / you must imagine the rest" (36-37). In these two lines the role of nostalgic place sense becomes particularly acute. Cowley completes this phase with the last stanza:

But sometimes when the candles sputter,  
 their trees, disordered by the utter  
 black placelessness of midnight, wail  
 like those of my own country:  
 and sometimes when in bed I see  
 three hills against the canopy,  
 three mischievous little hills that lie  
 side by side in a narrow bed,  
 kicking their feet against a muslin sky. (38-46)

The imagery of the last stanza echoes that of "Poverty Hollow" from the baseline "Blue Juniata" section:

The valley is too narrow, and we have driven  
 our plows against the bony shanks of a hill.

Now rest, my brothers,  
 lie down together in a furrow. Rest,  
 and some day when the mineral earth has grown  
 cold as the moon's craters, when the sun

fades in perpetual starlight, then our hills  
 will fold like wrinkles in a forehead, press  
 the valley out between them like slow fingers  
 against a bone-hard thumb, and so provide  
 for us magnificent burial, my kin. (5-15)

The image is the same, but the place perception has shifted. In "Poverty Hollow," the poet only knows his own region. Compared with what he imagines the rest of the world has to offer, his realm seems cold and unforgiving. Later, as the adventurer begins to turn to exile in "The Peppermint Gardens," the barren landscape gains new life as he reevaluates it. Instead of a burial, his memories are now kicking, awaiting a new birth.

Perhaps Cowley intends for the younger generation to learn the power of death and rebirth, and how that imagery can be found in perceptions of place. Possibly, he also hopes to show that a place can "experience" the same phases, vicariously through its inhabitants. Thus when Cowley describes New York, or rural Pennsylvania, he is conjuring up memories of mood and experiences, which in turn reflect his own phases of place sense. That this entire process is relational to an identification with a childhood place and time means that those who import a different set of meanings into a place somehow corrupt the sense identity of the other inhabitants. This desire to see the members of a community as homogenous is tied to the way that generations differentiate themselves. What happens to a place between generations is the main concern in the poem "Ten Good Farms," found in the "City of Anger" portion of *Blue Juniata*. In this poem, Cowley describes Manhattan in terms of the exile phase. Importantly, it isn't the mere physical Manhattan, but what happened to the Manhattan of a previous generation.

The associated moods and events of a time and place are gone, corrupted by the later generations. The poem describes the physical decay of the present form,

With storm-washed gullies marking where the streets  
 ran riverward, with mounds of splintered glass  
 and barricades of marble split across them  
 and crazy girders bridging them, to rust  
 in the northeast gales. (1-5)

Counter to the urban present, is an image derived from both the past and the imaginative future:

with towers crumbling in the sunshine, lakes  
 of peace in every cellar, brambles guarding  
 the public squares, and underfoot a rat  
 crossing the stone jungle (all horizons  
 vast and empty of smoke). (6-10)

Much as Cowley's country in "The Peppermint Gardens" places the environment in the seat of power, here the wilderness has usurped order. Further tying past and future together via the imagination, or the possibilities of nostalgic positing, he writes,

no, in our lifetime we could never make  
 out of Manhattan Island ten good farms,  
 or five, or two – and yet the open graveyards,  
 the rich plots where slaughterhouses flourished  
 and one day fell – our gardens will be there. (11-15)

The graveyards and death of the murderous slaughterhouses once again brings up the idea of the adventure / creation and exile / death dynamic. Instead of the place identification holding power over the individual, as in "Variations on a Cosmical Air," the individual now holds power over the place. Here we see the nostalgic phase providing catharsis for the individual fighting a sense of disillusionment. In reality, those torn by their attraction to and their dislike for New York, like Cowley, simply bought farms in Connecticut. But in their imaginations, they built their gardens over the tops of the asphalt streets.

## Part 2 – The Role of Sense of Place

Malcolm Cowley appears to define his own position in life in terms of his place sense. Given Cowley's attention to sense of place, it isn't surprising that the events of his time are also at the forefront of his consciousness. While the surrounding events are typically important to the individual, the events of Cowley's generation are particularly apt for developing a sense of place; indeed, the events themselves seem to amplify the phase differentiation. The expatriation movements, the First World War, and the unstable European economy following the war create convenient mechanisms for physical place change, as well as allowing disparate and innovative ideologies to be brought together – all the while maintaining place identification. In turn, this allows Cowley to discuss the post-World War I attitudes of Americans in Europe or Europeans in New York. As an inextricable part of these discussions, Cowley consistently links place and ideology. In *Blue Juniata*, Cowley divides the poems by phase of place perception. In the introductory note to the second part of *Blue Juniata*, entitled "The Crooked Streets," he writes of New York, "There was much in our surroundings that agreed with our mood" (32). Further, he adds, "We worshiped the cluttered streets, the overflowing ash barrels, the houses full of people and rats." Cowley prefaces the third section of poems, entitled "Valuta," with the line, "In the years from 1920 to 1924 old Europe, that continent of hierarchies and values, had ceased to have any values whatever" (48). Emotions are couched within the scenes – the edelweiss in "Sunrise over the Heiterwand" (52), the "High Street of Cologne" in "Marizibill" (54), or the nostalgic longing for the "pale Alaska virgin" and "Texas Rose" in "Valuta" (50). The emotions are part of the shared experiences of his generation, and allow place to serve the second noted cognitive aspect:



as an icon of shared experience. Future readers may not understand the full impact of the images, depending partly upon their own sets of experiences and partly upon their knowledge of the shared experiences of Cowley's generation. However, for many readers contemporary with Cowley, the power of the sense of place allows them to draw deeper meanings from the words and places he references. Ultimately, Cowley creates a structure of perception that imparts new meanings onto the language.

There are several ways that Cowley uses place sense to create new meanings. One way is using place sense as a generational identifier, an idea that has already been briefly described. Basically, place sense used in this regard allows generations to differentiate themselves. Another way that place sense is used is as a guide to background knowledge. Cowley uses place as a way to evoke images and memories, so that a reader with similar background knowledge will find additional meaning in a poem that mentions some shared referent. A third way that Cowley uses place sense is as an indicator of time. An image couched in a certain place perspective, such as Cowley's depiction of Bohemian New York, allows the reader to identify the time period being described. Another way in which place sense is used is as a device in the story. A shift in place perception provides movement in the story, and may serve as an indicator of a shift in time as well. Lastly, given the way in which Cowley ties background knowledge to place indicators, he is able to create structures of metaphor and metonymy.

### **Place as a Generational Identifier**

Cowley distinguishes his concern for a generational approach to literary periods in the "And Jesse Begat...! A Note on Literary Generations" chapter of – *And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, when he writes about the clusters of writers born in given spans of years (1-3). Further,

If we bear such clusters in mind...the history of literature assumes a different aspect. No longer does it seem to be a plain dotted with separate obelisks and sloping gently upward toward the present. Instead...it becomes a rugged landscape crossed at intervals by mountain ranges. Talented writers cluster in the valleys between the ranges, where they often have as neighbors talented artists, composers, social thinkers, and scientists of the same age, besides a larger community of those willing to listen. In each of the valleys, moreover, all the inhabitants have a common fund of memories, aspirations, antipathies, and a shared feeling of what it means to live in the world. (3-4)

The imagery of valleys and peaks has already been discussed in relation to the cycles of exile and adventure. However, Cowley's point here has to do with the way that individuals sharing a common background or ideology find a sense of group identity. This sense of group identity is important, since it replaces a sense of place identity in the adventurer. In fact, place identity seems simply another form of this process, where individuals have their identification with a region in common. Regardless, Cowley sees the divisions forming along various lines, with age figuring prominently. He adds, "In spite of their rivalries, often intense; in spite of shifting alliances and broken friendships, they tend to think of themselves as 'we' and of other age groups as 'they,' strangers and potential enemies" (4).

Looking past a generalized process, and towards his own experiences, in *Exile's Return*, Cowley notes the emerging differences in the writers of his generation. He writes, "Sectional and local influences were more important during the years before 1900. Two New England writers born fifteen or twenty years apart-Emerson and Thoreau, for

example-might bear more resemblance to each other than either bore to a Virginian or a New Yorker of his own age" (4). As already mentioned, Cowley stereotypes his generation as rejecting a sense of regional attachment. Consequently, with the demise of sectional differences, place must be identified with ideas.

Kempf notes Cowley's the use of place as a generational identifier when he writes,

Summing up the general characteristics of the experience and literary interests of the young men he had been associating with in Boston and new York, Cowley's essay [in the Oct 15 *Literary Review*] points out differences between the tastes and subject matter of his generation of writers and those of the older generation...The lack of social concern tends, as Cowley says, to differentiate young writers from pre-war English writers like George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells. Paris, not London, has become the ideal city of art and letters. (14)

Further, in *The Literary Situation*, Cowley reviews when he began to feel the difference between his own generation and those previous, writing,

It would seem that every generation in turn starts with this feeling of lost values, as if it were a necessary step in education. I can remember coming down the steps of Widener Library one morning in the early spring of 1917. I looked out at the leafless elms in the hard sunlight, and the duckboards still in place along the walks, and found myself saying compulsively, 'It was all lies, everything they told me at home, everything they taught me at school.' I can remember too that I found comfort in the statement; it wasn't so much the wail of a little boy deserted in the night as a sort of incantation and a first step toward seeking truth, wherever it might still be found. (70)

It is important to remember that Kempf is looking at Cowley after his period of adventure and exile in France; whereas, albeit at a much later age, Cowley is describing his feelings during the early stages of his initial adventure phase. What Cowley is describing is a sense of disillusionment, and how this led to his finding a sense of belonging to a literary generation, separate from those previous. Recalling what Cowley said about the University casting aside attachments to place, it is interesting that it also seems to have caused him to cast aside attachments to academic traditions as well.

The experiences of Cowley's time perhaps led him to reject the traditions handed to him. In fact, such a movement is perhaps what Cowley is suggesting in *The Literary Situation*, when he writes, "In the literary world every big war of our time has been followed by a movement away from socially oriented writing toward abstract or subjective literature, toward pure poetry, dream fiction, or dogged scholarship" (5). In such tumultuous periods, the writer's movement away from the comfortable creates a fracture, causing the representations with which we are comfortable, the structures and relativity, to break or shift. This fracture allows new perspectives and, ultimately, a view into the mechanisms of language and the mind. Cowley shows the importance of language in defining these groups when he writes,

On the other hand, if we use terms like disloyal, bigoted, fascist, pinko, do-gooder, godless, intellectual, forward-looking, democracy, sound literature, renegade, Uncle Tom, or subversive, our hearers are likely to interpret them in different fashions, depending on the special language of the political or religious or racial groups to which they belong. (73)

The "special language" applies equally to members of a generation, though Cowley only implies this. In *—And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, Cowley writes, "Before a simple age group becomes a generation...it has to satisfy all the preconditions...First and I should say most important, it has to possess its own sense of life, something that might be defined as an intricate web of perceptions, judgments, feelings, and aspirations shared by its members" (10).

The ability to distinguish itself as an entity, as a generation, is important in both the adventure and exile phases. Just as these phases operate relative to the identification of the individual, they likewise operate relative to the previous generation. Continuing, Cowley writes, "Before that time, as a rule, the generation finds that it has rejected most of the notions acquired from its parents. It may return to them later, but most often in devious fashions and after a long delay" (11). In the poem "The Lost People," from *Blue Juniata*, he describes such a return while in France. He writes, "we sailed against the sun and found ourselves / here in a countryside of phlegm-gray mist / and soot-gray shadowless evil" (36-38). In the next stanza Cowley adds,

Is it too late for homeward journeys?  
 ...what we ask is only  
 a word to unlock the corridors of dream.  
 Lest in the wilderness of days we wander  
 too long without direction, take our hands,  
 close tight our eyes, and lead us into nights  
 rich with the smell of childhood. (39-45)

Once again, language, the tool of the nostalgic imagination, is the key to resolution. The adventure phase has veered into exile, a "wilderness of days we wander." The immutable night sky, with its relation to the identification phase, represents a sense of safety.

Somewhere within the elusive "word" lies a way to reconcile the past with the present, a way to create the future. Lurking in the lines is a realization that home represents not only more than place, but also a prior generation, a "parent" who can take Cowley's generation by its "hands" and lead it back to its homeland.

Whereas "The Lost People" shows the possibility for individuals to reconcile themselves with a generation, "Day Coach" shows how this process can fail. The poet exhorts his fellow adventurers,

O travelers, with you  
 I moved like a firefly over twilight waters;  
 with you I was spit  
 like a cherry stone from the puckered lips of the tunnel,  
 then blindly plunged with you into seas of light.

Travelers all!  
 Let us join hands and dance  
 to very old music. (6.1-8)

Yet, the attempt is unsuccessful, "Out of the group that lingered at the station / no single form detached itself to meet him. / The circle of their backs was a wall against him" (7.1-3). Shared experience hasn't reached the point of creating a generation. The shared experience is entirely too minor, having only been the fact of fellow travel, and a possible

sense of exile. Yet, background shared experience is lacking, so the author, "Feeling the weight of darkness on his shoulders, / he stumbled on with his burden of trees and hills," the baggage of his youth (7.10-11).

### **Place as a Guide to Background Knowledge**

Deep into the structure of his phases, Cowley is inadvertently exposing the cognitive machinery at work. Central to the idea of phase is the idea of relation to other. From the vantage point of the reader, their own experiences with place and relation to (i.e. "of it, enjoying it, and outcast") allows them to gain insight into the writer's feelings towards place. P.D. Ouspensky, in discussing Kantian origins of his theory of knowledge, notes, "It must be perfectly clear to everyone that it is impossible to accept *the thing sought as the given*; and impossible to define one unknown by means of another" (8). The reader's own background knowledge serves as the comparison, yielding varying returns as a function of the similarity in background knowledge shared between reader and writer. Deeper in this relation are concepts of how place relates to the imagination and language. The idea of place, much like the idea of person, is portrayed through the language, but this outer language is a manifestation of the relationships inside the mind. Ouspensky identifies the cognitive nature of place when he writes,

Thus space and time, defining everything that we cognize by sensuous means, are in themselves just forms of our receptivity, categories of our intellect, the prism through which we regard the world – or in other words, space and time do not represent properties of the world, but just properties of our *knowledge* of the world gained through our sensuous organism. From this it follows that the world,

apart from our knowledge of it, has neither extension in space nor existence in time; these are properties which we add to it. (11)

The Ouspenskian argument is a precursor to blending theory. Seanna Coulson writes, "meaning construction is successful because speakers utilize background knowledge, general cognitive abilities, and information from the immediate discourse context to help them decide when to partition incoming information and how to establish mappings among elements in different spaces" ("Blending Basics" 178). From the vantage of blending theory, the sense of place provides a set of known things, experiences and ideas, by which the unknown can be deciphered. Moreover, the meaning that is derived via blending will be conditional upon what background knowledge is available. Place thus becomes something of a shibboleth, simultaneously demonstrating the individual's identification with a local geography, culture, and time, as well as revealing an inner relation between individual concepts within the language.

At the most fundamental level, place identification engages personal experience. That is to say that recognition of place indicators from outside the individual's own direct realm must engage a place indicator familiar to him. This assertion is essentially the same as Ouspensky's assertion that the unfamiliar is understood in the context of the individual's own experiences. From within the blending framework, this relationship is similar to what Coulson and Oakley are describing when they state, "The focal participants and their on-scene relations can be used to structure information from other spaces because abstractions are easily extracted to form the generic space for the network" ("Blending Basics" 179). Further, "the blended space contains information from each of the inputs as well as emergent structure that arises as a product of the



imaginative processes of integration." This process allows Cowley to use place sense to impart meaning on foreign objects. For example, in "The Beach at Palavas," from *Blue Juniata*, the sea links his fellow bathers with mytho-historical Greece. In lines 15-20, the poem reads,

This is, if you consult a map,  
 the sea that washed the shores of Greece,  
  
 from which came riding on the spume  
 Venus Anadyomene,  
 and other Venuses descend  
 up to their, in a word, the sea. (15-20)

The background knowledge of the reader, and possible experiences in a similar situation, i.e. swimming, are conjured up to impart a sense of identity with classical ideals. Part of this association is triggered by the proper name "Venus Anadyomene," but more importantly, the major part is triggered by the place name "Greece."

The relationship of the bathers to the land in "The Beach at Palavas" demonstrates how place can influence the selection of background knowledge when constructing meaning. Also, place influences which experiences are to be filed away as background knowledge. Kempf shows this relationship between place and experience when he writes, regarding Cowley's July article in *Freeman*, entitled "A Brief History of Bohemia", "Representing an important statement by Cowley on the sociology of modern art, it clearly derives its emotional force from his experience in Greenwich Village. The irregularity, incoherence, and squalor of Bohemian society are, Cowley avers, reflected in

contemporary art and aesthetics" (21). The use of place as a filter when acquiring knowledge also appears in Cowley's August 10, 1921 letter to Kenneth Burke, when he writes of Paris, "It is Greenwich Village, only much more so than the Village" (*The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley* 96). Cowley describes what to find in Paris, "the little fille [who] seduced Napoleon" and the table where "Voltaire plays chess." In other words, Cowley is presenting the details of the identification phase, or the background and history of previous generations, for Paris, yet he couches his details in the imagery of the fresh adventurer. It is Paris, the momentum of its generations, which produces what Cowley will remember, not his own conscious selection. McClamrock touches on this idea when he writes, "it's now an entirely ubiquitous suggestion that what we refer to is conditioned by the environmental context in which our thoughts and utterances occur. What fixes the reference of our words and thoughts isn't just 'in the head,' but in the structures of the physical world and social context around us. By making use of the context, there may be all sorts of ways to refer to features of the character of experience of beings other than ourselves" (173).

### **The Role of Common Experience**

When place is used as a guide to background knowledge, it can be particularly effective among those who share a similar subset of experience. This shared experience becomes part of what Cowley uses to define a generation. Returning to his previous discussion in *—And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, where Cowley is noting the preconditions which must be met in order to form a generation, he writes, "The generation must participate in, or at least be witness to, historic events that will furnish its

members with a common fund of experience. This fourth precondition is a comparatively simple one to meet" (11). Looking at his own generation in *Exile's Return*, he adds,

Soon it became evident that all the younger members of this class had had about the same experiences, the Midwestern background, the year in the army if they were men, the unhappy love affair that took its place if they were women, the long voyage to France; and it was evident, too, that most of them were lost in their new environment and discontented...That was the class into which the exiles were being merged. (208)

Furthermore, the group will begin to define its experiences based upon its membership. This definition, in turn, is based upon the effects of the identification phase, coupled with the current stage, e.g., adventure or exile, of its membership. Noting Jose Ortega y Gasset's comments on the effects of war upon a generation, Cowley notes in *—And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*,

Ortega makes a wise observation about such convulsions. In their effects, he says, and even in their essence, they are different for each of the five age groups that coexist at every moment. Thus, Hemingway's World War II was not the same as that of Norman Mailer or his coevals, and Mailer's war was not the same as that of Donald Barthelme, who was still a boy when it ended. The shared memories, however, have all the deeper effect for being confined to a single group. (12)

This realization forces an interesting point, just as events are viewed through the collective filters of a group or generation, so is place identification. Thus, when using place sense in writing, there is a concern that ideas will be properly conveyed.

With an apparent disparity in meaning across generations, a useful analogy for how meaning is conveyed is translation. In *The Literary Situation*, Cowley writes, "Translation is an art that involves the re-creation of a work in another language, for readers with a different background of experience who still must be made to understand what the author means and implies" (179-180). The different background is important, since this encompasses not only language, but also experiences and place identification. Often, translations only approximate intent, destroying the power of the image. Touting the importance of experience, Cowley comments on the power of Hart Crane's poetry, stating, "At their worst his poems are ineffective unless read in something approximating the same atmosphere, with a drink at your elbow, the phonograph blaring and somebody shouting into your ear" (*Exile's Return* 230).

### **Place and Metonymy**

Cowley often uses examples, nouns in particular, which trigger an emotional response in readers who share a similar set of experiences, e.g., members of his expatriate generation. He is relying upon the phenomena that "a particular process of meaning construction has particular input representations; during the process, inferences, emotions and event-integrations emerge which cannot reside in any of the inputs; they have been constructed dynamically in a new mental space – the blended space – linked to the inputs in systematic ways" (Fauconnier and Turner 135). Importantly, the emotional responses to the language are assumed and are known to the Cowley only when he considers himself as the reader. As such, if the response on the part of the reader is deemed necessary by the author, then the technique of using place-indicative words in order to generate emotional response, using background knowledge as the catalyst, would identify

a solipsistic and individualist quality in the writing process. In other words, the intended meaning can only be guaranteed when the author is also the reader. However, if intended meaning does not need to be guaranteed, but instead serves a purpose such as identifying members of a collective generation via the similarity of emotional response, then the use of place-indicative words becomes a trait by which Cowley identifies himself within the context of his chronological generation.

Extending beyond the use of place-indicator as a generational indicator is the possibility that readers who do not share the same background experiences may still be able to respond to the place stimuli "correctly" through their own constructed metonymic structures. The place indicators would serve as analogs to a set of references relevant to the reader, allowing him to arrive at a reasonable understanding via a process of blends. The blend relies upon "emergent structure not in the inputs. First, *composition* of elements from the inputs makes relations available in the blend that did not exist in the separate inputs...Second, *completion* brings additional structure to the blend" (138-139). The additional structure is developed from background knowledge and combines with the input spaces to create a new, familiar structure. This structure occupies a mental space, "built up in part by recruiting structure from (possibly many) conceptual domains and from local context" (157). During the completion phase "this familiar structure is recruited into the blend" (140). However, because of the complexity of the blend involved, multiple blends are spawned off to create the necessary generic spaces. A network such as this is called a "many-space model," and involves additional layers of rules.

In the many-space model of conceptual projection, **meaning is not constructed in any single space, but resides in the entire array and its connections.** The 'meaning' is not contained in the blended space. We know **each space in the array** and can work and modify all of them and their connections. **During blending,** conceptual work may be required at any site in the conceptual array. **Spaces, domains, and frames can proliferate and be modified.** Blending can be **applied successively** during that proliferation. (158)

The original stimulus is then understood in the context of background experience.

"Importantly, the blend remains hooked up to the Inputs, so that structural properties of the blend can be mapped back onto the Inputs" (140). Consequently, the reader makes up differences in background experience through a reserve of known input spaces, interchangeable based upon a similarity of relationship. This process of swapping input spaces allows readers to "understand" the poem, yet protects the quality of the place indicator as a generational identifier.

An important consideration, though, is the relationship between metaphor and metonymy. Often, Cowley uses a metaphoric place name in metonymic relation to background identifications. For example, Cowley often relies upon imagery associated with mountains, using them metaphorically to describe everything from obstacles, to dreams and generations. In *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* he writes of his experiences in the Communist Party,

then as if the mist had blown away to reveal that the level ground was only a terrace, that chasms lay on all sides of us, and that beyond them were mountains rising into the golden sunlight. We could not reach the mountains alone, but

perhaps we could merge ourselves in the **working class and thereby help to build a bridge for ourselves and for humanity.** (118)

The bridge, the mountains, and the golden sunlight are **metaphors, but when he refers to mountains again, they are used metonymically.** "As the **bickering continued,** what would happen to the dream of revolutionary brotherhood that has **been mentioned often** in this narrative? It faded imperceptibly for some dreamers, perhaps for **most of them;** the golden mountains receded into the mist" (314). The golden mountains **represent the structures built previously using metaphor.** In other words, the mountains **represent completion,** chasms represent obstacles, the mist is the combination of time and space, and the gold, whether the sun or the mountains, represents success. This entire structure is then referenced by the notion of "the dream of the golden mountains." This process is behind Cowley's remark in an April 1922 letter to John Wheelwright: "Many ideas can be born and be polished by rubbing against each other" (Kempf 25). Ideas may or may not have real-world analogs. Cowley proves this point by naming a book *The Dream of the Golden Mountains*. As Fauconnier and Turner state, "simulation can operate on mental spaces which need not have potential real world reference" (135). Moreover, the reference can be simultaneously real and imaginary, with a single label metonymically placed to represent both. In *Blue Juniata* Cowley sets up possibilities for metaphor and metonymy even within the context of titles. In the "Definitions" of the self-titled chapter, he provides both a song and a river as definitions of "Juniata," (2) thereby associating the poetic and the place. Likewise, in *Exile's Return*, Cowley uses this dual-context when he describes his generation's coming-of-age, writing, "The late 1920s were an age of islands, real and metaphorical" (235).

In the *Blue Juniata* poem "The Pyre," the poet burns mementos of youth, of his dead sister,

all these and my own boyhood,  
 the big frame house under the locust tree,  
 the land itself, the woods in chestnut season,  
 the spring plowing, the hayfields in July –  
 all these and your mother's grief  
 consumed with the pencil box and the satin hair ribbon,  
 drifting in smoke into the pale sky. (64-70)

The mementos represent many things, particularly the identification phase youth, no longer realizable in any physical sense. The physical artifacts have lost their meaning, having been usurped by the stronger nostalgia phase representations. The satin hair ribbon and the pencil box are easily identified as examples of metonymy, with an initial impulse to see them as merely standing in for his sister. However, they are also metaphors for the identification phase. Likewise, her three deaths (56) parallel the poet's own cycles of adventure and exile.

### **Place as Indicator of Time Period**

Another way in which Cowley uses place perception is as an indicator of time. As mentioned previously, perceptions of a given place will change over time, so that indicators of a certain phase of place perception will evoke, to those with a shared background, the time in question. This use of place as indicator of time appears in *–And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, when Cowley considers the *Exile's Return* section on Greenwich Village: "As I read those cabbalistic words, I can see myself walking in



cracked shoes under the Ninth Avenue Elevated" (53). The place perception evokes memories from the time, bringing forth meaningful images to the reader. He is recalling the days described in the prefatory note to "The Crooked Streets" section of *Blue Juniata*, where he writes, "After college, after the war, some of us drifted to New York, to the crooked streets south of Fourteenth" (32). Background knowledge provides images, reinforcing Cowley's recollection of the time. He describes these images, writing,

In that setting of grime and poverty we spent the postwar years, scantily clothed, poorly fed, signing drafts against our abundant constitutions, and greatly enjoying ourselves. There was much in our surroundings that agreed with our moods.

Having lost our illusions proudly, at an early age, we felt the need of replacing them with others, and we had made a kind of religion out of the sordid (32).

Once again, physical experience is tied in with ideology, so Cowley can recall sights and smells as easily as moods. Moreover, these recollections are tied inextricably to a place and a place perception. That is, he is recalling Greenwich Village during his early adventure phase, during the latter part of the second decade of the twentieth century.

Just as the relationship between place and perception is reciprocal, so is the relationship between time and perception, a dynamic driven by the idea of generations. In *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* Cowley writes, "If they had been born sooner or later, the principles would have been different. Coming of age in 1920, they would have been Dadaists; in 1927, they would have been Surrealists" (146). Further, in the Note to "Valuta" section of *Blue Juniata*, he writes, "Those new conditions produced a new race of tourists, the *Valutaschweine*, the profiteers of the exchange, who wandered from France to Rumania, from Italy to Poland, in search of the vilest prices and the most

picturesque upheavals of society" (48). **The environment** and the perception of it exist in a push and pull relationship, creating a **whole far more complex** than any single generation realizes.

Recalling the idea that different generations **will derive different** meanings from the same experiences, there is an inference that time for **Cowley is relative** to those who experience it. There is some evidence for this **assertion in the poem "So Perish Time."** In this poem, the philosopher takes his clock and "**toss[es] it into the hall**" crying "So perish tyranny!" and "So perish time!" (25). After doing so, **the philosopher** "went back to his accustomed place. / The room had grown so dark **he could not see,** / leaving him out of time and space, whirled in an eddy of infinity" (26-29). However, time still exists for the philosopher, as it "dripped through his veins" (32), but **he had broken time's control** over him. Through selective reconstruction via the nostalgic phase, and even the bias of his current phase of experiential place perception, he essentially controls time, rather than the reverse.

### **Place / Time Perception as a Mechanism in "Story"**

One of the major ways in which Cowley uses place perception is as a narrative device. Changes in place perception, whether explicit or implicit, provide movement. In Cowley's description of Cloverlands, in *The Dream of the Golden Mountains*, he uses his time there as a phase in his narrative. He writes, "Although I might come back to Cloverlands, it would never again be the same as in that last spring of another age" (203). Moreover, the changes in perception should follow a progression, in order to form the story. This concern is seen in Cowley's complaint about the lack of story in *On the Road*.

This complaint is tied to the role place has in creating a story, causing Cowley to complain of the "pendulum like movement" (Gussow 295). Adam Gussow writes,

but Cowley was a critic with the soul of a storyteller. He had not merely experienced something like *On the Road* but had created, in *Exile's Return*, a road narrative about his own rebellious, "lost" generation. Published in 1934 (and revised for republication just two years before Cowley first read Kerouac's novel), *Exile's Return* is Cowley's first-person account of the exploits of a group of rootless and high-spirited young Americans during the decade following the Great War. Like *On the Road*, *Exile's Return* moves back and forth nervously along an East-West axis: Paris-New York in Cowley's case, New York-San Francisco in Kerouac's. Like *On the Road* it swerves south several times for pilgrimages to spiritual fathers and for binges facilitated by favorable foreign exchange rates. (295-296)

The desire for a linear progression is interesting given the noted cyclical nature of place perception. However, in a separation between life and fiction, Cowley finds a progression, rather than a cycle, of place perception essential to his concept of narrative. Cowley states, regarding *On The Road*, "I thought that there should be some changes to make it more of a continuous narrative. It had swung back and forth between East Coast and West Coast like a huge pendulum. I thought that some of the trips should be telescoped" (Gussow, 303).

Another way in which place imparts meaning to story is through background knowledge. Various experiences and connotations of place can bring additional meaning to a narrative. In some cases, this background knowledge can be key to the story. For

example, in the *Blue Juniata* poem, "Two Swans," the death of two swans develops impact because their murder occurred in the Paris Public Gardens. As the poem claims, "other passionate crimes in curtained alcoves, knife or poison, they seemed less tragic than those two dead swans, Racinian victims, or the formal pool, empty without them, an eye that stares / fixedly into a fixed and empty sky" (5-6). Once again, Cowley links the sky and death through the ability to see, or perceive. This linking resonates with the poems "Mortality" and "Variations on a Cosmical Air." In turn, the development of place perception through the progression of these poems likewise imparts meaning. Assuming that this association is intentional, as it appears to be, it brings an added level of complexity to Cowley's idea of story.

There appears to be a contradiction in what Cowley is saying, in trying to reconcile the complex story that Cowley himself provides with the simplified version he describes in relation to *On The Road*. Returning to Cowley's earlier criticism of *On The Road*, he had pointed out an inconsistency in organization. Place perception is one way to organize, a principle that Cowley actively engages. However, as demonstrated, place perception is a complex phenomenon by its nature, and it would necessarily impart some of this complexity to the resultant structure. In his own evaluation, Cowley notes, "The true story is an organized period of time, much as a sculpture is organized three-dimensional space" (*Writer's Trade* 207). Building on ideas of time and space, he adds, "The lyric too is an organized period of time. Usually the organizing principle is repetition: that is, the poet establishes a pattern in the first stanza, then repeats it with variations in the stanzas that follow" (208). Bearing in mind the repetitious nature of place perception, such a representation of poetic organization points to Cowley's own

acceptance of it as an organizing feature. Furthermore, as Kempf notes, "Communicability in art was becoming one of Cowley's fundamental tenets" (19). This pursuit of communicability is attained through the use of meaningful symbols such as place indicators.

### **The Importance and Role of "Story"**

In *The View From* 80, Cowley examines the relationship between fiction and life. Central to this examination is the idea of a continuous story unfolding in our daily lives. He writes,

Our lives that seemed a random and monotonous series of incidents are something more than that; each of them has a plot. Life in general (or nature, or the history of our times) is a supremely inventive novelist or playwright, but he – she? – is also wasteful beyond belief and her designs are also hidden under the Langley Collyer rubbish of the years. (71)

In order to recognize the story, the details must be arranged somehow. For Cowley, the arrangement usually includes a sense of place. When he presents an example from his childhood, farm lanes and nettle patches provide guideposts for his recollection,

A first step in the untangling, if we choose to make that effort, is gathering together the materials that composed our lives (including even the rubbish, which may prove to be more revealing than we suspected). In other words, the first step is simply remembering. That seems easy in the beginning, since it always starts with our childhood, whose scenes are more vividly printed on our minds. Some of them, though, may reappear unexpectedly – for example, in my case, the picture of Jim Overman taking off his work shoes and insisting that I wear them

on my bare feet before crossing the patch of nettles that barred our way to the farm lane. Jim followed me in heavy woolen socks that had been knitted for him by his older sister Maggie, who flashes across my mind as an image of blowsy kindness. What happened to dear Maggie? What happened to Jim after he went to work in a steel mill? Both of those orphans played their parts in my world. (72)

The sense of place is thus essential in regards to the potential for place to help root a story. A shift in place sense can thus provide a sense of movement. Gussow writes,

That narrative literature should tell stories had been a near sacred principle for Cowley throughout his career. In "The Limits of the Novel," published in *The New Republic* in 1956, he framed the principle publicly: '[A novel is] a long but unified story, designed to be read at more than one sitting, that deals with a group of lifelike characters in a plausible situation and leads to a change in their relationship...[O]n pain of early death for his book, [the author] must create a mood of expectancy.' (303)

In the foreword to – *And I Worked at the Writer's Trade*, Cowley once again notes the relationship between life and fiction, writing, "[I] believe that literature comes out of life – where else could it come from? – and that, if successful in its own terms, it goes back into life by changing the consciousness of its readers" (x). Such sentiments are extended in Cowley's discussion of Erskine Caldwell, when he writes, "[Caldwell] expressed the mood of those years, but expressed it better than others did because his stories seemed to be lived, not constructed according to a theory about proletarian writing" (114).

Returning again to the question of what difference Cowley sees in his own method of weaving a story versus *On The Road*, it is elucidating to examine his comments on what

makes a good story. When discussing the difference between story and narrative he writes,

As a basis for that distinction [the difference between a story proper and a newspaper narrative], I might suggest that the story proper, if it is complete, will include four elements. A *person* (or group of persons) is involved in a *situation* and performs an *act* (or series of acts, or merely undergoes an experience) as a result of which *something is changed*. (204)

The part that is most relevant here is that something is changed as a result of some experience. In fact, this need for change in "story" is the most relevant part for Cowley as well, since he later states,

I feel that the 'something changed' is the most important of the four elements. Since it results from an interplay of the other three, it unites them into a single action marked off in time and set apart from the confusion of daily life. (205)

His earlier comments regarding story are useful at this point, since they point to his concepts of narrative versus story. On this topic he writes,

Narrative deals with a sequence of events, that is, with a becoming, with a process rather than a pattern, and process thinking is an essential trait of the modern mind. Living as we do in unstable situations, we try to recognize the forces of change: How fast are they moving and in which directions? What seems obsolete in the light of such questions is the image thinking and pattern thinking of many contemporary authors....Because they present the world as a spatial concept, a stasis instead of a process, they offer misleading pictures of the world in which we live. (203)

The impact of this on his criticism of *On The Road* is that he classifies it as a narrative, and not a story. However, the narrative, in his case of *Exile's Return*, describes a pattern based, or cyclical, event. Therefore, while fiction, or the story, can use place perception as a device, narrative cannot. This statement implies a paradoxical relationship between time, which may serve as an organizing principle for place perspective and sense of generation, and chronology, which may serve as an organizing principle for narrative. Another point, however, is that there is a fundamental difference between Cowley and Kerouac in how they view adventure, particularly in how place plays into this phase. For Kerouac, the promise of adventure was inherent in the process of moving from place to place, and the destination retained a benign character. Conversely, for Cowley the process of moving from place to place was benign, and the promise of adventure was inherent in the destination.

### **Place Sense as Chronological Indicator**

In order to gain a better understanding of how Cowley is using place sense as a chronological indicator, his poetry proves illustrative. One example of place sense providing the story is in "Day Coach," from the self-titled section of *Blue Juniata*. Section 5 of this poem begins, "Time is recorded not by minutes, but by station stops; we are two stops east of Altoona, one stop west of it; Cresson, Cres-son, change cars for Luckett, Munster, and all points on the line that runs crookedly into a boyhood." Here, as the individual is first leaving the homeland, and the identification phase with it, place-based identification is strongest. However, there as the train moves farther from home, the ties to place begin to snap. The change in perception, as the poet's realm expands,



likewise causes expansion in the poem. There is a path leading back home, but it isn't a linear progression, but "crooked."

The movement away from the identification phase is even greater in "The Red Wagon." In this poem, the role of place perception is greater. The early stanzas of this poem discuss his boyhood house and farm, his mother and sister, but then it shifts to a deserted farm and his sister's grave in the fifth stanza:

The red wagon rolled faster.

Now it was in strange country.

It passed a white house he must have dreamed about,

deep woods he had never seen,

a graveyard where, something told him, his sister was buried. (*The View From 80*,

6-7 ln.19-23)

This poem illustrates all four phases of place perception, as the poet moves from identification to exile. The early stanzas show boyhood identification, whereas the exile phase turns his homeland into "strange country." The red wagon received on his birthday (1) provides is the adventure phase, pulling him across generations. The entire process is presented via the nostalgia phase, creating a shortened schedule and associations based upon perceptions. Once again, Cowley addresses the inevitability of death, a completion of his ride. He asks, "would it ever stop? / Would the road always go downhill?" (17-18). In a possible reference to *The Dream of the Golden Mountains*, where the "mountains rising into the golden sunlight," "the sun was sinking into a broad plain" (25). Further, Cowley is no longer attempting to control time, but "was clutching the seat, not even trying to steer" with "white hair stream[ing] in the wind" (27,29). As the wagon

moves past the place indicators, the poem's movement is provided by the shift in place perception. The same ground that was a source of joy becomes a source of longing and reflection.

## Epilogue

In the epilogue to *Exile's Return*, Malcolm Cowley sums up the experiences of his generation. He describes four stages, which in turn describe the progression from adventurer to exile, and back to adventurer again. He writes,

For most of them the adventure had been divided into four stages. There was the first stage when young writers born at the turn of the century were detached from their native backgrounds and were led to think of themselves as exiles in fact, even when living at home. There was the second stage when they went abroad, many of them with the intention of spending the rest of their lives in Europe. The voyage had an unexpected effect on most of them: it taught them to admire their own country, if only for its picturesque qualities.

They had entered a third stage of the adventure, one in which the physical exile had ended while they were still exiles in spirit.... There was a fourth stage for others, and it was their real homecoming.... They had acquired friends and enemies and purposes in the midst of society, and thus, wherever they lived in America, they had found a home. (289-291)

The realization of a place sense is the focus of his poem "The Urn." In this poem, he writes, "we carry / each of us an urn of native soil, / of not impalpable dust a double handful" (2-4). The past, and the perception of self is found in "this little earth we bore / in secret, blindly, over the frontier" (*Blue Juniata* 7-8).

The collected experiences of the individual, and the collective experiences of a generation, are accessible through sense of place. One reason for this is the changing mood of the individual. While the place may not change much during the individual's

occupation, his view of it probably will. These shifts in mood become convenient labels by which to identify time and place. Alternately, time and place can also serve as a way to identify moods. Collectively, these moods, times, and places serve to distinguish generations. By triggering memories of these events and feelings, a writer can leverage background knowledge in the reader, allowing those with a similar set of experiences to derive a deeper meaning from the text. Moreover, by manipulating the shifts in perception, the writer is able to create additional levels of story.

One important point is that place and perception become linked through phases of place perception. Since Cowley places a great emphasis on the power of literary creation, it would follow that language serves as a byproduct of this relationship. In *The Literary Situation*, Cowley writes,

I should like to emphasize their [writers] linguistic function. "If Dante had been born in Venice or Rome or Palermo instead of Tuscany, modern Italian would have been a different language—and one might add that modern Italians, who think mostly in words, like people everywhere, would have had slightly different thoughts. (140-141)

For Cowley, place and perception, perception and language are so inextricably tied that it would be impossible for him to imagine an organizing principle that wasn't place based. Yet his early dismissal of place, in favor of the abstractions of academia and adventure, forced him to realize the role of place. For those who never strayed from the limits of Belsano, the impact of place could never be realized because there was no "other" to compare it to. For Cowley, life became a series of comparisons early on. As his own place perception changed, so did his language. Often, this change was literal, as he

ventured from America to France, to Germany, and back. However, the language of creation, his poems, also changed. In *Blue Juniata*, he organizes these poems in a way that makes sense to the world traveler. In the first section, "Blue Juniata," he describes his boyhood, the identification phase. Then, in "The Crooked Streets," he ventures into the early stages of adventure. "Valuta" is a later stage of adventure, building into the exile of "The City of Anger." The following sections are retrospective, nostalgic structures built from the experiences of the preceding sections. While the native of Belsano may never escape the influence of place, Cowley was never to escape the influence of place perception.

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